

THE PARABLES OF CHRIST

IN THE NEW AND BEAUTIFUL LIGHT IN WHICH THEY APPEAR
WHEN INTERPRETED BY

THE TRUTH

INSTEAD OF BEING FORCED INTO ACCOMMODATION WITH THE
PAGANISED THEOLOGY OF MODERN TIMES,
TO WHICH THEY DO NOT BELONG.

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BY

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PREFACE.

THE Parables of Christ differ from all other parables— (whether Æsop's fables or the flowers of modern oratory)—in that they are the authoritative enunciation of eternal truth. The form is a veiled form, but the essence is divine. Hence, their paramount pre-eminence.

The meaning of them is lost to most readers for want of the key—the Kingdom of God—which is absent from modern theology. With this key restored—in the understanding of Moses and the prophets—it is possible to get at their full meaning and see their full beauty. An endeavour to display these is made in the following pages, with a degree of success or failure which must be left to the judgment of the reader.

THE AUTHOR.

Birmingham, 24th June, 1897.

The Parables.

“**W**HY speakest thou unto them in parables?” So the disciples enquired of Jesus. The answer may seem abrupt and unsympathetic — “Because it is given unto you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to *them it is not given.*” Why not? “For whosoever hath, to him shall be given, and he shall have more abundance; but whosoever hath not, from him shall be taken away even that he hath” (Matt. xiii. 11, 12).

The logic of these sayings might seem turnable the other way. If a man hath not, it might be a reason why something should be given to him, and not taken away; and if a man have, it is superfluous to give him “more abundance.”

There is a certain common-sense smartness about this kind of criticism, but it has no application to the subject in hand. It might apply to food or clothes or money; but it does not apply to those spiritually-enlightened moral and intellectual attainments which commend a man to God. If a man lack these, there is nothing to work on to lift him higher. But if he have them, the tendency is for him to increase in attainment and in acceptability with God and man.

A man or a nation's poverty in the matter in question is largely the result of neglect and misuse of opportunities given. God gives these, and asks men to seek Him. If they turn away, or remain supine in the presence of proffered mercy, God may choose to withdraw the privileges, as it is written in Isaiah: “Forasmuch as this people . . . have removed their heart far from me, and their fear toward me is taught by the precepts of men, therefore behold I

will proceed to do a marvellous work among this people ; the wisdom of their wise men shall perish, &c." (xxix. 13, 14) ; and as it is also written concerning the Gentiles : "They received not the love of the truth that they might be saved : and for this cause, God sent them strong delusion that they should believe a lie" (2 Thess. ii., 10, 11).

"Therefore speak I to them in parables," said Jesus, "because they seeing, see not : and hearing, they hear not, neither do they understand, and in them is fulfilled the prophecy of Isaiah." Here again it might be said "Surely, if they are deficient in sight and hearing, that is a reason for speaking very plainly, and not for cloaking meanings in parabolic forms of speech." To a merely human view of the case, this might seem sound reasoning. But it is impossible for a merely human view to be a right view of the ways of God. How can mortal man conceive what is right and fitting from God to man ? It is God's view that is all-governing. The judgment of God would never be congenial to human views. The population in Noah's day would have voted against the flood. But the views of God prevailed, and the population was drowned with a strong and decided hand that faltered not in the doing of what was right, as God saw things.

So in this matter : God is a dreadful majesty, and will be held in reverence, and when men are blind and deaf to Him through their habitual and presumptuous negligences for a long season, it is not unreasonable at all that God should hide His wisdom from them. God requires to be approached with the humility and docility of little children. When men do this, wisdom is not hidden to them.

"Blessed are your eyes," said Jesus, "for they see, and your ears, for they hear. For verily I say unto you, that many prophets and righteous men have desired to see those things which ye see, and have not seen them, and to hear those things which ye hear, and have not heard them." None of us can have any difficulty in understanding this blessedness. It was a privilege and an honour confined to that generation, and to the few lowly men in it whom God saw fit to admit to it—the privilege of witnessing the glory of God manifested in Christ. It is a privilege to be renewed in a more impressive form when God's work on earth has reached a riper stage : "for God shall send Jesus Christ . . . (in) the times of restitution of all things, which God hath spoken by the mouth of all His holy prophets since the world began" But how few in our generation do themselves the advantage, and God the honour, of looking forward with any interest, or even faith, to this prospect.

THE PARABLE OF THE SOWER.

In this, a man is introduced in the act of sowing seed in a field, containing various kinds of soil. The difficulty with us Westerns as regards the mechanism of the parable is to understand how there could be in one field such a variety of conditions of ground as is here

depicted. This difficulty disappears when we learn from travellers that Oriental agriculture differs in nothing more from agriculture in the west than this, that the fields put under seed are not really enclosed patches of land, all of a sort, but lie scattered over a hillside containing all the varieties mentioned in the parable. The feature of the parable is the difference of the yield in differently conditioned soil: "*Some seed fell by the wayside (that is on a trodden path), and the fowls came and devoured them up. Some fell upon stony places, where they had not much earth, and forthwith they sprung up, because they had no deepness of earth. And when the sun was up they were scorched and because they had no root, they withered away. And some fell among thorns, and the thorns sprang up and choked them. But others fell into good ground, and brought forth fruit—some a hundred-fold, some sixty-fold, and some thirty-fold.*"

Nothing more thoroughly illustrates the difference between ecclesiastical theology and the teaching of Christ than this parable. The theology of the pulpit, based on the assumption that men are immortal in their inner constitution, tacitly assume that they possess similar moral powers and mental capacities, and are amenable to similar rules and conditions. The practical differences among men are set down partly to will and partly to the influence of antagonistic spiritual beings. Such an idea as comparing human hearts to different classes of soil would never occur to a teacher that believed men to have in common what are popularly called "immortal souls." But here is Jesus making the comparison. Here is Jesus proclaiming a truth which has been thoroughly discerned in modern times, and which has been embodied in the practically true though professionally spurned system of "phrenology"—viz., that men are by no means the same in their moral and intellectual natures: that there is just as much diversity in their mental constitution as there is variety of earth and stone in the constitution of the crust of the earth: that some are as impenetrable to all fructifying influences as the roadside: some as irresponsive as ground in which there are more stones than soil: some as cumbered and obstructed as a thistly patch: and some like the generous garden mould, ready to yield to every effort of tillage. These are Christ's own comparisons, and they are true to nature.

The seed, he afterwards explained, is "the word"—the word ministered by himself and co-labourers. "The word," it is perhaps needless to say, is a synonym for the class of ideas comprehended in the gospel, called "the word" because it has been divinely spoken (1 Thess. ii. 13), and "the truth," because it is pre-eminently that form of truth without which men cannot live in the ultimate sense (Jno. viii. 32). The comparison of this spoken word of God to seed is a very happy comparison. Viewing the mind of man as soil, there is a strict analogy between the one and the other. Just as soil—the very best—has no power to yield garden flowers without seed or its equivalent, so the human brain has no power to evolve knowledge or wisdom without the impartation of ideas from without. Ideas are not innate in the human mind. The mind of a new-born babe is an absolute blank:

and the mind of a grown man would be the same, if from his babyhood he were kept away from all contact with idea-acquiring agencies and sources. The kind of ideas he forms depends upon the class of ideas implanted by these external agencies. His mind will develop according to the influences acting upon it from without.

The seed in the parable is "good seed," because it represents good ideas—ideas that have come from God—"the seed is the word of God" (Luke viii. 11). Admitted to the mind and nourished, the good seed will bring forth good fruit.

But the extent of the result depends upon the state of the soil and the nature of the husbandry. The good seed falling into unfit minds will prove abortive, notwithstanding its goodness, because the soil is bad: so Christ teaches, and so experience shows. The good seed falling into good soil will bring forth good fruit if the soil is not pre-occupied with other growths which absorb the power of the soil. Thorns and weeds of all kinds will thrive in good soil, of course. If they are allowed to do so, the plant shot up by the good seed will have little chance of "bringing forth fruit to perfection." The weeds require keeping down. What they are, Jesus tells. "The care of this world, the deceitfulness of riches, and the lusts of other things." These, he says, "choke the word, and he (the man) becometh unfruitful." It is not enough, therefore, to have good soil, or a mind capable of understanding and appreciating the truth revealed in the gospel, there must be a care to protect the mind from those influences that are calculated to undermine the power of the gospel. There are many things competing for human affection; and for most of them, the mind possesses a natural affinity. The danger therefore is great: the need for wise and energetic horticulture very pressing. Happy are they who practically recognise this and act accordingly. As for the seed that fell into good ground, Christ's explanation is very clear and simple: "The good ground are *they who in an honest and good heart, having heard the word and understood it* (Matt. xiii. 23) keep it, bring forth fruit with patience" (Luke vii. 15).

Those who are accustomed to the indiscriminating gush of "Evangelical" Christianity may revolt at this view. They may feel it to be a harsh and repulsive doctrine which teaches that men can only be influenced by the gospel to the extent of their capacity to receive it. But it is a true doctrine, even if it is "harsh," as many true things in the universe are. It is impossible for intelligence to ignore the fact that it is the doctrine of Christ and the lesson of painful experience. It is not alone this parable. The whole of Christ's practical teaching is tinged with it, as when he says: "To him that hath shall be given" (Luke xix. 26), "He that is able to receive it, let him receive it" (Matt. xix. 12), "Ye believe not because ye are not of my sheep" (John x. 26), "No man can come unto me except the Father who hath sent me draw him" (John vi. 44).

And every man who has any extensive contact with his kind in this present evil world, is bound to learn that the men are more rare than precious stones who have capacity to discern or taste to relish the

good things of the Spirit of God. The patches of good soil are few and far between : and more often than not, they are too covered over with vigorous thistle-growth of all kinds to make it possible for the good seed to have an opportunity. As to why the matter should be so, that is another and not a very practical question. God is the worker out of His own plans. There are no other plans with stability in them. The revolutions of time kill them all off the surface of the earth. God having His plans, and having adopted His own means of working them out, it is ours simply to learn what they are, and what demands of conformity they may have for us which it may be in our power to render.

THE PARABLE OF THE TARES.

The kingdom of heaven has been in preparation from the beginning of God's work upon earth. The parable of the tares represents that phase of it embraced in the personal work of Christ. This appears from Christ's explanation. We will look at that explanation item by item :—*"A man sowed good seed in the field."* EXPLANATION : The sower, Christ : the field, the (Jewish) world : the good seed, the truth, as embodied in its true believers. — *"While men slept, his enemy came and sowed tares among the wheat."* EXPLANATION : The enemy, the devil, consisting of the authorities of the nation, who everywhere stealthily neutralised the teaching of Christ, disseminating evil doctrines, and scattering wide their sympathisers and disciples, who drew away the people, and multiplied their own number greatly by the energy of their operations and the popularity of their influence. *"When the blade was sprung up and brought forth fruit, then appeared forth tares also."* EXPLANATION : When Christ's teaching began to take effect in the development of earnest disciples, the result was not so general as might have been expected, for the Scribes and Pharisees had meanwhile been very busy on the quiet, and out of the sight of Christ, and the people sided with them in larger numbers than would have been the case if they had been let alone to consider the works and words of Christ for themselves.—*"So the servants of the householder came and said unto them : Sir, didst thou not sow good seed in thy field? From whence then hath it tares? He said unto him, an enemy hath done this. The servants said unto him, wilt thou then that we go and gather them up?"* EXPLANATION : The surprise of the Apostles that the people did not submit to the word of Christ, and their proposal (as on one occasion) that they should command that fire should come down from heaven and destroy them.—*"But he said, Nay, lest while ye gather up the tares, ye root up also the wheat with them."* EXPLANATION : The destruction of the wicked would have interfered with the development of the righteous, which requires that the wicked prosper for a while in their disobedience.—*"Let both grow together until the harvest, and in the time of harvest, I will say to the reapers, Gather ye together first the tares, and bind them in bundles*

to burn them; but gather the wheat into my barn." EXPLANATION: Both the wheat-class and the tare-class in Israel to be left unmolested till the arrival of their respective times, to be dealt with "according to their deeds." The tare-class to be harvested "FIRST": the wheat-class afterwards—the one a long time after the other, as the event has proved. The harvesting to be performed by the angels in both cases, under Christ's command, but the harvesting of the tares to be done in the way of Providence, in which the angels work by influencing natural circumstances, while the harvest of the wheat would be done by them in an open and visible manner. The parable has been nearly all fulfilled, except the glorious part which is still future. "First" as the parable required, at the end of the Jewish world, the tare-class were gathered into Jerusalem, as into a furnace of fire, where there was wailing and gnashing of teeth, where they were destroyed with every circumstance of suffering and horror, as a study of the details of Josephus' account of the devastation of Judea, and the destruction of Jerusalem, nearly forty years after Christ's ascent to "all power in heaven and earth," will abundantly show to the reader. Thus were retributively "gathered out of his kingdom all things that offended" during his personal ministry, and "them who did iniquity." The kingdom of the Holy Land is his kingdom which enables us to understand the interpretation. If we supposed with modern theologians that "his kingdom" was "heaven" or the "church," it would be difficult to apply the statement that he is to gather the workers of iniquity out of his kingdom. But with an understanding of the kingdom, there is no such difficulty. The destruction of the whole generation of Jews that were honoured by his presence and wonderful works, and proved themselves so utterly unworthy by rejecting and crucifying him, enables us to recognise the historic application of a parable which was at the same time a prophecy. The gathering of the wheat is next in order—tares "first,"—wheat afterwards. The wheat-class will be gathered openly by the angels at Christ's return. "He shall send his angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they shall gather together his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven even to the other" (Matt. xxiv. 31). The "gathering of the wheat into the barn" will have its fulfilment in the entrance of the righteous into the Kingdom of God.—"*Then shall the righteous shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father.*" It reads as if the shining forth of the righteous in the Kingdom would be immediately after the gathering out of the Kingdom of all that do iniquity, but the scope of the parable compels us to attach the larger meaning of "then" to its use in this case. When we say, "first this, then that," we do not define time, but order. "First the tares, then the wheat" gives no indication of the length of the interval. As a matter of history, it has already run into more than 1800 years. The righteous will shine forth in the kingdom when the angels come forth to gather them for an entrance therein. It is a long time since the tares were burnt up on the same spot with fire unquenchable. Some argue from this that there is no judgment and rejection of the unfaithful at the second

coming of Christ. This does not follow. There is a place for every part of the truth : and one part of the truth is that the tares of Christ's own day were cast into a furnace of fire for consumption within forty years or so of the utterance of the parable.

THE PARABLE OF THE MUSTARD SEED.

“ Another parable put he forth unto them, saying, The kingdom of heaven is like to a grain of mustard seed, which a man took and sowed in his field ; which indeed is the least of all seeds : but when it is grown, it is the greatest among herbs, and becometh a tree, so that the birds of the air come and lodge in the branches thereof.”

This is a parable which carries its meaning on its face. Least of all things among men at the beginning : greatest of all things at the end : such is the kingdom of God in every aspect in which it can be viewed—whether as first planted in the earth in the promises ; or as first introduced to any man called to be an heir thereof ; or as first manifested in the earth at Christ's return.

When first planted in the promises, it was confined to one old man who must have seemed demented as he sallied forth from the midst of his friends to an unknown land, or as he afterwards sojourned among the inhabitants of Canaan with the quiet confidence that he would one day be the possessor of “ all these countries.” What an indescribable contrast to this will be the occupancy of Palestine by Abraham and his multitudinous seed with Christ at their head, not only as the joyful inheritors of the most glorious of lands, reinstated in more than its original glory, but as the rulers of the entire habitable globe, whose enlightened inhabitants will joyfully repair to worship God and make obeisance at Jerusalem.

When first introduced to a man's notice, in the testimony of the of the gospel, the kingdom seems to him the most insignificant of his personal affairs. Slowly his view enlarges until he begins to discern its importance, and submits to the requirements associated with it. At last he dies in the confidence of the hope thereof ; and at the resurrection, he awakes to find all his personal affairs perished and gone, except this one momentous element of them—that he is an heir of the Kingdom of God which he enters in the unspeakable joy of a glorified nature, and a position of everlasting power and honour, friendship, and joy.

Finally, when Christ steals into the world as a thief, the Kingdom of God arrived in his person is the smallest political fact on earth for the time being ; but soon, the mustard seed sprouts. He awakes the dead ; he gathers them to judgment with the few living who stand related to his tribunal ; he separates the unworthy element from among them ; with the accepted and glorified remnant he commences belligerent operations against “ the kings of the earth and their armies ”—first

shattering the Gogian hosts encamped against Jerusalem ; then proceeding in detail against all countries and all governments, till the whole fabric of human power is prostrated in the dust, and the Kingdom of God is the easy key to the parable of the mustard seed.

