

THE * PARABLES * OF * JESUS. †

THE
PARABLES OF JESUS.

BY THE
REV. ALFRED NEVIN, D. D., LL. D.

"What if earth
Be but the shadow of heaven, and things therein
Each to other like, more than on earth is thought?"

MILTON.

"Never man spake like this man."—JOHN VII. 46.

"And he spake many things unto them in parables."—MATT. XIII. 3.

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THE PARABLE.

THE word *parable* is derived from the Greek *παραβολή*, which comes from *παραβάλλειν*, to compare, to collate. In the Old Testament it denotes an obscure or enigmatical saying, as in Ps. lxxviii. 2: "I will open my mouth in a parable: I will utter dark sayings of old;" also a fictitious narrative invented for the purpose of conveying truth in a less offensive or more engaging form than that of direct assertion, as in Nathan's reproof of David (2 Sam. xii. 1-4), Jotham's exposure of the folly of the Shechemites (Judg. ix. 7-15), and the address by Jehoash to Amaziah (2 Kings xiv. 9, 10). It is generally employed in the New Testament in this latter sense. It has been supposed, indeed, that some of the parables uttered by our Saviour narrate real and not fictitious events; but whether this was the case or not is a point of no consequence. Each of his parables was *essentially* true. It was true to human nature, and nothing more was necessary.

"The parable differs from the fable, moving as it does in a spiritual world, and never transgressing the order of things natural; from the mythus, there being in the latter an unconscious blending of the deeper meaning with the outward symbol, the two remaining separate and separable in the parable; from the proverb, inas-

much as it is longer carried out, and not merely accidentally and occasionally, but necessarily, figurative; from the allegory, comparing as it does one thing *with* another, but preserving them apart as an inner and an outer, and not transferring, as does the allegory, the properties and qualities and relations of one *to* the other."

The mode of teaching by parables is one of great antiquity. It was, as we have already seen, practiced under the Old Testament dispensation, and appears to have been very generally afterward adopted by the rabbis even down to the time of Christ. Its advantages are obvious. Experience has demonstrated that this sort of composition is better calculated to command attention, to captivate the imagination, to affect the heart, and to make deep and lasting impressions on the memory, than the most ingenious and most elegant discourses. Besides, the very obscurity in which parables are sometimes involved has the effect of exciting a greater degree of curiosity and interest, and of urging the mind to a more vigorous exertion of its powers, than any other mode of instruction. There is something for the understanding to work upon, and when the concealed meaning is at length elicited, we are apt to value ourselves on the discovery, as the effect of our own penetration and discernment, and for that very reason to pay more regard to the moral it conveys.

Then, again, when the mind is under the influence of strong prejudices, of violent passions or inveterate habits, and when, in these circumstances, it becomes necessary to rectify error, to reprove sin and to bring the offender to a sense of his danger and his guilt, there is no way in which this difficult task can be so well

executed, and the painful truths that *must* be told so successfully insinuated into the mind, as by disguising them under the veil of a well-wrought parable.

For all these reasons we need not be surprised that our Saviour largely employed this mode of teaching. And yet it must not be overlooked that he was influenced by another consideration in doing so. The Jews rejected his doctrine when it was plainly delivered; it was therefore to be clothed in figurative speeches. Had they been docile hearers, they would have had everything explained; they shut their eyes and hardened their hearts, and so truth assumed a veiled form, which the careless did not choose to search into, and only the earnest-minded desired to understand. Our Lord gave this reason to his disciples when they questioned him, and showed that besides the intrinsic beauty of the parable it tested the hearts of those to whom it was spoken. Matt. xiii. 10-17.

It is proper to add, however, that though both the design and the effect of Christ's teaching in parables was to remove it in a manner further from the Jews and make it less palpable to their understandings, he still longed for their salvation. He wept in anguish of spirit over them even at the very last, when he knew the things of their peace were for ever hidden from their eyes. And not only so, but no sooner were the things which concerned himself fully accomplished than he sent his apostles with the message of reconciliation *to the Jews first*, propounding it in the plainest terms and confirming it by signs from heaven.

Our Lord's parables have ever been regarded with profound admiration. And well they may be. They attest the genuineness of the Gospels, for they are in-

imitable by any writers of that or the succeeding age. They possess a life and power which stamp them with the "image and superscription" of the Son of man. They are the most complete and finished models—"apples of gold in pictures of silver." They present the most important instructions in the most inviting form, in the noblest language; with the most lively colors, in the most suitable arrangement are these small paintings set before our eyes. They contain nothing more and nothing less than is just necessary to give clearness and force to the ideas sought to be unfolded; everything is rendered palpable through means of the most powerful contrasts, and each individual is marked according to his characteristic properties.

In their original delivery these parables were wisely adapted to the time and people at which and for whom they were spoken. Yet they are equally valuable now, and in all parts of the world, "for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness." They never weary the mind, never grow old, never lose their force or beauty.

The *scope* or *design* of Christ's parables is sometimes to be gathered from his own express declarations, as in Luke xii. 16-21; xiv. 11; xvi. 9. In other cases it must be sought by considering the context, the circumstances in which it was spoken and the features of the narrative itself—*i. e.* the *literal* sense. For the right understanding of this, an acquaintance with the customs of the people, with the productions of their country and with the events of their history, is often desirable.

"True as it doubtless is," observes an eminent scholar, "that there was in each parable a leading thought to be learnt, partly from the parable itself, partly from the

occasion of its utterance, and that all else gathers round that thought as a centre, it must be remembered that in the great patterns which our Lord himself has given us there is more than this. Not only the sower and the seed and the several soils have their counterparts in the spiritual life, but the birds of the air, the thorns, the scorching heat, have each of them a significance. The explanation of the wheat and the tares—given with less fullness, an outline as it were, which the advancing scholars would be able to fill up—is equally specific. It may be inferred from these two instances that we are, at least, justified in looking for a meaning even in the seeming accessories of a parable.”

“We have the right interpretation,” remarks Dr. Angus, “when all the main circumstances are explained. If any important member of the narrative is rendered by our interpretation nugatory, or is paralyzed, the interpretation is false, and when we have a true interpretation of the whole, that interpretation of any part is to be rejected which does not conduce to the consistency and force of the whole.”

The truth, in the matter of interpretation of the parables, in our judgment, is, that we are to avoid both the extreme of supposing that only the design of the whole should be regarded, and the extreme of insisting upon every clause as having a double meaning. In other words, whilst on the one hand we are to ascertain the general scope of the parables, and to interpret the attendant circumstances as they bear on this, on the other hand we are to guard against the mistake of some well-meaning people, who have supposed that every particular of the figure presented has a symbolical meaning apart from the principal illustration, thus

making the whole a collection of riddles, on which ingenuity may amuse itself, but which common sense repudiates.

It is a wise saying of Trench, that the parables may not be made first sources of doctrine. Doctrines otherwise and already grounded may be illustrated or indeed further confirmed by them, but it is not allowable to constitute doctrine first by their aid. For from the literal to the figurative, from the clearer to the more obscure, has been ever recognized as the law of Scripture interpretation.

Guided by these principles, we have humbly yet earnestly attempted an unfolding of the parables of our blessed Lord. Much more anxious to prove useful than to be esteemed original, we have gathered from every available source, both in substance and form, whatever would subserve our purpose. We have also steadily aimed to give the exposition such plainness and fidelity as would, whilst free from the parade of scholarship or the vanity of speculation, meet the capacity and satisfy the needs of ordinary minds. The preparation of the work has given us great pleasure, not unattended, we trust, with spiritual profit; and our strongest desire for it will be fulfilled if the great Teacher graciously accompanies it with the enlightening, comforting and sanctifying influence of the Holy Spirit to all who may give it either a cursory glance or a careful perusal.

THE * TWO * BUILDERS.

“To spread the page of Scripture, and compare
Our conduct with the laws engraven there;
To measure all that passes in the breast
Faithfully, fairly, by that sacred test;
To dive into the sacred deeps within;
To spare no passion and no favorite sin;
And search the themes important above all—
Ourselves, and our recovery from our fall.”

24 *Therefore whosoever heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them,
I will liken him unto a wise man, which built his house upon a rock :*
25 *And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and
beat upon that house ; and it fell not : for it was founded upon a*
26 *rock. And every one that heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth
them not, shall be likened unto a foolish man, which built his house*
27 *upon the sand : And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the
winds blew, and beat upon that house ; and it fell : and great was
the fall of it.*

MATT. VII. 24-27. See also LUKE VI. 47-49.

THE
PARABLES OF JESUS.

THE TWO BUILDERS.

MORE than eighteen hundred years ago an immense multitude assembled on a mountain in Galilee to hear the "Teacher come from God" proclaim the Magna Charta of his heavenly kingdom. The illustrious Speaker penetrated the hearts of his audience and read their most secret emotions, their passions, their prejudices—even their very enmity against himself. He saw before him the sleek scribe, the lawless Gadarene and the canting Pharisee. Turning from these hostile hearers, he addressed himself to the few devoted followers sitting at his feet, but in tones loud enough to be heard by the gazing crowd. His utterances on that memorable occasion constituted the "Sermon on the Mount," which was designed to be the exponent of the new faith and the guide of his beloved people in all future time, and of which the great Webster said, "The richness and beauty of the gems sparkling through it prove them to belong to the treasury of Heaven."

It was just as he finished this inimitable sermon that our Lord spoke this parable. Having opened the spiritual nature of his kingdom and the true, practical character of saving religion, he now proceeded to make a solemn application of what had been said. This he did first by giving warning in plain language: "Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven;" and then he uttered the similitude now before us.

A peculiar charm invests this parable from the fact that it was the *first* which fell from the lips of Jesus. With what delight, did the world hold such treasures, would we look at the first stanzas of Homer's muse, the first attempt of Archimedes' skill, the first oration of Demosthenes, the first sermon of Chrysostom, the first sketch of Rubens, though we could hope to see nothing in these but the dawn of talents which at maturity produced their splendid works and won them immortal fame! With what a thrill of interest, therefore, must we look upon the first parable of Him "in whom are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge"!

Such a thing as the Saviour here describes might happen in our land, but it was far more likely to happen in Judea, where the rains are periodical. When they descend they often descend in torrents, and continue to do so with unabated violence for a number of days. In consequence of this a deluge rushes down with dreadful impetuosity from the high grounds to the plains. The huts of the inhabitants—generally formed of clay hardened in the sun—are exposed to great danger. They are often literally melted down by the heavy rains, or undermined, and then overturned by the furious gusts of wind, and when not founded

on the solid rock are swept away by the resistless torrent.

The word "therefore" in the parable imports that between the men named there was a most marked distinction in the sight of God. Yet the distinction of "wise" and "foolish" is not to be regarded as one of the head, but as one of the heart. It is not that the one class was deficient in intellect and the other abounded in it, but that the one had a deficiency which was moral and spiritual, and the other an excellency which was spiritual, permanent and saving. Manifestly, the characterization of the parties has its foundation in truth. Who *is wise* if that man is not who is more concerned about the eternal world to which he is hastening than about the affairs of time—who is more zealous to obtain everlasting happiness than to gain the riches of this world? And who *is foolish* if not the man who is resting on some false hope, erecting an edifice which shall tumble and smother him in its ruins, sending, as it falls, its dreary echoes to reverberate through a lost eternity?

The direct reference in the expressions, "heareth and doeth them," and "heareth and doeth them not," is to the "sayings" of our Lord in the discourse just concluded; but what he affirms of *these* words is equally true of *all* his words, whether spoken by himself personally or made known through his inspired apostles. To "hear" the sayings of Christ is just to have them addressed to us, to have an opportunity of becoming acquainted with them. To "do" these sayings is something more than merely to perform the actions which he requires; it is to conform the whole inward and outward life to them, to form our whole character by

them, to fashion our habits of thought, feeling and action in accordance with them. The man who is represented as hearing and doing is one who not only listens to these sayings and understands their meaning, but, believing them, repents, changes his mind, is "converted," is radically changed, is "born again," becomes "a new creature," being "transformed by the renewing of his mind." The *other* description of character, whilst it includes several classes—those to whom our Lord's sayings are addressed, and who make light of them, and those who, listening to them with some degree of attention, still refuse to believe and obey them—yet is mainly intended to designate such as profess to believe Christ's words and declare their determination to obey them, but while calling him Lord, Lord, do not the things which he has commanded. All these classes have this in common: that, while they have the means of obtaining acquaintance with the words of Jesus, they refuse that subjection of mind and heart and conduct to them to which they are entitled, and without which, from the very nature of the case, saving benefit cannot be derived from them.

Observe the points in which the two characters here presented were alike.

Both men were builders. The word was not totally lost upon either of them. It was heard by them both, and not altogether in vain. Each felt that he had a work to do, and both set about their own several occupations. Both were hearers of the Saviour. They also heard with sufficient attention to understand, and they were so influenced by what they heard that a spirit of inquiry was produced in each of them. They saw the necessity of building a house, a place of refuge. Hence

they do not represent pagans in the darkness of ignorance, or Jews who utterly reject Jesus, or infidels, or openly profane persons, but a class altogether different—such as hear, read and outwardly respect the gospel, such as get acquainted with its doctrines, precepts and gracious promises.

Each built a house. Many persons whose minds are somewhat awake to the momentous realities of religion propose to come to some determination in which they will feel safe, and to erect for themselves some habitation which will shelter them from the storms through which they know they must pass. But for various reasons they defer this work, or, if they commence it, proceed with it but a little until it is abandoned. Not so, however, with these men. They selected a site, collected the materials, commenced the building, and stayed not until it was finished. Both fabrics too were of the same description. Nothing, at least, is said disparagingly respecting the external appearance of that which the foolish builder erected. It was such an one as *he felt* he could rest in with security, and hence doubtless must have been constructed with some carefulness and skill.

The houses were both exposed to storms. On both of them “the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew,” and “the stream did beat vehemently.”

The Christian may expect to be tried by God, by the world and by Satan. He has nowhere a promise of a life of ease, of freedom from trial, tribulation and anguish. His Master was “a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief.” “The servant is not better than his lord.” If these things were done in the green tree, what may be expected in the dry? When John, from the rocky and desolate island, saw “a great multi-

tude clothed with white robes, and palms in their hands," he was told, "These are they which came out of great tribulation, and have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb." The believer has nowhere been told that his house shall not be exposed to storm and flood. But, blessed be God! he may glory in tribulations, "knowing that tribulation worketh patience, and patience experience, and experience hope, and hope maketh not ashamed, because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us."

"Let not him who is established and built upon the rock," says Chemnitz, "imagine that he can now be no more overtaken by all manner of affliction or danger. Rather is he like a house that is situated on the shore of the sea, upon which the waves beat heavier than is known to houses inland. This house must be the target and mark of all the beating storms of the world. But because it is founded on the rock, it may indeed be shaken to the centre and its rafters creak, yet fall shall it never, for its foundation stands fast and immovable. Our great concern should not be, whether trials await us, not whether the tempest will come, but whether we have a good building on a sure foundation that will defy the sweeping of the torrents."

"While I draw this fleeting breath,
When my heartstrings break in death,
When I soar to worlds unknown,
See thee on thy judgment-throne—
Rock of Ages, cleft for me,
Let me hide myself in thee."

Not only is the true believer, however, destined to trials and afflictions, but so is the man, also, whose

religion is *false*. Only let him *act* as if he were a child of God, and the reproach which the world will cast upon him, and the seductive influences with which Satan will ply him, will combine with disappointment, poverty, sickness, mental oppression, and change of scene, circumstances and society, to try what manner of person he is, as anticipatory of the final test when we shall stand at the bar of God, where not a single self-deceiver shall be left unstripped, nor one trembling believer disappointed or unblessed.

Thus is it evident that these builders have a strong resemblance. Both proceeded to build houses. To one passing by they would appear to be equally wise and skillful; all he could see would be the walls of either house as they were rising above the level of the ground—the one, it may be, attracting him most from a greater pretension about it than the other. The *object* of both was the same. They wished to build a house which should shelter them under its roof, and be the means of pleasure and comfort to them. Both of them had *time* given them in order to do this; they had opportunity to engage in it as they severally desired. Both of them had the choice of situation; they might build where they pleased. Both of them finish and take possession of their dwellings. This was in fair weather, when all was calm and serene, and gave promise of quiet, security and peace. Both of the edifices were tried. On each of them there fell a storm which put them to the severest proof. And it was not a little storm for one and a great storm for the other, but it was a vehement flood and tempest for both.

Observe now the contrast. *These men differed as to their calculations for the future.* There was danger ahead.

This was owing to the state of the earth. "For several months," says a modern traveler, "there is not a drop of rain in that country, and the burning sun has loosened the ground, when at once the torrents descend, the chapped earth suddenly swells, and the foundations are moved by the change;" so that in erecting an edifice it was of the utmost importance to select a site where the base would not suffer from the teeming rain. This was thought of by the wise man, and he acted accordingly. The other thought only of fine weather. He was solicitous only for the present convenience and comfort of his building. He troubled himself not about the future. The sky was clear when he began to build; no storms were rising, no floods swelling. Imagining that it would be always thus, he acted accordingly.

So, too, is it with the *real* Christian and the *nominal* one. The one, as it has well been said, is satisfied with a religion that will answer his present purpose, quiet his own conscience, and make him respectable among his neighbors. There is no forethought, no anxiety to be right. And the reason is plain: he is unacquainted with the evils for which he needs a remedy. But to the *other* the Holy Spirit has shown the misery of his lost condition, and has enabled him to see his present wants and the evils that are coming on him. A religion which will satisfy his conscience and his neighbors is not what he cares for, but a religion that will bring pardon and strength and salvation—a religion that will satisfy his God, endure a storm and support him when everything else gives way. He wants a hope that will bear him up when conscience stings, Satan accuses and death strikes—a refuge for his soul amidst the convulsions and terrors of a departing world.

By one of these men *a rock* was chosen for a foundation—a firm, immovable, unyielding basis. By the other the spot was selected that was most pleasant and inviting—the *sand*; which, though in the dry season it might appear solid and firm, yet was fragile in its texture and movable in its character. Here is *the main* point of diversity between the persons represented; and it is of the greatest importance to mark the scope of the parable in this respect. One of the men began his building “*on the earth,*” just as he found it, and so at least he had the satisfaction of making a great show with it, and it may be he plumed himself on the skill with which he nicely adjusted his building to the surface of the ground as it was; but the other “*digged deep.*” Not satisfied with lifting a spadeful here and there, he toiled, and descended deeper and deeper through the soil until he reached the rock, and laid his foundation *there*; and then, having found this, he patiently proceeded to raise course after course on his building above it. The same difference holds between the persons whom these builders represent. The mere professor rests upon his own righteousness in opposition to the sacrifice and righteousness of Christ—his benevolence, liberality, morality; or upon the mercy of God irrespective of Christ’s death; or upon the union of his works with those of the Redeemer as the ground of his acceptance; or upon the mere assumption of the name and forms of religion; or on the public avowal of his faith, without respect to practical obedience to the Saviour. But the heaven-taught sinner has *another* foundation. Whatever may be the cost in the casting away of cherished earthly things, he digs down and passes through the hard and all but impenetrable soil

of a proud, a carnal and a self-righteous heart ; and he never ceases thus to do until he has found *Christ* as the strong Rock on which he may rest every hope for time and eternity. And when he has found him he shows that it was only to *build* upon him as the "only foundation." And thus we see the wondrous connection between the disciple's work and his security. He shows that if he sought for Christ, it was that he might go after him, walk with him and be like him. He surrounds himself with all the fruits of righteousness, just as the wise builder raised stone over stone in his building. He is seen and known by them ; he *dwells* in them. But it is not from them he derives his safety. It is not simply because they are there around him that he is safe and happy. The other builder, for that matter, had the same kinds of materials about him. No, no ! He *hears* the sayings of Jesus ; he *does* them. *That* is the evidence and proof of his faith, but it is not his hope. His hope rests on that chief Corner-stone, elect, precious, which the eternal God has laid in Zion.

We see the buildings on which these men have expended their time and strength, and in which they have trusted. They are complete, and scarcely can any difference be discerned between them. Suddenly a mighty storm arises, and as the rain descends the foaming torrents rush from the mountain-heights, and a hurricane accompanies them. Amid the scene of wild confusion and devastation fix your gaze upon one of these edifices, and you see that it is immovable. It is exposed indeed to the fury of the blast and the mad waters rush *around* it, but it cannot be shaken, and its happy occupant sits sheltered and secure. And so God tells us it will be with the Christian. Storms may come, and storms will

come—storms of sorrow and trial, and the still more dreadful storms of death and the judgment—but through all these he shall be unterrified, unmoved. Nothing can harm him, because he is resting on the Rock of Ages. Trouble may “come in as a flood,” and persecution and temptation may add to its shock, but he shall neither be overthrown nor shaken. “*It fell not.*”

Turn now to the other building, to learn whether its strength is equally enduring and its destiny equally propitious. See the wavering roof, the trembling pillars, the tottering structure; *it falls*, its basis is swept away, and nothing is left to sustain it. It has become one heap of ruins; its beautiful form, its elevated walls, its commodious rooms are all lost in one utter desolation. Is this all? Look beneath this rubbish, listen to the wail that rises above the howling of the tempest. It is the dying shriek of that building’s inhabitant. In it he was reclining in calmness and security, but in a moment his expectations and prospects were swept away. In the storm, when he had most need of the building in which he trusted, it is serving to proclaim his folly and to cover him with death. And so God tells us it shall be with the *self-deceiver*, the *nominal* Christian. He may retain his false hope till the final hour, but *then* it will be tried and condemned. His self-delusion vanishes; he feels it, but it is too late. The house is undermined; the winds smite it and it falls. And oh what a fall! It is *sudden*, it is *unlooked for*, it is *irreparable*, it is *awful*. What can be compared with it? The desolations of an earthquake, the mouldering cities of Babylon and Rome, the flaming temple at Jerusalem,—what are these but *trifles* in comparison with a soul homeless, unsheltered from avenging wrath, the time

for building gone, the means for building removed, the opportunity for building departed, and the ability for building withdrawn!—all gone, FOR EVER GONE!

Let him who is about to enter upon the Christian's work see that he begin that work well. Let him spare no pains to secure a good foundation. He is not a workman called to work in order that he may be seen of man, but that "he may have praise of God." It is "unto the Lord, and not unto man," that he must labor; what he does must be in "the name of the Lord Jesus" and to the glory and praise of God—"not unto himself, but unto Him who died and rose again." And all this must he do with "his might," and then let him patiently and hopefully leave himself and his work in the Lord's hands.

Reader! how does *your house*—your spiritual building—stand? Has it a foundation? Is it on the Rock? Look well to this matter. If you feel any doubt, begin again from the very base of the structure. Take the house all down and build it afresh, rather than run the risk of its being swept away. It will be too late to make it safe when the storm comes. Now, in this calm and quiet season, now, while yet you may, look well to the foundation on which your hope for eternity rests. Let nothing satisfy you but a true foundation in Christ, than whom "other foundation can no man lay." Thus may you be found among those who are doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving their own selves.

"This, this is wisdom, manful and serene:
 Toward God all penitence, and prayer, and trust,
 But to the troubles of this shifting scene
 Simply courageous and sublimely just.
 Be, then, such wisdom thine, my heart within:
 There is no foe, nor woe, nor grief, but sin."

☞ THE ✕ SOWER. ☞

“Oft as thy word, O God, is cast
Like seed into the ground,
Let the rich dews of heaven descend,
And righteous fruits abound.

“Let not the ever-watchful foe
This holy seed remove,
But give it root in every heart,
To bring forth fruits of love.

“Let not the world's deceitful cares
The living Word destroy;
But let it yield a hundredfold
Of peace and faith and joy.”

3 *And he spake many things unto them in parables, saying, Behold,*
4 *a sower went forth to sow; And when he sowed, some seeds fell by*
5 *the wayside, and the fowls came and devoured them up: Some fell*
6 *upon stony places, where they had not much earth: and forthwith they*
7 *sprung up, because they had no deepness of earth: And when the*
8 *sun was up, they were scorched; and because they had no root, they*
9 *withered away. And some fell among thorns; and the thorns*
10 *sprung up, and choked them: But other fell into good ground, and*
11 *brought forth fruit, some an hundred-fold, some sixty-fold, some thirty-*
12 *fold. Who hath ears to hear, let him hear.*

MATT. XIII. 3-8, 18-23 See also MARK IV. 3-8,
14-20; LUKE VIII. 5-8, 11-15.

THE SOWER.

AFTER Jerusalem, Bethlehem and Nazareth, no part of Palestine so abounds in interesting associations as the Sea of Galilee, now the "Bahr Tubariyeh." In the Saviour's time it was the scene of busy life; its borders were thickly populated; fortresses, cities, towns and villages were to be seen all around it; and its surface was enlivened with numerous boats passing and repassing with passengers and goods, while the fishermen launched forth to cast their nets in its waters. The shores were everywhere cultivated, and offered numerous delightful gardens, fragrant vineyards and shaded retreats, while numerous people, busy or unoccupied, were passing to and fro, and on every side were heard the noise of the mill-stones, the lowing of the herds upon the hillsides, the voices of men calling to each other, the joyous shouts of happy children and the sound of the song and the harp. But *now* an air of silence, loneliness and desolation hangs over this entire locality. And yet, notwithstanding the sad contrast which it presents with its past condition and aspect, to the Christian traveler there is no more interesting region on the map of the globe, nor is there any water which is surveyed by him with such emotions as that of Gennesaret.

This feeling in regard to this sea, variously called the

Sea of Galilee, of Tiberias and of Gennesaret, is well expressed by the gifted and sainted M'Cheyne:

"How pleasant to me thy deep blue wave,
O Sea of Galilee!
For the glorious One who came to save
Hath often stood by thee.

"Fair are the lakes in the land I love,
Where pine and heather grow,
But thou hast loveliness far above
What Nature can bestow.

"It is not that the wild gazelle
Comes down to drink thy tide,
But He that was pierced to save from hell
Oft wandered by thy side.

"It is not that the fig tree grows,
And palms, in thy soft air,
But that Sharon's fair and bleeding Rose
Once spread its fragrance there.

"Graceful around thee the mountains meet,
Thou calm reposing sea ;
But, ah, far more ! the beautiful feet
Of Jesus walked o'er thee.

"Those days are past. Bethsaida, where?
Chorazin, where art thou ?
His tent the wild Arab pitches there,
The wild reeds shade thy brow.

"Tell me, ye mouldering fragments, tell,
Was the Saviour's city here ?
Lifted to heaven, has it sunk to hell,
With none to shed a tear ?

"Ah, would my flock from thee might learn
How days of grace will flee,
How all an offered Christ who spurn
Shall mourn at last, like thee !

“And was it beside this very sea
The new-risen Saviour said
Three times to Simon, ‘Lovest thou me?
My lambs and sheep then feed.’

“O Saviour! gone to God’s right hand!
Yet the same Saviour still,
Graved on thy heart is this lovely strand
And every fragrant hill.

“Oh, give me, Lord, by this sacred wave,
Threefold thy love divine,
That I may feed, till I find my grave,
Thy flock—both thine and mine.”

On the shore of this lake a multitude were assembled to listen to the great Teacher. A certain divine authority, strangely combined with the tenderest human sympathy, marked his discourses to the “common people” especially, as entirely different from all that they had been accustomed to hear in the synagogue, and therefore they “heard *him* gladly.” At this time, probably, as on another occasion, the crowd pressed upon the Saviour, so that he found it convenient to enter into a boat. When, by a few strokes of the oars in John’s or Peter’s hands, the boat is shot a short way out, he turns to address the multitude who throng the shore, sitting or standing, tier above tier, on its shelving sides. How grand the scene! Lighted by the sun, its roof heaven’s own lofty dome, its walls the hills that girdle the lake, which, shining like a mirror, lay still and quiet at its Maker’s feet,—what edifice of man’s ever offered preacher such a noble temple!

The immense multitude which covered the beach were chiefly peasantry, whom curiosity to hear so eminent a prophet had allured from all parts of the

adjacent country. Jesus well knew that he would obtain the most ready access, as well as render more lasting service, by leading their thoughts homeward to things with which they were well acquainted. To them all the various processes of husbandry, the anxious toils of seed-time and harvest, the imperceptible growth of vegetation and the efforts of domestic industry, were subjects, not of knowledge merely, but of lively and habitual interest, and this was calculated to give perpetuity to any moral impression of which they were made the associating principle. In the attire of such rural imagery, therefore, Jesus set forth in *this* parable and the three which follow it the instructions he deemed most useful to the spiritual state and wants of those country hearers.

Referring especially to this parable of the Sower, a recent traveler writes: "Is there anything on the spot to suggest the image thus conveyed? So I asked as I rode along the track under the hillside by which the Plain of Gennesaret is approached. The thought had hardly occurred to me when a slight recess in the hillside close upon the plain disclosed at once in detail, and with a conjunction which I remember nowhere else in Palestine, every feature of the great parable. There was the undulating corn-field descending to the water's edge. There was the trodden pathway running through the midst of it, with no fence to prevent the seed from falling here and there on either side of it or upon it, itself hard with the constant tramp of horse and mule and human feet. There was the good rich soil which distinguishes the whole of that plain and its neighborhood from the bare hills elsewhere descending into the lake, and which, where there is no interruption, produces one vast mass of corn. There was the rocky

ground of the hillside protruding here and there through the corn-fields as elsewhere through the glossy slopes. There were large bushes of thorn, the 'Nubk'—that kind of which, tradition says, the crown of thorns was woven—springing up in the very midst of the waving wheat."

Two considerations invest this parable with special interest and importance: 1. Its prophetic character. It predicts the reception the Christian religion will meet with in the world. It might have been thought that a system of truth so pure and heavenly as the gospel, so calculated to make men happy in themselves and in the enjoyment of God's favor, would be at once embraced and held fast by all. Our Lord knew men's hearts too well to think thus, and that knowledge must have been indeed divine by which he saw that all hearers of his word to the end of time would find their portraits in one or other of the characters here drawn, and that instances of all the four classes would be found in every new generation.

2. The particular desire of the disciples to have the parable explained, and the great pains the Saviour took to explain it. It is not indeed too much to affirm that he seems to have considered it as the fundamental parable, the one on the right understanding of which would depend his disciples' comprehension of all which were to follow. Hardly less than this can be inferred from his inquiry: "Know ye not this parable? and how then will ye know all parables?" In full harmony with this view is the fact observable in no other discourse of our Lord, that this parable both begins and ends with a distinct call *to hear, to hearken*.

Jesus is the true and great Sower of the seed. He

came "forth" from God, and from the storehouse of infinite beneficence and wisdom and life, to sow this earth with the seeds of truth and holiness and joy—seeds of love that shall produce conviction, and seeds of gospel that shall produce responsive gratitude, joy and love. Others were able to sow only because he had sown first; they did but carry on the work which he had begun. Yet every preacher of the gospel is also a sower of the seed. When such an one enters the pulpit it may be said as truly as on the day when Jesus was the preacher and a boat the pulpit, "Behold, a sower went forth to sow." Nor is the work of dropping the precious seed into human hearts wherever an opening may appear, confined to those who, being trained to it and freed from other cares, may thereby be capable of conducting it on a larger scale. As every leaf of the forest and every ripple on the lake which itself receives a sunbeam on its breast may throw the sunbeam off again, and so spread the light around, in like manner every one, old or young, who receives Christ into his heart may and will publish with his life and lips that blessed name.

The seed to be sown is "the word of the kingdom;" therefore, not merely what God has spoken in general, but pre-eminently his gospel, his gracious message by Christ, his testimony and invitations concerning the kingdom of heaven. The seed belongs to the sower—it is Christ's. Luke expressly calls it "his seed." It is the property of Him who was himself the seminal word which he communicated. Thus the Lord, it will be remembered, defines the place and value of the Scriptures: "They are they which testify of *me*." Christ is the living Seed, and the Bible holds it.

There is *life* in a seed. Dry and dead as it seems, let it be planted with a diamond, and while the one remains a stone, the other will awake, and, bursting its shell, rise from the ground to adorn the earth with beauty, perfume the air with fragrance or enrich men with its fruit. There is *force* in a seed. Buried in the ground, it does not remain inert, but forces its way upward, and with a power quite remarkable in a soft, green, feeble blade, pushes aside the dull clods that cover it. "So," says an old divine, "the word hath in it a productive virtue to bring forth fruit according to its kind; that is, the fruit of a *new life*—not only a new habitude and fashion of life without, but a new nature, a new kind of life within, new thoughts, a new estimate of things, new delights and actions."

The husbandman's life is one of various toils and great fatigue. With him every season has its appointed work, and is so much a season of labor as to leave but short intervals for relaxation, and none for idleness. From the commencement of his public instructions to the very close of his life our blessed Lord preached incessantly to the people. Whether they were assembled by thousands, or whether two or three individuals were met together on boat, on shore or field or hillside, he omitted no opportunities of declaring the will of *Him* that sent him. In his estimation, the magnificent temple and the obscure cottage were equally sacred when that instruction was to be imparted by which men were to be made wise unto salvation. The gospel minister who imitates the example of Jesus will find no time to be idle.

We should carefully observe the great truth presented in the parable by the diverse soils on which the seed was cast—that God soweth *everywhere*, that he willoth that

“*all* should come to the knowledge of the truth.” As in that wondrous and beautiful panorama of natural scenery stretching before the Saviour’s eye in the land of Gennesaret there was every variety of soil, so in the world of human hearts and homes was there every variety of condition and rank, disposition and character. But the Sower was to sow all the soil; the gospel was to be preached to *every creature*. If the scattered seed bore no produce, the fault was not God’s, the shortcoming rested not with the Sower, but with the ungracious soil of the human heart. He would have none to perish unwarned.

The title which the Germans give this parable is *The Four Kinds of Ground*; and as its central idea is the reception the Christian religion will meet with in the world, this title is, we think, more correct than that with which in our language it is associated.

In the East in many places there are no roads except beaten tracks through the middle of the fields, and consequently the grain that falls along the course of these, if not previously picked up by the birds, is soon trampled and dies under the feet of the passengers.

“*Wayside hearers*” are those whose minds, like the beaten highroad, are hard and impenetrable and inaccessible to conviction. Such are the persons who have imbibed early prejudices against Christianity, and who, either conceiving themselves superior to the rest of mankind in genius, knowledge and penetration, reject with scorn whatever the bulk of mankind receives with veneration, and erect systems of their own which they conceive to be the very perfection of human wisdom; or, on the other hand, having been unfortunately very early initiated in the writings of modern skeptics, adopt the

opinions of those whom they consider as the great luminaries of the age, accept ridicule as argument and assertion as proof, and prefer the silly witticisms, the specious sophistry, the metaphysical subtlety, the coarse buffoonery which distinguish many of the most popular opponents of our faith, to the simplicity, dignity and sublimity of the divine truths of the gospel.

Careless hearers are embraced in this class. Such are they whose hearts, like this ground, are hard and cold, not in a state to receive the word. They have come to the place where it is preached; perhaps they were obliged to come, perhaps they came because it is respectable to come, or because they would not have felt easy in staying away. But they did not come in a spirit of prayer. They did not come for the good of their souls. They did not come to hear God's message to them. It is astonishing to think how commonly the imagination of such persons is suffered to carry them away from their proper business—hearing. Instead of a serious regard to the truths which the minister delivers, they indulge their minds in schemes of worldly business or they are pursuing some plan of future pleasure.

Then there are speculating hearers, who study religion as other men do mathematics—either to gratify curiosity and love of discovery, or because they hope to render it subservient to worldly interest and reputation, or vainly imagine that a sound creed is the one thing needful, the sure and only passport to heaven. These persons are often very severe on blind Pharisees who think to be saved by a *form of godliness*, but they cannot see that a *form of knowledge* is equally worthless, and far more dangerous, because it produces a more desperate kind of pride and self-preference, for “knowledge

puffeth up." Akin to these are captious hearers. They go to the sanctuary on purpose to criticise, to discover their own acuteness by detecting some error of the preacher. They seek for nothing but the bran or the chaff, and this alone they carry away. They mean not to learn, much less to practice.

When husbandmen are sowing, thousands of birds will cover the ground in Palestine, and levy a heavy contribution on the grain thrown into the furrows. "*The fowls of the air came and devoured them up.*" When the seeds of truth are scattered upon hearts hardened by selfishness and evil passions, they either rebound or are borne away by the evil one as soon as they fall. They "understand not the word"—that is, they do not appreciate its excellence and the necessity of their immediately receiving and keeping it. They know so little of its value that they suffer it to lie exposed to the first temptation, or, as Luke says, to be "trodden down." The heart becomes indurated by hearing a gospel which it does not carry into life. The very repetition increases insensibility. The kingdom of darkness fights against the kingdom of God, which is built up within us through the word of God. Modern Ritualists may talk loudly of their forms and ceremonies, of their fonts and their altars, their crucifixes and their candles, while they sneer at Bibliolatry and "preaching the word." But Satan knows better than they. He will give them all these things, and make them heartily welcome to much more too, if they will only allow him to snatch away *the word*, as seed after seed of it falls upon the heart by the wayside, for he well knows that all these things have never saved, and can never save, a soul. But he knows equally well

that the word *received into the heart* is followed by *believing* "unto salvation."

Notice precisely why it is that the truth in the "way-side hearers" is not effectual to their salvation. It is not the fault of the seed, for that is the very same that is dropped into those who bring forth the fruits of faith. Neither is it the fault of the sower, for though there are men of different abilities, yet the saving reception of the word does not depend on that. Where, then, does the fault lie? In a heart unsoftened, exposed to every evil influence till it has become hard as a pavement. Felix, the Roman governor, was a specimen of the trodden wayside. His heart, worn by the cares of business and the pleasures of sin passing alternately in great volume over it, presented no opening for the entrance of the gospel. Hence Paul, when called to preach before him, did not in the first instance pour out the simple, positive message of mercy, but reasoned of righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come, thus plying the seared conscience with the terrors of the Lord in the hope—which, alas! proved vain—of breaking thereby the covering crust and preparing a seed-bed for the word of life.

Are we, then, to despair of the salvation of all those persons who remain unmoved under a ministry of mercy? As far as man's agency is concerned the answer to this question is obvious. But it must be remembered that nothing is impossible to God. He who can raise the dead in churchyards can waken the dead in churches. "Lo, I am with you always," says Jesus, "even unto the end of the world." This promise is the soul of hope and the life of preaching. How know the heralds of the gospel that it may not be with many

hardened sinners under their ministry as it was with the jailer of Philippi? His heart was rent as well as his prison, and over the openings, while they were fresh, the skillful sower dropped the vital seed: "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved;" and the word entered, and its entrance gave life.

"Let those that sow in sadness wait
Till the fair harvest come;
They shall confess their sheaves are great,
And shout the blessings home.

"Though seed lie buried long in dust,
It sha'n't deceive their hope;
The precious grain can ne'er be lost,
For grace ensures the crop."

The "*stony places*" mentioned by Matthew are to be explained by the "*rock*" in Luke. A soil mingled with stones is not meant, for these would not certainly hinder the roots from striking deeply downward, as those roots, with the instinct which they possess, would feel and find their way, penetrating between the interstices of the stones, and would so reach the moisture below. But what is meant is ground where a thin coating of mould covered the surface of a rock, which presented an impassable barrier, rendering it wholly impossible that the roots should penetrate beyond a certain depth.

Here is indicated a different state of heart from that we have just considered. "*Forthwith* they sprung up, *because* they had no deepness of earth." Quickly up, they as quickly disappear. True in Nature as in grace. The rock under a thin layer of earth may, by the heat which it reflects, stimulate the seed into a rapid growth.

The heart which remains unconverted is just that which, if there be a momentary interest in religion, will make the most striking *show* of its feelings and emotions. It will stimulate the growth of outward seeming with amazing rapidity. "Hath not root in himself," no settled, fixed principles in his judgment, no firm resolution in his will, no rooted habits in his affections—nothing firm that will be either the sap or the strength of his profession. The effect of the word upon him is superficial, transient, evanescent. It will be observed that whilst the miscarriage of the first hearer is ascribed to direct diabolical influence, *here* Satan cannot merely come and take the word out of the heart without further trouble, and hence he brings some hostile influences to bear against it—"tribulation or persecution," outward and inward trials.

The persons here represented constitute that class of hearers in our churches who are susceptible of strong and lively emotions. Not like the preceding class, who are careless and apathetic, *they* enjoy a preached gospel. They are delighted with oratory, good language and graceful delivery; they admire the flights of a fine and vigorous imagination, or perhaps they are pleased with close reasoning or the discussions of an acute logician. They gratify themselves, however, by hearing preachers whose talents suit their tastes, whatever those may be. This employment sometimes agreeably fills up a vacant hour which might otherwise be tedious, and they *endure* even the truth for the sake of the *manner* in which it is delivered. Such persons attended Ezekiel. "Lo, thou art to them," said the Lord to his prophet, "as a very lovely song of one that hath a pleasant voice, and can play well on an instrument."

for they hear my words, but they do them not." Nothing is more deceptive than the influence of taste and sensibility in religion. Men may be thrilled with the grand themes which lie within its compass, resolutions of new obedience may be formed, the church may be left with a tear in the eye; but then, after all, it is only *surface-work*, superficial, shallow impression. It has sprung up under the stimulating heat of excitement, and expends itself in emotional feeling.

Let there be no misunderstanding here. Our Lord, in representing the stony-ground hearer as "receiving the word with joy," does not mean to check the glad hearing of divine truth. The gospel of salvation, the free offer, the sure promise,—these constitute the happiest tidings to which mortal ear can listen. Let the word, then, be heard with gladness. Let no cold caution be suffered to quench the rising flame. Only let us not forget that in order that the word may be heard with real and permanent gladness there must be repentance of our sins. Christians may feel different *degrees* of grief, but they all *grieve*. Those who have felt no godly sorrow will easily be induced to return to the world; they will never consent to make any great sacrifice for Christ. Like the stony-ground hearer, into whose calculation trials and suffering did not enter, they take from the gospel only what is light, not what is otherwise. They are like Herod, who heard John gladly as long as John did not touch the darling passion that he cherished in his heart. Had the truth been well rooted, it would have endured, but here it withered.

Young persons too often come under the class now in view. They quickly take up a profession, are restless till they are known to be among the Saviour's

followers, look down perhaps on those who without any such show have yet been long going on quietly in the way of godliness, and, with much that the experienced Christian knows to be only another form of self-conceit and self-pleasing, do yet often show such buds and blossoms as promise well for fruit. But temptation comes, and they find that they have no root; their religion was only a notion in the head, not a principle rooted in the heart. The same sun, thus, that gives nutriment and progress to the seeds on one soil, withers and blasts the young plants that grow upon the other.

The first disciples and first preachers of the gospel were exposed to the severest trials. Some who had not sufficient root in themselves gave way to the storms that assailed them, but others stood firm and unmoved amidst the most tremendous dangers, and underwent with unparalleled fortitude the most excruciating torments. Happily, *we* live in a country where Christianity pervades the nation, but faith must nevertheless have its trials, and "all who live godly in Christ Jesus" must have a portion of persecution. If we are determined not to comply with the fashions and vanities of the world, we may rest assured that we shall meet with opposers, our profession will be sorely tried, and if there be no root this hot sun will wither our sapless stalk and we shall become barren and unfruitful. Experience shows that a sneer from some leading spirit in a literary society, or a laugh raised by a gay circle of pleasure-seekers, or the rude jest of scoffing artisans in a workshop, may do as much as the fagot and the stake to make a fair but false disciple deny his Lord. Where, however, there is true faith, Christ's people need not much dread

trials. To borrow the figure here, the hotter the sun, if the heavens send it showers and the earth give it soil, the plant grows the taller and the stronger—grace growing in converted hearts like corn in strong, deep, rich, well-watered soils. The warmer the summer the richer the harvest.

There is more reality in the class of *thorny-ground hearers* than in either of the former. They do not with hardened hearts at once reject the word. On the contrary, they are conscious of its great importance, and welcome it as something which they require. It penetrates more deeply than in the other cases; but, alas! it is so mingled with other things which exercise an all-powerful sway over the feelings and affections that it is rendered useless and unprofitable. In other words, the seed fell in ground out of which the weeds and thistles were not extirpated. There were plenty of soil, abundance of softening showers and genial sunbeams, but the weeds grew up faster than the grain, till by their rank luxuriance and overshadowing branches they choked the good seed. "In the East," says Jamieson, "thorn-hedges were, and still are, cultivated as fences for the fields, and as the principal object in rearing them is to secure the crops from the depredations of the Arabs, they are seldom pruned, but are allowed to grow in wild luxuriance till they spread to a considerable extent over the extremities of every field."

The people here represented hear the word, are arrested, touched, convinced, persuaded. They acknowledge that they are sinners, they see that Christ is the only Saviour, they feel the value of their souls and they desire to lead a religious life, but their affections are drawn off from God by worldly things. They do not abandon

their profession through fear of persecution, but, while they continue to make a profession of religion, are enslaved by the love of the world. "The care of this world and the deceitfulness of riches," "the lusts of other things entering in" and "pleasures of this life," "choke the word, and he becometh unfruitful." Let us look separately at the principal antagonists to the efficacious working of the divine word which are here specified by the Redeemer.

There is no necessary antagonism between the claims of earth and heaven. The weight of a clock seems a heavy drag on the delicate movements of its machinery, but, so far from arresting or impeding those movements, it is indispensable to their steadiness, balance and accuracy. The planets in the heavens have a twofold motion—in their orbits and on their axes; the one motion not interfering, but carried on simultaneously and in perfect harmony, with the other; so man's twofold activities—around the heavenly and the earthly centre—need not disturb nor jar each other. He who diligently discharges the duties of the earthly, may not less sedulously, may at the same moment, fulfill those of the heavenly sphere; at once "diligent in business" and "fervent in spirit, serving the Lord." But whilst it is true that a proper diligence in the world is justifiable, and even commendable, it may not be denied that men's pursuit of their secular vocations may prove disastrous to their spiritual interests. Experience, indeed, shows that in many cases it does. They get too much absorbed in things out of themselves. Their works, projects, professions, grow to an unnatural importance, and encroach upon all their thoughts. They become fond of the mere energy and habit of business. Dexterity, skill, foresight,

calculation, become things pleasant in themselves, and are enjoyed for their own sakes. Thus it comes to pass that as the things with which they are surrounded thrust themselves between their souls and the realities unseen—drop like a veil over the faint outlines of the invisible world and hide it from their eyes—the spiritual sensibilities that are in them grow inert and lose their virtue by the dullness of inaction. They become forgetful of their own interior life by allowing their aims, measures, rules, to be of an external character. They become anxious, craving, sensitive, impatient, amid the disappointments, fears, uncertainties, competitions, of the world, and thus chafed, agitated and preyed upon by the fretting of unrest, they are far removed from the calm, inward shining of the love of God. Little by little dullness creeps over their souls, marked by no great changes; much as the dimness of the natural sight, which must reach to an advanced point before it is detected to be more than a passing film.

As “the care of this world” designates care for our present livelihood, the pressure of an earthly existence—every care, indeed, which has not some tendency to piety and the worship of God, even though it be not mixed up with what is positively prohibited—so *the deceitfulness of riches* represents the glittering side of this life with those who are in quest of riches and those who already have them, because both look upon them as the highest good and put their confidence in them. What an affecting example have we of this class—the choking of the seed, the unfruitfulness and the condemnation—in the case of Ananias and Sapphira, who “kept back part of the price” and “lied unto God”! Consider avarice in itself, and nothing appears more

base and contemptible; yet, dragging along with it the ideas of power, place and security, it changes its nature and becomes a provident provision. This is one species of that *deceit* which sin obtrudes upon its votaries, in which it is assisted by the very nature of sin itself.

In this feature of the third class in the parable what a living protest have we against the great crying sin of our day! Men of promise and high aspirations, men of religious training and religious profession, become seized with the accursed thirst for gold, bartering health, morals, principle, social ties, life itself, in this demon-scamble. The cold-blooded murders and villain-plunderings of the street and the highway, perpetrated by the dregs of society, are not one whit more heinous in the sight of God than are the polished counterparts of social and individual baseness, where the betrayal of high trust or the delirium of wild speculation has embittered the widow's tears, defrauded the orphan of his bread and left happy firesides stripped and desolate. Well did He who knew the human heart denounce "*covetousness*" as "*idolatry*." Depend upon it, God will visit our land and our time with judgment if this usurping Dagon be not hurled from its throne. It is this mammon-spirit which, in the case of all ancient nations, formed the first symptom of decadence and decrepitude, the first impelling wave which rose to a wild deluge of ruin. God keep us from the verge of this engulfing whirlpool, and tune our lips more and more to the music and spirit of the prayer of honest, contented, unostentatious frugality, "Give me neither poverty nor riches; feed me with food convenient for me"!

“But should my destiny be quest of wealth,
 Kind Heaven, oh keep my tempted soul in health!
 And shouldst thou bless my toil with ample store,
 Keep back the madness that would seek for more.”

Overlook not the expressions “the lusts of other things entering in”—that is, with the seed; and “the thorns sprung up *with it*” and “choked it”—that is, rendered it feeble and attenuated, destroying its vigor and covering the life with the seeds of vanity. The very knocking at the door of the heart by the preaching of the word often opens it to the entering in of these “other things.” Men warm for a little moment at the sound of the gospel, and then the rein is given to their desires. The natural heart takes alarm, and soon drowns thought and anxiety for the future by “the cares, the riches and the pleasures of the present.” We are not to understand that only the mere sensualist or man of fashion is here referred to, but even the man of science and letters, the admirer and cultivator of the elegant arts or accomplishments; for personal pleasure may be intellectual as well as bodily, and only a more refined species of the love of self and sense in general. Whatever be the idol of a man’s heart, it is still some favorite creature of his own choice and selection, and in devoting himself to it he is still studying his own pleasure, finding both its beginning and its consummation within the limits of this world; and hence he too must be ranged with those in whose hearts the seed has been stifled, or is liable to be stifled, by “the lusts of other things entering in” and by the “pleasures of this life.”

GOOD-GROUND HEARERS.

It will be observed that in the classes mentioned

there is progression. The first rejects at once; the second, not so speedily; the third, still less so. The fourth *brings forth fruit*. Not all the seed which is sown perishes. The spiritual husbandman is to sow in hope, knowing that he will not always sow in vain—that a part will prosper.

The peculiarities of the good-ground hearers are as follows: 1. They have "*an honest and good heart*," a heart unlike those of the hearers mentioned before—not careless, unstable or worldly, but sincere, desirous to know the truth, and resolved to follow it, humble and teachable. In the full sense of the words, however, "*an honest and good heart*" must mean a heart renewed by grace, a heart which the Holy Spirit has prepared to receive the seed of the word. It is not intimated by the parable that the Husbandman finds any good ground in us; the ground, like the tree in another analogical lesson of our Lord, is not good until it is *made* good. "It is," says an able commentator, "beyond the scope of this parable to explain how the ground is rendered soft and kept free from thorns. The Teacher was content in this lesson to tell us what the good ground produces; we must discover elsewhere in the Scriptures whence its goodness is derived. . . . The similitude from Nature is no longer applicable to the mystery of the kingdom; as a parable, it has already reached its limits when the truth goes beyond the similitude. There is a *miraculous seed*, superior indeed to all natural seed—so powerful that by its growth it can and will choke all thorns. Nay more, it can also break through the rock in striking its root down into the earth, and can make that to be again a field of God which was a way for the feet of the prince of this world."

2. They not only hear the word, but “understand” it—receive it in faith, obey it—and thus experience its power, and understand it always better and better; in which respects they are distinguished from the first class.

3. They *keep* the word in a good heart, often meditating on it by themselves, and laying it up in the deep recesses of the mind; which constitutes their distinction from the second class.

4. They *bring forth fruit*; in them are manifested the fruits of the Spirit. And they do this with *patience*, persevering with unshaken steadfastness against opposition and difficulties, under the reproach of the world and in the storm of persecution; thus differing from the third class.