THE PARABLE OF THE LEAVEN.

“Another parable spake he unto them, the kingdom of heaven is like unto leaven which a woman took and hid in three measures of meal till the whole was leavened.”

There have been fanciful interpretations of this. The leaven has been taken in its evil sense (for it was undoubtedly used to denote the spreading tendency of evil principles). It has been suggested that Christ meant the working of apostacy in the Church till Christendom should be overrun with error. In this interpretation, the woman is taken as “the church,” and the “three measures of meal,” as the three great ecclesiastical divisions of Christendom—the Greek Church, the Roman Church, and the Protestant communions.

There is a certain superficial appropriateness in this that is pleasing at its first proposal ; but deeper thought will not confirm it. Jesus spoke his parable with a meaning that his discerning hearers could penetrate. The coming state of the Christian world so-called, was not within their horizon ; and it is not likely that Jesus would concern himself with the temporary triumph of darkness as the subject of a parable, or that he would speak of such a triumph as a matter in which the Kingdom of God was “like” something else. In the Apocalypse, apostate Christendom is spoken of as “the court which is without (outside) the (mystical) temple,” and which was not to be measured because “given to the Gentiles.” It would be incongruous if a system sustaining such a relation to the divine regards should have been the subject of a parable speaking of it as “the kingdom of heaven.” We must look for an interpretation that will steer clear of such an anomaly. It is not difficult to find one.

Leaven has characteristics apart from evil. One of these is its tendency to quietly work in secret with a power that will conquer a mass out of all proportion to its own bulk. A small quantity divided among three “batches” will leaven the whole. It is evident this is the aspect in which Christ finds a likeness to the Kingdom of God. His work is “hid” “till the whole is leavened.” This is the feature—a change extending to a certain “whole” brought about by a something “hid” and working quietly. As in the case of the mustard seed, so in this ; it is not difficult to see a perfect parallel in the relation of the Kingdom of God to the earth in which we dwell. It was a long time ago put into the mass or bulk of human affairs, as leaven is put into dough. The form in which it was so introduced was the word and work of God “at sundry times and divers manners.” It has been quietly affecting them ever since. In the laws established in Israel ;

in the word written by the Spirit, and studied by the faithful; in the gospel preached by the apostles, and received, more or less intelligently by thousands, there has been a gradual modification of the state of things on earth, apart from which, the whole world would have been in the condition of the uncivilised races at this day. A principal part of the work done in this leavening process has been the development in all the ages of a people in harmony with God, from Abel downwards; who, in the further unfolding of the process, will re-appear in the land of the living, and be made use of in the position of governors of mankind, to powerfully affect the populations of the globe with the word-leaven till all are brought into sympathy with God, and the glory of the Lord fills the earth as the water covers the sea.

THE PARABLE OF THE HID TREASURE.

“Again the kingdom of heaven is like unto treasure hid in a field the which when a man hath found he hideth, and for joy thereof, goeth and selleth all that he hath and buyeth that field.”

The discovery of hid treasure is not so frequent an occurrence in our time as to enable us so readily to see the aptness of this comparison as those would see it who lived in the days of Jesus in the countries of the east. It is, however, even for us, easy to understand the pleasurable excitement with which a man would discover that a certain piece of land contained a mine of wealth, and the promptness and energy with which he would contrive to find the means of purchase. This is the point of the comparison.

The Kingdom of God is the hid treasure. The title to it is contained within the promises, and offered to men. But in the days of Jesus, these promises and this offer were not widely known. There was nothing for the bulk of mankind but the present life, with its imperfection and its shortness. When a man got to know that God had offered life eternal and a kingdom to all who should conform with the requirements associated with the offer, he was in the position of a man making a sudden and unexpected discovery of treasure trove; and this parable gives us to understand that Jesus expects that a man becoming acquainted with this supreme fact will be as enthusiastic and prompt and enterprising in his measures for securing its advantages, as men always are to secure temporal wealth when suddenly brought within their reach.

THE PEARL OF GREAT PRICE.

“A merchant man, seeking goodly pearls, found one pearl of great price, and went and sold all that he had and bought it.”

The evident lesson of this is the same as in the parable of the treasure hid in the field, only it is put in a stronger light. The finder

of the treasure in the field appears only as an accidental finder. In this case, the man is on the outlook for something good to buy, and, finding a particular gem, recognises its value so decisively as to sell his whole stock that he might obtain it. The parallel intended by Christ is that of a thoughtful man pondering life with a view to find good, and discovering the gospel of the kingdom, and God's invitation associated with it, perceives that it is of a value with which nothing else in human reach can be compared, and therefore bends his whole energy that he may attain it. The faithfulness of this to human experience will be most appreciated by those who have the most clearly seen and grasped the truth as it is in Jesus. Investigation, study, and labour are all found fruitless at the last when not directed towards God and His purpose in Christ. The part offered by God in him is the only "good thing that shall not be taken away." This was Christ's description of it in the house of Martha and Mary, when he commended Mary's unmistakeable preference for the things of God.

THE PARABLE OF THE NET.

"Again the kingdom of heaven is like unto a net that was cast into the sea, and gathered of every kind; which, when it was full, they drew to shore and sat down and gathered the good into vessels, but cast the bad away."

This is another phase of the matter. It refers to what may be called the collective results of the offer of the kingdom in the preaching of the gospel, as distinguished from the individual applications suggested by the parables of the treasure and goodly pearl. Jesus called the apostles "fishers of men" (Matt. iv. 19). Their business was to take out of the sea of human life, for God's after use, a proportion of the rational creatures swimming in its waters. In the parable, we are shown the implement by which the fishing was to be performed—the kingdom preached was the net let down into the sea. The parable is of great value in one way. It shows us that the collective results of gospel word are not all genuine: that is, that the mere acceptance of the truth and enclosure in its net by the preliminary submission to baptism is not a certain guarantee of fitness for divine selection. If we were not plainly taught this, we should be perplexed at the result of the truth's operations. Imagining that everyone who received the truth must necessarily show the spirit of the truth, we should be distressed at the fact that comparatively few show themselves true disciples of Christ. But here is this parable: "every kind" in the net, including "bad" that are "cast away."

The meaning is placed beyond doubt by Christ's interpretation: "The angels shall come forth and sever the wicked from among the just, and cast them into the furnace of fire: there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth." This puts everyone on his guard, and prevents him from leaning on man. Even a "brother" is but *contingently* a

son of God. Our trust must be what is written—not in mortal man's thought or utterance. If we lean on a brother because he is a brother, without reference to whether he reflects the mind of the Spirit or no, it might turn out that we are following one of the useless fish, that is permitted to swim in the net for the time being.

THE WISE AND FOOLISH BUILDERS.

This was not a parable in the sense of a complete story. It was more in the nature of a simile interwoven with plain discourse. Still, it is instructive, as the conveyance of important truths by illustration. —A man built a house on the solid rock: another built his on the loose sand—a supposition borrowed from the practice of the East, and not so obvious in the West, where the nature of foundations, though of some importance, is not so important. While the weather is fine the difference between the two houses, as regards the foundation, is immaterial. But a time of storm and inundation comes. The difference is then both great and apparent. The one falls to ruins; the other is unhurt by the violence of the storm, and remains a useful habitation when the storm has passed away.

The application is of great importance. Jesus supplies it. The building of the house is the acceptance of the teaching of Christ, in both cases. (*Note by the way*: Apart from this acceptance, a man has no house—no abiding place in futurity: must die without hope. *Ergo*, the growing and popular view that “mortality” will save, especially the thought that all will be saved, is a delusion.) But a man may accept the teaching of Christ and not conform to it. His house—his hope, is in that case on the sand. For only that acceptance of the truth which is accompanied by affectionate submission to its requirements will be acceptable with God. “Not every one that saith, Lord, Lord, will enter the kingdom, but he that doeth the will of my Father” (Matt. vi. 21). Faith will not save a man whose “works” are not in accordance with faith. Without faith, he cannot please God: but he cannot please God by an inoperative faith. “Faith without works is dead” (Jas. ii. 20). A disobedient man's belief of the gospel will go for nothing in the day of the issues of things—the day when the judgment will “try every man's work, what sort it is” (1 Cor. iii. 13). The house of hope which he has built will fall to ruins in the day of storm,—lacking a stable foundation—even that foundation to which Paul refers when he exhorts rich men to “lay up for themselves a good foundation against the time to come” (1 Tim. vi. 18). “But the man who heareth these sayings of mine *and doeth them* is like a man who built his house on the rock.” The judgment of God is coming like a storm to “sweep away all the refuge of lies” (Is. xxviii. 17). In that terrible day, the man will stand unmoved who has acted the part of the friend of God in the midst of “the crooked and perverse generation” now upon earth in apparent safety.

He will pass unharmed through the destructive revolutions in which thrones will perish and society itself be dissolved. He will be "under the shadow of the Almighty" during "the time of trouble such as never was": and when the storm has passed, and the sun shines out he will stand forth in safety and glory as one of those "kings and priests" whose work it will be to re-build the shattered fabric of human life, and lead mankind in ways of peace, blessedness and well-being. But in vain will you look round at that moment for those believers who merely have a name to live during these times of probation, but who are dead, as shown by their non-submission to all the requirements of the Word of the living God. The difference between the two classes is scarcely discernible now; it will be known and read of all men then.

SEED CAST INTO THE GROUND.

"So is the Kingdom of God as if a man should cast seed into the ground, and should sleep and rise night and day, and the seed should spring and grow up, he knoweth not how. For the earth bringeth forth fruit of herself: first the blade: then, the ear: after that, the full corn in the ear. But when the fruit is brought forth, immediately he putteth in the sickle because the harvest is come."

A knowledge of what God has revealed concerning His Kingdom makes it easy to understand this parable. Although the Kingdom of God is not yet in existence in the sense of an actually developed and visibly established institution in the earth, yet it is a thing for which great preparations have been made "from the foundation of the world," and are still going forward. If we imagine ourselves at the crisis of its establishment (even in the presence of Christ at his return), we can the more easily realise this. For what is the most striking aspect of things then? The retrospective. The past is gathered up into that moment with a reality and a brightness impossible at any other time. Here are "Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob and all the prophets" (Luke xiii. 28). Here are the multitudinous "many" who have come from the east and the west, and the north and the south to sit down with them. "These HAVE come out of great tribulation." The joy of the hour is largely made up of what is past. Even the Lord Jesus, the centre of the manifested glory of God, draws much of his joy from looking back: "He shall see (the result) of the travail of his soul, and shall be satisfied" (Is. liii. 11).

The history of the land, the history of the nation, the history of the Gentiles, all contribute their ingredient to the perfect satisfaction that will be the experience of each individual constituent of that wonderful assembly. That history has developed them all. They (the very kernel of the Kingdom of God) are the result of all that has gone before, the hand of God has been the chief agent. For had not God made promises to Abraham: had He not spoken by the prophets: had He not issued an invitation by the hand of the Apostles: He had

not given His own Son as a propitiation for our sins: had He not raised him from the dead, and exalted him to His own right hand: had He not confided his plan to the hands of the angels (then present in their hosts to witness its completion), had He not taken steps to prepare for Himself a family by the ministry of the Word, and by the guidance of their affairs in chastisement and discipline and instruction, how could the glorious result that will then be manifest have been achieved?

When we realise that the Kingdom of God is the result of a work of long preparation, involving all that God has done in past times, we can see how it is like seed cast into the ground, which, though invisible to the passer-by, is slowly advancing by a process of germination, and a result of harvest that are alike independent of man. The ripening of natural grain comes at a fixed time; and the reapers come at the ripeness. So with the Kingdom of God: the maturity of God's plan will be reached, and the harvesting will come off at a time that is fixed in the nature of things, independent of the knowledge or care or will of man.

THE TWO DEBTORS.

“There was a certain creditor which had two debtors: the one owed five hundred pence and the other fifty. And when they had nothing to pay, he frankly forgave them both. Tell me, therefore, which of them will love him most? Simon answered and said, I suppose that he to whom he forgave the most. And he (Jesus) said unto him, Thou hast rightly judged” (Luke vii. 41).

The bearing of this is best seen in connection with the circumstance calling it forth. Jesus had accepted a Pharisee's invitation to dine. In the house, while reclining Oriental fashion at a table, a woman of blemished character approached Jesus from behind, and began to kiss his feet and wipe them with the hair of her head, and anoint them with precious ointment. The Pharisee, who knew the character of the woman, watched the proceeding with some considerable contemplations. He was undecided in his mind as to the true character of Christ. He had evidently asked him to dine for the purpose of getting a closer view of him than he could get out of doors or in the synagogue, and this incident of the woman taking such liberties with him unrebuked, exercised him unfavourably.

The argument going on in his mind was, “This man, if he were a prophet, would have known who and what manner of woman this is that toucheth him.” The parable was Christ's way of meeting this argument, for he not only knew who and what manner of woman the woman was, but he knew what was passing in the Pharisee's mind, though the Pharisee was not aware of it. Christ's application of the parable was that the very character of the woman was the explanation of her affectionate attention—so different from the Pharisee's cold

courtesy. Her greater love was the result of the forgiveness of her many sins. "To whom little is forgiven, the same loveth little."

On reflection, it will be found that this principle goes beyond the individual case that called forth its enunciation. It supplies the key to the plan on which God is guiding the earth to its everlasting place in the universe. That plan is the permission and the cure of evil, with reference to the supremacy of His declared will in the minds and actions of men. It is a distressing process while it lasts: as Paul testifies, and we all know from experience: "The whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now." But enlightened intelligence is enabled to endure it in view of the other testified fact, that the affliction is "working out for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory." But for the evil, the good never could have been appreciated as it requires to be—in humility and gladness. The prevalence of sin provides the occasion also for forgiveness of sin; and forgiven sin opens the way for love and joy.

THE GOOD SAMARITAN.

The meaning of this parable is shown by the incident that called it forth, and by the application that Christ made of it. A certain interesting young man, who was rich, asked him what he must do to inherit eternal life. Jesus asked him what he found written in the law; to which the young man responded by quoting that summary of its principles contained in the words of Moses: "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart; and with all thy soul, and with all strength, and with all thy mind; and thy neighbour as thyself." Christ's answer was: "Thou hast answered right: *this do and thou shalt live.*"

This ought to have closed the colloquy, because the question was completely answered. But we are informed that the young man was "willing to justify himself." He evidently concluded—(probably from Christ's answer)—that Christ implied shortcoming on his part in the desired conformity to the command; not as to God, but as to his neighbour. He took quite a complacent view of his own case on this point. He was evidently of opinion that he not only rendered unto God the things that were God's, but that he fulfilled a neighbour's part as well, or at least if he did not, it was for lack of opportunity. Perhaps he was one of those who retire into a comfortable corner, and shut their eyes to the miseries of their race, and who become so absorbed in their own personal affairs as to forget that there are any neighbours to love and serve; or, who at the most, think their duty in that direction discharged by a reluctant donation unsympathetically flung here or there. "Willing to justify himself," he said, "and who is my neighbour?"

This is the question which the parable is designed to answer, and does answer. It has probably done more than anything else uttered

by Christ to foster acts of disinterested kindness wherever his teaching has become influential. The parable does not introduce to notice a next-door neighbour or a fellow townsman or a compatriot, but a total stranger in faith and blood. And the man who acts the right part is not a priest or a Jew, but a detested Samaritan. The priest and the Jew are shewn avoiding their duty. "*A certain man went down from Jerusalem to Jericho and fell among thieves, who stripped him of his raiment and wounded him and departed, leaving him half dead. And by chance there came down a certain priest that way, and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side. And likewise a Levite, when he was at the place, came and looked on him, and passed by on the other side. But a certain Samaritan as he journeyed came where he was, and when he saw him, he had compassion on him and went to him, and bound up his wounds, pouring in oil and wine, and set him on his own beast and brought him to an inn, and took care of him. And on the morrow, when he departed, he took out two pence, and gave them to the host, and said unto him, 'Take care of him, and whatsoever thou spendest more, when I come again, I will repay thee.'*"

The application of the parable Jesus drew from the man's own mouth by a question: "Which now, of these three, thinkest thou was neighbour unto him that fell among the thieves?" There could be but one answer: "He that shewed mercy on him." What then? "GO AND DO THOU LIKEWISE." Here is what is meant then by "Doing good unto all men as we have the opportunity." "Relieve the afflicted" when it is in your power. "Deal thy bread to the hungry; bring the poor that are cast out to thy house: when thou seest the naked, cover him; hide not thyself from thine own flesh (that is, from human nature). Then shall thy light break forth as the morning, and thine health shall spring forth speedily: and thy righteousness shall go before thee, and the glory of the Lord shall be thy reward. Then shalt thou call, and the Lord shall answer: thou shalt cry, and He shall say, 'Here am I'" (Is. lviii. 7-9).