Here let it be remembered that *bringing forth fruit* is the truest test of Christianity. The fruit is always the same substantially as the seed. The seed is holy; the fruit must be holy also. If it be the seed of instruction, the understanding will be enlightened; if the seed of comfort, the heart will be cheered; if the seed of warning, care will be taken not to walk in the ways that are corrupt; if the seed of example, steady and strenuous effort will be made to follow Christ and them that through faith have inherited the promises. If there be no fruit, there can be no Christianity; fruit is the test of the tree—character, the symbol of principle. And fruit in season, above all—that is, our life showing itself as Christian and victorious in that sphere or place in which God in his providence has placed us—is precious. Such fruitfulness disarms all opposition, is the most eloquent credential of our creed, and strikes a world that will read our lives while it is determined not to read our Bibles.

Extraordinary as is *the measure of increase of the seed* cast into the ground fixed in the parable, it is not beyond the standard of produce in favorable climates. Pliny, after relating generally that the soil of Syria and Egypt yielded easily a hundred and fifty fold, informs us that from the Campus Buzacus in Africa there were sent on one occasion four hundred stalks to Augustus raised from one grain, and on another three hundred to Nero. Jouwett, speaking of some Indian corn that he saw growing in the Levant, says that he "counted the number of stalks which sprouted from a single grain of seed, carefully pulling to pieces each root in order to see that it was but one plant. The first had seven stalks, the next three, the next nine, then eighteen, then fourteen. Each stalk bore an ear. Even the wheat, which is so familiar a grain in our country, grows so luxuriantly in southern latitudes that, according to the testimony of the most respectable travelers, that which grows on Lebanon produces seventy-fold, while the six-sided barley yields thirty."

"Some an hundred-fold," says Jesus, "some sixty, some thirty." While all the ground that was broken deep and clean in spring and summer bears fruit in harvest, some portions produce a larger return than others. The picture in this feature is true to Nature, and the fact in the spiritual sphere corresponds. There are diversities in the Spirit's operation, diversities in natural gifts bestowed on men at first, diversities in the amount of energy exerted by believers as fellow-workers with God in their own sanctification, and diversities accordingly in the fruitfulness which results in the life of Christians. The Saviour, it will be noticed, in speaking of those who upon receiving the seed of the gospel

brought forth in different measures, yet allows them all to be *good ground*. He also elsewhere declares him to be "a good and faithful servant" who had improved his talents into five, as well as he who had improved his into ten. Hence it is evident that the gospel does not judge of our state by the degrees, but by the reality, of our righteousness. While all believers are safe in Christ, each should covet the best gifts.

"If any man have ears to hear, let him hear." Such are the solemn words with which Jesus closed the parable. It is as though he had said, "I have delivered many things in your presence, and ye have done well in hearing them. But my preaching is not to be viewed as an entertainment. My doctrine is not designed to amuse the mind, to gratify curiosity, to furnish a number of lifeless speculations. Hearing is only instrumental to something else; there is a duty of greater importance still remaining." What is that duty? What would our Saviour say in explanation of his command? What has he said in other parts of his word? "Mix faith with it. Let not the sense leave the mind as soon as the sound leaves the ear. Remember it. Enliven it by meditation. Reduce it into feelings and actions. Fear these denunciations; embrace these promises; obey these commands; walk according to this rule."

THE * TARES.

“Like the detested tribe
Of ancient Pharisees, beneath the mask
Of clamorous piety what numbers veil
Contaminated, vicious hearts! How many
In the devoted temple of their God,
With hypocritic eye, from which the tear
Of penitential anguish seems to flow,
Pour forth their vows, and by affected zeal
Pre-eminent devotion boast, while vice
Within the guilty breast rankles unseen!”

24 Another parable put he forth unto them, saying, The kingdom of
heaven is likened unto a man which sowed good seed in his field :
25 But while men slept, his enemy came and sowed tares among the
26 wheat, and went his way. But when the blade was sprung up, and
27 brought forth fruit, then appeared the tares also. So the servants of
the householder came and said unto him, Sir, didst not thou sow good
28 seed in thy field? from whence then hath it tares? He said unto
them, An enemy hath done this. The servants said unto him, Wilt
29 thou then that we go and gather them up? But he said, Nay; lest
while ye gather up the tares, ye root up also the wheat with them.
30 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.
36 Then Jesus sent the multitude away, and went into the house: and
his disciples came unto him, saying, Declare unto us the parable of
37 the tares of the field. He answered and said unto them, He that
38 soweth good seed is the Son of man; The field is the world; the
good seed are the children of the kingdom: but the tares are the chil-
39 dren of the wicked one: The enemy that sowed them is the devil;
the harvest is the end of the world; and the reapers are the angels.
40 As therefore the tares are gathered and burned in the fire; so shall
41 it be in the end of this world. The Son of man shall send forth his
angels, and they shall gather out of his kingdom all things that offend,
42 and them which do iniquity: And shall cast them into a furnace of
43 fire: there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth. Then shall the
righteous shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father.
Who hath ears to hear, let him hear.

MATT. xiii. 24-30; 36-43.

THE TARES.

THE cultivator of the soil in Eastern countries was, and still is, subjected to a peculiar annoyance. In lands where there is a well-established state of society the husbandman has no further anxiety about his seed after it is committed to the bosom of the earth, but lives in tranquil hope that should Heaven bestow its kindly influences to crown the labors of the year nothing can come between him and a happy harvest-home. Far otherwise is it with the Oriental husbandman, to whom the whole season from the moment the seed is prepared for the ground till the grain is gathered into the barn is a time of anxiety, experience having proved that he holds the produce of his field by a very precarious tenure unless he can secure it against other influences besides those of an inclement sky. Not the least of the dangers referred to arises from the arts of some secret enemy to ruin the crop by intermingling with it noxious weeds.

In the fact just stated we find the basis of the parable which is now to be considered, and the main design of which is to exhibit the *kingdom in its relation to the wicked one*, who endeavors by cunning stratagem to destroy it, just as the design of the parable of the Sower which immediately precedes is to exhibit the kingdom

in its relation to unbelieving men, who, in various forms and with various measures of aggravation, ultimately reject it.

As "he that soweth the good seed is the Son of man," it is evident that the parable does not refer generally to the contest ever going on in the world between good and evil, but specially to those manifestations of it which have taken place since the divine power of Jesus Christ began to be displayed in the kingdom founded by him.

"*The field is the world;*" that is, the field *was* the world before the seed was sown—the out-field in which no preparatory process had been begun, but on being ploughed, cultivated, hedged and sown that part of the world became the separated district, the sequestered and consecrated place; in short, what we call the visible Church. This seems plain from the very nature of the description contained in the parable, for it is nothing new to discover that good and bad are in the world, nor is the possibility of a desire to root out the bad and separate them from the good at all inconceivable to any who have watched the world's plans of self-regeneration; but it is a new and striking announcement, and to some an incredible one, that in the visible Church there should be a mixed multitude—tares and wheat; that the weeds of earth should mingle with the flowers of Paradise, and the poisonous plants of the fall with the fragrant and beautiful productions of the kingdom of grace. "Although Christ afterward explains that the field is *the world*," says Calvin, "it is yet not to be doubted but that properly he wished to apply this name to the Church, concerning which he had instituted his discourse. But since he was going to

draw the plough of his gospel through every region of the globe, that he might cultivate fields for himself throughout the whole world, and disperse abroad the seed of life, by synecdoche he transfers to the world what properly applied only to a part of it."

"*The good seed are the children of the kingdom.*" There is no disagreement here, as might at first sight seem, between this parable and the preceding, in which "the seed is the word of God;" there is only a progress from that parable to this. In *that* the word of God is the instrument by which men are born anew and become children of the kingdom; that word is there considered more absolutely in and by itself, while *here* it is considered after it has been received into the heart, incorporated with the man, as that which has brought him into the position of a child of the kingdom.

The existence of Christ's people in the Church, it should be distinctly noticed, he traces to himself. He compares them to wheat springing up—not spontaneously, but from seed brought and sown there. And this seed, he says, *he sowed*. He causes his gospel to be preached in the world, preparing here and there the hearts of men to receive it, implanting it in their hearts, rooting it and making it fruitful within them, and there, through the gospel, he has a people rise up—a people of his own, a peculiar people—to love, serve and glorify him. Hence his people are said to be "begotten unto him" through the gospel, and to be "born again" of seed—incorruptible seed—which is the word of God.

"*The children of the wicked one*" are sown by the wicked—of course in a moral sense, not according to the substance of their human nature—just as the sons of the kingdom are specifically "the seed" sown by the

Saviour in the moral and religious sense. Here is a dreadful description of sinners, yet such an one as is true, it being given us by Christ himself. They are no other than tares, who choke the good seed and hinder it from growing up in the love of truth and from bringing forth the fruit of charity. Men become "the children of the wicked one" by following his dispositions and promoting his designs.

The record that it was "*while men slept*" the enemy's operations were carried forward is not to be regarded as any reproach of an indolent ministry in the Church. It was night; all the community had retired to rest. Sleep the servants must; Nature requires it. Had it been said that while they played or were careless or riotous the injury was done, that would have implied negligence on their part; but it is only said that they *slept*—were in a condition without which they could not live—so that the representation, instead of proving that their negligence caused the mischief, plainly proves that their diligence could not prevent it.

At the same time it is true that the result here mentioned, "*his enemy came and sowed tares,*" is too often the result of our supineness and idleness. Our unwatchfulness is Satan's opportunity. Errors and vices spring up in the mind like weeds in a field neglected, and unless due care and culture be applied will soon overrun it. Idleness begets ignorance, and ignorance begets error. The greatest heresies have stolen into the Church, not in times of light and knowledge, but in the hour of ignorance and the "power of darkness." When the Roman Empire became Christian, and Christians were no longer exposed to persecution, but lived at ease and in pleasure, then the primitive discipleship of the Church relaxed;

then men grew more careless about spiritual affairs and more busied about secular; then the tares sprang up and heresies abounded. Romish superstitions too crept into the Church in the most dark and illiterate ages since the coming of Christ, when the world was asleep to everything that was virtuous and praiseworthy and awake only to war and wickedness. In like manner, when that artful impostor Mohammed set up his pretensions, his countrymen, the Arabians, were sunk in the lowest ignorance, and the Christians of the East were infected with heresies and so divided among themselves that they became an easy prey to their common enemy. And as errors spring up in the understandings of men while they are remiss and negligent, so likewise evil affections gain ground upon their morals and corrupt their practice. The tempter is awake while we are asleep, and then plants those habits which commonly grow up with time, and are seldom rooted out afterward. Indeed, the best Christians are not always upon their guard; they are sometimes apt to remit their vigilance and care. Hence the Scriptures so frequently enjoin watchfulness, which is the very opposite to sleeping: "Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour;" "Blessed are those servants whom the Lord when he cometh shall find watching."

"His enemy came and sowed tares among the wheat." Observe, it is Christ's own enemy that is here named. God declared in Paradise that there should be enmity between these two, "the Seed of the woman" and "the serpent;" and here this enmity is in operation. No sooner does Christ begin to gather sinners to himself than Satan comes in to mar his blessed work. Man,

left to himself, would have done much to corrupt the gospel, but Satan would not leave man to himself. He came out of darkness among us with his falsehoods as soon as Christ had come among us from the light of heaven with his truth, and the consequence is, the Church of Christ on the earth has been from the very first a mixed scene; it has had truth and error prevailing in it, false doctrine and true. Just as Christ's truth enters into men's minds and works there through Christ's power, making them "the children of his kingdom" and conforming them to his image, so do Satan's falsehoods enter into men's minds, and, working there through his power, they form the character of men after his model and lead them to do his works.

It is not without significance that it is said of Satan that, after sowing "tares among the wheat," he "*went his way.*" He does not permit himself to be seen; he works in darkness; the fruit of his working alone is seen. After he has sown tares no subsequent or superintending care is required; the unsanctified human heart is congenial soil for them. Satan knows the soil, and how rapidly the seeds of evil will grow if only placed in it. Errors are like weeds; let alone, they grow. The difficulty is to prevent their growth.

Just here let us not fail to notice the personality ascribed to the devil. That such a malignant and powerful being as Satan exists none can doubt, unless it be those whose minds are "spoiled by philosophy and vain deceit." That there are difficulties attending every attempt to define the character and relations of this prince of evil none will deny, but the difficulties are much greater if we attempt to reconcile the expressions of the sacred writers with the opinion that they merely represent "a

symbolical person," "the principle of evil personified," "an evil disposition," etc. Such attempts cannot be reconciled with any consistent principles of Scripture interpretation. We have no more right to reduce Satan and hell to figure than we have so to treat Christ, angels and heaven. It is no more contrary to the nature of God's government that there should be a Satan than that there should be a Nimrod, a Nero, a Tamerlane or a Mohammed. By the devil our first parents were betrayed into transgression. He is called *Satan*, or the *Adversary*, and here by our Lord expressly denominated "the devil." He is also characterized by the epithets "the god of this world," "the prince of darkness," "the prince of the power of the air," "the accuser," "Belial," "the tempter," an "adversary," "deceiver," "liar," "the spirit which worketh in the children of disobedience," who "leads them captive at his will"—descriptions which could not with the least conceivable propriety be applied except to a living, active and malicious being.

"The fullness of Satan's dominion," says Macmillan, "was most clearly manifested in the world when the fullness of the Godhead that dwelt in Christ bodily was displayed to the eyes of men. But now that Christ is concealed by the cloud, so is Satan. In harmony with the viewless operations of the Holy Spirit are the subtle and impalpable agencies which Satan now wields. He has withdrawn his sorceries, his outward signs, and tempts with covetousness and worldliness. And so thoroughly has he carried out this system of invisible temptation that he has succeeded in persuading many that he has no existence as a personal spirit of evil, and that evil is only an immature stage in the progress of the world's ripening."

“*But when the blade was sprung up and brought forth fruit, then appeared the tares also.*” What at first did not clearly discover itself as tares, even to the experienced eye, could not conceal itself in its further progress when it became more matured. By their development and fruit the tares were known to be what they really were, though till then they had preserved a deceitful resemblance to the wheat. This representation precisely corresponds with the representation made by Dr. Thomson of some tares which he saw in Palestine. “Let me call your attention,” says he, “to these ‘tares’ which are growing among the barley. The grain is just in the proper stage of development to illustrate the parable. In those parts where the grain is *headed out* they have done the same, and *there* a child cannot mistake them for wheat or barley, but where both are less developed the closest scrutiny will often fail to detect them.” “By their fruits ye shall know them.” To hold the same doctrines, make the same profession and worship in the same church, produces a likeness up to a certain point among men who are quite different in heart. But when a total contrast is seen between profession and practice, then the sad conclusion is forced upon us that such a person cannot really be one of “the children of the kingdom.”

Observe the questions of the servants: “*Sir, didst not thou sow good seed in thy field? From whence then hath it tares?*” The sense of the first question is, “We know perfectly well that thou didst sow good seed.” The second question expresses in a lively manner their astonishment at the result: “Lord, we have read the glorious descriptions of thy Church, which represent it as ‘the bride,’ ‘the Lamb’s wife,’ ‘the living stones,’ ‘the fruit-

ful trees,' 'the glorious Church not having spot.' What means, then, this awful and repulsive mixture, these poisonous plants in the midst of it?" It is impossible for Christ's servants on the earth to be blind to the corruptions and evils that exist in his Church on the earth. "All is well," others say. Whether truth or error more abounds they hardly know. Whether men live as the gospel commands them to live or after the course of this evil world, they do not care. The state of Christ's Church is nothing to them. They feel as a man feels when he passes by a stranger's field. Occupied with his own concerns, he never thinks of noticing in what state it is, whether weeds are covering it or corn. But Christ's servants feel as though that field belonged to One they love, as though it were their Master's, or rather their Father's, field. They long to see it covered with corn ripening for his garner, and when weeds overrun it they cannot help seeing them and wishing them away.

"*An enemy hath done this*" is the answer to the servants' perplexity. Human nature is indeed corrupt, but this fact does not suffice to explain the great corruption in the Church, whose divine agencies are so inefficacious in many of her professing members. There is an enemy who knows well how to make a skillful use of every unhappy circumstance in order to restrain the empire of light.

The third question of the servants, "*Wilt thou then that we go and gather them up?*" expresses at once their desire and their readiness to serve the Lord. It is well that they ask of him, for in the Lord's kingdom nothing must be transacted by his servants according to their own will, their private sense and conviction of what

is right. His will is the true rule of conduct, and becomes also the will of his servants. To "gather up" means to "root up," to apply a power of extirpation.

Evidently the Lord's "Nay" could not have intended that his Church should be defiled and discredited by retaining in her communion openly profligate and dissolute offenders. Such "children of the wicked one" as should presumptuously associate themselves with his people, and yet manifest themselves to be "aliens from the commonwealth of Israel" by profligacy and vice, it never could have been meant to tolerate within the bosom of his holy Church. Any arguments against the exclusion of unworthy members, founded on this parable, are perversions of Scripture. Elsewhere Christians may clearly read their duty in regard to any brother who walks disorderly; elsewhere they may learn how to counsel, exhort and rebuke the erring, and, if he remain impenitent, how to cast him out of communion by a spiritual sentence.

What, then, is the meaning of this prohibition that the tares be extirpated? It requires that we should not be harsh or precipitate in judgment or discipline toward those whom we may deem unfit members of the Church. Ministers cannot always distinguish between true and false believers. It is God alone who knows the heart; he knows them that are his, and he alone knows it with *certainly*. The prophet Elijah imagined that he alone was left a worshiper of the God of Israel, but God said unto him, "I have reserved to myself seven thousand men who have not bowed the knee to Baal." The disciples did not know that Judas was a devil, but Jesus knew it from the beginning. When Saul of Tarsus was first converted the disciples at Jeru-

salem did not know that he was sincere, and were for some time afraid to receive him. Whilst severe in judging ourselves, we should endeavor to judge favorably of others, placing before our minds every consideration tending to aid that charity which "thinketh no evil, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things." We should only seek the excommunication of others from the Church for such conduct as will tarnish her glory and bring dishonor upon her Lord.

There is, on the part of many good people, a disposition, for the wheat's sake, hastily to pull up the tares. "There is that hypocrite," they say, "that worker of iniquity! He comes in and out among Christ's people as one of themselves, no man suspecting him. What harm he will do among them! We must unmask him; we must show him to our neighbors and fellow-Christians as he is." But "Be still," God says to us here. "Be not over-hasty in this matter of judging others. Leave that man to me. Fret not thyself because of evil-doers." It is not always certain that men are the hypocritical and iniquitous men we deem them. We see but a part of their conduct, yet judge of them as though we saw the whole.

We are to expect that good and evil will always be found together in the professing Church until the end of the world. In the band of our Lord's apostles was a Judas; in the little church of Samaria, a Simon Magus; in the church of Pergamos, those "who held the doctrines of Balaam;" in the church of Thyatira, a Jezebel-like woman; in the church of Sardis, those whose works "had not been found perfect before God;" and in the churches of Rome, Corinth, Colosse, Ephesus, Philippi, Thessalonica were those "who had

a name indeed to live, but yet were dead in trespasses and sins." The same mixture of believers and unbelievers, converted and unconverted, existed in the times of the early Fathers and during the Reformation, and what was true then is true now. In every gospel field we find tares growing up with the wheat. The devil, that great enemy of souls, continues to sow "tares." Do what we will to purify a Church, we shall never succeed in obtaining a perfectly pure communion. Tares will be found among the wheat. Hypocrites and deceivers will creep in. And, worst of all, if we are violent, rash and extreme in our efforts to obtain purity, we shall do more harm than good. We run the risk of encouraging many a Judas Iscariot and breaking many a bruised reed. In our zeal to "gather up the tares" we are in danger of "rooting up the wheat with them." *Such* zeal is not according to knowledge, and has often done much harm. Those who care not what happens to the wheat provided they can root up the tares show little of the mind of Christ. There is deep truth in the charitable saying of Augustine: "Those who are tares to-day may be wheat to-morrow."

Yet, after all this admission, the obligation and the duty remain to have the field of the Church preserved in every respect as pure as possible, that in doctrine, practice and constitution she may be conformable to the mind of Christ.

Though the tares are thus for several wise reasons suffered to grow up among the wheat, there is a time coming when there will be a discrimination. God, the most just Governor and righteous Judge of the world, must show his approbation of virtue and disapprobation of vice one time or other; it is evident that he does not

always do this in the present state, and therefore we may be certain that he must and will do it hereafter.

"*The harvest,*" says Jesus, "*is the end of the world.*" The end of the world, then, is a fixed, an ordained and expected time. The God of Nature has wisely appointed the order and succession of the seasons. After the Deluge, when God promised no more to destroy the earth by water, he also engaged that while the earth remaineth seed-time and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, and day and night should not cease. The experience of more than four thousand years has convinced us of the faithfulness of God to this promise; and by the same authority "it is appointed unto all men once to die, and after death the judgment." Death and judgment are as certainly fixed and appointed as seed-time and harvest are. The end of the world may also be compared to harvest, because it is a separating time. Then "the Son of man shall send forth his angels, and they shall gather out of his kingdom [his Church] all things that offend and them that do iniquity."

How dreadful the condition of ungodly professors! They shall be "cast into a furnace of fire;" "there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth;" deep lamentation, anguish and despair, aggravated by a recollection of the privileges they once enjoyed and abused, and the vain hope which, as professed disciples mingled with the true ones, they once entertained. Even admitting that this language is figurative, yet how dreadful must be the doom set forth by such terrible imagery! The fierce struggle of contending passions, the unchecked power of evil rising and swelling with tumultuous rage, the writhings of a spirit bereft of every hope

and haunted by despair, the goadings of a conscience quickened into intense activity by the memory of the past, the remembrance of what is lost—heaven, the soul, God's pardon, Christ's favor, everlasting bliss—and the consciousness of what has been self-induced,—oh, this, this, supposing it to be all, would be enough to make the lost sinner, exclaim, “Which way I fly is hell, myself am hell”—would be enough to fill the soul with unutterable horror, and to keep alive the fire that ever burns with gnawing but never-consuming flame!

Look now at the glorious destiny which awaits “the righteous” at this “harvest”—those who are justified by faith in the righteousness of Jesus, and in whom his Spirit dwells, working conformity to his law. During their earthly conflicts they much resembled other men; they had the same wants, the same toils, the same gains and losses, the same sicknesses and decays, the same besetting infirmities of a fallen nature; but still there was in them “the law of the spirit of life in Christ Jesus,” and now they have reached the day of their entire and eternal deliverance from “the body of this death.” Then shall they shine forth as the sun. Then shall all that here lay hid in them be unfolded; all shall be perfect and enlarged to an ineffable perfection. The very body shall become a vessel of glory, being made like to the glorious body of the second Adam, of whom even in the days of his flesh, we read, in his one only season of transient lightness, that “his raiment was white and glistening,” “white as the light,” “exceeding white as snow, so as no fuller on earth can white them,” “and his face did shine as the sun.” So with our flesh: “it is sown in weakness, it is raised in power; it is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory.” The body in which

we have groaned, "being burdened," in which we have often fainted, in which we have been bowed down to earth, even that same earthly frame shall be full of life and penetrated with the light of heaven. There shall be in it no more any law warring against the law of the Spirit, no division of the man against himself, no strife in the being of the righteous; but the glorious body shall be the glad minister of a holy will and quickened by the pervading unity of the glorified spirit. We know that "they which shall be accounted worthy to obtain that world and the resurrection from the dead" cannot "die any more, for they are equal to the angels, and are the children of God, being the children of the resurrection." Nay more: we shall bear the likeness of the Son of God, of whom we read, when he appeared to John, that "his countenance was as the sun that shineth in his strength." All this glory of the body, too, will, as it would seem, be chiefly but the manifestation of the glory of the spirit. Then shall our sanctification be perfectly fulfilled: "We shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is."

Such is the representation which the parable makes of the final separation. And what is to be the rule of separation? Relationship? our love and affection one for another? our desire to go together and rejoice or suffer together? No! Here goes the wife and there the husband, here the parent and there the child, here the brother and there the sister; they who are now dwelling in the same house are separated as far asunder as heaven and hell. The children of the kingdom are to be parted from the children of the evil one. If we have never known the cleansing of a Saviour's blood, never sought and found his mercy, no matter how our souls may now

love some of those who are his people and cling to them, there is a day coming when we shall be torn from them and bound together with the filthy and the vile.

No wonder Jesus concluded such a parable with the injunction, "*Who hath ears to hear, let him hear.*" Let the skeptic and the worldling hear. Often, when anxious to get an objection to Christianity or a reason for having nothing to do with it, they quote such a person or such a minister who fell into such a sin, and make that a reason for rejecting the whole. But how absurd! Every passage in the Bible which alludes to the subject leads us to believe that the visible Church will be a mixture of good and bad, and the very fact of finding the bad in the midst of it is only evidence of the fulfillment of God's prophecy, that so it should be till the end of the world. Nor is the fact that there are good and bad in the visible Church to be blamed on our religion. The gospel never made men bad; it is not fitted to do so, and to blame Christianity for the bad men and hypocrites who hide within it is no more fair than to blame patriotism for traitors or the mint for bad coin.

Let impatient Christians hear. If the great Husbandman is patient with the tares, much more should we be.

Let self-deceivers hear. Let them not imagine that their being ranked in outward profession with "the children of the kingdom" constitutes them of the happy number. Let them examine themselves as to the grounds of their hope.

Let *all* hear, so as to give all their care to this great object, that they themselves may now be approved by Christ as wheat, and gathered into his glorious garner.

❧ THE * MUSTARD ~ SEED, ❧

“Cross to our interests, curbing sense and sin,
Oppressed without and undermined within,
It thrives through pain, its own tormentors tires,
And with a stubborn patience still aspires.
To what can reason such effects assign,
Transcending Nature, but to laws divine,
Which in that sacred volume are contained,
Sufficient, clear, and for that use ordained?”

31 *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
32 seeds: but when it is grown, it is the greatest among herbs, and be-
cometh a tree, so that the birds of the air come and lodge in the
branches thereof.*

MATT. XIII. 31, 32. See also MARK IV. 30-32;
LUKE XIII. 18, 19.

THE MUSTARD-SEED.

THIS parable and that of the Leaven, which succeeds it, might seem, at first sight, to be repetitions of the same truth, but they are not so. On nearer inspection an essential difference will be discerned between them. The latter relates to the kingdom of God, which "cometh not with observation;" the former is concerning the same kingdom as it displays itself openly. The one declares the *intensive*, the other the *extensive*, development of the gospel. The one sets forth the power and action of the truth on the world brought in contact with it; the other exhibits the power of the truth to develop itself from within itself, as the tree shut up within the seed, which will unfold itself according to the law of its being.