This practical benevolence towards the afflicted is the most beautiful of all the fruits of the Spirit. It is one, however, requiring hardihood for its cultivation. It has often to be brought forth in great bitterness. The tendency of things as regards man is to make you shut up the bowels of your compassion, and pass on with the Levite and the priest. It seems a hopeless, thankless, useless business. Nothing will keep a man to it but the constant setting of the eye on God and Christ, who have required it, and the constant realisation of the fleeting character of the state of things to which we are presently related, and the certainty of the glorious age that God has promised, which will chase away the self-denials and confusions incidental to the present evil world.

A word—not exactly on the other side, for there is not another side—but in deprecation of the extreme to which the helping of the distressed can be and is carried. Christ did not mean to hide any other part of the truth by telling the young man to imitate the Good

Samaritan. He did not mean to say that salvation was to be found in the succouring of the destitute, though the succouring of the destitute is one of the duties connected with it. Though he shows a Jew disobedient and a Samaritan doing a neighbourly part, he did not mean to deny or cast the least discredit on what he said to the woman at the well of Samaria, concerning the Samaritans and the Jews respectively: "Ye worship ye know not what: we (Jews) know what we worship, for salvation is of the Jews." Nor did he mean to weaken the words he spoke to his disciples, when he told them to "Go not into the way of the Samaritans:" or when he spoke to the Syrophenician woman of the non-Jewish people as "dogs."

The modern treatment of the subject calls for this remark. Where the Samaritan example is recognised at all, it is generally done with the effect of nullifying very much else of the teaching of the Spirit of God. The doing of good to the poor in the matter of temporal supplies is made to take the place of the "righteousness of God, which is by faith in Christ Jesus." The outcast position of Adam's race is denied: the mortal and hopeless relation of man to God, both by nature and character, is not admitted: the imperative necessity for the belief of the gospel, and submission to its requirements before men can become acceptable worshippers of God or heirs of life eternal, is completely ignored—because of the parable of the Good Samaritan. This is a great evil, and calls for circumspection: "We must contend earnestly for the faith once delivered to the saints," even against many who may seek to shine in the work of the Good Samaritan. We must, on the other hand, contend for the neighbourly part against those who would confine the service of Christ to the agitation of doctrines. We live in a world where there is a constant tendency to extremes; and even good itself carried to an extreme becomes evil. But there is less likelihood on the whole, perhaps, that the parable of the Good Samaritan will be overdone than that it will be overlooked.

THE GOOD SHEPHERD.

"He that entereth not by the door into the sheepfold, but climbeth up some other way, the same is a thief and a robber. But he that entereth in by the door, is the shepherd of the sheep. To him the porter openeth: and the sheep hear his voice, and he calleth his own sheep by name, and leadeth them out. And when he putteth forth his own sheep, he goeth before them, and the sheep follow him: for they know his voice. And a stranger will they not follow, but will flee from him, for they know not the voice of strangers" (Jno. x. 1-5).

"This parable," we are told, "Jesus spake unto them, but they understood not what things they were which he spake unto them." Presently, however, he explained, and anyone may understand who is capable of the necessary attention and discrimination. The explana-

tion shows that Christ himself is the import of more than one feature of the parable. The sheep occupy a secondary place.

The parable itself was a literal truth apart from any spiritual application. Sheep-culture was a prominent occupation in the country as it is to this day. It differed from modern sheep-raising as regards the domestic relations subsisting between the shepherd and the sheep. The sheep were provided with substantially-made folds, into which they were driven at night for safety from the wolves and other dangers. The fold had a solid entrance at which a porter waited, ready to deny entrance to those who were not entitled to it. The sheep-stealer did not present himself at the door, but clambered over some unprotected part of the wall. The lawful owner had no object in using any but the proper entrance. This owner also knew his own sheep as no western sheep-farmer knows his; and so intimate were the relations between them that they knew his voice and went after him when he called them to go forth upon the hill-sides for pasture—not driving, but leading them. To the voice of a stranger they could not be made obedient. They scampered off at the unaccustomed tones.

These are facts in which Jesus asks us to recognise a figure of himself and his people. It is profitable to trace the correspondence and its nature. The thing signified is, of course, much higher than the figure; but there is an analogy which helps the understanding of the matter. There is a variety of points, but all are beautiful and instructive. There is the shepherd, the fold, the door, the porter, the sheep, the wolf, the hireling shepherd, the shepherd's voice, the listening flock, the shepherd's death in defence of the sheep.

THE SHEPHERD.—“I,” says Jesus, “am the good shepherd.” Here is the key of the parable. How simple, yet how much there is in it. For who is the “I?” “Who art thou, Lord?” “I am Jesus of Nazareth.” But who is he? The Son of Mary (and therefore of Joseph, David, Abraham, Adam), but, which is of much more consequence (for there were plenty of that sort of no benefit to themselves or their kind)—Jesus of Nazareth was the Son of God—begotten of the Holy Spirit, and therefore one with the Eternal Father, who sent him forth to be “righteousness, wisdom, sanctification, and redemption” to all who should receive him.

The Good Shepherd is God thus manifest in the flesh. It was not the first time the character had been so associated. It had been written (Isaiah xl. 10), “Behold the Lord God (*Yahweh Elohim*) will come with strong hand, and His arm shall rule for Him. . . He shall feed his flock *like a shepherd, &c.*” The Creator in Shepherd-manifestation by the Spirit: this is the glorious idea before us in the parable put forth by the son of David, in the hearing of an undiscerning audience in the Temple. Here are power and kindness in combination. You may have power without kindness, and kindness without power: and either or both without wisdom. But when “the Creator of the ends of the earth” steps into the arena, we have all in combination. The wonderful phenomenon presented to view is of a kind, strong, wise, unerring, SHEPHERD-MAN, in whom the Father dwells.

THE SHEEPFOLD.—The place where the sheep are collected and defended—principally required at night. Paul says: “The night is far spent: the day is at hand.” We are at no loss to recognise the night. It is now, while darkness prevails over all the earth in consequence of the hiding of the face of God (the glorious sun of the universe). During such a time, a fold for the sheep is necessary. If none had been provided, the sheep must have remained squandered and exposed to depredation and death.

Literally speaking, if God had made no arrangement for the spiritual development and nurture of men and women, barbarism must have prevailed for ever, as in the dark places of the African earth at the present day. The provision of sons and daughters must have remained an impossibility. But He has not left the earth in so hapless a state, His purpose being to fill the earth with His glory, in the sense of ultimately populating it with a race which should ascribe to Him the glory of His own works. He arranged for their development in the due measure required by that purpose at various times. This arrangement, taking different forms at different times, according as His wisdom saw fit, took, in the days of Christ, the form of creating a community—founding a church or ecclesia—establishing a fold. This community by another figure is considered as a house or temple—“built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets; Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner-stone.” By another figure, it is spoken of as a body of which Christ is the head. “There is one body,” says Paul, “composed of many members.”

We are unfavourably placed in the 19th century for judging of the character and the beauty of this institution, and its adaptation to realise the object of its appointment. We are living at the end of a disastrous history. As the Israelitish nation departed from divine ways after the death of Joshua, and the elders who overlived Joshua, so the community founded by the apostles changed, when the apostles and their co-labourers had passed away, from being “the House of God, the pillar and ground of the truth” into “the synagogue of Satan,” whose constituents “turned away their ears from the truth, and turned unto fables,” as Paul had foretold (Acts xx. 30; 2 Tim. iv. 4). Ecclesiastical history is a history of the corruptions and bickerings that ensued upon this change—the effect of which has been to blight and destroy, instead of conserving and invigorating the work of the Gospel. What was once the fold for the sheep has become a well-fortified enclosure of fat wolves and other noxious creatures, from whose association the sheep of the flock have fled in panic long ago.

Whether we look at the Church of Rome or the Church of England, or other kindred communions, we see systems which suffocate, suppress, and destroy the truth, instead of nourishing and cherishing it. We see a different spectacle from what was presented to view in the first century, when the friends of Christ were organised into loving and enlightened communities, under the fostering care and guidance of shepherdly men, “feeding the flock of God, over which the Holy Spirit had made them overseers” (Acts xx. 28). It is a day of

devastation and downtreading for divine affairs, both in the national fold and the individual fold.

It would be a beautiful and a glorious thing if God were to permit a clearing out and renovation and revival of the fold in which real and healthy sheep might multiply and dwell in safety. The prophetic word does not justify any hope of this sort, till the Great Shepherd of the sheep Himself arrive, for, to the last, it speaks of darkness prevailing till the coming of Christ, and the prosperous ascendancy of antediluvian indifference till the very hour of his manifestation. The most to be done with present agency is for believers, in the spirit of loving co-operation, to approximate, as nearly as they can, to the primitive assemblies, doing all things decently and in order, and all things for the edification of all, in the spirit of mutual and affectionate submission in the fear of the Lord. By this co-operation, the one fold in little sections may be planted here and there, in which a little may be done in this evil day for the keeping alive of the testimony in the earth, and the development and preservation of a people controlled by the knowledge, love, and obedience of the truth. All such, in all time, are in the one fold in the highest sense; they are constituents of the one community that God is forming for Himself out of the mixed material of the passing generations, and every one of them will, at the appointed time, be gathered from the accomplished ages of probation, and set in his appointed place in the happy day when "there shall be one fold and one shepherd."

THE DOOR.—Jesus says, "I am the door." This is one of those graphic figures that carry their meaning home at a stroke. By Christ only can we enter the sheep-fold. He immediately adds a comment to this effect: "By me, if any man enter in, *he shall be saved.*" This is enough. Men who work apart from Christ work without hope; that is, any hope they indulge must prove illusory. Men are naturally without hope, as Paul testifies in Eph. ii. 12. They are straying on the inhospitable mountains of sin-caused evil and death. Remaining there, they must perish. There is a fold in the mountains, entering which, there is safety. The door of this fold is Christ: and how we enter in was expounded by the apostles. It was their work to do so. The mode is too simple for most men. It was defined by Christ himself in the memorable words about the Gospel which he addressed to the apostles before he sent them forth: "He that believeth and is baptised shall be saved" (Mar. xvi. 16).

What this double process of faith and baptism does for the believer is stated by Paul, in terms which can only be read with one meaning: "As many of you as have been *baptised* INTO Christ have *put on* Christ" (Gal. iii. 27). When a man believes the Gospel apostolically delivered, and submits to the baptism apostolically enjoined, he enters in by the door of the sheepfold. He enters by Christ, than whom there is no other entrance—a negative fact of the first importance to recognise. Men who think there are other doors are liable to neglect him. There are many such now-a-days. Almost all men nourish the idea that a fairly moral life will secure salvation

(if there is any, of which many are in doubt). In this, they hold the views of "natural philosophy," which Paul, in his day, declared to be a foolish and a spoiling, because an untrue thing (1 Cor. iii. 18-19; Col. ii. 8). The foolishness of the world's wisdom has not become the wisdom of God with the progress of time. "The simplicity that is in Christ" remains the truth, though unfashionable now as ever. Christ is the door, and "by him," and by him alone, "if any man will enter in, he shall be saved."

THE PORTER.—"To him (the shepherd of the sheep) the porter openeth," says Jesus. If we are justified in giving a specific application to this, we might fix on Moses as the porter in the first degree, and John the Baptist in the second degree. Both acted in the porter capacity to Christ. As regards Moses, this may not be apparent on the first suggestion, but it will be found to be true. First, Jesus says, "He (Moses) wrote of me." Paul says, "Moses was faithful in all his house *as a servant*, FOR A TESTIMONY of those things which were to be spoken after, but Christ *as a son over his own house*, whose house are we" (Heb. iii. 5). And again, "The law was our schoolmaster *unto Christ*" (Gal. iii. 24). Again, "To him gave all the prophets witness" (Acts x. 43); and again, "Christ is *the end of the law* for righteousness to every one that believeth" (Romans x. 4).

Thus Moses, in whom the Jewish leaders made their boast—the great pioneer of the (shortly-to-be-finished) work of God with Israel, was the great opener of the way for Christ, whom they rejected. Moses expressly told Israel (Deut. xviii. 18) that God would raise them up such an one to whom they would listen (which they had not done to Moses); and in all the laws and institutions delivered by his hand there was a shadowing of the glorious realities connected with this greater "prophet like unto Moses." In the case of John the Baptist, the analogy to the porter is still more obvious. He stood at the very threshold of the work of Christ, calling direct attention to him, and introducing him to all in Israel who feared God. He was sent to "prepare his way." "He was not that light, but was sent to bear witness of that light" (Jno. i. 8), and, having done his work, he announced: "He (Jesus) must increase, but I must decrease." He declared to them: "There standeth one among you whom ye know not. He it is that coming after me is preferred before me, whose shoe latchet I am not worthy to unloose;—that he might be made manifest to Israel, therefore I am come baptising with water." John's work attracted great attention and exercised a powerful influence with the whole nation, as we saw in the chapter devoted to the consideration of that matter. To him Jesus appealed in confirmation of his own claims as the good shepherd. "Ye sent unto John, and he bare witness to truth. . . . He was a burning and a shining light, and ye were willing for a season to rejoice in his light. But I have greater witness than that of John; the works that my Father hath given me to finish, the same works that I do bear witness of me that the Father hath sent me" (Jno. v. 33-36). To Jesus, the good shepherd, the porter-ministry of John the Baptist (which was known to the hearers

of Christ's discourse), opened the door of the sheep-fold, in which they might have recognised an incontestable evidence of his claims.

THE SHEEP.—Who they are, Jesus makes plain: "My sheep *hear my voice*: and I know them, and *they follow me*" (Jno. x. 27). Here is their characteristic wherever found: men who submit to the word of Christ and do what he commands. This is a more cordial and distinct type of discipleship than is common among the multitude who recognise the lordship of Christ in the abstract. It is the only type of discipleship acceptable with him, and the type acceptable with him is the only type of ultimate value. He spoke very plainly on this subject more than once: "He that hath my commandments and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me" (Jno. xiv. 21). "Ye are my friends if ye do whatsoever I have commanded" (xv. 14). "Not every one that saith unto me Lord, Lord, shall enter into the Kingdom of Heaven, but he that *doeth the will of my Father* which is in heaven" (Matt. vii. 21).

The apostles spoke with equal plainness. Thus Paul: "If any man have not the spirit of Christ, he is none of his" (Rom. viii. 9). Thus John: "He that saith he abideth in him, ought himself also to walk even as he walked" (Jno. ii. 6). Thus Peter: "If, after they have escaped the pollutions of the world, through the knowledge of the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, they are again entangled therein and overcome, the latter end is worse with them than the beginning" (2 Pet. ii. 20).

The men who submit to the word of Christ and obey his commandments are most aptly represented by sheep. The sheep is a strong but harmless animal, from which no living thing suffers injury. There could be no more powerful exhortation than the employment of such an animal to figure the disciples of Christ. He is himself *the Lamb of God*, and those who follow him are like him in the strength of their spiritual attachments and the guilelessness and inoffensiveness of their characters.

THE WOLF.—The nature of this animal is well-known. He will stop at nothing in the gratification of his hunger, provided he runs no risk. He attacks the weak and shies at the strong. In contrast to the sheep, he represents the rapacious character which is common in the world—headstrong, unscrupulous, merciless men who will sacrifice everything but their own skins in the accomplishment of personal ends. They prefer the weak for their prey. Therefore, the sheep are their especial victims, because the true sheep are not given to fighting. "*The wolf catcheth the sheep and scattereth them.*"

The wolf may be taken to represent any danger that arises to the sheep, but more particularly the one danger with which the name of the wolf is particularly associated in the sayings of Christ and the apostles—the spiritual wolf. This wolf is given to disguises. If he came in his open character, the sheep would flee. So he puts on the fleece. He professes to be a true and humble sheep, and above all, a tending sheep, a bell wether, a kind of shepherd sheep.

These are false teachers, clever men of shallow intellect and no

conviction, who live by their wits in the religious realm. They have always been a numerous tribe, as at this day. Jesus foresaw their activity, and forewarned his disciples. "Beware of false prophets. They come to you in *sheep's clothing*, but inwardly they are RAVENING WOLVES. Ye shall know them by their fruits." Paul also foretold their advent and success when the restraint of his presence should be removed:—"I know this, that after my departing shall GRIEVOUS WOLVES enter in among you, not sparing the flock. Even of *your own selves* shall men arise, speaking perverse things to draw away the disciples after them" (Acts xx. 29, 30). Elsewhere, he speaks of them as "evil men and seducers," who should "wax worse and worse, deceiving and being deceived" (2 Tim. iii. 13). By their ravages, the sheepfold of the apostolic age became emptied and desolate soon after the apostles' death. The fleecy-clothed wolves "caught the sheep and scattered them," because of the officialism of

THE HIRELING.—The apostles were not hirelings, nor were the men who came immediately after them. They were men in earnest love with the work for Christ's sake, at the peril not only of their living, but of their lives, serving in the spirit enjoined by Peter, who said to them, "Feed the flock of God which is among you, taking the oversight thereof, not by constraint but willingly, not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind, neither as being lords over God's heritage, but being ensamples to the flock" (1 Pet. v. 2).