The connection between this parable and all that precedes it in the chapter is manifest. The disciples had heard that three classes of the seed sown by the Sower perished, and only a fourth prospered. They had also heard that even among the wheat there were tares. Lest, therefore, they should be tempted to despair, Jesus spoke this parable for their encouragement.

If it should be asked why a mustard tree was chosen as that with which the kingdom of God should be compared, when many noble plants, as the vine, or taller

trees, as the cedar, might have been named, it might be replied that this particular tree was chosen, not with reference to its ultimate greatness, but with reference to the proportion between the smallness of the seed and the greatness of the plant which unfolds itself from thence.

There is no need of supposing that any other than the well-known mustard-plant is referred to. "Of the mustard-plants which I saw on the banks of the Jordan," says Dr. Hooker in Smith's *Dictionary*, "one was ten feet high." Thomson saw the wild mustard-plant as tall as the horse and his rider. Dr. Hackett writes: "Some days after this, as I was riding across the Plain of Akka on the way to Carmel, I perceived at some distance from the path what seemed to be a little forest or nursery of trees. I turned aside to examine them. On coming nearer, they proved to be an extensive field of the plant which I was so anxious to see. It was then in blossom, full grown, in some cases six, seven and nine feet high, with a stem or trunk an inch or more in thickness, throwing out branches on every side. I was now satisfied in part. I felt that such a plant might well be called a tree, and, in comparison with the seed producing it, a great tree; but still the branches or stems of the branches were not very large or apparently very strong. Can the birds, I said to myself, rest upon them? Are they not too slight and flexible? Will they bend or break beneath the superadded weight? At that very instant, as I stood and revolved the thought, lo! one of the fowls of heaven stopped in its flight through the air, alighted down on one of the branches, which hardly moved beneath the shock, and then began to warble forth a strain of the richest music. All my doubts

were now charmed away. I was delighted at the incident. It seemed to me at the moment as if I enjoyed enough to repay me for all the trouble of the whole journey."

In considering the progressive development of Christianity, which the parable sets before us, we are called to notice, first, *the smallness of its beginning*.

"The birth of the Son of man in Bethlehem is the small and unpromising commencement of the heavenly kingdom, which in its manifestation is identified with him. In the quiet of domestic privacy the child increases. In his thirtieth year he comes forth into public, teaches three years, and then dies upon the cross. Fishermen and publicans, plain and unlettered men, are his first scholars and messengers, and they gathered themselves to him only by degrees. So small at first was the company of our Lord's followers!"

When Jesus, after the obscurity of his youth, came forth and "began to teach and to preach," who saw in the plain Nazarene anything to indicate a greatness that should fill the earth with its glory? Who would recognize in him one who should revolutionize the world? Or, beholding him at the beginning of his ministry—selecting as his disciples, as we have just seen, not the titled, the wealthy, the influential, but fishermen and tax-gatherers, ignorant and rude Galileans—who would not have said that here, surely, was a great mistake? Who would not have said that to entrust to such uncouth and uneducated men so great a treasure as the gospel professed to be, was a mistake? that, if the design of Jesus was to make converts and popularize his doctrines, he should have selected well-skilled scribes, learned Pharisees or influential Sadducees—men who would have

been listened to with reverence? But to call a man from his nets and fishing-tackle, and to tell him to go preach the gospel—to call another from his publican's seat and taxable, and commission him to declare the whole counsel of God concerning man's highest and eternal interests—seemed to finite minds like attempting to achieve great ends by totally inadequate means. When, at last, after three years' going up and down throughout the cities of Palestine, the Founder of this new religion was arrested, condemned and crucified like a slave, who would have supposed that his tenets could survive the dispersion of his disciples and his own ignominious death?

Thus the life and death of Christ, in their human aspects, had emphatically the insignificance of a grain of mustard-seed.

But mark *the glorious progress of the gospel* notwithstanding all the outward disadvantages and the violent opposition which it had to encounter! "On the fiftieth day after their Master's death his apostles commenced executing his charge. Beginning in Jerusalem, the very furnace of persecution, they first set up their banner in the midst of those who had been first in the crucifixion of Jesus and were all elate with the triumph of that tragedy. No assemblage could have been more possessed of dispositions perfectly at war with their message than that to which they made their first address. And what was the tenor of the address? 'Jesus of Nazareth,' said Peter, 'being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, ye have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain, whom God hath raised up. Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly that God hath made that same Jesus, whom ye have crucified, both Lord and

Christ.' One would have supposed that the same hands that had rioted in the blood of his Master would now have wreaked their enmity in that of his daring and, to all human view, most impolitic apostle. But what ensued? *Three thousand souls* were that day added to the infant Church. In a few days the number was increased to *five thousand*, and in the space of about a year and a half, though the gospel was preached only in Jerusalem and its vicinity, 'multitudes, both of men and women,' and '*a great company of the priests, were obedient to the faith.*' Now, the converts being driven, by a fierce persecution, from Jerusalem, 'went everywhere preaching the word,' and in less than three years churches were gathered 'throughout all Judæa, Galilee, and Samaria, and were multiplied.'"

About two years after this, or seven from the beginning of the work, the gospel was first preached to the Gentiles, and such was the success that before thirty years had elapsed from the death of Christ his Church had spread throughout Judæa, Galilee and Samaria, through almost all the numerous districts of the Lesser Asia, through Greece and the islands of the Ægean Sea, the seacoast of Africa, and even into Italy and Rome. The number of converts in the several cities respectively is described by the expressions, "a great number," "great multitudes," "much people." What an extensive impression had been made is obvious from the outcry of the opposers at Thessalonica, "that they, *who had turned the world upside down*, were come hither also." Demetrius, an enemy, complained of Paul that "not only in Ephesus, but also *throughout all Asia, he persuaded and turned away much people.*" In the mean while, Jerusalem, the chief seat of Jewish rancor,

continued the metropolis of the gospel, having in it many tens of thousands of believers. These accounts are taken from the book of the Acts of the Apostles, but as this book is almost confined to the labors of Paul and his immediate companions, saying very little of the work of the other apostles, it is very certain that the view we have given of the propagation of the gospel during the first thirty years is very incomplete.

In the thirtieth year after the beginning of the work the terrible persecution under Nero kindled its fires. Then Christians had become so numerous at Rome that, by the testimony of Tacitus, "a great multitude" were seized. In forty years more, as we are told in a celebrated letter from Pliny, the Roman governor of Pontus and Bithynia, Christianity had *long* subsisted in these provinces, though so remote from Judæa. "Many of all ages, and of every rank, of both sexes likewise," were accused to Pliny of being Christians. What he calls "the contagion of this superstition" (thus forcibly describing the irresistible and rapid spread of Christianity) had "seized not cities only, but the less towns also, and the open country," so that the heathen temples "were almost forsaken," few victims were purchased for sacrifice, and "a long intermission of the sacred solemnities had taken place."

Justin Martyr, who wrote about thirty years after Pliny, and one hundred after the gospel was first preached to the Gentiles, thus describes the extent of Christianity in his time: "There is not a nation, either Greek or barbarian, or of any other name, even of those who wander in tribes and live in tents, among whom prayers and thanksgivings are not offered to the Father and Creator of the universe in the name of the crucified Jesus."

Clemens Alexandrinus, a few years after, thus writes :
“ The philosophers were confined to Greece and to their particular retainers, but the doctrine of the Master of Christianity did not remain in Judæa, but is spread throughout the whole world—in every nation and village and city, converting both whole houses and separate individuals, having already brought over to the truth not a few of the philosophers themselves. If the Greek philosophy be prohibited, it immediately vanishes ; whereas, from the first preaching of our doctrine, kings and tyrants, governors and presidents, with their whole train, and with the populace on their side, have endeavored with their whole might to exterminate it, yet doth it flourish more and more.”

Thus did the gospel, beginning in so insignificant a way, grow and mightily prevail. True, indeed, it brought strange things to the ears of the schools of earthly wisdom. The Sophist looked for subtle reasonings, the orator for attuned periods, the populace for mythological and monstrous fictions, for noisy festivals and for polluting rites ; but to no class did this new religion present anything attractive. True, indeed, also it was, like its Author, hated and rejected of men. Everything rose in opposition to it, all the prejudices of the people, all the bad passions of the people, all the institutions of the people ; yea, and the civil arm too was lifted up. But resistance though there was, the truth spread and triumphed, making its power to be deeply and widely felt. Its noble philosophy, notwithstanding the feebleness of the instruments employed, settled itself in the conviction of the loftiest intellects, while the voice of mercy which it uttered, the love of Christ which it proclaimed, spread gladness and hope through myriads of

despairing men. Its morals checked the progress of social corruption; its benevolence set the captive at liberty and gave protection to the oppressed; its manifested immortality controlled one world by the revealed solemnities of another. Paganism fell prostrate before it like the Dagon of Philistia, and lay broken and mutilated on the very thresholds of the temples where it had been adored.

Thus did that grain of truth, small as a mustard-seed, sown by the Son of man, grow up into a tree of life, "sending out its boughs unto the sea, and its branches unto the river." Thus has it since continued to increase and expand until it has become the controlling force of the world, and its future development is beyond all contingency or doubt. Christianity can meet no obstacles greater than it has already overcome. Already it has pervaded with its saving power the philosophic Greek, the warlike Roman, the bigoted Jew, the wandering Arab, the pliant Persian, the superstitious Hindoo. No peculiarity of caste or tribe or climate has arrested its progress. It has shot forth in all the beautiful crystallization of Christian character wherever its power has been allowed to penetrate. Its influence has spanned gulfs and firths; climbed the Alps, Apennines and Himalayas; crossed broad seas and traveled bleak deserts, and left its trophies everywhere. It has seized and transformed humanity in every latitude. Great intellects have bowed before the truth, and humble minds have been elevated by it. Prejudice has fled like morning mists at its approach, and fierce passions have subsided like waves after the storm, and idol-shrines and temples have been transmuted into the churches of Christ.

This power which has been so gloriously triumphant will not cease to go forth "conquering and to conquer" until the victory is complete, and all peoples and kindreds, in acknowledgment of their obligation and allegiance to Him who is "the Desire of all nations," shall, with one grand doxology,

"Bring forth the royal diadem,
And crown him Lord of all."

Napoleon, in St. Helena, with the solemn ocean round him and the silent sky above, the fierce passions which had so long raged in his heart growing still as the volcanic fires which once tore the heart of his lonely isle, said to Count de Montholon :

"I know men, and I tell you that Jesus Christ is not a man! The religion of Christ is a mystery which subsists by its own force and proceeds from a mind which is not a human mind. We find in it a marked individuality which originated a train of words and actions unknown before. Jesus is not a philosopher, for his proofs are miracles, and from the first his disciples adored him. Alexander, Cæsar, Charlemagne and myself founded empires, but on what foundation did we rest the creations of our genius? Upon force. Jesus Christ founded an empire upon love, and at this hour millions of men would die for him. I die before my time, and my body will be given back to the earth to become food for worms. Such is the fate of him who has been called the Great Napoleon. What an abyss between my deep mystery and the eternal kingdom of Christ, which is proclaimed, loved and adored, and is extending over the whole earth!"

Not on *man's* opinions, however, do we rest our expecta-

tion of the gospel's triumph, nor upon his plans and efforts, but upon God's promised power. The plan is not ours. It was laid in the mind of God before the world was. The principal arrangements of the scheme are not left to us, but are already fixed by the infinite wisdom of God. The part we fill is very subordinate, and we expect success, not for the wisdom or fitness of the means themselves, but because they are connected with mightier motions, whose success is vast and rapid and whose direction is divine. In a word, we expect success because God has formed a scheme of universal redemption, to be gradually but fully developed. He has given gifts to the world, the value of which is in every age to be more fully demonstrated, and he has established offices in the person of Christ which he is qualified to fill to the full height of the divine idea.

Full of encouragement is this parable for all who are engaged in preaching the gospel and all who take an interest in its spread. We see the growth of a seed into a plant, and wonderful as it is we are not surprised at it; nay, we expect to see it so, because it is according to the course of Nature—that is, according to God's appointment. But it is also according to the declared will and purpose of God that the gospel shall spread in the world and his kingdom prevail. Let us believe and look for this as surely. Let us feel encouraged in our efforts to diffuse divine truth. God causes the seed to grow, and God will cause his kingdom to spread. The one is his will as much as the other. Let every worker for God be cheered in his work by this belief. Let all who long for the reign of righteousness rejoice in this hope.

THE † LEAVEN.

“Oh, bless the pious zeal
And crown with glad success the laboring sons
Of that best charity, whose annual mite
Sends forth thy gospel to the distant isles!
So shall the nations, rescued myriads, hear,
And own thy mercy over all thy works!
So, from each corner of the enlightened earth
Incessant peals of universal joy
Shall hail thee, heavenly Father, God of all!”

The kingdom of heaven is like unto leaven, which a woman took, and hid in three measures of meal, till the whole was leavened.

MATT. XIII. 33.

THE LEAVEN.

OUR Lord had just given to his hearers an agricultural analogy in the parable of the Mustard-Seed. To this he now adds another, borrowed from domestic life, as if to leave no part of every-day experience unemployed in the elucidation and enforcement of religious truth.

The phrase "kingdom of heaven" is used in a variety of senses in the New Testament. Sometimes it is descriptive of the state and economy of the Church under Christianity as opposed to the Jewish and Mosaic economy; then, again, it turns our thoughts inwardly upon ourselves, and teaches us that the kingdom of heaven is within us, calling us mainly to consider the dominion of divine grace in the human heart. By this phrase here we are to understand the reign of grace by which Christ rules in the hearts of men.

Having exhibited in the preceding parable the kingdom in its own inherent life and irresistible power, the Saviour in this exhibits it as working within the soul of the believer. The first has principally to do with the open, manifest triumph and glory of the Messiah's kingdom; the second shows that coextensive with this there is proceeding an inward process of assimilation, so that

the dwellers under the shadow of the kingdom shall also have it "within them."

Leaven is a small piece of fermenting dough, which, placed in a large mass of meal or paste, produces fermentation in it, and thus, by the escape of the generated gas, diffuses a lightness, or "raises" the dough with which it is intermixed. There need be no difficulty in regard to our Lord's using this substance for the purposes of his illustration. True it is that leaven is frequently used elsewhere in the Scriptures as the symbol of something evil, but then it is not always so; and even if it were, there can be no good reason why it should not be also employed to illustrate what is good. There are other instances in which the sacred writers employ a figure sometimes in a good sense, sometimes in a bad one. For example, Satan is compared to a lion, and yet Jesus is called "the Lion of the tribe of Judah." So, too, the most common scriptural emblem of the devil is a serpent, and yet a serpent, raised high upon a pole, was employed as a type of the Redeemer.

No difficulty, indeed, in regard to the use of "leaven" in this parable in a good sense would ever have occurred but for the interpretation which some have attempted to put upon the parable, as though it were a foreshadowing of corruptions which should arise in the Church. Such interpretation, however, gains no support from the sense which it falsely insists the term "leaven" should here have, for if it be admitted it implies a universal apostasy, the utter extinction of that Church against which Christ promised that the gates of hell should not prevail.

A woman is mentioned in the parable rather than a man, because bread-making was woman's work. Yet,

though it may not be directly taught here, it certainly is the case that in spreading the gospel there is a work for women as well as for men. We have only to read Paul's Epistles to see how women were made use of for this purpose in the early Church, and in our own time women hold a most important place in the work of the gospel.

The leaven, let it be observed, was a *foreign importation*. It was not naturally in the substance to which it was applied, nor derived from it, but taken from elsewhere. The gospel, it is scarcely necessary to say, is neither in whole nor in part of earthly or human origin; it is the mystery which was hid in God before the foundation of the world. It "came into the world," as did its pre-existent Author. It descended from the region where all is life into our earth, where all is decay, that it might infuse vitality into our diseased and shattered humanity.

Thus, too, is it with the grace which is identified with the gospel in its saving application to men. It is something alien from us—something that is introduced into us from without, not the unfolding of any powers which already exist in us. The change involved is not the excitation of some gracious principle which lay hid before in nature under the oppression of ill habits, as corn lies hid under the chaff, but is corn still; not an awakening, as of a man from sleep; not, either, the mere restoration of depressed vitality, as the life which retires into the more secret parts of the body in those creatures that seem dead in winter, but is revived and called out to the exterior parts by the genial influence of the vernal sun. Neither, nor all of these, represent the change that is implied in conversion. The man is

quicken from his death in trespasses and sins. He is made alive unto God.

Leaven is of an assimilative nature. It communicates its own property to the meal with which it comes in contact. It does not destroy its identity, but alters its qualities. That Christianity is the one all-renewing power, we have only to glance at the inefficacy of all other expedients for man's moral and spiritual elevation, to be satisfied. What has it availed for this purpose that Philosophy has had its ages of trial, and that Science has erected her thousand temples, and worldly Wisdom has delivered her myriads of lectures on the beauty of virtue and the hideousness of vice? Let this question be answered by the world's condition at the time when Jesus sent forth his disciples with their divine remedy for abounding depravity. Though Philosophy was at its height, and Reason had achieved her proudest triumphs, and the arts were in their maturity, and eloquence was most finished and poetry most harmonious, yet the principles which were operating were only such as dissocialized society and oppressed humanity—as placed slaves at the sole mercy of their owners, to be tortured or killed as their savage tempers prompted; and if there was religion, it was a heartless system, having no precepts of forgiveness and charity, and leaving revenge and hardness of heart among the very virtues.

Yes, the gospel is the world's sole renovator. Neither art nor science, nor religion in general as faith merely in a higher state of being, nor even the divine law itself, is able to produce that reformation within man which is wrought by the leaven of the heavenly kingdom. Besides the external conversion of the Roman world, it eradicated the innumerable heathen practices,

customs and feelings which had entwined their fibres round the very heart of society. It has ever since gone forward, transforming society into the likeness of itself, substituting peace and affection for hate and revenge, giving sanctity to the ties of nature, throwing its gentle protection over the oppressed and leading men to live as members one of another.

As it is with Christianity in its general application in this respect, so likewise is it with that which is particular. *Divine grace comes into actual contact with the soul.* It is not a thing that lies on the surface of a man or consists in outward forms, but it is something that gets into the heart. It is a principle that is conveyed into "the spirit of our mind," the centre and source of our being.

It is *alterative*, too, in its efficacy. Chemists tell us that a very minute portion of some things will, to an almost incredible degree, transform the mass into which they are put. So is it with the divine power, which is compared to leaven. It works a change in the subject of it. He is "a new creature" because he has come to be "in Christ." The change he has experienced is so great that all things which were old are said to be done away, and all that remains to be made new. Is the man physically changed? No; he has the same senses, tongue, eyes and ears. Is he intellectually changed? No; he has not another understanding, memory, imagination. Is he socially changed? No; he is still a husband, father, master. And yet he is another man, a new man. He is regenerate. He has something of the holy and heavenly nature of divine truth in him. His mental faculties are changed in their use and sanctified. His physical powers are sacred to new purposes. He fills his relations in life with a new

spirit. He is godly in them all. He carries on the same business, but now he abides with God in his calling. Whether he eats or drinks, or whatever he does, he aims to do all to the glory of God. If he was covetous, now he is liberal; if he was prayerless, now he is devout; if he was not vicious before, now he abhors from disposition what he once only shunned from selfish motives; if he was moral, now his morality is evangelized.

“Grace,” as has well been said, “did not give John his warm affections, but it fixed them on his beloved Master, sanctifying his love. It did not inspire Nehemiah with the love of country, but it made him a holy patriarch. It did not give Dorcas her woman’s heart of sympathy with suffering, but it associated charity with piety and made her a holy philanthropist. It did not give Paul his genius, his resistless logic and noble oratory, but it consecrated them to the cause of Christ; touching his lips as with a live coal from the altar, it made him such a master of holy eloquence that he swayed the multitude at his will, humbled the pride of kings and compelled his very judges to tremble. It did not give David a poet’s fire and a poet’s lyre, but it strung his harp with chords from heaven and tuned all its strings to the service of religion and the high praises of God.” So grace ever works. Granted that there is not a perfect uniformity in this change as it is produced in different individuals, yet in each case the original complexion or constitutional peculiarity remains. The *man* is seen in the *Christian*. Like water, which partakes a little of the nature of the soil over which it runs, his very religion takes a hue from his natural temperament. This very fact, however, falls in precisely with the metaphor in hand, for flour remains flour; only it is leavened.

It accords also with the aim of Christianity, for whilst it does produce a community of saints, one faith, one love, one hope in all the real members of the Church, it does not propose to produce identity of thought, temper of mind and disposition.

The gospel, like the leaven, *is diffusive*. The power which it exerts reaches to the entire man. The remedy is commensurate with the disease, and the recovery covers all the ruin. It is thus that the terms of the apostle are to be understood in his prayer in behalf of the Thesalonians, that God would "sanctify them wholly;" that is, "in spirit, soul and body." So must divine grace pervade every part of our constitution. It must enthrone itself in the soul, and have its residence there, yet diffuse its energy and vital influence through all the parts and powers of the man, as well as all the departments of his life.

Notice also the diffusion of the gospel from one man to others. As that which is once leavened becomes leaven to the rest, so every individual who has experienced in himself the efficacy of the gospel becomes a leaven to work still further. The presence of a pious man in a neighborhood tells in a marked degree upon its character. Many a district has undergone a species of moral renovation through the introduction within its circles of a God-fearing individual. From such an one, as he lives consistently, there emanates amazing power to check and reprove; and not unfrequently is that power the agency which God employs to win the profligate and the worldly to himself. Like the leaven, the natural tendency of a Christian life is to spread itself. This it does in the domestic and social spheres, and beyond these in the great missionary-work of the Church.

As leaven works from *within, outwardly*, so does the gospel. Human schemes rely on a revolution in the state, Christianity on a revolution in the heart. The first begin at the circumference and try to work inward to the centre ; the second begins at the centre and works outward to the circumference, producing a mighty outward and visible change. We learn this from the Acts of the Apostles and from that interesting portion of Church history which treats of the spread of Christianity. The gospel was hidden in the mass on which its influence was to be exerted. It was deposited there, accompanied by that unseen power—the power of the Spirit—without which no second causes, nor even the evidence of miracles and prophecy, could have given it currency in a world which hated it for its very truth and excellence. In that mass, a little below the surface of society, it worked mightily. This operation, however, did not long remain latent. It soon showed itself in its happy influence upon the world and in the astounding changes in faith and practice which it effected. The concealed force which was working ere long made its elevating power felt in the gentle but effective insinuations of itself into the fountains and channels of society. Hence it is that we find society rising in its moral tone.

Now, in all this we have an exact counterpart of the work of Christianity upon the human soul. Religion in the individual is a hidden activity. Its source and principles are unintelligible to natural men. The Christian's life is "hid with Christ in God." Yet it is the law of this new life to work from the inward to the outward. It shows its presence by its agency. It is not only real, but visible. As it flows from principle,

so it is exemplified in practice. The grace which the believer has received, instead of lying within him as a dead thing, brings him under the dominion of holy habits of mind and urges him on to active outward obedience. It spreads in every direction, pervading every relation which he sustains.

Like leaven, the gospel is *silent in its operation*. It creates no noise or confusion. Religion in the heart is like the sap that is taken up by the root and silently ascends the trunk of the tree, and diffuses itself to every branch, so that we see it lives, but do not see how. Great forces are silent. It is the vulgar idea that thunder and the storm are the mightiest forces, because they are the most audible. Gravitation, which is unseen and unheard, binds suns and stars into harmony and puts forth a force vastly greater than that of the lightning. The light, which comes so silently that it does not injure an infant's eye, makes the whole earth burst into buds and blossoms, and yet is not heard. Thus, love and truth, the component elements of the gospel leaven, are silent but mighty in their action—mightier far than hate and persecution, and bribes and falsehoods, and sword and musket. Souls are won, "not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, saith the Lord of hosts."

The operation of leaven is *gradual*. First it reaches one part of the meal, and then another. The work is silently progressive. So is it with the kingdom of God in the world. Our life is so short and our vision so contracted that we cannot observe the progress which this kingdom makes. Sometimes and in some places it seems to recede, but when the end comes it will be seen that every step of apparent retreat was the couching in preparation for another spring. So, too, is it

with the kingdom of God in the soul; it advances by degrees.

“So is it throughout the world of Nature. There is the babe, the youth, the man; there is the blade, the ear, and the full corn in the ear; there is the acorn, which grows to the wide-spreading oak; and the dawn, which brightens into the effulgence of noon. And so must we believe it is in the world of grace, unless we would despise all analogy and offend against the generation of God’s children, and overlook what is said of Christians as ‘renewed day by day’ and ‘going from strength to strength.’ Alas! when we remember the years that have come and gone since we were converted, and how many Sabbaths we have enjoyed, how many sermons we have heard, how many prayers we have offered, how many communions we have attended, and how many providences we have met to help us on in divine life—goodnesses that should have led us to repentance and waves of trouble that should have lifted us higher on the Rock of Ages—how does sad experience teach us that progress in holiness is not only *gradual* but *slow*!”

Still, let God’s people thank him and take courage. Though grace, like leaven, is slow in its progress, it shall change the whole man, and the motto which flashed in gold on the high priest’s forehead shall be engraven on our reason, heart and fancy, on our thoughts, desires and affections, on our lips and hands and feet, on our wealth and power and time, on our body and soul: the whole man shall be “Holiness to the Lord.”

“Our Lord,” says Luther, “wishes here to comfort us with the similitude, and give us to understand that when the gospel, as a piece of new leaven, has once mixed itself with the human race—which is the dough—it will

never cease till the end of the world, but will make its way through the whole mass of those who are to be saved. And just as it is impossible for the sourness, when it has once mingled itself with the dough, ever again to be separated from it, because it has changed the nature of the dough, so is it impossible for Christians to be ever torn from Christ. For Christ, as a piece of leaven, is so incorporated with them that they form with him one body, one mass." "The righteous shall hold on his way, and he that hath clean hands shall wax stronger and stronger." Grace will complete what grace begins. It will "perfect that which concerneth us." "Being confident of this very thing, that He which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ." "For I am persuaded that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord."