A hireling is a man who is paid for his job, and who works because he is paid, and ceases to work when he is not paid. This class of worker has been numerously developed by the clerical system. Paid work in spiritual things is liable to become poor work and mercenary. Paul, who had a right to be maintained, refused on this ground, "lest the Gospel of Christ should be hindered" (1 Cor. ix. 12). He did not refuse occasional help, prompted by love and the appreciation of his labours (Phil. iv. 10, 17). But he declined a set maintenance, as all wise men have done since his day.

The hirelings have no objection to a set maintenance. On the contrary, it is what they most particularly appreciate and aim to secure. The consequence is seen in what Jesus says happens in times of peril: "The hireling fleeth because he is an hireling and careth not for the sheep." When he sees the wolf coming in the shape of any danger, "he leaveth the sheep and fleeth." How little he cares for the interests he professes to have in charge becomes apparent when he cannot turn them to his personal advantage. To be out of pocket or put up with disgrace is quite out of the line of what he feels himself called upon to submit to. This is quite beyond his calculations of prudence. The least smell of danger in this shape makes him look round for a decent pretext to get away. In complete contrast to this is

THE SHEPHERD WHO LAYS DOWN HIS LIFE FOR THE SHEEP.—This primarily refers to Christ himself, who offered himself a sacrifice of "sweet smelling savour" to Him who required this declaration of His righteousness, "that he might be just and the justifier of him that

believeth in Jesus" (Rom. iii.). But it is true of all shepherd-men who have received the truth in the love of it, and estimate the work of Christ as their sweetest occupation and their highest honour. There is "a chief shepherd" (1 Pet. vi. 4), viz., "that great shepherd of the sheep," our Lord Jesus, who was "brought again from the dead through the blood of the everlasting covenant" (Heb. xiii. 20). This implies under-shepherds, namely, the apostles and all who enter into their work in the line of things indicated to Timothy in the words of Paul: "The things that thou hast heard of me, among many witnesses, *the same commit thou to FAITHFUL MEN*, who shall be able to teach others also" (2 Tim. ii. 2). Men of this qualification are the true "successors of the apostles," and they have been found wherever faithful men of ability have received and espoused the faith of Christ with the ardent appreciation and disinterested aims of the apostles. They require no hiring to look after the sheep, and when the wolf of danger in any shape presents itself, they sally forth with clubs to beat off the beast at the peril of their lives.

THE SHEPHERD'S VOICE AND THE LISTENING FLOCK.—"*The sheep hear his voice, and he calleth his own sheep by name and leadeth them out. And when he putteth forth his own sheep, he goeth before them, and the sheep follow him: for they know his voice. And a stranger will they not follow, but will flee from him: for they know not the voice of strangers.*" These are the natural facts in the case. Their spiritual meaning is plain. The shepherd's voice is what Christ has said for the guidance of men, but with this is bound up much more than the precepts that actually came out of his own mouth. What he said himself is only part of the message of God to man. For the rest of the message, he refers us to Moses and the prophets: "Think not," said he, "that I am come to destroy the law and the prophets. I am not come to destroy but to fulfil" (Matt. v. 17). "They have Moses and the prophets: let them hear them. If they believe not Moses and the prophets, neither would they be persuaded though one rose from the dead" (Luke xvi. 29). "If ye believe not his writings (the writings of Moses), how shall ye believe my words?" (Jno. v. 47). "The Scripture cannot be broken" (Jno. x. 35). "The Scripture must be fulfilled" (Mark xiv. 49).

Such are a few illustrations of the way in which, in so many words, he binds up the message of God in the "Old Testament" with his own personal word in the New. In addition to these, the instances in which he does so by implication, and in which such an association results of necessity from his teaching and his work, are more numerous and weighty than the casual reader of the Bible can be aware. The conclusion resulting from them all is that the Shepherd's voice is co-extensive with the Bible. The Shepherd's voice is *the voice of the Spirit*, as especially manifest from the pendant to each of the messages sent by Jesus to the seven ecclesias: "He that hath ears to hear, let him hear what *the Spirit saith* unto the churches: "concerning all of which messages, he says "*I, Jesus*, have sent mine angel to testify unto you these things in the churches" (Rev. xxii. 16).

Because, therefore, the Scriptures of Moses and the prophets are given by inspiration of God—because their authors were “holy men of God who spoke (and wrote) as they were moved by the Holy Spirit,” and not as impelled by human will (2 Pet. i. 21), those only truly listen to the voice of the shepherd who listen to those Scriptures, as interpreted and applied by the Spirit in Jesus and the Apostles. The voice of Jesus is not a different voice from the Holy Scriptures which were read in the Jewish synagogues every sabbath day in the days of Jesus, and now placed in the Providence of God in the hands of Christendom. The voice of the personal Jesus is but a supplementary and explanatory expression of the same Eternal mind. The Old Testament Scriptures, in conjunction with the Apostolic testimony to Jesus as their fulfiller, were able to make to “make men wise unto salvation” in the days of Paul (2 Tim. iii. 15); and they are still able to work that great result for men if they will allow them. God not only spake by Jesus, but the prophets also, as Paul says: “God, who at sundry times and divers manners, *spake in time past unto the fathers BY THE PROPHETS, hath in these last days spoken unto us by His Son*” (Heb. i. 1). So also Jesus teaches in the parable of the vineyard—the proprietor of which sent first various messengers, and then his son.

Now, the voice of the shepherd being of this amplitude, we have to note how the fact bears on the claims of many in our own day who are regarded as his sheep. If that which constitutes and distinguishes men as the sheep of Christ’s parable is the hearing of the shepherd’s voice, and if that voice be the voice of God in the entire Scriptures of Moses, the prophets and the apostles, where do myriads stand, professing his name, who not only neglect making the acquaintance of these Scriptures, but who actually, in an increasing multitude of cases, discard them as the obsolete and infantile conceptions of a past age? They are manifestly not even hearers of the Word, let alone doers. They do not recognise the voice of the Shepherd, and therefore follow him not. The sheep are to be found among those who are enlightened in this matter—who discern the voice of the Shepherd in the “whatsoever things” that have been written aforetime for our learning—who “hear what the Spirit saith,” whether through Jesus, or the apostles, or the prophets. Such are strongly characterised by that other sensibility of which Jesus speaks, when he says his sheep “know not the voice of a stranger.” “A stranger will they not follow, but will flee from him.” A knowledge of the Scriptures, in the understanding thereof, gives them a quick sense of the alien element. They quickly detect what is foreign to the mind of God.

Philosophy in all its branches comes under their reprobation, where it claims to guide in divine matters. They see with clear eye that Paul uttered no empty flourish when he spoke of philosophy as a spoiling thing, of which believers had to beware. They can exactly tell why. They can define the limits of philosophy in relation to religious truth, and demonstrate the radical distinctness of the two realms of thought. They know the whereabouts of the natural

thinker, while the natural thinker cannot place the sheep, except by a blundering hazzard, which attributes their conceptions to mental peculiarity bordering on aberation. Paul expresses the fact well when he says, "He that is spiritual judgeth (discerneth) all men, but he himself is judged (discerned) of no man." The eyesight of the spiritual man not only covers the ground occupied by the natural man, but extends much further, like the visual range of the man at a higher altitude than his fellows, *e.g.*, a mountain observatory overlooking a plain. They know enough to know that Christ is the only guide for man in relation to the things of God and futurity. Therefore they hear his voice and follow him, while they flee very determinedly from any man or system who poses as a substitute, or rival, or equal. These things are discerned by all who truly know Christ. They know his voice, and they know all counterfeits.

THE MAN WITH THE BARNS.

"The ground of a certain rich man brought forth plentifully, and he thought within himself, What shall I do, because I have no room where to bestow my fruits? And he said, This will I do: I will pull down my barns and build greater, and there will I bestow all my fruits and my goods. And I will say to my soul, Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years: take thine ease, eat, drink, and be merry. But God said unto him, Thou fool, this night shall thy soul be required of thee; then whose shall those things be which thou hast provided? So is he that layeth up treasure for himself, and is not rich towards God" (Luke xii. 16).

This is not so much in the nature of a parable as an illustration. The object of its employment is manifest from its concluding sentence. It is to illustrate the ultimate folly of making self-provision the engrossing rule of life, as it is with the common run of men. The occasion of its introduction gives even greater piquancy to the lesson.

We are informed that "One of the company" on a certain occasion, "said unto Jesus, Master, speak to my brother, that he divide the inheritance with me." This was invoking Christ's authority in a case of disputed title to property. Such an appeal is generally considered important and respectable. In the present circumstances of human life (in which men to whom God has spoken are on probation as to the question of doing the will of God), Jesus could not look on questions of human property as men generally look upon them. First, he denied jurisdiction in such matters in the present state of affairs, though he will have jurisdiction enough when he comes to exercise judgment and justice. "Man, who made me a judge or divider over you?"

Next, most men would reckon he goes out of his way to have a needless fling at covetousness which more or less animates most men in their dealings. "Take heed and beware of covetousness; for a

man's life consisteth not in the abundance of things which he possesseth." The man who asked him to interfere must have felt this as an unkind rebuff, and the majority of people in our day would sympathise with him. He would feel that he was only wanting "his own," and that if he asked Christ to help him, it was because the influence of a just man would be powerful. Yes, but there was another side to the question to which most men are blind.

The lust of possession is a snare. It catches the heart and deadens it to other and higher considerations which ought to be supreme. Hence Jesus says "Beware," and speaks of "the *deceitfulness* of riches;" their tendency to cheat the heart out of wisdom. He, therefore, advises men to turn "the mammon of unrighteousness," when it comes their way, into a friend, by its use for God in a good stewardship of which He alone, and not man is judge. Universal experience shows the necessity for his exhortation. Nothing is more common than for men of enlarging wealth to make use of it for still greater enlargement in self-provision and self-administration to themselves and families. And nothing seems more ghastly and sterile in the day of death than munificent and skilful arrangements in this direction to the neglect of what God requires at a man's hand in the way of faithful stewardship.

Nothing will emancipate a man so thoroughly and wholesomely from the bondage of riches as the use of them in the various duties which God has attached to this probationary state. This is what Jesus calls "being rich towards God" in contrast to a man "laying up treasure for himself." Being rich towards God may not seem much of an acquisition in the day of health and liberty, but the matter wears a different aspect when that day sets in clouds and darkness, as it inevitably does sooner or later. When the dead rise, and the Lord sets up His throne in judgment, the reality of treasure laid up in heaven will be manifest in the eyes of men and angels.

THE BARREN FIG-TREE.

"A certain man had a fig-tree planted in his vineyard, and he came and sought fruit thereon, and found none. Then said he unto the dresser of his vineyard, Behold these three years I come seeking fruit on this fig-tree and find none: cut it down. Why cumbereth it the ground? And he answering, said unto him, Lord, let it alone this year also, till I shall dig about it, and dung it, and if it bear fruit, well: and if not then after that, thou shalt cut it down" (Luke xiii. 6).

The connection of this parable shows its meaning. The parable itself seems to carry its interpretation on its face. Some of the crowd attending Jesus on a certain occasion reported to him some recent occurrences of a tragical character—the slaughtering of some Galileans to be offered with their own sacrifices: the crushing of some 18 people to death by the falling of a tower. Their report was

apparently made in a tone that suggested the opinion that the said persons must have been more wicked than ordinary mortals for such things to happen to them. Jesus at once offered a comment unfavourable to this view, and made one of those manlowering remarks that distinguished him from all human teachers "Suppose ye that these Galileans were sinners above all the Galileans because they suffered such things? I tell you, nay: but *except ye repent, YE SHALL ALL LIKEWISE PERISH.*" Then he adds the parable which likens them all to barren fig trees spared at the request of a patient gardener, in the hope that a little further treatment may induce fecundity, but on the distinct understanding that a further failure is to be decisive as to their removal as useless pieces of herbage.

The parable was, doubtless, uttered and recorded for general use afterwards. It invites men to regard the continuance of their privileges as a mark of divine patience, and not as an indication of their own merit. How naturally most men reason otherwise. When prosperity lasts, they complacently take it as a matter to which they are entitled. When adversity comes, they ask, "What have I done?" If they would realise that human life is altogether a matter of divine toleration, because of God's own purpose, and not because of human desert, they would most easily enter into this parable, and take the truly modest and perfectly reasonable attitude apostolically enjoined when we are commanded to "work out our own salvation with fear and trembling," and to "pass the time of our sojourning here in fear."

There was, of course, a special applicability in the parable to the generation contemporary with Jesus. The divine displeasure had been gathering over the land of Israel for generations. The iniquity of the people was coming to a head, and the long gathering storm was about to burst, which would sweep Israel from their place among the nations, if reformation did not avert it. "Except *ye* repent, ye shall all likewise perish," had special point as addressed to those who were to be engulfed in the flood of destruction that came with the overflowing of Roman victory 40 years later. We of the nineteenth century stand related to a similar situation. A dispensation is culminating, and judgment impends that will sweep away vast multitudes for the same reason—divine patience long misunderstood and abused. God is gracious and long-suffering. The parable illustrates this, and though the fact will remain absolutely without influence as regards the population at large, it is a source of comfort and encouragement in personal cases where there is a disposition to turn from evil.

THE PARABLE OF THE LOWEST PLACE.

"He put forth a parable to those who were bidden, when he marked how they chose out the chief rooms. When thou art bidden of any man to a wedding, sit not down in the highest room, lest a more

honourable man than thou be bidden of him. And he that bade thee and him, come and say to thee, Give this man place, and thou begin with shame to take the lowest room. But when thou art bidden, go and sit down in the lowest room, that when He that bade thee cometh, He may say unto thee, Friend, go up higher; then shalt thou have worship in the presence of them that sit at meat with thee” (Luke xiv. 7).

This, like the last, seems not so much what is technically understood by a parable, as a piece of preceptive counsel. Yet it is a parable in so far as it selects one sort of occasion, and one form of humility to inculcate a lesson that applies to all occasions and any form. Invitation to partake in wedding festivities is a casual occurrence, and it would be a poor modesty that was to be confined to such occasions. It is, therefore, a parable in teaching a general lesson by a special instance. The need of the lesson may not be very apparent in modern educated circles where it has become embalmed in the forms of their etiquette: but a different feeling is created in the contemplation of either the harsh and undisguised emulations of Greek and Roman life, or Jewish life either, 1,800 years ago: or the barbarous self-assertiveness still prevalent in the vast mass of human population on the earth. To the end of Gentile times, Christ's parable will remain the unmistakable indication and inculcation of the kind of behaviour that is acceptable with him. He emphasized the lesson with the immediate remark: “Whosoever exalteth himself shall be abased: and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted.” The lesson may have no power with the mass of men, but it will to the last prevail with those who conform to the mind of Christ with the docility and zeal of true disciples. A modest and retiring disposition everywhere is more or less the indirect result of the commandment which took shape in this parable.

THE VINEYARD LABOURERS.

Jesus had declared that the salvation of the rich would be a difficult thing. Peter drew attention to the fact that they (the disciples) were not rich but poor, and that this poverty was in a large measure voluntary: upon which he invited Jesus to state to them the advantages of their sacrifice. In this, there was a mixture of child-like simplicity with just a trace of complacency verging on vain-glory. This accounts for the double nature of Christ's answer, which deals with both aspects of Peter's attitude.

First, Jesus deals with the sincere aspect. He tells the disciples frankly that the counterpart of their fellowship with him in the day of his contempt would be a participation in his power and glory, when he should sit upon his throne in the day of restitution. He further says that “*everyone*” who had sacrificed for his sake would be recompensed a hundred-fold and inherit everlasting life. But he adds a statement that suggest a qualification: “But many that are first shall be last, and the last first.” The mere giving up of worldly

advantage for His sake would not ensure final acceptance with God unless the act were performed and accompanied with an acceptable spirit of modesty and self-abasement: "For"—and he proceeds to employ a parable which can only be rightly understood in view of these attendant circumstances.

It is a parable of hired labourers. The owner of a vineyard goes out early in the morning and employs all that accept service at a penny a day (about 8d.). About nine o'clock (to adopt modern time) he goes out again, and finds other hands loitering unemployed in the market place. He sends them to his vineyard with the general assurance that he will make their wages right. He did the same at twelve o'clock, and three. Again, at five, when the day is nearly done, he pays another visit to the market place, and finding another batch of men idle, he sends them to work in his vineyard. At the close of the day, the whole of the labourers were mustered for payment of wages. Payment began with those who had come last. The early comers, looking on, imagined that as they had worked all day, they would get more than those who had worked only a part, although the contract was for one day's pay. When their turn came, they received what they had agreed for: but because the others had received a greater amount, they grumbled. Hearing their grumbling, the owner of the vineyard reasoned with one of them on behalf of the rest: "*Friend, I do thee no wrong. Didst thou not agree with me for a penny? . . . Is it not lawful for me to do what I will with mine own?*"

It is customary to understand this parable as teaching that every one of the accepted will be alike in their status in glory; that those who have just believed and taken on them the name of Christ and passed away without the opportunity of faithful stewardship, will rank equally with those who through long years of trial have "borne the burden and heat of the day." Another favourite idea with some is that it teaches that every one who believes will be saved without reference to their "walk and conversation." Those who take this view speak of "the penny of eternal life." They suppose the penny to teach that every one called to the vineyard will receive eternal life, and that the difference between acceptable and unacceptable labouring will be in the position assigned to them in the state to which eternal life will introduce them.

There are reasons for rejecting both views. The first reason lies in the interpretation which Jesus himself gives of the general drift of the parable. He concludes it with this remark: "So the last shall be first and the first last: *for many be called but few chosen.*" As the labourers represent the "called," this makes it certain that they are not intended to stand indiscriminately for the saved. They stand for the called—not for the chosen, though they include the chosen. The parable is employed expressly to teach that it is not everyone casually employed that is selected as a permanent servant by the owner of the vineyard. This reason is of itself decisive. There are others. It is not fitting that any class of the saved should be repre-

sented by those who "murmur against the good man of the house," or who have an "evil eye." The idea that all are to be equal would conflict with the plainly enunciated doctrine of the New Testament that the standing of men with Christ in the day of account will be determined by the account they have to render. This doctrine is rejected by the Christianity of the day, as a great many other true doctrines are. It has been nullified by the mis-application of that other true doctrine, that salvation is "by grace" "not of works, lest any man should boast."

There is no conflict between these doctrines, when it is seen that the doctrine of salvation by grace applies to the foundation and initiation of the plan. If salvation primarily depended on "works" no man could be saved: for "all have sinned, and the wages of sin is death." One sin is quite enough to ensure death, as shown in the case of Adam in Eden. Salvation, to be possible at all, has to be "by grace," by favour. This favour takes the form of the forgiveness of sins, by which a man becomes justified in the sight of God, and an heir of life eternal. But forgiveness is *on conditions*. The preaching of the Gospel is a proclamation of the conditions. The conditions not only determine the question of forgiveness or no forgiveness, but they also affect the questions of how high in glory those who are forgiven will rise, for there are degrees of attainment in Christ: and it is here where the element of "account" comes in. It is here where "works" will determine a man's position. The man who in this connection exclaims "Not of works" does not "rightly divide the word of truth," but wrests it to his own destruction. Nothing is more plainly or more frequently indicated than that the called will be judged with reference to their works, and that their position will depend upon their account. Let these examples suffice:—"Behold I come quickly, and my reward is with me to give every man *according as his work shall be*" (Rev. xxii. 12); "The Son of Man shall come in the glory of his Father with his angels, and then he shall reward every man *according to his works*" (Matt. xvi. 27); "Every man shall receive his own reward *according to his own labour*" (1 Cor. iii. 8); "He that soweth sparingly shall *reap also sparingly*, and he that soweth bountifully shall *reap also bountifully*" (2 Cor. ix. 6); "Have thou authority over *ten cities* . . . be thou over *five cities*" (Luke xix. 17-19).

What then is the teaching of the parable? That not every one who labours in the vineyard will receive the Lord's favour at the last; that not even the forsaking of houses and lands and relations, or the bearing of the burden and heat of the day, will commend to God a man who is a murmurer, or has an evil eye, or who is great in his own eyes: that it is a necessity that a man recognise the absolute sovereignty of the Lord of the vineyard, both as to possession and the right to do as he wills, uncontrolled by any will, or wish or whim, on the part of those whom he favours with employment: in a word, that "*except a man humble himself as a little child, he shall in no case enter the kingdom of heaven.*" The paying of the penny is a mere part of the drapery of the parable, but if a specific counterpart

to it is insisted on, it is found in the fact that the Lord is just, and will give all that the holders of the covenant can justly claim to receive—which is merely resurrection. Everything beyond this is favour-grace: and the Lord bestows this of His own bounty, and only where men find favour in His eyes.

THE LOST SHEEP.

Jesus said, "I am not sent but unto *the lost sheep of the house of Israel.*" "The Son of Man is come to seek and to save that which was lost." The religious and well-to-do classes of the nation generally had too good an opinion of themselves to regard themselves as the lost: and Jesus took them at their own valuation. They considered themselves the Lord's saved elect, like thousands in the present day. Therefore he did not go after them, but after those whom they despised. "I came not," said he, "to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance." To the publicans and sinners he addressed himself: and this class paid attention to him. At this the Pharisees and Scribes murmured, saying, "This man receiveth sinners and eateth with them."

This gives the key to the parable he spoke: "*What man of you having an hundred sheep, if he lose one of them, doth not leave the ninety and nine in the wilderness and go after that which was lost until he find it? And when he hath found it he layeth it on his shoulders rejoicing, and when he cometh home, he calleth together his friends and neighbours, saying unto them, Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep which was lost*" (Luke xv. 4-6).

He spoke this parable in answer to their cavils. Therefore, it applies to those to whose association on the part of Christ the Pharisees were objecting—the sinners. They are the lost sheep—(all were, in fact, for all had sinned, but all did not recognise the fact)—Jesus had come to seek and save them. It was with this view he humbled himself to their society. He did not associate with them as sinners, but as sinners willing to be saved, which is a very different class of sinners from those of whom David speaks when he says: "Blessed is the man that standeth not in the way of sinners." (Psa. i. 1).

Jesus did not associate with sinners to entertain them, or to take part with them in their pleasures or their sins. He humbled himself to them that he might teach them the way of righteousness: and if they would not listen to this, he turned away from them, and they from him. If they listened to him, and conformed to the Father's requirements as made known by him, then he received them gladly, and could say of such to the Pharisees, "The publicans and the harlots go into the kingdom of God before you." Nay, he not only thus received them: what said he in finishing his parables? "There is joy *in the presence of the angels of God* over one sinner that repenteth." "More than over ninety and nine just persons that need no repentance."

If a Pharisee was glad at the recovery of living mutton, why should he be envious at a spiritual recovery which caused joy among the angels? This was the argument of the parable. The lesson it conveys, it is easy to see; but how flat the lesson falls in our worse than Laodicean age, when the gladness of the angels is esteemed a myth, and interest on behalf of the fallen is pitied as an enthusiasts' craze. Yet there are those who as in Peter's day will "save themselves from this untoward generation." Let such be very courageous, and go in the face of the sublime complacency of a generation of shallow wiseacres who think themselves profound and learned and great and excellent, when the state of the case is tremendously the reverse when estimated in the light of divine common sense. "The wisdom of this world is foolishness with God."

THE LOST MONEY.

A woman has lost money, and makes diligent search and finds it, and is so glad that she convenes her neighbours to rejoice with her (Luke xv. 8). This parable was spoken on the same occasion as the parable of the lost sheep, and has the same meaning—the figure being merely changed.

THE PARABLE OF THE PRODIGAL SON.

There have been many fanciful interpretations of this. There is no need for special ingenuity. The meaning of it is evidently very simple. It follows the parables of the lost sheep and the lost money, and was spoken in the same connection, and is therefore to be read in the light of the cavils and feelings that suggested them.

The Pharisees and the Scribes murmured at Christ's reception of publicans and sinners. Christ aims by parable to exhibit the true meaning of his attitude, which on the surface appeared ambiguous. This he could not have more effectively done than by supposing the case of a man with two sons, one of whom, having received the portion his father had set aside for him, should emigrate and squander his substance in riotous living, and afterwards rue his course of life, and resolve to return home and throw himself upon his father's mercy. That a father should compassionately receive a son under such circumstances must have seemed natural even to the fossilised Scribes and Pharisees. How much more was Divine clemency to be shown to the fallen classes of Israel, who listened gladly to Christ, with an earnest resolution to walk in the ways of righteousness? There was a power in this argument which must have gone home even to the perceptions of the "blind Pharisee."

But Jesus did not stop his parable there. He introduced a picture of the odious part the Pharisees themselves were playing. This

he did in the case of the second son who stayed at home and behaved correctly, so far as outward decorum was concerned ; and who, finding his vagrant brother received, in his own temporary absence, with joy and festivity, " was (on his arrival) angry, and would not go in." His father went out to him, and expostulated with him. The son complained that the father had never made him a feast, although he had faithfully served him so many years. The father pointed out that he was always at home, and that the whole establishment was at his command, and that it was reasonable they should make merry at the return of a son who had been as good as lost and dead to them all.

The whole parable was an answer to the cavils of the Pharisees at Christ consorting with sinners. The record of it has been at the same time an encouragement, during all the ages that have since elapsed, to the erring who desire to return to the ways of right. It is, in a parabolic form, a reiteration of the comforting words of the Eternal Father, by Isaiah, " Let the wicked forsake his way and the unrighteous man his thoughts, and let him return unto the Lord, and he will have mercy upon him, and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon " (Is. lv. 7) ; or by Ezekiel, " If the wicked will turn from all his sins that he hath committed, and keep all my statutes, and do that which is lawful and right, he shall surely live ! he shall not die. All the transgressions that he hath committed shall not be mentioned unto him " (Ezek. xviii. 21).

THE UNJUST STEWARD.

" A certain rich man who had a steward, and the same was accused unto him that he had wasted his goods. And he called him and said unto him, how is it that I hear this of thee? Give an account of thy stewardship : for thou mayest be no longer steward. Then the steward said within himself, What shall I do? for my Lord taketh away from me my stewardship. I cannot dig : to beg I am ashamed. I am resolved what to do, that when I am put out of the stewardship they may receive me into their houses. So he called every one of his lord's debtors unto him, and said unto the first, How much owest thou unto my lord? And he said, an hundred measures of oil. And he said unto him, Take thy bill, and sit down quickly and write fifty. Then said he to another, And how much owest thou? And he said, an hundred ounces of wheat. And he said unto him, Take thy bill and write fourscore. And the lord (that is, the lord of the steward) commended the unjust steward because he had done wisely," to which Jesus adds the comment, " The children of this world are, in their generation, wiser than the children of light."

The sense of this remark we realise on reflection. It was good policy on the part of the steward to use his vanishing opportunity while it lasted, as to make it provide a future for him which it did not yield in itself. The point of Christ's remark lies here, that the children of light—(those who embrace and profess the faith of the king-

dom)—do not, as a rule, make a similarly wise use of their vanishing opportunity. They have only one life to live, and but a short time in which to use the power and opportunities they may have as stewards of the manifold grace of God. And yet, in most cases, they live as if this life would last for ever, and as if its one business were to provide for natural and personal wants. The consequence will be that, sowing to the flesh, they will reap corruption (Gal. vi. 8). In this they are not so wise as the children of this world, who, when they see a thing is going from their hand, make the most of their chance, "making hay while the sun shines."

That this is the view Jesus wished to enforce by the parable, is evident from the remarks with which he accompanied it. "And I say unto you, Make to yourselves friends of the mammon of unrighteousness, that when ye fail, they may receive you into everlasting habitations." The mammon of unrighteousness is a phrase by which Jesus defines worldly wealth. Why he so designates it, we need not concern ourselves to enquire beyond noting that, as a rule, wealth is acquired and used unrighteously, which sufficiently accounts for Christ's expression. The important question is, How can the mammon of unrighteousness be turned into "friends" against a time of failure? The time of failure is certain, in view of the fact that everyone of us must shortly part with all that we have. Death dissolves a man's connection with all he may have: and resurrection will not restore it. He will emerge from the ground a penniless man. How can wealth be so handled now as to be at such a time a "friend" providing us "everlasting habitations?" Jesus indicates the answer in saying, "He that is faithful in that which is least (mortal wealth) is faithful also in much (that which is to come). . . . If therefore ye have not been faithful in the unrighteous mammon, who will commit to your trust the true riches? And if ye have not been faithful in that which is another man's—(the property of Christ in our hands now as stewards)—who shall give you that which is your own?" (what a man receives in eternal life will in a peculiar sense be "his own").

Faithfulness, then, in the use of what we have now is the rule of promotion when the time comes to "give to every man according to his works." "Unrighteous mammon" used in the service of God will be found to have been turned into a friend for us in the day of account, when we have no longer any control over it. How it may be so used is abundantly indicated throughout the Scriptures. It is not confined to any particular form, but certainly does not consist in bestowing it wholly on one's own respectability and comfort, whether in self or family. The mode is indicated in Paul's words to Timothy about the rich: "Charge them that are rich in this world . . . that they do good; that they be rich in good works, ready to distribute, willing to communicate, laying up in store for themselves a good foundation against the time to come, that they may lay hold on eternal life" (1 Tim. vi. 17-19). Jesus strongly recommends this application of the unrighteous mammon, by which a dangerous foe is turned into a friend. He emphasises his exhortation by dogmatically

asserting, "No servant can serve two masters. *Ye cannot serve God and mammon.*" The doctrine may be unacceptable, but it is true, as will be found in joy and grief by two different classes in the day of the issues of life.

There is no real ground for the difficulty that some feel about Christ parabolically holding up an unjust steward for imitation. He did not do so in the matter of the unjustness. The falsifier of his master's accounts is only introduced to illustrate the wisdom of providing for future need. The children of this world do it in their way, the children of light are exhorted to do it in theirs, by a faithful use of "the unrighteous mammon."

THE RICH MAN AND LAZARUS.

There are two questions to be considered in the study of this parable (Luke xvi. 9): first, the significance that Jesus intended to convey by the use of it; and secondly, the light it may throw on the state of the dead. These are totally distinct questions, and it is important they should be kept separate.

The first question presents no difficulty. The lessons of the parable are apparent on its face, especially when viewed in the light of the circumstances that called it forth. It was evoked by the opposition shown by the Pharisees to the teaching of his previous parables—those we have just been considering. Jesus had especially emphasised the doctrine that it was impossible to serve God and mammon; and that the way to use riches to spiritual advantage was to make use of them as a means of abundant well-doing.

We are told that "the Pharisees, *who were covetous*, hearing all these things, *derided him.*" This drew his attention directly to them. They were in great reputation with the people for superior sanctity; which made their opposition particularly galling in view of the light way they treated the obligations imposed by Moses and the prophets, and the selfish objects with which they used their influence, and the hypocritical arts they employed to keep up that influence.

This was the first point he touched: "Ye are they which justify yourselves before men, but God knoweth your hearts, for that which is highly esteemed among men is abomination in the sight of God" (verse 15).

The second point was their trifling with the law of Moses and the prophets to make room for their own traditions. This he condemned by affirming that "the law and the prophets were (in full force as the binding expression of the will of God) until John; and that since then," the preaching of the kingdom of God by himself and his disciples, which was resisted by the Pharisees as an innovation, had been attested as the latest manifestation of the will of God, with the result that thousands of the common people accepted it gladly, though the Pharisees held aloof.

As for the law of Moses, with which they trifled, it was easier for heaven and earth to pass away than for even the smallest of its provisions to fail. The laxity of the marriage law, as interpreted by the Pharisees, was in direct violation of the Mosaic precepts, though so popular with the Pharisees and their disciples.

This was the situation which the parable of the rich man and Lazarus was introduced to illustrate, and on the true nature of which it throws the light of divine interpretation. The Pharisees had one view of that situation, and this shows another. They thought themselves the righteous of the earth, and monopolised the fat things of life as their just portion from God, regarding with a supercilious contempt the low class to which Jesus, in their eyes, belonged. The parable shows them a tolerated class for a time merely, and the Lazarus class as the beloved of God, to be exalted in due time when the triflers with the Scriptures would be brought down and made suppliant at the feet of the Lazaruses they now despise. But suppliant in vain, for a wide gulf will divide the rejected of God from the accepted in that day, rendering it impossible for one to render good offices to the other if ever so disposed, which will not be the case when the day of opportunity and mercy is passed. "They have Moses and the prophets; LET THEM HEAR THEM." This is the great lesson of the parable put into the mouth of Abraham. Jesus considers the claims of Moses and the prophets to be established on such grounds, that the submission of true and docile reason is inevitable, and in effect says that a man standing out against those claims is beyond reach of conviction. "If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded though one rose from the dead." This declaration ceases to appear extravagant when we become acquainted with the character of Moses and the prophets, and with the facts involved in the existence of their writings.