It is even so. Grace will have a triumphant issue in the believer's heart. Is his path as the shining light—the sun, which never made a dawn without carrying it into full day—the sun, whom none can drive back or stop in his course—the sun, which, if it had enemies and they cursed its beams, their rage would be as vain as it would be unreasonable? Then *must* it be that the word of life, which has been received by the mystery of regeneration into the believer's heart, and claims every region and part of his being as its own, shall not there cease its effectual working till it has brought the whole man into obedience to it.

The same issue of triumph awaits Christianity in its bearings *on the race*. To Jesus has been committed the

government of all things for the establishment of his mediatorial kingdom, and the purposes of his grace *shall be* accomplished. He goeth forth "conquering and to conquer;" and as all power is given to him in heaven and on earth, no obstacle can resist his triumphant progress. The passions and prejudices of men, no less than their talents, energies and hearts, are all subject to his control; and, though an unbelieving world may scoff, the kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together against the Lord and his Anointed, "yet" will he overturn till He shall reign whose right it is, and until the song of the world's jubilee is heard from every hill and vale: "Hallelujah! hallelujah! for the Lord God omnipotent reigneth."

"Fly abroad, thou mighty gospel!
Win and conquer, never cease;
May thy lasting, wide dominions
Multiply, and still increase!
Sway thy sceptre,
Saviour, all the world around."

THE * HIDDEN * TREASURE.

“Religion’s all. Descending from the skies,
To wretched man the goddess in her left
Holds out this world, and in her right the next.”

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.

MATT. XIII. 44.

THE HIDDEN TREASURE.

IN Eastern countries the insecurity of property has ever been proverbial. This arises from the frequent changes of dynasties and the revolutions which accompany them. On this account many rich men divide their goods into three parts—one part to be invested in the daily transactions of commerce, a second converted into precious stones, which might easily be secreted about the person and carried away on any emergency, and the third buried in some place known only to the owner.

Numerous accounts of the discovery of such hidden treasures are found in the pages of history. Herodotus tells of an ancient king of Egypt who had amassed four hundred thousand talents in the course of his life, which he had securely deposited in the garden adjoining his palace, and which was never known nor suspected by any till he imparted the secret to his sons on his death-bed. Josephus informs us that Solomon laid up vast treasures in the royal sepulchre, which was reckoned the place of greatest security, from the sacredness attached to the abodes of the dead. The same historian also tells us that the inhabitants of Jerusalem, during its last and memorable siege, concealed their treasures in the streets and under the floors and within the doorposts of their

houses, and in various unfrequented parts of their city, and that the precious secret would have been for ever buried in the grave with the owners had not the plough of the conquerors passed over the ruins of the holy place and reduced it to a field. Discoveries of a similar kind are related in modern Oriental histories. "We are constantly hearing," says Mr. Roberts, late missionary in Hindostan, "of treasures which have been, and are about to be, discovered; and it is no rare thing to see a large space of ground completely turned up, or a group of old and young digging amid the foundations of an old ruin, all full of the greatest eagerness and desire to reach the expected treasure." A few years ago about eight thousand gold coins of Alexander and his father Philip were found near the city of Sidon. They were contained in several copper pots, and are estimated as worth, at the price of gold in the time of Alexander, two hundred thousand dollars. Thomson, who speaks of the discovery, suspects that "it was royal treasure which one of Alexander's officers concealed when he heard of his unexpected death in Babylon, intending to appropriate it to himself, but being apprehended, slain or driven away by some of the revolutions which followed that event, the coin remained where he had hid it."

An occurrence like these supplies the groundwork of this parable.

After our Lord had withdrawn himself from the people, was come home, and had given to his disciples the desired explanation of the parable of the Tares, he went on to deliver this and the three following parables. He here teaches that the kingdom of God is not merely a general, but also an individual, thing. It is not merely

to be observed and admired at a distance; it is not a thing about which we may or may not be interested without involving any moral consequences; but there is a necessity for a personal appreciation and acceptance of it; each man must have it for himself, and make it his own by a distinct act of his own will. It is not enough that a man come under the shadow of the great tree of the gospel and partake of the many blessings of its shelter; it is not enough that he dwell in a Christendom which has been leavened, and so in a manner himself share in the universal leavening,—but the blessings of the gospel must find a place *in his own soul* or else it will be lost.

Let it be observed that our Lord merely takes such a case as was of common occurrence as the similitude of the truth he wished to inculcate. With the honesty or dishonesty of the man in the matter we have nothing to do. It is no more intended that we should act upon the *principle* which influenced him than we are to act upon the *principle* which influenced the unjust steward. Just as in the latter case it is the man's *shrewdness*, not his dishonesty, that is the lesson, so in the parable before us it is the man's eager desire to obtain at every cost the "treasure in the field" which is the lesson, and not the cunning by which he attained his end.

How well may the blessings of the gospel be denominated a "treasure"! The tongue of an angel could not describe their value and preciousness. Pardon, acceptance, peace, joy, adoption, sanctification, all-sufficient grace, a triumphant death and eternal life,—these great gifts meet and relieve every want of the soul. They are true riches, unsearchable riches, durable riches. They deliver from death. They ennoble in the world to come.

What a contrast is there between these blessings and mere earthly interests and possessions! All happiness of a worldly kind is uncertain; all the possessions and pleasures of this life are liable to decay and "perish in the using." Even when they are not taken from us, how often do they lose the qualities which originally fixed our regard, and, though they do not cease to exist, cease to please! Like faded flowers, they become offensive instead of pleasant. Even if they were more satisfying and less corruptible than they are, how difficult—in many cases how impossible—it is to retain them long!

Solemn and significant indeed is the testimony that has been given from experience on this subject. "I now read Solomon," said Lord Chesterfield when sixty-six years of age, and near the close of his unenviable life, "with a sort of sympathetic feeling. I have been as wicked and vain, though not as wise, as he, but am now at last wise enough to feel and attest the truth of his reflection that 'all is vanity and vexation of spirit.'" Madame Malibran, the most celebrated opera-singer of her age, returning home from a grand, aristocratic party where all had striven to overwhelm her with admiration, burst into tears, knowing that after all she was "a mere *opera-singer*." Alexander wept on the throne of the world. Charles V. and Diocletian descended from the throne to seek that happiness in private life which could not be found in the robes of royalty. Goethe said of himself in advanced age, "They have called me a child of fortune, nor have I any wish to complain of the course of my life. Yet it has been nothing but labor and sorrow, and I may truly say that in seventy-five years I have not had

four weeks of true comfort. It was the constant rolling of a stone that was always to be lifted anew." After the great prince Saladin had subdued Egypt, passed the Euphrates and conquered cities without number, after he had retaken Jerusalem, he finished his life in the performance of an action that ought to be transmitted to the most distant posterity. A moment before he uttered his last sigh he called the herald who had carried his banner before him in all his battles; he commanded him to fasten to the top of a lance the shroud in which the dying prince was soon to be buried. "Go," said he, "carry this lance, unfurl this banner, and, while you lift up this standard, proclaim, 'This, this is all that remains to Saladin the Great, the conqueror and the king of the empire, of all his glory!'"

But while men's sensual and intellectual pleasures, worldly riches and honors, are unable by themselves to yield true enjoyment and must soon vanish from their grasp, the happiness which the gospel imparts to the Christian is pure, satisfying and permanent. It is not a mere pretence; it is a glorious reality. It is beyond the reach of accident or change. Force cannot wrest it from us, fraud cannot beguile us of it. It forms part of the very nature, intellectual and moral, of him who possesses it, and he can no more lose it than he can lose himself. His inheritance above is "incorruptible and undefiled, and fadeth not away." There is nothing in its own nature to cause decay, and it is secure from all external violence. It is at once incorruptible and eternal. It is thus suited to the immortal spirit. Instead of weakening and wearying our powers, it exalts and strengthens them. "The appetite

grows with what it feeds on." The satisfactions arising out of these celestial enjoyments are not lessened by repetition nor disturbed by the fear of their coming to an end. They shall not merely never be diminished, but shall grow with the enlarging capacity for excellence and happiness throughout eternity.

"Eye hath not seen,
Ear hath not heard, nor can the human heart
Those joys conceive, which—blissful heritage!—
Christ for his faithful votaries prepares."

The "field" in which the "treasure" is hidden cannot be, as in the former parables, "the world." There is no treasure in *that* field worth the buying, neither can it, in any sense, be said of any one that he "bought the world." Neither can it mean "the Church," for the Church has no such treasure in her which can thus be taken possession of. She may tell of such treasure, and point to where it is to be found; the faithful may tell where they themselves have found it, but they will say, as Paul did, "We neither received it of man, neither were we taught it, but by revelation of Jesus Christ." Besides, how could it with any propriety be said that as the man in the parable *bought* the field for the treasure, so also he who seeks for the gospel treasure must possess himself *of the Church* in order to obtain the treasure? Evidently, the "field" in this parable is the same which is set forth in the parable of the Sower by the seed. It is "the word of God." When the direct power and energy of the word upon the sinner's heart is intended to be shown, then it is *good* seed sown on good ground, springing up and bearing fruit. When it is the sinner's eager desire to possess that word with

all its hid treasure, to give up all in order to obtain it, then it is "a field" in which "a treasure is hid."

There is important significance in the *name* which is here given to the Scriptures. It was certainly possible for God to make his revelation to the race in such a form that (according to the demand of the infidel Strauss) a man should be able to lay his finger upon a precept or a doctrine for each occurring need, and to find in one place and under one head all that relates to one matter. It might have been given to us as a systematic body of divinity, or as a statute-book with a digest and index accompanying it, so that in a moment, as it were, all might be seen that it contains touching any of its articles of faith or rules of practice.

But suppose this arrangement had been adopted, would it have carried with it any advantage to us? Think for a moment! How much more pleasant is it to wander over a broad and beautiful field, with its graceful undulations, its alternate lights and shades, and its freshly-growing plants with the dew upon their leaves and the mould about their roots, than to walk in the straight, hard, level and narrow path of a garden which is entirely the product of constant labor and forced culture! How much less agreeable to traverse such a confined and stiff enclosure, all of which falls under the eye at a single glance, leaving no variety to delight and no discoveries to be made as the step advances, than to pass over an expanded territory on which the systematizing influence of art has not yet been brought to bear, with heights and valleys, forests and streams, on the right and left of our path and close about us, full of concealed wonders and choice treasures!

Now, this is the manner in which the Scriptures have

been given to us; and it is impossible not to perceive the wisdom which it indicates. As thus before us, these holy oracles constitute an abiding stimulus to research and an unfailing source of variety and interest. "It is only," says one, "when our energies are roused and our attention awake, when we are acquiring or correcting or improving our knowledge, that knowledge makes the requisite impression upon us. God has not made Scripture like a garden, where the fruits are ripe and the flowers bloom, and all things are fully exposed to our view, but like a field, where we have the ground and seed of all precious things, but where nothing can be brought to view without our industry, nor then without the dews of heavenly grace."

This "treasure" may be considered as having been hidden in the ancient types and sacrifices. These all contained the germs or seeds of gospel truth. They all referred to the Messiah and the salvation he came to accomplish. He was the Rock whose streams followed the Israel of God, and the Manna, the true Bread that came down from heaven. He was the City of Refuge for security from avenging justice, and his atonement was foreshadowed by every bleeding sacrifice. The same thing may be affirmed in relation to the Old Testament predictions and promises. These all testified of Christ, and referred to his advent, work, offices, sufferings and glory. "To him gave all the prophets witness." Yet in their dim significance and their metaphorical costume and figurative style the gospel was rather hidden than fully revealed in those types and predictions. Thus was it also when Jesus appeared among men. His kingdom was still hidden. Only a few fishermen and here and there a ruler discovered the

precious deposit, and drew from it enough to enrich themselves for ever; to the multitude it was still unknown. Even, indeed, after our Lord had fully declared his mission and finished his work; after he had died for our sins, and risen again for our justification; after his disciples through the ministry of the Spirit had published the glad tidings in many lands,—even then the treasure still lay hidden. Those who found it found out at the same time that they had been almost treading on it for years, and yet were ignorant of its existence and worth. So is it now. The treasure is near men, but they see it not. Their minds, as Paul says, are blinded. “The god of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not;” “The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness unto him, neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned.”

We do not believe that the treasure of the gospel is hidden in the sense that God desires to conceal it from men. It is hidden by their own unwillingness to recognize it. Their affections are so wedded to the earthly and the temporal that they have no relish for the spiritual and the everlasting. Besides, from their very youth they have been walking on this field, and are so much accustomed to certain influences of Christianity, so familiar with its doctrines from their ever-recurring opportunities of hearing the word, that their very familiarity with that word generates indifference to it, and blinds them to the priceless treasure it contains.

“Long years before Australia’s treasures were brought to light many shepherds had gone from other lands to herd their flocks on its boundless pastures; the hut of the squatter had encroached on the hunting-grounds,

and his axe had sounded in the forests of the wondering savage; and there, earning only a bare subsistence, far removed from the homes and friends of their love, without hope of improving their condition or returning with a fortune, many had pined and drooped. Yet all the while a fortune lay hid beneath the exile's feet; the roots of the tree under whose shadow he reclined, recalling scenes and friends far away, were matting rocks of gold, and from the bed of the stream where he quenched his thirst, thousands, with thirst for gold burning as his, came afterward to draw splendid fortunes, vaulting at once from abject poverty to the heights of affluence." * So is there a treasure of infinitely greater value lying all around us, and it is only for us to search for it that we may make it our own, and that it may enrich us with the blessings of peace on earth and ineffable glory in heaven.

It is possible to find a treasure hidden in a field by accident. This seems to have been the case with the man in the parable. It is probable that he had passed by the spot where the treasure was a hundred times, had trodden it down with his feet, but he never suspected what lay so near till the day when perhaps the plough-share, in turning up the soil, disclosed what was beneath. In like manner, though there is nothing casual in the salvation of a sinner as to *God*, yet as to *himself* the event may be wholly undesigned and unlooked for. Thus there is a fulfillment of what is written in Isaiah: "I was found of them that sought me not, I was made manifest to them that asked not after me."

And just here, be it observed, is the point of difference between this parable and the one of the Pearl succeeding

* Thomas Guthrie, D. D.

it. "That parable represents all those persons who feel that there must be some absolute good for man, in the possession of which he shall be blessed and find the satisfaction of all his longings, and who are therefore *seeking* everywhere and inquiring for this good. This parable represents those who do not discover that there is an aim and a purpose for man's life, that there is a truth for him at all, until the truth as it is in Jesus is revealed to them." It shows that God will have mercy on whom he will have mercy, that salvation is of grace and not of merit, and that he sometimes bestows it where it has never been sought. Hence it does not presuppose a *seeking*, except as all acting and striving on the part of man is a seeking after a treasure, after well-being, repose, peace.

Look at some examples of this. Matthew was sitting at the receipt of custom when the Saviour said, "Follow me." Curiosity to see Jesus led Zaccheus to throw himself into the crowd, and finally to climb the sycamore under whose branches he was to pass, but besides a sight of the Saviour he obtained a hold of salvation. The Samaritan woman came to draw water from the well, but she received also the water of life.

As the past history, so the present experience of the Church, shows that some suddenly stumble, as it were, upon salvation when they neither expected nor desired to find it. It is said of Colonel Gardiner, who was a lover not only of pleasure, but of the basest pleasures, that the eventful night which he so unexpectedly spent in prayer he had intended to spend in sin. As he impatiently watched the finger of the clock moving slowly on to the hour of a guilty assignation, nothing was further from his thoughts than conversion, and had

Death himself, throwing open his chamber-door, stood before him in visible form, he had not been more startled than by the blow, dealt by an unseen hand, which laid him penitent at the feet of Jesus.

A youth leaves his home in the country and plunges into a city to push his fortune, and finds there what he did not seek—pardon of sin and peace with God through the Saviour. A young lady is invited to a fashionable party, but at the threshold of the prepared festivity a message meets her—a message charged with a mighty sorrow, which banishes joyful anticipations from her heart; she is thrown aside in solitude, and in the aching emptiness of her soul the knocking of Christ from without is for the first time heard. She finds a treasure which, though often near her before, had hitherto escaped her notice. Some have gone to the house of God from mere custom or curiosity or a design to ridicule, but have remained to pray, and have said, “Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?” “But,” says Matthew Henry, “though he is sometimes found of them that seek him not, he is always found of them that seek him.”

By the representation of *the man hiding the treasure after he had found it*, it is not meant that he who has discovered the treasures of wisdom and knowledge that are hidden in Christ Jesus will desire to keep that knowledge to himself. Rather, indeed, will such an one feel himself a debtor to all men, to make all men see what is the fellowship of the mystery that is hid in Christ. He will act as Andrew did toward Philip. The spirit of the gospel unlocks the heart, and spreads wide the arms to all who may either profit ourselves or receive any advantage from our society. Indeed, a cordial desire to

make others "partakers of the benefit," to throw open to them the gate of life, is inseparable from true religion. But the finder of the treasure in the parable is eager to secure it, and that he may do so must conceal the knowledge of it from others. He told of it to no one, but went and *sold all that he had and bought the field*. When once the heart is awakened to a sense of the preciousness of the gospel, then there is a change indeed. Other things lose much of their value; the soul is felt to be of the deepest importance, and the good news of salvation through Christ is prized above all. To gain a share in this salvation, to be forgiven, reconciled and saved, this is now felt to be the great concern, and all else seems of comparatively trifling moment. Our Saviour taught us that there is but one thing needful. Even so must we embrace the gospel. We must seek salvation as the chief good; we must be willing to part with all for Christ's sake. No bosom sin must be spared, no vain attempt must be made to serve two masters; all that stands in the way of our souls must be freely parted with. We must "buy the truth" at every sacrifice, and "sell it not." We must yield ourselves and all we have to Christ. This purchase of course does not imply any meritorious acts on the part of the sinner. We can offer no equivalent for the possession. We must buy "without money and without price." The meaning is simply *exchange*, as in buying we part with something to gain something, thus showing our estimation. We cannot merit salvation.

"What is all righteousness that men devise?
What but a sordid bargain for the skies?
But Christ as soon would abdicate his own
As stoop from heaven to sell the proud a throne."

It should not be overlooked that when the man discovered the treasure it was "*for joy thereof*" he went and sold all that he had, in order to buy the field that contained it. This joy, it has been well said, is, on the spiritual side, an essential element in the case. If it is wanting, the business will at some stage certainly miscarry, the transaction will never be completed. One love in a human heart cannot be overcome and destroyed except by another. Love of the world will not yield to fear, even though the fear be a fear of God's anger. It cannot be overcome and cast out until another and greater love has been brought against it. The man who has, by the teaching of God's Spirit, been made acquainted with the preciousness of the gospel, feels joy thereof—not that firm and glorious joy which arises in the established Christian from a consciousness of possession, but the joy of the patient in hearing of the arrival of the physician whose remedy was never applied in vain—the joy that results from the discovery of the reality, the excellency, the suitability, the all-sufficiency, the attainableness of the blessing, and is called "*rejoicing in hope.*" Hence the choice is not difficult; everything is given up for the attainment of the highest good, as the mariner in a tempestuous sea readily parts with all, that he may save his life. Whatever there may have been of sacrifice before, there is now no more; self-denial is no longer painful; it is joy and bliss. What no external violence could have torn from the heart—the love of the world, fleshly wisdom, self-righteousness,—all is abandoned. Such was the feeling of Paul. As a member of the Jewish community, and observing rigidly its Levitical observances, he had, at one time, to use his own language, great "*confidence in*

the flesh"—*i. e.* great reliance on his own righteousness—but when he was arrested on his persecuting journey, and made to see the truth as it is in Jesus, when the scales had fallen from his eyes and he beheld the long-hidden treasure before him, then he quickly abandoned all that he held most dear, saying, "What things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ. Yea, doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ."

This is the very spirit of the man finding the hid treasure. He puts upon it its true value; he estimates everything else as comparatively worthless; he feels the force of the Saviour's assertion, "He that loveth father or mother more than me is not worthy of me," and that if we would be his disciples we must "forsake all and follow him." In the spirit of these injunctions he is ready to give up everything that conflicts with his getting possession of these hid treasures of the gospel.

This surrender is, too, *cheerfully* made—not as an arbitrary condition imposed from without, but rather from a delightful constraint acknowledged within; even as a man would willingly fling down pebbles and mosses, which hitherto he had been gathering, and with which he had filled his hands, if pearls and rubies were offered to him. The man sees things as he did not before.

Two aëronauts, hanging in the mid-air, looked down on the earth from their balloon and wondered to see how small great things had grown: ample fields were contracted into little patches; the lake was no bigger than a looking-glass; the broad river, with ships floating on its bosom, seemed like a silver snake; the widespread

city was reduced to the dimensions of a village; the long, rapid, flying train appeared but a black caterpillar slowly creeping over the surface of the ground. Such changes the world undergoes to the eyes of him who, rising to hold communion with God and anticipating the joys of heaven, lives above it and looks beyond it. This makes it easy, and even joyful, to part with all for Christ; this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith.

THE * PEARL.

“Are virtue, then, and piety the same?
No, piety is more; 'tis virtue's source,
Mother of every worth, as that of joy.”

45 *Again, the kingdom of heaven is like unto a merchant man, seek-*
46 *ing goodly pearls: Who, when he had found one pearl of great*
price, went and sold all that he had, and bought it."

MATT. XIII. 45, 46.

THE PEARL.

IT is by no means one of the least recommendations of the parables of our blessed Lord that they bring moral subjects out of the dim region of speculation into the world of living realities. Men need to be addressed in this way, so much are they of this world in their modes of thinking, feeling and acting. By this means the truth is dropped into the main channel of their life, blended with their common associations and exhibited to them in familiar attire, and thus is most likely to secure for itself a lodgment in their hearts and win for itself a permanent influence in the formation of their character.

The circumstances introduced into the body of this parable are in accordance with the most authentic account we have of Palestine. In all the countries of antiquity pearls obtained the preference over all other trinkets worn as ornaments for the person. They occupied the place that diamonds do among us. Although the Jewish ladies, in common with their Eastern neighbors, are known to have set a high value on them at an early period, their rage for these beautiful jewels received a fresh impulse from their connection with the Romans. That people, in the time of the emperors, were most prodigal in the use of this superfluity. Julius Cæsar

endeavored to check the growing extravagance with regard to pearls by prohibiting them from being worn except by persons of a certain rank and age and on particular occasions, but the power of fashion proved too great for that of the legislature. The public taste for the profuse display of pearls continued on the increase, and, as from Rome it soon spread into the provinces, persons of all ranks among the Jews bought them with avidity. The wives and daughters of inferior officers and tradesmen vied with their superiors in the display of these ornaments, wore them on every part of their dress, and were ready to part with their whole fortunes in order to gratify their vanity by the possession of these costly gems.

We are not to regard this parable and the one which precedes it as being identical. They are closely allied, yet the one is by no means a mere repetition of the other. The word "Again" with which it is introduced shows that the Saviour is passing to a new form or phase of thought. Each is the complement of the other. The finder of the hidden treasure represents those who do not discover that there is a purpose for man's life, and consequently give themselves little if any thought about a new life or the hope of a blessed eternity, but to whom, nevertheless, the truth as it is in Jesus is revealed, in accordance with the prediction: *I was found of them that sought me not.* But here he who obtained the kingdom of heaven is no longer represented merely as a fortunate finder, but as *an earnest, active and untiring seeker.* It may also be noted that as the former parable illustrates the hidden character of divine truth, so this illustrates its unsurpassed beauty and value.

The pearl is a small, silvery, hard, smooth, lustrous

substance, globular, oval or pear-shaped, found in the interior of the shells of many species of mollusks, particularly of the pearl-oyster, apparently resulting from the deposit of the nacreous substance around some nucleus. The art of covering a baser substance of any shape with gold or silver by the process of electroplating is an analogous operation. Pearls are found in the Persian Sea and in the ocean which washes the shores of Arabia and the continent and isles of Asia. They are brought up from the marine depths by professional divers. These, armed with pointed staves, plunge into water four or five fathoms deep, and when they find a pearl-bearing oyster, rise to the surface and deposit their prize in a sack hung to the vessel's side. This they continue to do until they are exhausted or their time of labor is over. "Some air-bells bubbling up, and blood that spreads crimsoning the surface of the sea, are all that is ever more seen of one who dies a sacrifice to his hazardous pursuit; and the story of the dangers which pearl-fishers have always to encounter and the dreadful deaths they have often to endure will recall to a reflective mind the memory of Him who purchased the pearl of salvation at so great a price, giving his life for ours, and dying, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God."

There is much difference of value even in real pearls. There are many defects which materially diminish their worth—as, for instance, if they have a yellow or dusky tinge or are not absolutely round or smooth. But there are pearls that are not real. There are some which are hastened in their growth in the oyster. This is done by the people of two Chinese villages near the city of Tchtsing by the introduction within the shells of living

mollusks of "moulds," and when the moulds are removed they are cut away from the naere, and "melted resin is poured into the cavity, and the orifice artfully covered by a piece of mother-of-pearl." There are also imitation pearls. These are made in Paris, being lined with fish-scales and wax, the scales being stripped from the fish while living, that the hue of the real pearl may not fail to be imitated. Much skill and wariness is therefore required on the part of those purchasing them now, as was doubtless the case in former days also. This itinerant merchant man was seeking *goodly* pearls, such as were of more than ordinary quality and value. Hence his search was determinate and discriminative. Whom does he represent?

Deep and dark is that abyss of misery into which man has been precipitated by his deplorable fall. He has lost not only the *possession*, but also the *knowledge*, of his chief good. He has no distinct notion of what it is or of the means of recovering it. Yet the human mind, though stunned and weakened by so dreadful a lapse, still retains some faint idea of the good it has lost. It has also a languid sense of its misery. From this arise some efforts of the mind, like those of one groping in the dark, but with a fruitless search. All men desire to attain true enjoyment, and though, alas! they often run themselves upon misery under the guise of happiness, yet even from this fatal error it is evident that they naturally pursue either real happiness, or what to their mistaken judgment appears to be such. Nor can the mind divest itself of this propensity without divesting itself of its being. As the Schoolmen say, "The will is carried toward happiness, not simply as will, but as nature."

But whilst all men are seeking happiness, some have higher conceptions of it than others. They are not, as the unthinking mass, violently carried away like brutes by a kind of secret impulse toward such enjoyments as fall in their way. They look not for the object of their desire in eating, drinking, sleeping or in being easy, gay and merry. They have higher aspirations and nobler aims than these. Once they may have been earthly and sensual in their tastes and pursuits, but their experience has taught them a lesson. Even the abundance which they then had has shown them the emptiness of the world's ordinary resources. Even the variety they then had has shown them how unable the world's common possessions are to meet the desires of an immortal mind. As they passed on in their pursuits they found themselves beguiled and cheated in every promise of true happiness, and their deep conviction now is that of Solomon, who sailed round the world to obtain this jewel, and finally returned after a tedious voyage with his hope disappointed, and exclaiming, "Vanity of vanities, all is vanity!" They now *feel* that there must be some absolute good for man, in the possession of which he shall be blessed and find the satisfaction of all his longings, and therefore they are seeking everywhere and inquiring for this good. Some seek it in philosophy. They have retreated from the bustle and the turmoil of life; they are seeking enjoyment in calm contemplation on the relations of things and on the abstract questions of philosophic inquiry. Others, men of leisure and of taste, find their enjoyment in the pursuit of elegant literature. Their time is spent in *belles-lettres*, in the records of historic truth or in the world of poetry and of fiction. Others, still, are pursuing

patriotic and philanthropic objects, seeking to be good and to do good as they have opportunity. All these are persuaded that man's happiness cannot lie in gratifications which are allied to those of the inferior creation, or in empty gayety, or in the common prizes of ambition, or in any amount of money.

There cannot be much difficulty, then, in determining whom this merchant man represents. He stands for any person seeking happiness or good for himself. Certainly he represents *an awakened soul seeking peace*. Such a man is not a mere seeker after happiness generally. He has been roused to a sense of religion; his conscience has been touched. He is so far enlightened, so far awakened, as to have become thoroughly dissatisfied with his own condition, and has received strong impressions of the odiousness of sin and of the beauty of holiness. But he has not yet found peace. He is seeking, inquiring, using means. He is conscious of his need, and sincerely sets about endeavoring to get what he wants. Simeon waited for the Consolation of Israel. Philip announced it to Nathanael as a thing which he knew would rejoice his heart, "We have found Him of whom Moses in the law, and the prophets, did write, Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph."

John Bunyan had come to know that the world and its pleasures could never satisfy the cravings of his heart. He felt the need of being other than he was. As an imprisoned eagle, chained to its perch and turning its eye up to the blue heavens, feels the strivings of a native instinct, and, springing upward, beats the bars of its cage with bleeding wings, Bunyan tried to rise out of his estate of sin and misery. He made vigorous efforts to keep the law of God, to live without sin, to

establish a righteousness of his own, to work out a sum of merits, and thereby obtain peace and pardon, and reconcile himself to God. Seeking the pardon of sin, a purer life and a holier heart, he had been a merchant seeking "goodly pearls," and in seeking he found, for he was led to Him who is "the way, the truth, and the life."

The treasurer of the Ethiopian queen was precisely such a merchant. He occupied the highest office in a kingdom, he stood on the steps of the throne and had charge of the royal treasury, but he counted himself poor notwithstanding. He must go in search of more precious pearls than these. Peace of conscience, righteousness, hope for eternity,—these are goodlier pearls than any that can be found in Ethiopia, and the man undertook a journey to Jerusalem to try if he could find them there. Disappointed there, he was on his way home, seeking still for the pearls, and seeking near the very spot in the Scriptures where the one priceless Pearl lay, when Philip met him, by whose skillful help he found it and went on his way rejoicing.

Many persons, indeed, of this description are to be found—persons who have, like Timothy, been carefully instructed in the Scriptures "from a child," or who, like Samuel, have early been impressed with divine truth, and who, possessing earnest and inquiring minds, anxiously seek for that which will satisfy and comfort the soul. They deliberately set themselves to seek the truth. They are not careless and ignorant persons, but of meditative minds, of tender consciences, of craving souls, who believe that there are "goodly pearls" of grace to be found in God's word, and who diligently seek them.

What does the pearl mean? Evidently *salvation*. This is the prize of the gospel, the great blessing of "the kingdom of heaven," the fruit of the coming and sacrifice of Christ. Indeed, Christ himself may be said to be the Pearl, in the sense in which the apostle says: "But what things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ, . . . that I might win Christ." It makes little difference whether we consider the pearl to be the Saviour himself or the salvation which he wrought out, for to have a part in Christ is to be saved by him, and this is the "pearl of great price."

The pearl which the merchant man found was, as has been well remarked, a remarkable as well as beautiful emblem in several respects—in, for instance, a color of snowy whiteness, a purity unclouded by the slightest haze, and a form so round and polished and perfect that it was impossible to improve it. The lapidary, to whose skill in grinding the very diamond owes much of its brilliancy and those many-colored fires with which it shines and burns, may not touch a pearl. His art cannot add to its beauty, the polish of its surface or the perfection of its rounded form. What an emblem, therefore, is this gem of that salvation which came perfect from the hand of God—of that righteousness of Jesus Christ which, as no guilt of ours can stain, no works of ours can improve!

The contrast between the *one* pearl which the merchant finds and the *many* which he had been seeking is by no means to be overlooked. Here we learn that when the awakened sinner is sincerely desirous to be invested with the beauty of holiness, then he discovers that in Christ everything necessary for this is to be found. He discovers that if he obtains Christ, he gets

“all things” besides—that if he “put on Christ,” it is the certain and the only way in which he can put away what is vile and unworthy, and be clothed with such a salvation as shall not only be a covering for him in the way of pardon, but shall be glorious apparel in which he may walk adorned with all the gifts and graces of the Spirit of God. There is but “one pearl,” for God and Truth and the Faith and the Church are one.

That which this pearl represents is the only restorer of unity to man’s divided and distracted heart. There is neither harmony nor unity in the earthly objects of men’s pursuits, nor is there in the means they use to secure them. If a man will be rich, he must restrain himself in gratifying his appetites, and perhaps use artifices that may stain his honor. If he would be honorable, he must often be prodigal of his riches and abstain from sordid pleasures. If he would have the full enjoyment of sensual pleasures, he must squander his riches and injure his honor. The lusts of men, as well as their objects, are various and contradictory. Covetousness and sensuality, pride and tranquillity, envy and the love of ease, and a thousand jarring passions, maintain a constant fight in the sinner’s breast. He is drawn this way and that, tossed from wave to wave, and there is no steadiness or uniformity in his pursuits.

How does religion, consisting in union with, and enjoyment of, God through Christ, contrast with these sad effects of sin! If earthly things, which are infinitely various and stand in manifold contrasts with one another, involve the soul that passionately clings to them in a confused, restless chase, heavenly things, on the contrary, are harmonious in holy unison, and are

alone able to bring true unity and abiding peace into the life of him who devotes himself to them with his whole soul. The discord in which the changing and contradictory impressions of the outward world involve us, this the one precious pearl is able to end. The wounds which the earthly life inflicts upon us, this pearl is able to heal. The believer may triumphantly say,

"Thou, O Christ, art all I want—
All-in-all in thee I find."

It is even so. The truth possessed brings that *unity* into the heart of man which sin had destroyed: that which through sin had become as a mirror shattered into a thousand fragments, and every fragment reflecting some different object, is now united again, and the whole with more or less clearness reflects, as it was intended at first to do, the one image of God. "It is God alone in whom any intelligent creature can find its centre and true repose; only when man has found him does the great *Eureka!* break forth from his lips in Augustine's beautiful and often-quoted words: 'Lord, thou hast made us for thee, and our heart is disquieted till it reacheth to thee.'"

*This pearl is of great price.** First, in view of its

* Some pearls among the ancients were of immense value. Pliny mentions that he had seen Lollia Paulina, the widow of Caligula, covered, head, neck, ears and fingers, with strings of pearls and emeralds placed alternately—plunder collected by her grandfather Lollius. The two largest pearls ever known, according to the historian just quoted, were both in possession of Cleopatra, queen of Egypt, and worn by her as ornaments. Each of these was valued at ten million sesterces, about four hundred thousand dollars. One she dissolved and drank off at a supper which she gave to Mark Antony; the other was brought to Rome by Augustus, and was

procurement. It is a well-known fact that objects and actions are frequently estimated according to the quality of the individual concerned in them. If that individual be exalted in rank or character, the eminence of his station gives weight to his deeds, insomuch that things in themselves unimportant derive consequence from his being concerned in them, and things of acknowledged excellence acquire a value increased according to the eminence of the person from whom they proceed. Try our redemption by this criterion, and see the result. Its Author was none other than the eternal Son of God. No angel could make atonement for our sins. So far as we have the power of ascertaining, no being but the divine, taking to himself flesh, could have satisfied justice in the stead of fallen men. It is not, we admit, for such worms of the dust as we to limit the Mighty One whose understanding is infinite. Yet it may be safely affirmed that the plan which God *has adopted* for reconciling the world unto himself is the *best that could have been adopted*. And if this be true, inasmuch as it is impossible that a Being infinitely wise can do other than what is *best*, it follows, of course, that God's sending his Son to die for us was the *only* plan which even divine wisdom could employ on our behalf.

Now, think of the greatness and glory of the appointed Mediator! He was the Second Person of the ever-blessed Trinity—"Jehovah's fellow," who is "exalted far above

divided into two, which were attached as pendants to the ears of the statue of Venus in the Pantheon. Julius Cesar presented Servilia, the mother of Brutus, with a pearl worth six million sesterces. Augustus dedicated at one time in the treasury of Jupiter Capitolinus jewels and pearls to the value of fifty million sesterces—two million dollars.

every name that is named in heaven, or on earth or under the earth," and who "thought it not robbery to be equal with God." He it was who, compassionating the ruin which transgression had brought on this earth, assumed our nature and died our death. It was he, who is the "brightness of the Father's glory, and the express image of his person," that "redeemed us from the curse of the law." It was "Jehovah-Jesus" who "became the Author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey him." Our salvation was bought by the blood of the Son of God. How, then, can we know "the price, all price beyond," at which our salvation was purchased until we can measure the distance between the eternal and the perishable, omnipotence and feebleness, immortality and death?

This pearl is of great price also in view of its personal relative value. "To them that believe he is precious." Who can estimate the value of the great salvation to its possessor? The man delivered by the gospel is not rescued merely from death, or merely from annihilation, or merely from the agony of the body or temporary agony of the soul. He is saved from the "worm that never dies" and the "fire that is not quenched"—from a worm and from a fire which, whatever be their precise nature, are described as wasting without destroying, as tormenting the immortal man without extinguishing life or the capacity of suffering.

Not merely, however, does this salvation include an emancipation from all evil, but an introduction to all good—to good unlike that of the present state, where everything that is pure is soiled with impurity, everything bright shaded with darkness, and where evil constantly struggles with good, and too often overcomes it.

The good of heaven is good without any mixture of evil. Search the sacred record and observe the picture there displayed to us of the joys of our Father's kingdom—of that temple of which God is the light and glory. There, it is said, the delighted worshipers "see his face," and his "Name shall be on their foreheads," "and they shall reign for ever and ever;" "They are before the throne of God, and serve him day and night in his temple; . . . and He that sitteth on the throne shall dwell among them;" "The inhabitant shall not say, I am sick: the people that dwell therein shall be forgiven their iniquity;" "God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes." But why multiply quotations on a theme so familiar? Can any man have caught the faintest glimpse of the splendors and joys of the world of spirits, and not feel his bosom throb with "joy unspeakable" as he thinks of the amazing mercy of God by which the portals of that world are thrown open to him, and a way of approach provided to the water of life and the tree of life which is in the midst of the paradise of God?

Nor only this: the happiness of heaven is *unchangeable*. True happiness must have a solid basis; it must be above change, vicissitude or contingency. Happiness cannot be found in a palace if that palace may at any moment fall down; in a cottage if the wind may at any moment sweep it away; in beauty that must soon fade; in health and strength that must soon become feeble; in a scene of pleasure if it may soon be succeeded by grief.

The ox may graze with delight in the rich pasturage, though it is then only fattening for the slaughter; and the ephemeron may whirl with ecstasy in the beams of a summer sun, though the termination of its existence is to be witnessed by the evening of the day whose morn-

ing brought it into being ; and the bird may sing gayly amid the vernal foliage, though the hunter's deadly aim may at any time lay it, struggling and gasping, in the dust. But thus it cannot be with *man*, whose nature enables and prompts him to look into the future, and who by a resistless necessity is obliged to think whether to-morrow shall be as this day, and dares to hope that it will be "more abundant." Man in order to be happy must have something beyond which he cannot extend his desires. He is always progressive, and as his capacity expands, so must there be objects presented to him corresponding with this enlargement of his views, aims and desires. He must have a fountain of enjoyment whose supplies he can use without reducing their power to gratify, and whose depths he can sound without feeling that their full amplitude is known.

Such a happiness as this it is that religion secures to its possessor. The man who finds the "pearl of great price" is at once installed in the possession of all the benefits and immunities of the Redeemer's purchase ; he emerges from under the dark shadows of the fall, that mighty and mysterious eclipse of humanity, into the effulgence of the light and the plenitude of the joy of a renovated, heaven-born nature, and the silent tide of oblivion instantly closes for ever over his past sins. A title to all the dignity and glory of heaven is made out for him, which nothing in time or eternity can alienate or rescind ; and in the endless future, separated from him only by "the narrow stream of death," there awaits him an inheritance in which the dominion of uncertainty and change is unknown, and destined to increase as interminable ages roll away.

He went and sold all that he had, and bought it. Easy

is it to understand why this man acted as he did. He was persuaded that the pearl he had found was so immensely valuable that it would reward him to purchase it at any cost. He was satisfied that it was worth a great present sacrifice to make this pearl his own. Others might think him foolish, but he knew what he was about : he was sure that he was making a good bargain.

Behold in this picture the conduct of a true Christian explained! He is what he is, and does what he does in his religion, because he is *thoroughly persuaded* that it is worth while. He sells all that he has and buys the pearl. We are not to strain this metaphor, as if it were to imply that by any valuable consideration whatever we can merit this inestimable treasure. It teaches that we must be fully determined to submit to the cost of procuring it, whatever it may be. The Christian gives such a decided preference to Christ above all worldly things whatever as to be willing to part with them all should they stand in the way of his obtaining his grace, his righteousness and his salvation. Neither will he do this merely as complying with *an arbitrary condition* that God has appointed, but rather will he do it cheerfully as the effect of a delightful constraint. *We must* make a choice and a sacrifice to evince our preference and attain our desire. Some things must be absolutely given up, some conditionally. And all, as to supreme regard and dependencè—the promises of superiors, the applause of companions, the smiles of friends, the ties of the dearest relations, for “he that loveth father or mother more than me is not worthy of me.” Sinful indulgences must also be given up. This splendid jewel would look ill upon him who is covered with the deformity of sinful practices ; and however dear these

indulgences may be, and though the parting with them may be painful as the plucking out of the right eye or the cutting off of the right hand, it must be done.

Augustine, the African bishop (who lived four hundred years after Christ), endured many sharp struggles before he would consent to part with his sins; but at length the grace of God subdued his stubborn heart. He cast himself down before the Lord under a fig tree and prayed, saying, "How long, Lord, wilt thou be angry? For ever? Remember not mine old iniquities. How long shall I say 'To-morrow'? Why should not *this hour* put an end to my slavery?" God, by whose Spirit this prayer was suggested, answered it and revealed Christ to Augustine's soul. Then this man, once so miserable, could say, "How sweet was it in a moment to be free from those delightful vanities, to love that which *had been* my dread, to part with which was now my joy! Thou didst cast them out, O my true and highest Delight; and thou, oh sweeter than all pleasure! enteredst in their room! How was my mind set free from the gnawing cares of sinful passions, and I conversed intimately with thee, my Light, my Riches, my Saviour and my God!"

How great encouragement have those that seek the Lord! Their success is sure. This is the case in no other pursuit. In the fields of worldly labor we may spend our strength in vain. But their heart *shall* live that seek God. He that goeth forth and weepeth, bearing precious seed, *shall doubtless* return again with rejoicing, bringing his sheaves with him.

THE * DRAW-NET

“See how, beneath the moonbeam’s smile,
Yon little billow heaves its breast,
And foams and sparkles for a while,
Then, murmuring, subsides to rest.
Thus man, the sport of bliss and care,
Rises on time’s eventful sea,
And, having swelled a moment there,
Thus melts into eternity.”

47 *Again, the kingdom of heaven is like unto a net, that was cast*
48 *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,
49 *but cast the bad away. So shall it be at the end of the world: the*
angels shall come forth, and sever the wicked from among the just,
50 *And shall cast them into the furnace of fire: there shall be wailing*
and gnashing of teeth.

MATT. XIII. 47-50.

THE DRAW-NET.

THE parables of our Lord were calculated to interest all classes of persons. Through them laborers, sowers, shepherds and fishermen, all had divine truth brought down to their capacity. That there was a special fitness in the utterance of *this* parable at Capernaum is evident at a glance. The Sea of Tiberias, which washed that seaport, opened in its fisheries a lucrative branch of trade to the inhabitants, and whether any of the hearers of Christ were so engaged or were connected merely by their locality with the watery element, they would all have sufficient acquaintance with a fisherman's occupation and habits to give interest to the scenery from which he drew his illustration.

While this parable is identical with that of the Tares in the field in two points—namely, the permitted mingling of good and evil within the outward Church *on earth*, and the final and complete separation of these in the day of the Lord (at “the end of the world,” as it is called in both)—the aspect under which these are presented to us is different.

It is not a *field* now in which seed is sown, but the *sea* into which a net is cast. From this we gather an important distinction between the general bearing of the two parables, while each closes with the separation of

the good from the evil. The parable of the Tares intimates to us that the ungodliness of mere profession will be *seen* to be mingled more or less with the reality of true godliness during the world's existence. The parable before us indicates another view of the matter. The net is cast in, and as "*it gathers of every kind*" its operation is out of sight. The end will show *what* it is gathering, but as it is dragged along it is under the water, and so out of view.

The same Being, likewise, who is mentioned in the former is implied in this. "The Son of man," who is represented as if "sowing good seed in a field," must be regarded here as if "*casting a net into the sea.*" But the imagery of the two parables suggests a widely different application. In the parable of the Tares in the field we see the representation of the *vital* power of the word in "the children of the kingdom." They are the "good seed," because with prepared hearts they have received the word and keep it. In the parable now before us we behold the *judicial* power of the word in retaining its hold on every one with whom it is brought into contact unto the judgment of the great day.

The sort of net to which our Lord likens the kingdom of heaven is not difficult to determine. In the heading of the chapter in our Bibles it is called a *draw-net*, and the particular kind is distinctly specified by the word in the original. It is a net of the largest size—what is called by us a *seine*—suffering nothing to escape from it; and this, its all-embracing nature, is certainly not to be left out of sight as an accidental or unimportant circumstance, but contains, in fact, a prophecy of the wide reach and potent operation of the

gospel, as designed not, like the old dispensation, only for one people, but for the race of mankind in its universality.

What more truthful image than *the sea* could have been employed to represent our world with its restlessness, its storms, its perils, its various population, from the self-righteous moralist to the vilest profligate or daring blasphemer; and all these, too, feeling themselves at home in it as the element in which they naturally delight to live! Such is the state of all men by nature, and the gospel is the only means of extricating them from their guilt and danger. And to this end it is divinely adapted. It is the grand catholicon for humanity. It comes down to men's circumstances of moral wretchedness. It recognizes them as fallen and perishing, and it contemplates their deliverance. It announces their ruin, and proclaims their help. It asserts their disease, and offers the healing balm. It is suited to the circumstances of all sinners. Like the net, which, corked above and leaded below, stood erect as a wall in the water, enclosing a large space, so the gospel makes its proclamations of mercy to all men. It embraces the wide world. It is addressed to every creature. It speaks to man as man, and reveals a Saviour to every perishing sinner. As God's expedient for rescuing sinners from perdition it is replete with his unerring wisdom. It is the power of God to salvation to every one that believeth.

Though what has just been affirmed of the gospel is true, only in connection with active instrumentality can it be expected to accomplish its destined end. The net must be "cast into the sea." It is not enough that the word of salvation exist, and that it be suitable for its

purpose; it must be *preached*. This is God's appointed method of saving men, and for the execution of it he raises up those whom he calls and commissions to proclaim the counsels of his grace. And this is an arduous, laborious work. Few occupations involve more toil, fatigue and self-denial than that of the fisherman. Such also is the laborious calling of the Christian minister. He must be wholly given to it in heart and holy desire for the good of souls—instant in season and out of season. He must sacrifice the love of ease and the honors and rewards of the world, and bear the cross of his divine Master.

It may be well here to notice that the word "fishers" is the oldest name by which the ministerial office is described in the New Testament. It lies deeper down than the name of bishop, elder or deacon, and "in it," says an old commentator, "is the work of ministers set out—to gain souls to God. They are not to fish merely for a livelihood, much less for honor and applause to themselves, but to win souls to God, and are to bait their hooks and order their nets to this end; which they never will serve if either by general discourses they make the meshes so wide that all will dart through them, or by their wit and learning they make their discourses so fine and curious that few or none of their hearers can understand them. 'Follow me,' said Jesus, 'and I will make you fishers of men.' Here we see our Lord's authority: *I will make you*. Paul may plant and Apollos may water, but God must give the increase. But yet we must order our nets rationally and probably in order to our end, and without that we cannot expect God's blessing."

The fish moves about at liberty in the deep, broad

sea. It does not think that the mysterious lines which it sees silently, slowly creeping near and winding round it constitute a net. It imagines they are some loose things, certain species of seaweed, such as it has often seen before. It has gone round them often and easily, and it will do so again. But they approach persistently, and always from the same side, the side lying between it and the open sea, so that to avoid them the fish must move toward the shore. Getting a nearer view, it descries some new features of danger. These lines are crossed and knotted in a manner all unlike the seaweed threads that streamed so long and straight and loose in the tideway. A secret foreboding of some unknown doom arises; the alarmed captive, having now no farther room to retire, darts wildly seaward, and is caught in the inevitable meshes of the encircling net. After a moment of violent but feeble struggle it is laid still and dumb on the shore.

Here is a picture touchingly, terribly exact of our own state. To whomsoever the gospel comes, it never leaves him. From that moment he never can shake himself loose from its power. It takes fast hold of him, and he never can escape from it. He may appear in outward things just as he appeared before. Men may mark no difference in him. They may be as little aware of a change of condition in him as a man standing on the shore is ignorant of what may be enclosed in a net which is being drawn, but in reality he has become enclosed within the meshes of a net which is dragging him irresistibly along. Whether for good or evil, whether for acquittal or condemnation, he cannot arrest for an instant his progress toward the judgment-seat, to which he is being carried from the first moment

when the offer of salvation in the gospel was made to him.

But, though the net cannot be evaded, it may be changed. And so it is to all believers. Death, in approaching those who have become new creatures in Christ, becomes a new creature too, as the image in a mirror changes with the object that stands before it. This dreaded net becomes like a warm, soft encircling arm pressing a frightened infant closer to a mother's breast.

The phrase "*every kind*" means both good and bad. As the servants who were sent to invite guests to the marriage-supper "gathered together all, as many as they found, both bad and good," so here the net takes fishes of all sorts within its folds. Men of every diversity of moral character, persons of every rank, class, nation and color—and these, one and all, without exception or distinction, are sinners—have the gospel preached to them, and thus are embraced in its comprehension.

How great a difference there may be even among the members of one congregation! They sit side by side, they unite in the same prayers, they hear the same preaching, yet how unlike may they be in the sight of God! He sees the hearts of all, and it is by the heart that he judges. Man may separate between the grossly wicked and the pious—between the thief, the swearer, the drunkard, the Sabbath-breaker, on the one hand, and the man of consistent godly life on the other. But God sees farther than man, and much that is respectable in the eyes of men is not approved by him. Only he who is of a penitent and contrite heart, and rests his hope on his Saviour, and seeks to serve and glorify him, is accepted and approved by God.

But, though we see here a mixture of good and bad—a Ham in the ark, a Judas among the apostles—this mixture is only for a time.

In the verse, “which, when it was full, they drew to shore, and sat down, and *gathered the good into vessels, but cast the bad away,*” we have, as has well been said, the central figure of the parable. A group of fishermen, panting from recent exertion, are sitting on a knoll close by the seaside, with the newly-drawn net lying in a soaking heap at their feet, picking up one by one the fishes that are fit for food and putting them on one side into baskets, and casting the rest away. The men are skillful, experienced and cool; they have no interest in forming an erroneous judgment, and they are not liable to fall into mistakes. The separation between good and bad is deliberate, accurate, inevitable. At the close not one good fish has been cast away, and not a bad one has been admitted into the vessels.

Our Lord offers no explanation of the “vessels” into which the good fish, or faithful Christians, are gathered; nor, indeed, is any needed: what the “barn” was in the parable of the Tares the vessels are here. They are the “many mansions” which the Lord Jesus went to prepare for his people, the “everlasting habitations” into which he promises to receive them, the “city which hath foundations” that Abraham looked for.

“*But cast the bad away.*” An entire freedom from all evil belongs to the idea of the Church, and this idea shall ultimately be realized. Notwithstanding all that mars its purity and defiles its brightness, whatever we see cleaving to it we know to be an alien, disturbing element which is one day to be separated from it. *Then* the sound and

faithful professors of Christ's religion shall be delivered from the presence of the evil disciples by whom their righteous souls have been vexed; *then*, separated from all evil in themselves and around themselves, they shall be, in their finite capacity, holy as God is holy; and *then* the wicked, severed from the good, shall be consigned to their merited doom. They shall be "*cast away*," or "*cast out*"—that is, condemned. In the book of Revelation we read that "*without*"—that is, outside the walls of the heavenly city—"are dogs," *i. e.* unclean persons, sinners; and the expression "*cast out from the presence of God*" imports an amount of suffering, sorrow and ruin which nothing else can adequately embody.