THE STATE OF THE DEAD.—And now for the form in which the lesson of the parable is propounded. Does Jesus teach the existence of the dead as conscious beings in a disembodied state? It is universally assumed that he does; and certainly such is the impression that any one would receive from a rough and casual reading of the parable. But second thoughts will show many reasons against this view.

In the first place, it was not the nature of "the future state" that was at all in question between Christ and the Pharisees when he uttered the parable. The question was as to *God's estimation of the position and teaching of the Pharisees and of Christ respectively*. Jesus dogmatically defined this, and then, as was his wont, uttered this parable in illustration of what he said. The question is, what is the nature of this parable? There are at least three kinds of parables. Jesus sometimes employed figures drawn from ordinary literal experience (as when he spoke of a man losing a sheep). Sometimes his parable was constructed from the views entertained by those around him without any reference to their truth (as when he discussed the abstract possibility of his doing miracles by the power of a mythical god—Beelzebub); or sometimes they were founded on the imagination of impossible circumstances (as when he spoke of keeping the left hand

ignorant of what the right hand was doing, or the stones crying out). Which of these it was in the case of the rich man and Lazarus, we must decide by investigation of *what is true outside the parable itself*. This is not the place for such investigation. It has been fully entered upon in other places (*Man Mortal, Christendom Astray, &c.*). The result is to show that the dead are truly in a state of death, not only having no capacity for any rational function whatever, but having no existence of any kind, except in the history which their life has written in the book of God's indelible memory. It is the great doctrine of the Bible, both in the Old and New Testaments, that on the foundation of this history, their existence will be resumed by the resurrection power God has given to Christ, at whose command the dead will be reorganised and come forth for judgment in accordance with what he may deem the deserts of mortal life; incorruption of nature and consequent deathlessness, with every attendant circumstance of glory, honour, and joy, being awarded to those of whom he approves; and condemnation to second death, corruption, and final perdition to those whose case in his judgment calls for so terrible a fate.

This being the unanswerably demonstrated literal truth in the case, it is inadmissible to put such a construction on the parable of the rich man and Lazarus as would make the dead alive, the soul immortal, and the occurrence of death the occasion of a man's experience of the judicial issues of life. We must look for such an aspect of it as will harmonise with Christ's own doctrine that man is mortal, and resurrection at his coming the time for every man to receive "according to his works."

Such we find in the second and third of the above-indicated classes of the parables he used. The parable bears a precise resemblance to what the Pharisees believed concerning the state of the dead, as anyone may see who reads the treatise on Hades, by Josephus, himself a Pharisee, and living in the same age of the world. That their view was untrue is nothing to the point in the way of its employment. Christ was addressing them, and it was natural and effective that he should make use of their view of how the dead are affected by death, when he wished parabolically to introduce the testimony of Abraham, in whom they boasted. If it confirmed them in a delusion we must remember that this was one of the objects of the employment of parable, as Jesus himself declares in answer to the question of the disciples, "Wherefore speakest thou to them in parables?" "That seeing they might see and not perceive, and hearing they might hear and not understand" (Luke viii. 10; Matt. xiii. 10, 13). Such an idea may shock modern critics; but modern critics must not shut their eyes to the fact of Christ's promulgation of that idea when they make it an objection to a particular interpretation of a parable, that it would tend to perpetuate a delusion.

His employment of an erroneous view of the death state in conveying a denunciation of Pharisaic morality and pretensions, was admissible on the principle of the second mode of constructing parables,

referred to above, viz., the use of impossible incidents in the figurative enforcement of a lesson.

The things believed by the Pharisees were impossibilities, but this was no bar to their employment in a mode of teaching which made frequent use of such figures. The sea making a declaration, for example (Is. xxiii. 4); the elements verbally repudiating the possession of wisdom (Job. xxviii. 14, 22); the floods clapping their hands (Ps. xcvi. 8); corpses making a stir and talking when the King of Babylon dies (Is. xiv. 9), are all examples of representing the impossible as occurring. Still more striking in this respect are the parables of Jotham, the son of Abimelech; of the trees sending a deputation and proposing a government (Jud. ix. 8), and of Joash, King of Israel, imputing marriage and political achievements to the thistle (2 Chron. xxv. 18); also Joseph's dream of the planets and sheaves of corn doing him homage, and Pharaoh's dream of corn eating corn.

They are all instances of a beautiful and rich poetic drapery of literal truth, which is not mistaken for literal truth in these cases, because the nature of the literal truth is recognised on all hands. That a similar figuration of speech and movement in the case of the dead should be literally construed is due to the existence of a philosophical belief that the dead are not dead, because incapable of death, and alive and active in another state. Jesus gave no countenance to this philosophical view in his plain teaching, but on the contrary, taught doctrines subversive of it altogether. That he should speak one parable appearing to countenance the philosophical view is not a wonder in all the circumstances. It is the part of wisdom to discriminate an accident of truth from the truth itself.

THE MEANING OF THE PARABLE.—As in the case of some of the parables, this has been the subject of a variety of laboured elucidations. The labour and the ingenuity have only helped to perplex a simple subject. As already remarked, its lesson is on its surface. The context shows that the rich man personates the opulent Pharisee whom the common people held in high estimation for sanctity. Lazarus stands for those on whom they looked with a lofty disdain—Jesus and his brethren—who in their eyes were no more than beggars full of sores. What happened when the two died exemplifies the relation of parties when the two classes are on the other side of death by resurrection—the Lazarus class comforted in the bosom of Abraham: the rich man class tormented in the affliction that Jesus told them awaited them when they should see Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the Kingdom of God, and they themselves be thrust out, with weeping and wailing and gnashing of teeth. There may at that time be some detail corresponding to the five brethren; but that is not essential to the purport of the parable as a whole. The enforcement of the lesson (that men must look to written revelation, and not to personal illumination, for the understanding of the ways of God), required the supposition of the existence of the rich man in death—a supposition which Christ's employment of the view of the Pharisees as the basis of the parable made easy and natural. The "great gulf" belonged

to the literal frame work of the parable (it is expressly mentioned by Josephus). If it have a specific counterpart in the actual truth shadowed by the parable, it may be found in the fact before alluded to, that in the state that separates the rejected from the accepted, it is impossible for the latter to render any service to the former then, or for the rejected to pass into communion with the accepted; an impassable gulf divides them.

The great lesson of the parable in a sentence is to be found in the literal declarations with which Jesus prefaced it: that men and things as God looks at them are very different from the estimation in which they are humanly held: that it belongs to the divine family to be now in affliction, but that a great reversal will ensue in the day of death's ending; that the right rule of conviction meanwhile is enlightenment in Moses and the prophets: and that men who are impervious to the evidences that cluster around them would be deaf to the voice of a person restored to life.

THE UNJUST JUDGE.

This parable (Luke xviii. 1-8) is directed against the view of some, that prayer is of no use. The indicated lesson of it is that "*men ought always to pray,*" which is the frequently inculcated precept of Scripture. That men should think it is of no use is natural in the absence of immediate apparent results, and in the absence of any power on their part to feel how God regards prayer. It is because of this that it was necessary that the Spirit of God should teach us, as He has done, by Christ and the apostles and prophets, what the truth is on the subject, that in the faith of it we might do what is wise and needful in the case, "*Pray without ceasing.*" Jesus gives us to understand by this parable that it is not only regarded by the Father, but that it is effectual in leading to results—always pre-supposing that the prayer is by an acceptable supplicant. The argument of it evidently is—if an unjust man is moved by continual entreaty to do what is requested, that he may get rid of the troublesomeness of importunity, how much more will God, who is kind and just, be moved by the continual requests of those he loves.

But there is a caution against impatience. He may "*bear long*" with those who are afflictions to his people." There are various reasons for this. God may by them be accomplishing the very purposes of his love in subjecting his people to needed chastisement. But whatever the reason may be, we are not to be discouraged at the apparent want of response, but to persevere, praying and waiting, in the confidence that God will do what is best, and cause "*all things to work together for good to those who love God and are called according to his purpose.*" It will at last happen that God will refresh his people by a great and visible interposition on their behalf, delivering them from all enemies, and bestowing goodness upon them, above all that they can ask or think.

THE PHARISEE AND THE PUBLICAN.

This immediately follows the other parable about the duty of prayer, and seems designed to bar the way against the extravagance that might be run into with regard to the subject, and that, as a matter of fact, has been and is run into. Though "men ought always to pray and not to faint," there are qualifications to be observed. Men are not to suppose they will be "heard for their much speaking" (Matt. vi. 7); neither is the mere offering of prayer acceptable unless it is offered in an acceptable mind. What constitutes this acceptability of mind is variously revealed. This parable is one of the revelations.

It was spoken, we are told in the verse introducing it, concerning "certain who trusted in themselves, that they were righteous, and despised others"; and it is concluded by the declaration on the part of Christ, that "everyone that exalteth himself shall be abased, and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted." The language of the two men in the parable shows what is meant. The Pharisee, who had a powerful backing of favourable human reputation, was well pleased with his attainments; the publican, whom the Pharisee and Jews in general regarded in an odious light, realised his dependence on the divine clemency for permission even to live. Their prayers were tinged with these sentiments respectively; and, in consequence, the one was acceptable, and the other obnoxious.

Why did the Pharisees think so well and the publican so ill of himself? We get the clue in that other expression of Christ's, "*Thou blind Pharisee.*" A man whose eyes are open—a man who understands things as they are—has such a sense of the eternal power, greatness, and holiness of God, and the ephemerality and weakness and sinfulness of man, that his own attainments, however excellent by comparison with bad men, must always appear as nothing in his eyes. His own righteousness must appear to him as filthy rags in the light of the purity and power and correctness of the Spirit-nature. This is the estimate that the Scriptures always put into the mouths of acceptable men. And it is the language of reason and not of cant, though canting use has been largely made of in the ecclesiastical ages.

THE UNMERCIFUL SERVANT.

A servant owes a large sum to his lord, which he is unable to pay. He entreats his lord to give him time, promising to pay all. His lord forgives the debt altogether. The servant afterwards demands of a fellow-servant the payment of a small debt. The fellow-servant is unable to pay, and asks time. The servant refuses to wait or to forgive, and has the fellow-servant imprisoned. The lord of the servants hearing of it, sends for the first servant, reinstates the forgiven debt, and orders him into prison and affliction till the debt is paid.

The application of this is both clear and important. Its meaning is established by the occasion of the parable, and by the comment which Jesus makes on the action of the lord of the servants in reviving the debt and imprisoning the man who had shown no mercy. The occasion was a question of Peter's: "Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me and I forgive him? Till seven times?" Jesus said unto him, "I say not unto thee, until seven times, but until seventy times seven." A parable intended to illustrate a saying like this must be a parable enforcing mutual forgiveness as a paramount duty among the servants of Christ; but it goes further than this, and shows that a failure to render this duty will be a very fatal affair to the offender. His own forgiven sins will be revived against him if he assume an exacting and unforgiving attitude towards others.

The importance of the matter is shown by the way Christ binds it up with the petition he puts into the mouths of his disciples for the forgiveness of trespasses: "Forgive us our trespasses *as we forgive them that trespass against us.*" By this association of words he confronts us with our duty to others every time we ask forgiveness for ourselves. It is a good test of our standing in the matter, whether we are able to make our forgiveness of others the measure of the forgiveness we request for ourselves. The remark with which Jesus concludes the parable is decisive. "So likewise shall my heavenly Father do unto you (as the lord of the parable did to the servant), *if ye from your hearts forgive not everyone his brother their trespasses.*"

PARABLE OF THE TALENTS.

This parable Jesus spoke on two separate recorded occasions, and in two different forms—first, when in Jericho, on the way to Jerusalem for the first time (Luke xix. 1-11); and next, after his arrival in Jerusalem and his presence there for some days (Matt. xxv. 14: in connection with chap. xxiv. 10). On the first occasion, he employed "pounds" as the subject of trust; on the second, "talents," and he varied the number entrusted to the servants.

When Jesus repeated the parable in Jerusalem in discoursing privately with his own disciples, he substituted "talents" for "pounds," and gave "five" and "two" to the first and second instead of one. This was accompanied by a change in the central character of the parable from a nobleman going on a political journey, to a simple traveller leaving domestics in charge of his affairs in his absence. The reason of the change may be found in the difference of the audience to which the one and the other was addressed. But whatever the cause of the difference, the fact of the difference creates no difficulty when the separateness of the occasion is recognised. The teaching is the same, and the teaching is manifest when once the mind is cleared of the ideas implanted by early theological education.

Recognising death as a reality, and the return of Christ and the resurrection of the dead, as essential to renewed life and the reaping

of the moral issues of the present life, we easily see Christ in "the nobleman," and "the man travelling into a far country." He has "gone into heaven." He has been "a long time" there. His absence is connected with the "receiving of a kingdom." For the Father's invitation to him was "Sit thou at my right hand *till* I make thine enemies thy footstool," that is, till the time come for that to be done. When it comes, then the decree is, "The Lord (ΥΑΗΩΕΗ, the eternal Father) shall send the rod of thy strength out to Zion. *Rule thou in the midst of thine enemies.*" The upshot is exhibited in the well-known words: "The kingdoms of this world are become the kingdoms of our Lord and of His Christ, and he shall reign for ever." The particular kingdom he is to receive as the basis of all these operations is the kingdom of David (now fallen), as said the angel Gabriel to Mary: "The Lord God shall give unto him the throne of his father David;" and the prophet Isaiah, "On the throne of David and his kingdom," and many others to a like purport.

Christ having departed into the far country to receive this kingdom—that is, to be invested with its title and authority and power, as against the opposition of the Jews and their rulers, who said, "We will not have this man to reign over us,"—he presently returns to assert his right, and to "take to himself his great power." That he would so return he plainly teaches by this parable; for if he be the nobleman departed, he must return to fulfil the part. It is what he several times said to his disciples he would do, in language which, from its association with the fact of his departure, leaves open no other meaning. "If I go away, I will come again." "I will see you again and your hearts shall rejoice." "This same Jesus shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go" (Acts i. 10).

When he returns in the personal sense required by the whole current of apostolic teaching, the judging of the servants falls into natural order. He is held forward in apostolic teaching as the judge and awarder of the final issues of life. He was particular to enjoin his apostles to make this prominent. So Peter says: "He commanded us to preach unto the people and to testify that it is he which is ordained of God to be the judge of the living and of the dead" (Acts x. 42). What they were commanded to do, the apostles did. In their writings, nothing is more explicit than their declaration that "we must all stand before the judgment-seat of Christ," that at his hands "we may receive according to what we have done" (2 Cor. v. 10). This judging is to be "at his appearing and his kingdom" (2 Tim. iv. 1).

The parable is in exact agreement with these apostolic attestations, and with all their attestations on the subject. They tell us that the judging is to be "according to our works." This is the one thing that is most conspicuous in the parable. With what other object could Christ have introduced servants of various degrees of administrative success obtaining recompense in the varying degrees—ten talents, ten cities; four talents, four cities; no talents, no recognition at all? On the practical application of this in the resurrection, the parable may be taken as a revelation. Our status in the Kingdom

will depend upon our attainments in probation. This is a question of capacity imparted in the first instance. All men differ: some have much more native gift than others: some, five talents; some, two; some, one. It is not the number of talents that is the rule of judgment, but the use of them. *Increase by faithful use*—this is the rule of acceptance. The holder of the one talent would have found equal favour with the others if it had been put out to use. The words of the judge show this. His offence was his sloth and indifference to the charge committed to him, such as it was. He did not turn what he had to account. Had he done so, he would have entered equally with the others into the joy of his Lord.

But though the number of the talents is not the rule of acceptance, it is the measure of the position to which that acceptance admits. The parable shows this; and the principle is reasonable, and is affirmed in the Scriptures in many ways. It is recognised that fruitfulness is in "some thirty-fold, some sixty-fold, and some an hundred-fold," and it is plainly declared that "every man shall receive his own reward according to his own labour" (1 Cor. iii. 8). It is on this principle that "the wise shall shine as the firmament, and they that turn many to righteousness, as the stars for ever and ever." It is a principle distinctly foreshadowed in the organization of David's worthies. There were a "first three," and those who "attained not unto the first three," and so on in the list downwards. The degree of rank was determined by achievement. All more or less did meritorious things under circumstances of difficulty; but the greatness and the difficulty of some deeds exceeded that of others (2 Sam. xxiii. 8-39). When Jesus says "he will give to every man according as his work shall be" (Rev. xxii. 12), we see the same thing.