The separation just described shall, as the Saviour tells us, take place at "*the end of the world.*" The end of the world! The infidel and scoffer may smile and sneer at the affirmation of such an event, and yet it is one which will as certainly come to pass as God is seated upon his throne, for the decree is gone forth and cannot be reversed; the day is fixed and cannot be altered. All that pertains to this present world—all its great and magnificent works, all the improvements of ages, all the labors of philosophers, artists, statesmen and agriculturists, all its libraries, castles, palaces, all its proud monuments and towering structures—shall be demolished; all its existing distinctions shall terminate; and all the means of grace which are now available in it will for ever be withdrawn: the Sabbath will no more shine, the Bible will no more open, the sermon will no more sound upon the dull or eager ear; the throne of grace, now so radiant with promise, will be hidden by the falling curtain of an expired dispensation of mercy, and

the proclamation of pardon through the blood of the Lamb will no longer roll its glad accents over a guilty race.

As this parable, one observes, is the last of the seven which have respect to the kingdom of heaven, and the Lord has in successive delineations represented the origin, nature, progress and glory of that kingdom, so it appears, as its position might lead us to suppose, that in this similitude the subject of discourse mainly respects the final completion of the kingdom, which is to be ushered in with a general judgment. Hence the gathering of the Church stands more in the background, and the final separation stands forth as the chief and prominent object. The judgment is the end of the world. It is the close of the mixed condition of things where good men and bad exist together in a state of trial. On the authority of our Redeemer, and in terms so transparent that they afford no room for doubt, we here learn that on the shore to which we are silently, surely moving a separation infallibly exact and irrevocably final will be made between the evil and the good. And what a separation! The nadir is not so distant from the zenith, the east is not so distant from the west, as the saved will be severed and separated from the lost. The wings of love can cross many a stream, the feet of love can wade many a deep, in this dispensation, but *there* a great gulf is fixed, so that he who would come here cannot, and he who would go there cannot go farther.

From the words, "*The angels shall come forth, and sever the wicked from among the just,*" we learn that the gathering into the net which takes place by the agency of *men* shall continue

“Till all the ransomed Church of God
Be saved to sin no more;”

but no longer. The last soul Jesus will ever save having been saved, the last pardon he will give having been given, the last act of grace being done, the last design of God's providence being accomplished, the world's last day having come,—then shall the bright angelic spirits which ever since the first constitution of the Church— with the transactions of which they had much to do— have been hidden, withdrawn from men's sight for so long,—then, at that great epoch of the kingdom, shall these glorious spirits “come forth” from before the throne and presence of God, appointed thereto by the King of the heavenly kingdom, to “*sever the wicked from among the just.*”

God has assigned the angels the work of making the last discrimination. And this appointment defines, in one important respect, the duty of ministers of the gospel. It is not for them to pronounce the destinies and doom of those who are living under the influence of the gospel. It is not for them to bring men before the throne of judgment, but to press them to come to the throne of grace. It is not for them to discriminate in the pulpit between *persons*, but to discriminate surely, clearly and distinctly between characters and principles. It is not for them to mount the tribunal of trial, but to spread the net. It is not for them to pronounce the doom, but to proclaim salvation—to beckon all sorts to the cross, to tell them that now is the accepted time, that none need be lost but those that will, and all may be saved who seek salvation, “without money and without price.”

Most fearful are the words which indicate the course

of justice upon the wicked: "*And shall cast them into the furnace of fire; there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth.*" "It cannot escape the notice of the Bible-reader," says an able writer, "how frequently the element of fire is made to act a part in the punishment of the ungodly. Whether those numerous passages in which this idea is brought out are to be taken literally, so that we are to learn thereby that the wicked, after the resurrection, shall indeed dwell with everlasting burnings, that the living, quenchless flames of material fire shall ever wrap themselves about their guilty yet unconsumable bodies, causing them to gnash their teeth for pain and wail for anguish, is not for us to assert or deny. One thing is certain: that by the use of such language God designs that we should gather the most painful and horrific idea of woe which it is possible for the human mind to conceive, that we should understand by this means the intensity and unbearableness of the doom which will be visited upon the ungodly, and that this punishment shall never end, for all who love not the Lord Jesus Christ shall be cast into hell, 'where their worm dieth not, and their fire is not quenched.'"

How tremendous the thought of the final separation! In this world, as neighbors, friends, parents and children, husbands and wives, brothers and sisters, we dwell together in intimate and endearing fellowship, but the day is coming when we shall be rent asunder. All, all will then be divided into two companies, and *only* two—one never to mingle with, never to see, the other!

"Great day of dread, decision and despair!
At thought of thee each sublunary wish
Lets go its eager grasp and quits the world."

Let it be a settled principle with us never to be satisfied with mere *outward church membership*. We may be inside the net, and yet not be in Christ. The waters of baptism are poured on myriads who are never washed in the water of life. The bread and wine are eaten and drunk by thousands at the Lord's Table who never feed on Christ by faith. Are we converted? Are we among the "good fish"? This is the grand question: it is one which must be answered at last. The net will soon be "drawn to the shore." The true character of every man's religion will be exposed. Let there be no self-deception, no stifling of conscience, no vain and unscriptural hope that things may not, after all, be as they are represented. They *will* be. Nothing can alter the word of God. Duty and interest combine to induce us to adopt the prayer and purpose which the Christian poet so tenderly expresses:

" Christ's blood and righteousness
 Shall be the marriage-dress
 In which I'll stand
 At God's right hand,
 Forgiven,
 And enter rest
 Among the blest
 In heaven.

" Help, Lord, that we may come
 To thy saints' happy home,
 Where a thousand years
 As one day appears,
 Nor go
 Where one day appears
 As a thousand years,
 For woe."

THE * MERCILESS * SERVANT.

“In the course of justice, none of us
Should see salvation: we do pray for mercy,
And that same prayer doth teach us all to render
The deeds of mercy.”

23 *Therefore is the kingdom of heaven likened unto a certain king,*
24 *which would take account of his servants. And when he had begun*
to reckon, one was brought unto him, which owed him ten thousand
25 *talents. But forasmuch as he had not to pay, his lord commanded*
him to be sold, and his wife, and children, and all that he had, and
26 *payment to be made. The servant therefore fell down, and wor-*
shiped him, saying, Lord, have patience with me, and I will pay
27 *thee all. Then the lord of that servant was moved with compassion,*
28 *and loosed him, and forgave him the debt. But the same servant*
went out, and found one of his fellow-servants, which owed him a
hundred pence: and he laid hands on him, and took him by the
29 *throat, saying, Pay me that thou owest. And his fellow-servant*
fell down at his feet, and besought him, saying, Have patience with
30 *me, and I will pay thee all. And he would not: but went and*
31 *cast him into prison, till he should pay the debt. So when his fel-*
low-servants saw what was done, they were very sorry, and came
32 *and told unto their lord all that was done. Then his lord, after*
that he had called him, said unto him, O thou wicked servant, I
33 *forgave thee all that debt, because thou desiredst me: Shouldest not*
thou also have had compassion on thy fellow-servant, even as I had
34 *pity on thee? And his lord was wroth, and delivered him to the*
35 *tormentors, till he should pay all that was due unto him. So like-*
wise shall my heavenly Father do also unto you, if ye from your
hearts forgive not every one his brother their trespasses.

MATT. XVIII. 23-35.

THE MERCILESS SERVANT.

“**A** MIDST so much excellence as we meet with in the gospel,” says Bishop Porteus, “it is not easy to say what is most excellent; but if I were to select any one parable of our Lord’s as more interesting, more affecting, coming more home to the feelings, and pressing closer on the hearts of men than any other of the rest, I think it would be this. Certain it is that in all the characters of excellence, in perspicuity, in brevity, in simplicity, in pathos, in force, it has no equal in any human composition whatever.” The question of Peter to our Lord, “How oft shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him?” (Matt. xviii. 21), originated this parable. The apostle by his question proved that he needed instruction in the great duty of forgiveness, and our Lord deals with him accordingly. It seems to have been a question among Jewish teachers so early as the time of Christ how often one should forgive his neighbor, which at a later period was thus resolved in the Talmud: “If a man commits an offence, he is to be forgiven for the first time; the second and third time he is also to be forgiven; but if he sins a fourth time he is not to be forgiven, according to Amos i. 3; ii. 6; Job xxxiii. 29, 30.” Peter asked Jesus how often he was to forgive his brother, and, feeling that

the gospel was a dispensation of larger grace than the law, he suggested seven times, supposing that thus he did something which was extraordinary, and which sufficiently answered all just demands. Our blessed Lord instantly replied to him in a way which extinguishes all arithmetic, all mechanics, all morality by measure or by weight, and establishes the great principle of action—namely, *love*. In accordance with his language elsewhere, he wished to impress on the mind of his disciple that *as often as an offending brother asked forgiveness*, so often there should be a ready and frank exercise of this spirit. Then, in the parable, he taught him more than this.

Peter was obviously too much taken up with the mere *number of times* in which it was expected that he should forgive his offending brother. In addition to the bare duty of forgiveness, Jesus urges what appears to be the main scope and bearing of the parable—the duty of “*forgiving from THE HEART.*”

It has been suggested—and, as we think, justly—that this parable and that of the Good Samaritan, although historically separate, are logically related, like two branches that spring from one stem: together they express a Christian’s duty to his brother in respect of injuries. Forgiving love is taught in the one; helpful love in the other.

Therefore—i. e. in view of the duty of unlimited forgiveness. The “kingdom of heaven” here refers to God’s dealings with men under the gospel dispensation. In forgiving men their sins, and requiring also in them a like merciful and forgiving spirit, God deals with them as a certain king did with his servants. The divine is in this respect analogous to the human.

There is nothing to forbid our belief that such an occurrence as is described in this parable actually took place ; but were it not a reality, there is no violation of truth, as illustrations from supposed events are of common use and well understood as such.

This is the first of the parables in which God appears in his character of King. The servants spoken of in it were not slaves, the property of their master, for afterward it is assumed that he may sell them, not as an ordinary right, but as the special penalty incurred by an insolvent debtor. In Oriental language all the subjects of the king, even the ministers of state, are called *servants*.

The "*reckoning*" which the king here demands is grounded on a relation of dependence, and so our relation to God is that of servants to a lord, to whom we are responsible for everything he has given us—for life, time, powers of body and of soul, opportunities of action and the word of his grace. This reckoning must not be regarded as representing the final reckoning by our heavenly King with his servants. It is perfectly distinct from such a taking account of his servants as is set forth in the parables of the Talents or the Pounds, in that of the Ten Virgins, the Sheep and the Goats and the Marriage-Supper. The reckoning here must have reference to something *before* the day of probation closes, not when that is past for ever. "To this the King brings us by the setting of our sins before our face, by awakening and alarming our conscience that was asleep before. He takes account with us when he makes us feel that we could not answer him one thing in a thousand. Thus David was summoned before God by the word of Nathan the prophet ; thus the Ninevites

by the preaching of Jonah ; thus the Jews by John the Baptist."

When the king had "*begun* to reckon" he had not to go far before he lighted on one who owed him ten thousand talents.* He did not select the greatest debtor, but the very first that came to his hand, and him he found to be a great defaulter.

How true it is that each of us owes God a vast debt! Every sin we have ever been guilty of has added to the account against us, and when we look back through the course of years to youth and childhood, and consider what we have left undone, as well as what we have done amiss by thought, word and deed—duties omitted, opportunities lost, mercies and chastisements unimproved, to say nothing of more direct guilt on the one hand, nor yet of such sins as we cannot remember on the other—which of us must not own that he indeed owes a debt which he can never repay?

It will be observed that this servant did not come to the king of his own accord, but was "brought unto him." The last thing that a debtor that cannot pay will do is to face his creditor. What a remarkable fact is this! There is, says one, something in sin that makes it skulk and shrink into a nook and court darkness. A man that cannot bear to look you in the face has something within that does not sit comfortably there. "He that doeth truth cometh to the light, that his deeds may be made manifest that they are wrought in God." Thus this conscious debtor would not have come to his creditor of his own free will, because sin dislikes that which reminds it of its turpitude. And if this was

* A vast sum, as a talent equaled twelve hundred and sixteen dollars.

true of this debtor in reference to his creditor, it is no less so of us debtors in reference to our great creditor, God.

What is the character of sin? It keeps the sinner at a distance from God. This is the very first and the most permanent effect that is produced by sin, so that instead of going with our sin to God's mercy to have it all expunged, we keep at a distance from God. And what is the effect of our keeping at a distance from him? That we are treasuring up additional debt and wrath against the day of wrath. Therefore, it is never until we see God, not in the light of a creditor (that is, the natural man's light), but in the light of a Father, that we go to him and say, "Forgive us." Who is it that can pray, "Forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors"? The people who can say, "Our Father which art in heaven." No man ever prayed aright till he prayed as a child before a father; and no man ever confessed his sins aright until he confessed those sins, not as a criminal thrust into the presence of a judge, but as a child seeking shelter in the bosom of a father.

As this servant "*had nothing to pay*," so is it with the sinner. It is not that he is merely short of the whole sum by which he might clear his account with God, but he has *absolutely nothing* which can in the least pass current in such a settlement as God requires in the affairs of his soul. And thus, by his spiritual bankruptcy, he has fallen into the hands of the living God and exposed himself to the whole penalty due to his misdeeds. The command of the lord that the defaulting debtor and his wife and children, and all that he had, should be sold, is very severe, but was in accordance with law and custom. No complaint, indeed, is made by the

servant against the sentence as if it were unjust in principle or excessive in degree.* "This," says Luther, "is the judgment which follows as soon as the law manifests sin; for God has not given his law that he might leave those unpunished who do not keep it. It is not pleasant or friendly, but brings along with it a violent and painful struggle, and gives us to the devil, throws us into hell, and leaves us in the hands of punishment—consequently insists upon our paying the very last farthing." God manifests himself in his law through demands and threatenings pre-eminently as a holy and righteous God.

When the bankrupt servant's wife and children and all were ordered to be sold, there was one resource left, and to this he betook himself. He fell down, according to the Oriental method of doing homage, and "worshiped" his lord. The word "worship" here does not mean divine adoration; it is often used to signify civil homage. In one passage in the Old Testament, indeed, it is used to denote both: "They worshiped both the Lord and the king," meaning that they worshiped the Lord as God, and gave to the king that civil homage which belonged to him. This man therefore fell down, giving all the homage to the ruler that that ruler properly required, and said, "*Have patience with me, and I will pay thee all.*" These words are characteristic of the extreme fear and anguish of the moment, which made him ready to promise impossible things, even

* It is scarcely necessary to say that no inference can be drawn from this sentence that God intends wives to suffer for the delinquencies of their husbands or children for those of their parents. Such an inference is utterly contrary to the analogy of faith. This punishment must be considered as inflicted upon the debtor alone.

mountains of gold, if only he might be delivered from the present danger.

When words of a like kind find utterance from the lips of the sinner, now first convinced of his sin, they show that he has not yet attained to a full insight of his relations with his God—that he has yet to learn that no future obedience can make up for past disobedience, since that future God claims as only his due. It could not, then, even were it perfect—which it will prove far from being—make compensation for the past. We hear in these words the voice of self-righteousness, imagining that if only time were allowed it could make good all the shortcomings of the past. “*Moved with compassion*” for the hopeless misery of his debtor, the king listened to his prayer, and, knowing that, try as he might, he could never pay such a sum as was due, forgave him all. Thus does God forgive sinners. This is the true aspect wherein most characteristically to represent him and our own heart. To make any other representation of him would depict him in an unjust light and otherwise than he is in himself. He is a gracious God and has a fatherly heart. Jesus Christ, his dear Son, has made a full atonement for sin by his blood, and in the gospel forgiveness is offered to all—free, full, present and eternal forgiveness. The conduct of the lord at the first, therefore, as rigidly and strictly adhering to the law, should serve merely to manifest to the heart its guilt, to break and humble it, that to the contrite, penitent and believing there may be granted forgiveness. Let it be noted that the king does more than the servant asks. At the first he brings up the deserved judgment or suffering, then he discharges the debt itself, declares him free. He had sought one benefit; he obtained two.

Our sins are many and great, but grace superabounds. These sins, though so many and so great, God constantly wishes to remit. Let faith here be put in exercise, that we may indeed believe this. And in this faith let us approach God, adoring him with fervent supplication and giving thanks to his name.

Here we are met by the inquiry, "Who is meant by this servant? Is he meant to represent a true child of God or not?" The answer to this question manifestly involves issues of the greatest magnitude. If we adopt the first of these views, we are driven to the conclusion that one who has been brought from darkness to light may again be banished to outer darkness and separated from Christ for ever. If we adopt the last, then the difficulty occurs, "How is it, then, that he is said to be forgiven?" The true solution of this difficulty we take to be this: It was common with our Lord in his parables to address men *upon their own principles*—not according to what they were in fact, but what they were in profession and expectation. For example, "There is joy over one sinner that repenteth, more than over ninety-and-nine just persons *which need no repentance*;" "The *whole* need not a physician, but they that are sick;" "I came not to call *the righteous*, but sinners to repentance." Not that there were any among mankind who were *righteous, whole and needed no repentance*, in fact, but merely in their own account. The *elder son* in the parable in Luke xv. is doubtless intended to represent the scribes and Pharisees, who at that time drew near and murmured at Christ's receiving sinners. And yet this elder son is allowed to be obedient (at least, he is not contradicted in this matter) and to have a large interest in his father's inheritance; not because it was so

in fact, but as reasoning with them on their own principles. Still nearer to the case in hand is the parable addressed to Simon the Pharisee. Our Lord here supposes that Simon was a *little* sinner and a *forgiven* sinner, and yet, in fact, he was neither. No set of men were greater sinners in reality than the Pharisees, and this man gave proof of his being in an impenitent and unforgiven state. But Christ reasoned with him upon his own principles: "You reckon yourself a *little* sinner, and that what few failings you have will doubtless be forgiven you. Well, be it so: this woman is a great sinner, and so accounts herself. I forgave her all her transgressions, and therefore you need not wonder at her conduct; her love to me is greater than yours, even allowing, for argument's sake, that your love is sincere."

Thus, in our parable our Lord solemnly warned all who professed to be the people of God, and who had their expectations of being forgiven by him, without determining whether their professions were sincere or their expectations well founded, that if they forgave not men their trespasses, neither would their heavenly Father forgive them their trespasses. Whether they were sincere or not made no difference as to the argument.

The servant whose case we have considered dealt to one of his fellow-servants a measure very different from that which his master dealt to him. "*He went out.*" This is not without meaning. When is it that we forget our obligation to God and our responsibilities to him? When, like Cain, we go out from God's presence. Where is the place of safety and of holiness, the place of strength and joy? The answer is, In the presence of God. When we let go our sense of a present God we let go one of the main motives to duty.

We are told that this "*fellow-servant*" "*owed*" *the other* "*a hundred pence*"—an amount comparatively small, as is fit between servant and servant, but by its very smallness bringing the cruelty of the creditor out in high relief. In this expression it is implied that we may really be so injured by others as to make them our debtors, but that such offences as we can receive from others, compared with those which we have committed against God, are but as a debt of one hundred pence compared to one of ten thousand talents. The reality of injury is not denied, but its comparative insignificance is strongly intimated.

This servant's behavior to his fellow-servant is a perfect contrast of that of the king to him. He forgets that he has been himself just forgiven an infinitely larger sum than what his fellow-servant owed him, and that his creditor, who had been thus moved with compassion toward him, was a mighty king, whereas his own debtor was a fellow-servant, to whom, from that common tie, he was especially bound. He thinks nothing of all this, but treats his petitioner with the severity which, in his own case, he had so lately deprecated. "*He laid hands on him, and took him by the throat ;*" which sets before us his passionate violence and heartlessness. The vehemence of his demand betrays a mind dead to all delicate feelings ; he enforces his threatenings through unheard-of cruelties.* How are we filled with indignation against this servant !

* Men are apt to demand their debts, especially from their equals or inferiors, with a haughtiness and roughness hard to be borne, and yet the poor debtor is forced by necessity to take it patiently and to be all submission. When a debtor is chargeable with no fault or fraud, but is disabled by mere poverty to satisfy his debts, to use the extremity of the law against such a man is cruel and inhuman.

Had he no gratitude? no sense of his own escape? no feeling of the unbounded kindness he had received? With the words of forgiveness still sounding in his ears, how could he go forth from the very scene of his deliverance and show himself so hard and unforgiving? How was it that even the words of his fellow-servant, "Have patience with me, and I will pay thee all," did not recall the very same words so lately spoken by him out of the depth of his distress, and so compassionately heard? The feeling is a right feeling; it is no more than a just indignation that is stirred within us; and it prepares us to find the sequel of the narrative what it is.

"When his fellow-servants saw what was done, they were sorry." *They* were sorry—their lord was wroth. "The distinction," says an eminent expositor, "is not accidental, nor without its grounds. In man the sense of his own guilt, the deep consciousness that whatever sin he sees come to ripeness in another exists in germ and seed in his own heart; the feeling that all flesh is one, and that the sin of one calls for humiliation from all,—will ever cause sorrow to be the predominant feeling in his heart when the spectacle of moral evil is brought before his eyes; but in God the pure hatred of sin—which is, indeed, his love of holiness at its negative side—finds place."

"*And came and told unto their lord all that was done,*" even as the righteous complain to God and mourn in their prayer over the oppressions that are wrought in their sight. The things which they cannot set right themselves, the wrongs which they are not strong enough to redress themselves, they can at least bring unto him, and he hears their cry. The unmerciful forfeits the respect and love of his fellow-men. "We

must know," says Calvin, "that there will be so many witnesses against us before God as there are men now living with us; for it cannot be but that cruelty shall be displeasing and odious to them, especially when every one fears for himself lest the severity he sees exercised upon another may alight upon his own head."

What can be more stern and awful than the words of the king to the unforgiving servant? "*Then his lord, after that he had called him.*" This shall be done at the last day. The phrase, "*Thou wicked servant,*" is most severe, yet it is richly deserved, for no man is so wicked as he that sins against light, excepting the man that sins against mercy. "*I forgave thee all that debt,*" as soon as, and because, thou "*desiredst me,*" out of free grace, without any desert and worthiness. The unmerciful supplies God with weapons against himself. "*Shouldest not thou also have had compassion on thy fellow-servant, even as I had pity on thee?*" The argument *a fortiori* is here employed: If I forgave you that great debt, *much more* should you have forgiven your fellow-servant the trifle he owed you. God first exercises compassion, and afterward desires and expects it of us. No answer of the merciless servant is recorded. "*And his lord was wroth*"—angry. Before this he was not angry, but now he is. Here is a representation of God's holy and punitive justice. "*And delivered him to the tormentors.*" The pardon is revoked. The king would forgive a debt of ten thousand talents, but he would not forgive that hard-hearted ingratitude. There are tormentors in the world of woe—fellow-sinners and evil angels, instruments of the just yet terrible judg-

ments of God. “*Till he should pay all that was due unto him*”—until with nothing he could pay an immense debt; that is, for evermore. His condition was remediless. “*Till*” does not indicate the time when punishment *will cease*, but the time up to which it will continue. Since man can never pay the slightest portion of the debt he owes to God, the making the payment of *all* the condition of his deliverance from punishment is the strongest possible way of expressing the eternal duration of his punishment.

“The day

Will come, when Virtue from the cloud shall burst
That long obscured her beams—when Sin shall fly
Back to her native hell, there sink eclipsed
In penal darkness, where nor star shall rise,
Nor ever sunshine pierce the impervious gloom.”

The practical lesson of the parable is thus stated: “So likewise shall my heavenly Father do also unto you, if ye from your hearts forgive not every one his brother their trespasses.” What is meant by forgiving a brother? In settling this question, as in the determination of other Christian duties, there must be careful discrimination. There should not, of course, be a little, narrow, grudging forgiveness; it should be large, loving and free. It should not be formal merely, but real—not outward only, but “from the heart.”

But parallel with forgiveness there must be faithfulness. For example, there is no virtue in simply permitting a man to wrong us as often as he chooses—forgiving him and doing nothing more. In the immediately preceding context the Lord has taught that the injured should tell the injurer his fault. Tell him faithfully in secret his sin. If he repent, thou hast gained thy

brother. If he do not listen, tell it in the presence of two or three witnesses. If he is still obdurate, tell it to the Church; and if he refuse to hear the Church, withdraw from his company. Let him and all the world know that you do not make light of his sin. So, likewise, in the parallel passage in Luke xvii. 4—"If thy brother trespass against thee seven times in a day, and seven times in a day turn again to thee, saying, I repent, thou shalt forgive him"—forgiving an offender is made to turn upon the condition that he is sincerely penitent and entreats forgiveness. Again, in some kinds of injury it becomes our duty, for the sake of the community, to aid in bringing the criminal to justice. To bring the discipline of the righteous law upon the criminal is not revenge; to shield him from its stroke is not love. So far from being necessarily inconsistent with forgiveness, such faithfulness in action may be associated with a Christ-like love to the sinner and a thorough forgiveness of his sin so far as it is an injury inflicted on us.

But whilst such considerations and conditions come in to modify forgiveness, be it remembered that they modify not its nature, only its outward form. Nothing is plainer than that God absolutely requires us to forgive one another. By his infinite mercy, his boundless compassion, his free forgiveness, he lays upon us this obligation. This parable is, indeed, a practical comment on that petition in the Lord's Prayer, "Forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors." We learn what infinite stress our Divine Master lays on this duty of forgiveness by the care he takes to enforce it in so many different ways—by this parable, by making it a part of our daily prayers, and by his repeated declarations that

we must expect no mercy from our Master "unless we from our hearts forgive every one his brother their trespasses." To the same purpose are those irresistible words of the apostles Paul and John: "Be ye therefore kind one to another, tender-hearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you;" "We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren. He that loveth not his brother abideth in death." Let the hard-hearted, unrelenting man of the world or the obdurate, unforgiving parent advert to these repeated admonitions, and then let him, if he can, indignantly spurn from him the repenting offender entreating pardon at his feet.

It is therefore a question affecting our own state before God whether we are of a forgiving spirit or not. If we are unwilling to forgive those who have injured us, are we ourselves forgiven? If we can go forth into the world from hearing the gospel message, and, finding there one who has done us wrong, can act or speak or think toward him in an unkind or unmerciful way, is it not sadly plain that the message of the gospel has not reached our hearts, and that God's mercy in Christ Jesus has not really been laid hold of by us?