Thus his judgment has two operations. While it decrees total rejection and death in the case of the class represented by the unprofitable servant (of whom it is said, "Cast out the unprofitable servant into outer darkness where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth"), it distributes differing measures of reward and distinction among those servants who, in differing degrees, are found faithful to the trusts severally reposed. It is therefore no mean flight of the imagination that looks forward in the light of this parable to the time when the accepted servants of Christ, reigning with him, will hold different positions of honour and power according to the parts they have performed in this cloudy and dark day. Some will be heads of villages while some are rulers of towns, and some, groups of towns, and others governors of districts and provinces, and some even heads of kingdoms. All will be satisfied and all glorious, but all will not be of equal rank and honour. The degree in which one of these stars will differ from another star in glory will be the Lord's sovereign determination. It will therefore not be open to question, or fruitful of envy; for every one admitted will be so much a lover of the Lord as to be ready to rejoice in all the Lord's appointments, even if they involved his own exclusion. The dreadfulness will

belong to those who, in the first establishment of these things, are permitted to see what they have lost, and doomed to a place in that distracted crowd which will depart with "weeping and wailing, and gnashing of teeth," to be seen no more for ever.

THE MASTER OF THE HOUSE.

Jesus said (Mark xiii. 34) he was "*like a man taking a far journey, who left his house and gave authority to his servants and to every man his work, and commanded the porter to watch.*" He added, "*Watch ye therefore, for ye know not when the master of the house cometh, at even, at midnight, or at the cock-crowing, or in the morning, lest coming suddenly he will find you sleeping. And when I say unto you (who now listen), I say unto ALL, Watch.*"

This falls into the explanation of the parable of the talents and the pounds, only that is intended to bear not so much on how the servants should be dealt with on the master's return, as on the need for their constant readiness on account of the uncertainty of the time of his return. The applicability of this has been direct to every generation of believers since Christ's departure, notwithstanding its special realization in that one that is actually contemporary with his appearing. Always having in view that there is no conscious interval in death, and that the occurrence of death is an incalculable eventuality, there has always existed, and will to the last moment exist, a need for daily circumspection and readiness for the coming of the Lord. There never can be a time when a man can reasonably feel that the coming of the Lord is a remote contingency. It never can be more remote from a man's consciousness than the day of his death, and because this may be any day, the shadow of the Lord's coming is over every hour of a man's present life. We are actually in the position sketched in this parable. We are exactly like servants who do not know when the master's wheels may roll up to the door. It is therefore no artificial or superfluous exhortation the Lord delivers when he says, "Be ye also ready, for in such an hour as ye think not, the Son of Man cometh."

THE TWO SONS.

"*A certain man had two sons; and he came to the first, and said, Son, go work to-day in my vineyard. He answered and said, I will not; but afterward he repented and went. And he came to the second, and said likewise: and he answered and said, I go, sir: and went not*" (Matt. xxi. 28).

The question which Jesus put to "the chief priests and elders of the people" immediately after he had uttered this parable, shows

the meaning of it. "Whether of them twain did the will of his father?" They answered, the first. He immediately made this application of it. "The publicans and the harlots go into the kingdom of God before you." On what principle? On the principle supplied in the answer they had given—that the man who did what was required of him was the right doer, even if in the first instance he made great show in the contrary direction.

The publicans and the harlots by their profession were such as refused to perform the commands of righteousness: but as a matter of fact, they "repented at the preaching of John the Baptist," whom the Scribes and Pharisees rejected. These Scribes and Pharisees made a great show of willingness to submit to the divine requirements, but as a matter of fact, while promising obedience, they did not yield it, and their long prayers and religious performances did not make up for their disobedience. They were in the position of the son, who said, "I go, sir," but went not.

The parable has a valuable modern application. There is much talk of the lips: much piety. Where is the doing of what God has commanded? There is very little of it. No wonder. The state of things is so corrupt that the very theology of the people almost kills incentive to righteous action. They are taught that they can do nothing to please God; that all that is needful is to believe that Christ died for them. "Only believe," that is enough, say they. As for doing, they are to "cast their deadly doing down—down at Jesus' feet." Jesus "did it all, long, long ago." As for them, they are "miserable sinners," who constantly do the things they ought not to do, and leave undone the things they ought to do.

In clear and dignified contradiction to this demoralising travesty of the apostolic doctrine of justification by faith, stands the words of Jesus: "He that doeth the will of my Father, the same is my mother and sister and brother,"—a doctrine he could not have placed in a clearer light than by this parable of the son who was approved even after rebelliousness of speech, because he did the things that were required of him. How reasonable and beautiful is the doctrine. Action is the very essence of character. If a man's actions are always evil, of what acceptance with God or man can the finest speeches find? They are as a fine cloak over a grinning skeleton. The man who talks finely and acts badly is not inaccurately known in all the world as a hypocrite, and a knave whose basenesses are rendered all the more hideous for being tricked out in the garb of a fine wordy profession.

THE PARABLE OF THE VINEYARD.

(Matt. xxi. 33-41). In this parable, we are informed that the Pharisees "perceived that he spake of them." If *they* saw through it on its first utterance, it ought not to be difficult for us to understand it after having had it so long in our hands. And, indeed, it is most easy when the history to which it relates is known and understood.

It condenses Israel's history into a single view. God forming them into a nation is set forth under the figure of a man planting a vineyard. The man who plants a vineyard for himself does so that he may have pleasure from it. It is not merely that the vineyard may exist. The human view is that a nation exists for itself, and that its end is served if it prosper and is happy. But here is another and a higher view—one that does not appeal to patriotic sympathies, but which is nevertheless the true one, conformity or non-conformity to which will ultimately determine all questions of national well-being. "God, in whose hand thy breath is, thou hast not glorified": this was Daniel's complaint against Belshazzar. It is the true indication against all nations, and is the cause of the judgment that is coming on all nations. Israel was especially formed for the purpose and pleasure of God. "This people have I formed for myself" (Isaiah xliii. 21), "that they might be unto me for a name, and for a praise, and for a glory" before all people of the earth (Jer. xiii. 11).

The planting of a vine is a frequent figure of Israel's national incorporation. It was not used for the first time when Jesus spoke this parable. So early as in David, we read "Thou hast brought a vine out of Egypt. Thou preparedst room before it, and didst cause it to take deep root, and it filled the land" (Psa. lxxx. 8). In Isaiah, it is the theme of a song, "Now will I sing to my well-beloved, a song of my well-beloved, touching his vineyard. My beloved hath a vineyard in a very fruitful hill, and he fenced it and gathered out the stones thereof, and planted it with the choicest vine. . . . *The vineyard of the Lord of Hosts is the House of Israel*" (Is. v. 7). For God's pleasure, and the well-being of the men composing it, this national vineyard existed. Had it answered its ends, nothing but the purest prosperity would have attended it. God was "waiting over them to do them good." Moses put it thus plainly to them: "It shall come to pass if ye hearken to these judgments and keep and do them, that the Lord thy God . . . will love thee and bless ye and multiply thee: He will also bless the fruit of thy womb and the fruit of thy land, thy corn and thy wine and thine oil, the increase of thy kine and the flocks of thy sheep, in the land which he swore unto thy fathers to give thee. Thou shalt be blessed above all people: there shall not be male or female barren among you or your cattle. . . . What doth the Lord thy God require of thee but to fear the Lord thy God, to walk in all His ways, and to love Him and to serve the Lord thy God, with all thy heart, and with all thy soul?" (Deut. vii. 12-14; x. 12).

Having planted the vineyard, the proprietor sent messengers to receive of the fruit. That is, God raised up prophets in the midst of Israel, to bring them to the obedience which He required, and to that service and praise in which He delighted. With what result everyone acquainted with Israel's history knows. There is no sadder chapter in the whole story of human confusion upon earth than this—that a nation, divinely founded, constituted, and guided, should, in all their generations, have turned against and killed the messengers divinely

sent to them to keep them in the right way. It is a fact which painfully appears in the detail of Israel's history, and is thus concisely and graphically summarised at the close of the divine record: "The chief of the priests and the people transgressed very much after all the abominations of the heathen, and polluted the house of the Lord which He had hallowed in Jerusalem. And the Lord of their fathers sent to them by His messengers, rising up betimes and sending, because He had compassion on His people and on His dwelling place. But they mocked the messengers of God, and despised His words, and misused His prophets, until the wrath of the Lord arose against His people till there was no remedy" (2 Chron. xxxvi. 14-16). This is, in fact, the state of things parabolically exhibited in this story of the vineyard.

Israel's long career of insubordination culminated in the rejection and crucifixion of the Son of God himself. Judgment was not long delayed after this. The account of public events during A.D. 30-70 (vulgar era), written by Jesephus, is the historic illustration of the process of that "miserable destruction" which, in fulfilment of the words of Jesus, slowly came on them as the result of their disobedience. The vineyard, by that process, was taken from the order of "husbandmen" then in possession. Of that vineyard, Jesus is here exhibited as "the heir." He has not since that time come into possession, but he must do so as the heir. He indicates such an event in sanctioning the statement that it will be "given unto others." The Gospel of the Kingdom enables us to recognise in those "others," the Lord Jesus and his brethren in the day of his glory at his return, as he says, "When the Son of Man shall come in his glory and all the holy angels with him, then shall he sit on the throne of his glory" (Matt. xxv. 31).

THE MARRIAGE FEAST.

This parable (Matt. xxii. 1-13) was spoken by Jesus soon after he had uttered the parable of the vineyard considered in the last chapter. It was addressed to the same people, that is, "the chief priests and Pharisees," who "perceiving" his parables were aimed at them, "sought to lay hands on him." We must remember this in our understanding of it. We shall blunder if we seek the key in circumstances not before the mind of Christ. The great fact of the situation was the hostile attitude of the priests, who ought to have been foremost in the recognition and exposition of the truth (Mal. ii. 7).

He had indicated the divine estimation and the ultimate consequences of this attitude in the parable of a vineyard held by unfaithful keepers. Now he changes the figure and increases the light. Israel's leaders are no longer vine dressers, who usurp the proprietor's rights, but men who have received an invitation which they despise, and who abuse and ill-treat and even kill the messengers who convey it to them. The invitation is from the highest quarter—the court of a king. It relates to the most interesting occasion that could arise—the marriage of the King's Son.

It scarcely requires saying that the King is God, and that the King's Son is Christ, and that the marriage purposed for Christ is that consummation of his work at his coming, which is expressly described in the last of the apostolic writings under the figure of a marriage: "The marriage of the lamb is come, and his wife hath made herself ready; and to her was granted that she should be arrayed in fine linen, clean and white" (Rev. xix. 7, 8). The union to Christ in glory of those who have been prepared for him in previous generations of probation is fitly likened to a marriage.

The aptness of the comparison is obscured by the common view that salvation is a thing of individual detail, going on daily with the supposed passage of each supposed soul to glory when the righteous die. When the truth of man's mortality is seen, and death is recognised as a temporary victory over the Lord's people, this obscurity vanishes, and the beauty of the parable shines out. The righteous are to be "glorified together" (Rom. viii. 17) "at the appearing of Christ" (2 Tim. iv. 1). They will be presented, a multitudinous bride, to the Lord at His return. Their union will be formally, ceremonially proclaimed and practically consummated in the assimilation of their nature to his (Phil. iii. 21; 1 Jno. iii. 2). Thus will be developed the true *com-une*—(together one), the only true commune the world is ever destined to see—the only one it requires—the only one adequate to its needs—an organised community of immortals developed by probation, and installed by divine right in possession of the earth and all power therein—under one head, the King's son, "King of Kings and Lord of Lords."

This is the goal of the divine plan upon the earth. It is the object that has been in view in all the divine measures that have been taken in the ages of the past. God "sent forth his servants" "at sundry times and in divers manners" to invite men to this purposed wedding. Christ's parable is to illustrate how it was received in his day at the hands of Israel's leaders and their followers, and the consequences that came of their treatment of it. The bearers of the invitation were Christ and his apostles. They delivered it to "many,"—only a few of whom appreciated it at its true value—so few that they are not represented in the first stage of the parable. The common attitude was that represented. "They made light of it and went their ways"—each to his own particular hobby. They did worse. They persecuted and destroyed the Lord Jesus and his apostles. The ultimate sequel was terrible. "The king was wroth, and he sent forth his armies, and destroyed those murderers, and burnt up their city." Let the awful particulars of the destruction of Jerusalem furnished by Josephus bear witness to the fulfilment of this.

Before things reached this terrible end, a minor but very important result sprang from Israel's rejection of the marriage invitation. It is one that specially affects us as a part of the Gentile community to whom the invitation has come. Paul gives expression to it thus "Through their fall, salvation is come unto the Gentiles" (Rou. ix. 11). The form in which it appears in the parable is in almost remarkable

coincidence with these words: "Then saith he (the king) to his servants, the wedding is ready, but they which were bidden were not worthy. Go ye therefore into the highways, and as many as ye shall find bid to the marriage." This part of the parable has its interpretation in the work of the apostles as recorded in the Acts of the Apostles. Peter, as Christ appointed, took the foremost part in this, as in other matters. As he said in the Apostolic conference (Acts xv. 7): "God made choice among us that the Gentiles by my mouth should hear the word of the Gospel and believe."

The persistent opposition of the Jews to the apostolic work, from its very outstart, was the proximate cause of this. Paul gives expression to it in his own case: "It was necessary that the Word of God should first have been spoken to you, but seeing ye put it from you, and judge yourselves unworthy of everlasting life, lo, we turn to the Gentiles" (Acts xiii. 46). Thus the invitation, originally addressed to Israel alone, was extended to the occupants of the Gentile highways. For eighteen centuries it has been almost confined to the Gentiles, and with the lapse of time and the prevalence of corruption, it has come to be very much misapprehended by them. They think it a wholesale, cheap, and easy affair. They have long lost the idea of the way being narrow and the gate straight. They have long forgotten that "God at the first did visit the Gentiles," not to convert the world by preaching, but "to *take out of them* a people for His Name" (Acts xv. 14). They have settled into the most inveterate complacency with regard to their position. They imagine they are all the Lord's people, in total forgetfulness of the words of Christ, that it is "not everyone that saith Lord, Lord, but *he that doeth the will of the Father*, that shall enter the kingdom." Well, there will be a wonderful disenchantment on this subject when Christ returns. The parable teaches what he elsewhere plainly declared: "MANY shall come to me in that day and shall say, Lord, have we not preached in thy name, and in thy name done many wonderful works? but I will profess unto them, I never knew you, depart from me ye that work iniquity."

What the parable has to teach on this point, it does by one case. It tells us first of the gathering of the motley congregation of guests from the highways. The "servants went out into the highways and gathered together all, as many as they found, both bad and good, and the wedding was furnished with guests." The apostles did their work: the result will be seen in the immense multitude gathered into Christ's presence for judgment in the day of his appearing. "And when the King came in to see the guests, he saw there a man which had not on a wedding garment." This man, questioned on the subject, is speechless, and ordered to be expelled "into the outer darkness, where there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth." Christ adds a comment, which supplies the sense in which he used the parable: "For many are called but few are chosen." The parable, as instancing only one man rejected, might seem to teach the reverse of this, that many are called and nearly all chosen; but we must take

the meaning as here interpreted by Christ, and illustrated by his plainer teaching elsewhere. The call is to all who come within range of the invitation: first, the Jews; secondly, the Gentiles. But the choice is from those who respond to the call, on the principle of preparedness for what they are called to. The man not accepted was dismissed because he *had not on a wedding garment*. He might have pleaded the free invitation he had received on the highways; but the objection to his want of fit vesture shows that preparation on this head was expected as a matter of course from those accepting the invitation. The meaning of the wedding garment is supplied by Rev. xix.: "To her (the bride) was granted that she should be arrayed in fine linen, clean and white: *for the fine linen is the righteousness (or righteous actions) of the saints.*" This is in harmony with every teaching of the word and every reasonable consideration in the case: that a man's acceptance of the Gospel will not be counted for righteousness unless it bring forth compliance with the will of Christ as expressed in his commandments.

The parable was spoken in Jerusalem during his last presence there before his crucifixion. He had spoken it in another form while on his progress through Galilee, before "setting his face to go up to Jerusalem" (Luke xiv. 16, in connection with Luke xviii. 31). Critics have assumed that the two versions are accounts of the same utterance, and they have not failed to point out the differences between them as discrediting inspiration. The criticism is as groundless as most of the similar efforts to undermine the authority of the Scriptures. It is inevitable that during the incessant teaching activity of three years and a half, Jesus should frequently repeat parables and precepts, not always in the same forms, whence most easily arises the so-called "discrepancy" between three or four separate accounts which are in themselves absolutely consistent.

The parable as spoken in Galilee makes the king "a man," who gives a supper, instead of a wedding feast; and sends out one servant instead of a number. It also gives the excuses of the invited guests which are in detail omitted in the Jerusalem parable. The principal difference is in the instruction given to the servant by the master on the refusal of the guests being reported to him. He was to go "into the streets and lanes of the city," and bring together "the poor and the maimed and the halt and the blind." The servant does as commanded, and returning, says, "Lord, it is done as thou hast commanded, and yet there is room." He is then ordered to "go out into the highways and hedges and compel them to come in, that my house may be filled." This feature is a noticeable one, not as a difference but as a supplemental item in the divine programme. The order of invitation according to the Galilee parable is, 1st, selected guests who refuse; 2nd, the people in the streets and lanes, many of whom come; 3rd, wayfarers on the highways outside of the town, and even loungers about the hedges.

An order something like this is visible in the apostolic operations: 1. "It was necessary that the word of God should FIRST have

been spoken to you (Jews)" (Acts xiii. 46). 2. "The salvation of God is sent unto the Gentiles, and they will hear it" (Acts xxviii. 28). 3. (Nearly A.D. 100, when the Apostles were all in their graves except John), "The Spirit and the Bride say come, . . . *whosoever will*, let him take of the water of life freely" (Rev. xxii. 17). The highways-and-hedges operation continues to the very coming of the Lord, and embraces "those who are alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord." It acts upon the figuratively "poor and maimed, and halt and blind." This explains why it is that the Gospel is not received among the wise and noble of the world, but is confined to such as are of no standing or account, even as it was in the days of Jesus. The cultured and the well-to-do are too much pre-occupied with their own self-comforting devices to have room for the ways of God. The lowly classes are not much better off in this respect, but among them are here and there to be found such as are small in their own eyes, and prepared in an honest and glad heart to "receive the Kingdom of God as little children."

THE PARABLE OF THE TEN VIRGINS.

This is the last and perhaps the most interesting of the parables (Matt. xxv. 1-12). A knowledge of the truth, as distinguished from orthodox theology, is particularly necessary to the understanding of it. It cannot be made to fit with the scheme of things that send men away to heaven or hell when they die. It is only intelligible in the of the doctrine that the return of Christ to the earth is necessary to the renewed life and glorification of his people.

"*Then* shall the kingdom of heaven be likened unto ten virgins," extorts the question—when? The answer of the context is free from all obscurity. The Lord of that servant *shall come* in a day when he looketh not for him, and in an hour that he is not aware of, and shall cut him asunder (that is, cut him off), and appoint him his portion with the hypocrites: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth." Then—WHEN THE LORD RETURNS.

Having in view the actual nature of the coming of the Lord, it becomes easy to see the bearings of the parable in all directions. At the crisis of his approach, the members of his house (all of them) are like "*ten virgins which took their lamps and went forth to meet the bridegroom.*" There is nothing in the number ten except that it was the usual number of bridesmaids that took part in the marriage ceremony as practised in the country. They performed a part unknown to Western customs. Their business was to meet the bridegroom on his way to fetch the bride from her father's house. They had to go so far on the road and wait. The arrival of the bridegroom was usually at night, requiring the use of lamps, and the hour was uncertain, almost always causing waiting. If the waiting was long, the lamps were liable to go out unless they had brought a supply of oil besides what the lamps contained; and any one with an unlit lamp was

considered by the etiquette of the country as much unfit to take part in the ceremony as any one would be in our country who should omit appropriate attire.

In what way the household of Christ at the era of his return are like virgins who have gone out to meet the bridegroom, will be instantly appreciated by everyone who knows the truth. It is the very peculiarity of their position that they have "gone forth" "to wait for" Christ—speaking now of no modern people or institution, though there are such. It is profitable to look at the matter from the apostolic point of view only. The writings of the apostles define the matter in a way to be trusted. They tell us that the saints have "come out from among" the people of the world who know not God (2 Cor. vi. 17); that they are a peculiar people (1 Pet. ii. 9) whose part it is "to wait for the Son of God from heaven" (1 Thess. i. 10), who, "to them that look for him, shall appear the second time without sin unto salvation" (Heb. ix. 28). However many or few may be truly answerable to this description of the 19th century, this is the characteristic attitude of the house of Christ ever since he parted with the disciples on the summit of the Mount of Olives 1850 years ago. They have one and all "gone forth to meet the bridegroom."

And as with any average company of bridesmaids, so with these; half have been wise and half foolish, half at a rough estimation. The folly of the foolish virgins consisted in not taking a supply of oil for the replenishing of the lamp. "But the wise took oil in their vessels with their lamps." The corresponding wisdom and folly of the anti-typical virgins it is not difficult to understand, when we discern the nature of the light by which they wait in the darkness for the coming of the bridegroom. The light is the understanding of the truth in the love thereof. The oil that feeds this light is the word. Those who light their lamps and go forth, but take no supply of oil in their vessels, are those who are delighted with the truth at their first reception of it, but do not keep up their interest afterwards, by the reading of the Word of God in which it has its source, and attending the assemblies of the brethren which have been enjoined for edification. The word is the oil, which, being combusted in the mind, sheds forth light, as Jesus commands ("Let your light shine"). To "let the word of Christ dwell in us richly," as Paul exhorts, is to keep oil in the vessel with the lamp. As in the natural, so in the spiritual; combustion involves consumption. The life of faith and obedience uses up the motive power which the mind furnishes in the memory of the word. If this is not renewed by reading and prayer, the oil fails and the lamp by-and-by will go out.

"While the bridegroom tarried, they all slumbered and slept." This cannot mean spiritual sleeping, for spiritual sleeping would mean that they were all foolish together. In what other sense has the House of Christ slept in his absence? In the sense in which Christ is "the first fruits of them that slept." They have all died, speaking of them generally. It is true that there will be some "who are alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord;" but the number of such is so

insignificant in relation to "the multitude that no man can number" that they are not taken into account in the rough presentation of the subject in a parable. As regards the apostles and the whole generation of disciples contemporary with the parable (those who in a special sense "went forth to meet the bridegroom"), absolutely all of them "slumbered and slept." They all went to their graves, and now "sleep in Jesus," waiting the awakening proclamation next referred to in the parable.

"At midnight, there was a cry made, Behold the bridegroom cometh, go ye out to meet him!" Midnight is just before morning begins. In the relation to the coming of Christ, it is the darkest hour of the night that prevails during his absence. We are in such an hour at present, when misapplied science is fast banishing all faith from the earth, and when nothing seems more childish and chimerical than the expectation that Christ will return. At such an hour as this—the appointed Gentile periods having some of them run out, and others nearly so—the cry is raised, "Behold the bridegroom cometh." It is a cry that awakes the sleeping virgins; therefore it is not a human movement of any kind. Some have imagined that the resuscitation in our age of the doctrine of the second advent is the midnight cry. It is evidently something much more powerful than this that is meant, for the sleeping virgins, wise and foolish, all arise. They all awake from their long sleep. They come forth from their graves by the resurrection power put forth at this period. What power is this? It is the power of Christ which he has received "over all flesh" (John xvii. 2); a power in response to which, in the form of command, as at Lazarus' tomb, the dead "come forth" (John v. 29; xi. 53). But by what instrumentality is this command made effectual?

The parable shows the bridegroom on his way, and a herald proclamation going before him. Who are the bearers of this herald proclamation! Jesus answers in saying, "He shall send forth *his angels* with a trumpet and a great voice, and they shall gather together his elect from the four winds" (Matt. xxiv. 31). The angels, then, who have had to do with Christ's resurrection, have to do with that of his sleeping servants. By his authority and power they wake these from their long sleep (but a moment to them), and summon them to a meeting with the bridegroom. They all "rise and trim their lamps." Never so earnestly was this done by them before; furbishing up memory, reviewing the ways of their probation, fixing their minds on the truth, casting themselves in prayer on the Father's mercy. The foolish who went to sleep with empty vessels find them still in that state (for every one will rise at the resurrection in the spiritual state in which death overtakes them). Dismayed now at their poverty-stricken state, they throw themselves upon the sympathy and support of their more spiritually-minded brethren and sisters. "Give us of your oil." Nay; too late. The most spiritually minded will have enough to do to sustain themselves at such a crisis. The time has passed for looking to others or helping

others All will have to look to themselves till the dread judgment seat is past. "Go rather to them than sell, and buy for yourselves." All will be so real and natural at the resurrection, and there may even be such time and deliberation in the proceedings, that it may even appear practicable to still do something to remedy spiritual poverty. But all the response the wise can make to the frantic appeals of the foolish is to do the best they can for themselves while as yet they are not in the Lord's presence. "While they went to buy, the bridegroom came, and they that were ready went in with him to the marriage." It is impossible to assign the exact counterpart to every detail in a parable, because a parable is only a rough imagining of general features. But it is possible there may even be place for something like this. There may be an attempt on the part of the self-condemned during the interval between emergence from the grave and appearance at the judgment-seat, to make good their shortcoming case. And while so engaged, the actual summons to Christ's presence may arrive to the others assembled, and these may be accepted, and the others afterwards arrive to find the door of the kingdom closed against unavailing cries of "Lord, Lord, open unto us."

The dramatic details of the resurrection era are not revealed, but some of them may be shadowed in such a parable as this. The general object of the parable is plain: to provoke habitual preparedness for the Lord's return on the part of all who call him Lord. This is the application he gives it himself: "*Watch, therefore*; for ye know neither the day nor the hour when the Son of Man cometh."

THE SHEEP AND HE GOATS.

"When the Son of Man shall come in his glory, and all the holy angels with him, then shall he sit upon the throne of his glory. And before him shall be gathered all nations; and he shall separate them one from another, as a shepherd divideth the sheep from the goats; and he shall set the sheep on his right hand, but the goats on the left."

To the sheep he says, "Come, ye blessed;" and to the goats, "Depart, ye cursed;" for reasons we shall look at.

First, let us recognise who are *not* to be understood by the sheep, or by the goats, or by "my brethren" to whom the king pointedly alludes in his speech to both. Some think "my brethren" means the Jewish race, and the sheep, those nations that have treated the Jews well, and the goats, those nations that have treated them badly. The only thing that favours this idea is the use of the phrase "all nations" in describing those gathered before the king for judgment. If the idea were right, all parts of the parable would be in harmony with it. That this is not the case must be evident from the words addressed by the king to "them on his right hand." "Come, ye blessed of my Father, *inherit the kingdom prepared for you* from the foundation of the world."

We know abundantly from the plain teaching of the word that the heirs of the kingdom, for whom it has been prepared, do not consist of *nations*, but of *persons out of all nations* with whom the Father is pleased, because of their faith and obedience: as James says, "God hath chosen the poor of this world rich in faith, *heirs of the kingdom which he hath prepared for them that love him*" (James ii. 5). It is the saints who "take the kingdom and possess the kingdom for ever" (Dan. vii. 18), who, being washed from their sins in the blood of Christ, are made kings and priests to reign with him (Rev. i. 6; v. 10). The nations, as such, do not inherit the kingdom, but are governed by the kingdom in the hands of the saints (Rev. ii. 26; 1 Cor. vi. 2). Consequently, an interpretation which makes Christ invite Jew-favouring nations to inherit the kingdom prepared only for the saints, must be a wrong one. It is manifestly wrong also from the unscriptural construction it would compel us to put on the phrase "my brethren."

Jesus has told us who his brethren are: "He that doeth the will of God is my brother." He has also given us his estimate of mere Jews according to the flesh: "Ye are of your father the devil" (Jno. viii. 44). "If ye were Abraham's children, ye would do the works of Abraham" (*Ibid* 39). "The flesh profiteth nothing" (Jno. vi. 63).

What, then, is the meaning of "all nations?" The plain representations of the judgment must be our guide: "WE must *all* stand before the judgment seat of Christ." What, "we?" The class to and of whom Paul wrote these words. He, a Jew, wrote to Corinthian Greeks, and affirmed things intended to be applicable to "all that *in every place* call upon the name of the Lord Jesus." It had been proclaimed by Peter, in opening the door of the kingdom to the Gentiles, that "*in every nation*, he that feared God and worked righteousness was accepted with him" (Acts x. 35). These, gathered at last in one body, speak of themselves as "redeemed unto God out of every kindred and tongue and people and nation" (Rev. v. 10).

Hence, it is plain that those who are gathered before Christ for judgment at his coming, are not unfitly described as "all nations." Literally and exactly stated, they would be "people of all nations," but the larger phrase is not out of place, as when we say of the first exhibition (of 1851) "All nations were there;" or, as when the scriptures, in speaking of the assembly of the armies of all the nations against Jerusalem to battle, say, "I will gather *all nations* against Jerusalem to battle" (Zech. xiv. 1). When Christ returns, and gathers the "all" who have to stand before his judgment seat, the resultant assembly (consisting for the most part of people raised from the dead of all countries of the Roman habitable) will be composed of "all nations."

The reason why Jesus should choose this mode of describing them may be apprehended if we realise that for many previous generations, the responsible class were Israelites exclusively. It would naturally be anticipated by the disciples that the assembly of the resurrected would be composed of none other. Jesus had already hinted the participation of the Gentiles (though the time had not arrived to invite

them). He had said "Many shall come from the east, and from the west, and from the north, and from the south, and shall sit down with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of God." There was advantage in his now saying that the judgment to be dispensed at his coming, in the presence of the angels who should be with him, would be dispensed to an assembly composed of "all nations," gathered before him for the purpose—not Jews only, nor all nations in the popular sense of absolute universality, but in the sense of people out of all nations who, through enlightenment, have become responsible to the judgment of God, whether their part be that of acceptance or rejection of His revealed truth — obedience or disobedience of His revealed commandments.

With this view, we may understand why the award of the judgment seat should be made to turn on practical service and not on doctrinal enlightenment. Some have remarked that there is said nothing about doctrine in this judgment scene of Matthew xxv. They say this in discouragement of that earnest contention for the faith which Jude enjoins. It is a case of setting one part of the word of God against another, which ought never to be done. Let everything have its place. It is enlightenment in the truth that brings the people out of all nations to the judgment seat. There is no need to bring that into question. The real question is their practical attitude towards Christ during the probation to which acceptance of the truth introduces them. "I was an hungred and ye gave me meat; I was thirsty and ye gave me drink; I was a stranger and ye took me in; naked and ye clothed me; I was sick and ye visited me; I was in prison and ye came unto me." This is the commendation the Judge passes upon the accepted. It covers every form of benevolent service.

It is not mere philanthropy that is commended. Attention is fixed upon the "I." As the Lord said to Israel when they did certain things, "Did ye it all unto *Me*?" Not that goodness to all men is excluded: far from it. It is Christ's command to "do good to all men as we have opportunity:" to be "kind even to the unthankful, and to the evil." But in the case before us, it is what men have done to Christ that is in question. Did they feed Christ, clothe Christ, succour Christ? But how do these things to Christ in a day when he is not upon the earth? The commended class are made to present this difficulty for the sake of bringing out the king's answer: "inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me." But who are his brethren? Not paupers who pronounce his name for the sake of the loaves and fishes. So he himself tells us: "Not everyone that saith unto me Lord, Lord, but *he that doeth the will of my Father.*"

By this we may try ourselves beforehand. Are we drawn out affectionately to the needs of such as show themselves in love with God and all His ways, because they are such? Could we lay down our lives for such? We know how our feelings act in this matter, and whether it is our practice in the measure of our possibilities to give them effect. If our case be so, we may look forward with confidence

to our arraignment on that solemn day, when men and angels will be made to see us as we actually appear under the searching light of divine exposure.

How pleasing, if the King is pleased to say, "Come ye blessed of my Father: inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world."

In the case of the rejected, the rule is just reversed. "I was an hungred and ye gave me no meat, I was thirsty and ye gave me no drink, I was a stranger and ye took me not in, naked and ye clothed me not, sick and in prison and ye visited me not." On this ground the awful order issues: "Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels." In no more forcible manner could Christ have enforced the fact that our ultimate acceptance with him depends upon self-sacrificing deeds of kindness of the kind that he himself exemplified, when, as he said, "The Son of Man came not to be ministered unto but to minister." Our faith is the foundation, but works in harmony with what he requires is the indispensable superstructure.

Much will be forgiven: but much will also be required at the hands of those who would enter life eternal. His commandments require us to "Look not every man on his own things" only, but to "Bear one another's burdens." If we harden our hearts to the afflictions of the afflicted, and wrap ourselves comfortably in the mantle of God's bestowed mercies, heedless of the needs of those to whom God has given less, the day so powerfully depicted by Christ in Matthew xxv. will show us in terrible severity, if we never realised it before, that though we speak with the tongues of men and angels, and though we have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, if we have not the love that takes an active serving shape, we are of no use to the King whose reign is to be a reign of love and blessing.