Alas! how frequently the offence is committed which this parable condemns! In fact, do we not every day see men resenting not only real injuries, but slight and even imaginary offences, with vehemence and passion? Do we not even see congregations and families rent asunder and domestic tranquillity destroyed by the most trivial causes, sometimes on one side, and sometimes on both, refusing to listen to any reasonable overtures of peace, haughtily rejecting all offers of reconciliation, insisting on the highest possible satisfaction

and submission, and carrying these sentiments of implacable rancor with them to the grave? And yet these people call themselves Christians, and expect to be themselves forgiven at the throne of mercy! Let every man of this description remember and most seriously ponder the truth—

“A wrong avenged is doubly perpetrated:
Two sinners stand where lately stood but one.”

❧ THE VINEYARD-LABORERS. ❧

“Fellow-workers are we: hour by hour,
Human tools are shaping Heaven's great schemes,
Till we see no limit to man's power,
And reality outstrips old dreams.
Toil and struggle, therefore, work and weep;
In God's acre ye shall calmly sleep
When the night cometh.”

1 For the kingdom of heaven is like unto a man that is an house-
holder, which went out early in the morning to hire laborers into his
2 vineyard. And when he had agreed with the laborers for a penny a
3 day, he sent them into his vineyard. And he went out about the third
4 hour, and saw others standing idle in the market-place, And said
unto them, Go ye also into the vineyard; and whatsoever is right, I
5 will give you. And they went their way. Again he went out about
6 the sixth and ninth hour, and did likewise. And about the eleventh
hour he went out, and found others standing idle, and saith unto them,
7 Why stand ye here all the day idle? They say unto him, Because no
man hath hired us. He saith unto them, Go ye also into the vine-
8 yard; and whatsoever is right, that shall ye receive. So when even
was come, the lord of the vineyard saith unto his steward, Call the
9 laborers, and give them their hire, beginning from the last unto the
10 first. And when they came that were hired about the eleventh hour,
they received every man a penny. But when the first came, they sup-
11 posed that they should have received more; and they likewise received
every man a penny. And when they had received it, they murmured
12 against the good man of the house, Saying, These last have wrought
but one hour, and thou hast made them equal unto us, which have
13 borne the burden and heat of the day. But he answered one of them,
and said, Friend, I do thee no wrong: didst not thou agree with me
14 for a penny? Take that thine is, and go thy way: I will give unto
15 this last, even as unto thee. Is it not lawful for me to do what I will
16 with mine own? is thine eye evil because I am good? So the last
shall be first, and the first last: for many be called, but few chosen.

MATT. XX. 1-16.

THE VINEYARD-LABORERS.

THE division of the chapters of the Bible is sometimes unfortunate. Here it is peculiarly so, causing, as it has often done, this parable to be explained quite independently of the preceding context, by reference to which only can the right exposition be reached. Nothing is plainer than that the particle *For* and the repetition in verse sixteenth of the saying in the thirtieth verse of the preceding chapter, with *So—i. e.* in this manner—indicate that the parable is joined to the words that go before. The circumstances out of which it sprung are these :

A rich young man, when called upon to sell all that he had and give to the poor for the sake of treasure in heaven, had gone away sorrowful from Jesus. Our Lord's observations on this sad picture of worldliness drew forth from Peter, who probably expressed the feeling which existed in the minds of his fellow-disciples, the question, "Behold, we have forsaken *all*, and followed thee: what shall *we* have therefore?" This question indicated an under-current of feeling within Peter's mind which needed warning and reproof. In the first place, he seemed to put himself and his brethren into a *favorable* comparison with the young ruler who had just left them. It was as much as to say,

“He has gone because he could not give up what he had for thee. But we have forsaken all and followed thee. We have done what he would not, and have shown love to thee as he has not.” It was, in fact, a glorifying of himself and what he had done by an implied condemnation of this young man. But, further, the spirit manifested in the question was specially wrong by the very terms of that question itself: “What shall *we* have *therefore*?” As if by their leaving all and following Christ they had put the latter under obligation to them, instead of receiving unspeakable mercy in being allowed to follow him at all!—as if, in fact, it was to be expected that by their “bearing the burden and heat of the day” they had acquired a special claim for some benefit by so doing, and he was anxious to know what that would be!

First, the Lord answered the question, “*What shall we have?*” As they in deed and in sincerity had forsaken all for Christ’s sake, and desired to know what their reward should be, he does not think it good to withhold the reply, but answers them fully: the reward shall be great—a hundred-fold, with everlasting life. But having thus answered, his discourse takes another turn, as is sufficiently indicated in the words, “*But many that are first shall be last;*” and he will warn them now against giving place too much to that spirit out of which the question proceeded; for there is therein a pluming of themselves upon their own work, an invidious comparison of themselves with others, a certain attempt to bring in God as their debtor. In short, the spirit of the hireling spoke in that question, and it is against this spirit that the parable is directed. It shows us that in rewarding his servants here or hereafter God

acts as a Sovereign to whom it is lawful to do what he will with his own. He is not bound to give according to what his servants think of their claims, but, while doing ample justice to all, he is at liberty to dispense his undeserved gifts according to the counsel of his own will, for which none may call him to account. Instead of murmuring at seeing others preferred to ourselves, we may well wonder at God's goodness to such as we are.

By the *householder* we are to understand God. As a householder transacts with his servants, so will the Lord transact with those who belong to his Church and enter into terms with him. By the phrase "early in the morning" is meant about six o'clock, called by the Romans the first hour. The representation of this householder going out to "hire laborers" affords the picture of a scene which the return of every morning exhibits at the gate of an Eastern city. There the workmen assemble in groups, and masters may be seen going from one to another engaging them for their several occupations. It must frequently happen that there will be a multitude of loiterers, either from the market being overstocked with hands or from numbers being rejected through weakness or want of skill. Morier, during his tour in Persia, resided some time in the city of Hamadan. Every morning he saw, about sunrise, a great multitude of persons assemble in a large open square which was used as a market-place, with their tools in their hands, waiting to be hired. Some of them often remained till late in the day without meeting with an employer, and on asking them, in the very words of this parable, "Why stand ye here all the day idle?" he received the answer here

given, though they had never heard of it: "Because no man hath hired us."

Man's coming into connection with God is from God; the call is of grace, for on this is grounded the salvation of sinners. "The spark of grace which we have to nurse, God by his Spirit kindled in our bosoms; it was his hand on the helm that turned us round, and whether we were first, as some are, driven to Christ by terrors, or, as others are, were sweetly drawn to him by the attraction of his love, any way it was the Lord's doing, Jesus—all praise be to his grace!—being at once the Alpha and Omega of salvation, the Author as well as the Finisher of our faith. A great truth this! It finds fit and glorious expression yonder, where the saints, descending from their heavenly thrones, cast blood-bought crowns at Jesus' feet, and was well put by the simple Christian, who, on being taunted with believing the doctrine of election, replied, 'I know that God chose me, because, unless he had first chosen me, I am sure I never would have chosen him.'" To *hire* indicates a free compact. God calls, and will bestow salvation; the sinner must consent, receive the call. The hiring contains within itself a reward, which is likewise of grace, for God, as Lord of his creatures, is not bound to give any special recompense, but he wishes, through the promise of this, to make men the more ready to accept of his gracious call. Not merely preachers, but all the called, are laborers, and are so named, partly on account of their dependence on God, and partly to intimate that in the attainment of salvation all must proceed upon the dutiful subjection of man to the will of God.

The Church is often represented in Scripture under the symbol of a vineyard. Thus in the eightieth Psalm,

“Thou hast brought a vine out of Egypt, thou hast cast out the heathen, and planted it. Thou preparedst room before it, and didst cause it to take deep root, and it filled the land. The hills were covered with the shadow of it, and the boughs thereof were like the goodly cedars. She sent out her boughs unto the sea, and her branches unto the river.” One reason for this frequent comparison perhaps was that vineyards of old were the most valuable kind of property, and were tended with special care.

The “*penny*” which the householder agreed to give the laborers first hired for a day’s service was the Roman *denarius*, a silver coin in value about seventeen cents. Though this may seem to us a small remuneration, yet it was not so, for the purchasing power of silver was much greater then than now. The wages of the laborers represent the reward which God confers upon his servants, but this must be taken with certain limitations, especially these two: 1, That the reward is partly a thing now begun, and partly something that is completed in heaven; 2, That the value of the reward depends essentially on the disposition of heart with which the workman receives it.

In the East, vineyards, which are generally on the mountain-sides, require a great amount of labor. The steepness of the slopes on which the vine grows best greatly increases the owner’s toil. In many cases the terraces must be supported by strong stone walls, and not only must the manure be carried on men’s shoulders up the steep slope, but in some cases even the soil itself is borne up in the same way and laid upon the bare rocks. In spring they prepare the soil, in summer they prune and tie up the vine-branches, and in autumn

all the joyous labor of the vintage comes on. The householder gives the called their appointed task. Never should it be forgotten that the disciples of Christ are to be working disciples. Men are introduced into the gospel not only to enjoy its fruits, but to work therein. True religion is eminently practical. It is the devotion of the heart and life to God. It is walking in the way of his commandments. It is doing the will of our Father in heaven. There are works of devotion, works of self-denial, works of benevolence and mercy. These works are fully specified in the word of God, and for the discharge of them sufficient grace is provided.

“ If faith produce no works, I see
That faith is not a living tree.
Thus faith and works together grow,
No separate life they e'er can know :
They're soul and body, hand and heart.
What God hath joined let no man part.”

About nine o'clock of the day, “ the third hour,” the householder, finding himself still slack of hands, returns to the market-place and hires others. He does the same at twelve, and the same again at three o'clock, promising the laborers, since they could have no claim to a full day's wages, to pay them whatever was right. By and by the sun sinks low and the shadows lengthen ; another hour, and the chance of an engagement is gone from any who are standing in the market-place. Yet once more, late though it be, the householder returns, and, undertaking to give them also what was right, he hires others, who betake themselves to work, confiding in his justice, perhaps also in his generosity. Even in the Christian Church, where all enjoy the means of

outward fellowship, some come in tender childhood, others in the season of youth, others only in ripened manhood, or even not till declining age, to a living and enlightened fellowship with the Redeemer, when alone they can regard themselves as laborers of the Lord and apprehend the true design of their being. It will be observed that all in the market-place were invited into the vineyard. The invitations of the gospel are addressed to all; all are welcome to embrace them, and if any do not accept them they will never forget it is their own fault, and their own fault alone.

Let us not fail to learn the lessons with which the question is freighted which was addressed to those found in the market-place at the eleventh hour: "Why stand ye here all the day *idle*?" Does not this teach us that all is idleness, however laborious it may be, which is not in some shape or way, directly or indirectly, associated with our own preparation for eternity or with the progress of the kingdom of God upon earth? While we are doing nothing for Christ we are standing idle, however busy we may otherwise be.

"There is," says an eloquent divine, "such a thing as laborious idleness. Busy? So was the shepherd on the Alps mentioned by Dugald Stewart who spent fifteen years of life learning to balance a pole on his chin; and the philosopher sagely remarks, 'How much good, had they been directed to a noble object, this diligence and perseverance would have accomplished!' Busy? So have I seen the miller's wheel, which went round and round, but idly, grinding no corn. Busy? So, in a way, was the Russian who, facing the winter's cold, nor regarding the cost of massive slabs brought at great labor from frozen lake and river, built him an icy

palace, within whose glittering, translucent walls, wrapped in furs and shining in jewels, rank and beauty held their revelry and the bowl and the laugh and the song went round. But with soft breath and other music and opening buds spring returned, and then, before the eyes that had gazed with wonder on the crystal walls of that fairy palace as they gleamed by night with a thousand lights or flashed with the radiance of gems in the bright sunshine, it dissolved, nor left 'a rack behind'—its pleasures 'vanity,' its expense 'vexation of spirit.' Busy? So, in a way, are the children who, when the tide is at the ebb, with merry laughter and rosy cheeks and nimble hands build a castle of the moist sea-sand—the thoughtless urchins, types of lovers of pleasure and of the world, so intent on their work as not to see how the treacherous, silent tide has crept around them, not merely to sap and undermine, and with one rude blow of its billow demolish the work of their hands, but to cut off their retreat to the distant shore and drown their frantic screams and cries for help in the roar of its remorseless waves. From a deathbed, where all he toiled and sinned and sorrowed for is slipping from his grasp, fading from his view, such will his life seem to the busiest worldling; he spends his strength for naught and his labor for that which profiteth not. With an eye that pities because it foresees our miserable doom, God calls us from such busy trifling, from a life of laborious idleness, to a service which is as pleasant as it is profitable, as graceful as it is dutiful, saying, 'Work out your salvation; work while it is called to-day, seeing that the night cometh when no man can work.'

"*Why* stand ye idle?" Is it because you have no work to do? Have you no mind to get enlightened?

Do you know your nature, your origin and end? Are you acquainted with God, the Mediator, the plan of salvation, your obligations, duty and happiness? Have you no heart to get renewed, no soul to be saved? Have you no God to glorify? Have you no fellow-creature to benefit? Why stand ye *here* idle—upon earth, a stage for action, a field intended for labor, a field of battle for fighting against the enemies of your souls? Why stand ye idle—ye rational and immortal creatures who are favored with the light of the gospel, and have, or may have, companions to walk and work with? Why *stand* you idle, as if you meant to work? You say by your very attitude, “I go, sir,” and yet you do not go. Why stand ye *all the day* idle? Is the work required to be done needless and vain? Is it unreasonable and difficult? Is the Master self-appointed and assuming, and one who has no right to your services? Is he false and perfidious, and one who will not reward you for them? or hard and austere, and whom it is difficult to please? Are the wages uncertain or worthless or transitory? Ever since our infancy God has called us, by every sermon we have heard, by every warning and mercy we have received, by good advice and good examples, by good thoughts put into our minds, even the secret influence of his Holy Spirit, so that if we are idle (as too many are to the sixth, the ninth, the eleventh hour), we cannot say we are idle because no man called us; we have not this excuse. If we are idle in what concerns our souls, it is because we do not choose to work.

“So when even was come, the lord of the vineyard saith unto his steward, *Call the laborers, and give them their hire, beginning from the last unto the first.*”

Here begins the second division of the parable, the distribution of the reward and justification of the manner of doing it. God reckons the laborer worthy of his reward. How could his promise fail, since his word is true? In bidding his steward to pay his laborers the same evening, the householder acted consistently with the merciful command of the law, which enjoined concerning the hired servant, "At his day thou shalt give him his hire, neither shall the sun go down upon it, for he is poor, and setteth his heart upon it." Christ is the steward—or the overseer rather—set over all God's house. The whole economy of salvation has been put into his hands, and in this, of course, the distribution of rewards. Mark the order of payment in the parable! The steward, acting under special instructions, called first the men who had entered the vineyard at five o'clock and quitted it at six, and gave each a denarius ("penny") for his hour's work. This order of payment was necessary to give opportunity for the complaint which was about to be made, for had the paying followed the order of the hiring, those first hired would have been off to their homes with their wages, nor have had their envy roused by the generosity which made all alike. Surprised by the munificence of their employer, the men who had labored the shortest time retired toward their homes with delight. Afterward those who had labored one half, and those who had labored three fourths of the day, were called in succession, and each received also a denarius. Last of all came the men who had labored from morning till night. They had been standing near, and had observed that all their fellow-laborers, not excepting even those who had been employed only an hour, received the same

uniform reward, each man "a penny." As this process was going on, they cherished in silence the expectation that when their turn should come they would receive more of the master's money because they had done more of his work. But the steward gave each of these men also a "penny," and no more. Not able to conceal their disappointment, although they were well aware that they had no legal claim for more than they had received, they broke out into murmurs against their employer. Though it was the sum for which they bargained, yet they thought themselves unfairly treated because others, who had not worked nearly so long, received the same. The master, however, would not listen to their complaint. There was no ground for it. Might he not do what he would with his own? Might he not give to whom he pleased? for a whole day's pay for an hour's work was almost a free gift. What was it to them if he chose to show such kindness? Let them take their due and depart. He had kept nothing from them of what was their right, though he had given to others what was far beyond their right. The expression, "*Is thine eye evil?*" is figuratively and proverbially put for, *Art thou envious?* The eye here is put for the person, because the sight of the prosperity of others is the usual incitement to envy. *Because I am good—i. e.* because I have shown kindness to these poor men, who stood waiting for employment almost the whole day, and found none. It will be noticed that God himself ascribes what he gave to the last-called laborers to nothing but his free goodness, thus denying all claim to his favor on the ground of merit. The wretched principle of envy frets and mourns when other men are happy; it finds fault with God in the administration

of his grace and mercy, and it is a dreadful scourge to every one who cherishes it in his heart. God has an undoubted right to confer special favors on whom he pleases. It is lawful for him to do what he will with his own. Shall we complain because others surpass us in gifts and graces? It is still more absurd to complain that men are made our equals.

This spirit of jealous dislike that others should be as favorably regarded as ourselves, because we think that they do not deserve it as well, is, alas! too often met with even among the followers of Jesus. We are all too prone to magnify our day of toil and labor, its burden and its heat, and to overlook the work of others, or at least to consider our own as in many respects much better. We would by no means deny *their* excellence, but we will not put it on a level with our own.

“Take *that thine is*, and go thy way.” “There is here,” says Trench, “a teaching by contraries; it is saying, Since you cannot conceive such a murmuring spirit as that here held up before you, and which you feel to be so sinful and hateful, finding place in the perfected kingdom of God, check betimes its beginnings—all inclinations to look grudgingly at your brethren, who, having in time past grievously departed from God, have now found a place beside yourselves in his kingdom, and are sharers in the same spiritual privileges; or to look down upon and despise those who occupy a less important field of labor, who are called in the providence of God to endure and suffer less than yourselves; check all inclinations to pride yourselves on your own doings, as though they gave you a claim of right upon God, instead of accepting all of the free mercy and undeserved bounty of God, and confess-

ing that you as well as others must be saved entirely by grace."

"So the last shall be first, and the first last: for many be called, but few chosen."

This is not spoken by the householder, but by Christ, and hence does not form a part of the parable, the design of which, as explanatory of this saying, is once again pointed out, with a manifest reference to chapter xix. 30. This saying may be regarded as meaning that many who, like the young ruler, are "first" in outward advantages and in appearances of piety and virtue, should be "last" in the esteem of God; and that the "last," according to human opinion—those who are rejected by such as judge according to outward appearances—shall be "first," or the highest in the divine favor. Or it may be regarded as teaching that many who enter late into the service of God may yet have the first reward, and many who enter early into that service may have the last reward.

This may be fairly illustrated in such a case as this: "Many persons are early called to the knowledge of the truth. They hear the gospel in early years, they cordially embrace it, their hearts come under the divine influence, and quietly and gently they pass through life blameless; not specially distinguished, nor characterized to the extent to which they should be by making sacrifices for the gospel, but still true Christians ripening for glory. Others, again, hear the gospel call at thirty or forty years of age—nay, some at seventy. They joy in the gospel, they embrace it cordially, but they concentrate into the last hours of their life a degree of energy, an amount of vigor, a singleness of eye, a simplicity of purpose, a devotedness of heart, that are

greater, though not longer, than all the efforts and sacrifices of all those that were called before them. Such, for instance, was the case with the apostle Paul. He was called, it may be, at forty years of age, yet he was more abundant in labors than all the apostles. Such was the case with John Newton. He was called into the gospel at a late age, yet that man's life was a life of wonderful vigor. So that when we look at what some of these men have been, we must be astonished at what human energy is capable of when sustained and sanctified by the Holy Spirit of God. Now, then, Paul, called at forty, may have a richer reward than John, called young; and John Newton, called late in life, may have a higher seat in the kingdom of heaven than many who were called in boyhood and walked consistently to the end of their pilgrimage."

A distinguished biblical scholar finds such difficulty in harmonizing these words, "the last shall be first," with the teaching of the parable that all are to be on the same footing, that he would wholly disjoin them from the parable, as having been by accident brought into this connection. But the parable does not teach absolute equality, for when some of the laborers were bitterly displeased at the partial course of the householder, he does not justify himself in his reply, on the ground that all were treated precisely alike, but that, being just to the murmurers, he had the most perfect right to be generous to the others. Besides, what is this "gift" referred to in the words, "*I will give unto this last even as unto thee*"? It is, we believe, *eternal life*, or, in other words, *God himself*. This, rightly understood, therefore, will expose the error of supposing that the parable involves a declaration that all

who are saved will be in absolute equality. *This gift is and will be to each man as he is prepared to receive it.* Eternal life is the portion of those who are found at the evening faithful workmen in God's vineyard. But "if the vision of God constitutes the blessedness of the future world, then they whose spiritual eye is most enlightened will drink in most of his glory." According to the enlargement of the vessel, "it will receive more amply of the divine fullness;" and thus with one reward at last to all, even as it was given to Abraham through faith long ago—"I am thine exceeding great reward"—it shall still happen that "there are first which shall be last, and last first." Some, by the very largeness of the capacity to receive and enjoy, shall be, as it were, before others who started in the race before them, and some who have "borne the burden and heat of the day," though not *less full*, yet according to the measure of their stature shall be as "*the last.*"

"*For many be called, but few chosen.*" If we should understand by these words that many hear the call of the gospel, but few are chosen by God and admitted through regeneration into his family, it would not be possible, as far as we can perceive, to assign to them any proper connection with the lesson of the parable. By the terms in which this sentence is introduced it is clearly intimated that it is the very conclusion and kernel, so to speak, of the doctrine which the parable was intended to convey. In that direction, therefore, we must seek for its meaning. The nature and variety of rewards in the kingdom of grace is the only and prevailing theme of the parable. The word "chosen" is sometimes applied in Scripture to that which is best of its kind, more than ordinarily good. This phrase, whether

used proverbially before Christ's time or not, is in nature and structure proverbial. He either found it a proverb and used it, or he made it a proverb there and then, for such it essentially is. It seems to have been employed by him on more than one occasion, and differently applied at different times. In the present use of it, by taking the term "called" (as we believe it should be taken) as signifying not all to whom the call of the gospel is addressed, but those only who are effectually called—not those who only hear, but those who also obey the call,—taking the term in this sense, which is a sober and scriptural view, we find that there is here not a distinction between saved and lost, but between two classes of the saved. The "called" and the "chosen" are both true disciples of Christ and heirs of eternal life, and yet there is some distinction between them. The general sentiment is this:

Many are called into the kingdom of Christ and enjoy its rewards, but few are chosen to those high positions of trust and usefulness to which are attached the higher rewards of heaven; or to such a spirit of love for the service of Christ as to be wholly free from the narrow prejudices of those who draw their motives of obedience principally from the rewards annexed thereto. "Very many are summoned, and very many obey and come into the vineyard, and are true Christians, but very few are choice, chief and distinguished Christians, who, last in time, shall be from their sacrifices and sufferings greatest and first."

Some obvious practical lessons may be appended to the exposition.

The work to which we are called is like vineyard-work. Its parts are to prepare the ground of our

hearts by penitence, prayer and meditation, uprooting all evil weeds, and seeking to have the good seed both sown in them and watered from above; to tend diligently the plant of grace as it springs up, that it may be fruitful in good works; to fence our hearts in by watchfulness and circumspection, persuading and assisting all others, as far as may be, to do the same. Two things, we must not forget, are necessary to success—the terrestrial labor, which is ours, and the celestial labor, which is God's.

Let none put off the great concern. As soon as they were called, at whatever hour of the day it was, these men went into the vineyard. Some who are continually being called are still putting off obeying the call. They "will obey later in life, not now." This is dangerous work. Your day may come to a close before you are aware. Now is the accepted time. Be it remembered that this parable furnishes no encouragement to rely on a deathbed repentance. The laborers who entered the vineyard at the close of the day *were not called till then*. They had no offer till the eleventh hour, and accepted the very first they received. Besides, the eleventh hour is not the hour of death, but the last period of a short life, and those who are then called labor one hour, or one-twelfth part of life. The case of these eleventh-hour laborers, consequently, affords us no encouragement to put off what concerns our salvation for a year, or a day, or even an hour. One thief on the cross was saved, that none should despair, but only one, that none should presume.

There is encouragement to us here to turn from past idleness to holy duties. There is salvation for the oldest criminal at the latest year of his pilgrimage upon earth.

If a man postpone the thoughts of God and eternity until old age, calculating on this, that is a very different thing, but if at this moment we find him old, with one foot on the brink of the grave and one foot in it, to him there is freely, fully offered instant peace with God, just as truly, as plainly, as it is offered to the youngest man or woman upon earth.

Those in a gospel land who are trifling life away, doing God no service and making no preparation for eternity, cannot say, as did some of the servants in the parable, "No man hath hired us." They have been called again and again, and are called still. Why are they not hired? Is it not because they are unwilling to be? They love not the Master, but prefer Belial; they love not the work, but prefer sin; they love not the wages, but prefer hell. Would they but consent to engage in the Master's service, what would he not give them? He would confer upon them an estate, a crown, a kingdom—yea, a heavenly inheritance, an immortal crown, a kingdom that cannot be moved. He stands ready to make them even sons, heirs—heirs of God, joint-heirs with Christ.

"There shall the good of earth be found at last,
Where dazzling streams and vernal fields expand—
Where Love her crown attains, her trials past,
And, filled with rapture, hails the 'better land.'"

THE * TWO * SONS.

“Repent, return, and live !

He who no penitent disdains

New heavens, new earth can give.

Simple obedience shall restore

Green fields and sunny skies ;

And, hearkening to his voice, bring more

Than Eden to their eyes.”

28 *But what think ye? A certain man had two sons; and he came*
29 *to the first, and said, Son, go work to-day in my vineyard. He an-*
swered and said, I will not: but afterward he repented, and went.
30 *And he came to the second, and said likewise. And he answered and*
31 *said, I go, sir: and went not. Whether of them twain did the will*
of his father? They say unto him, The first. Jesus saith unto
them, Verily I say unto you, That the publicans and the harlots go
32 *into the kingdom of God before you. For John came unto you in the*
way of righteousness, and ye believed him not: but the publicans and
harlots believed him: and ye, when ye had seen it, repented not after-
ward, that ye might believe him.

MATT. XXI. 28-32.

THE TWO SONS.

THE Saviour's parables relate impartially a few circumstances which awaken the moral sense, and then leave the mind to its own conclusions. Our eyes, as we read them, are turned unawares upon our temper and behavior. We make the application for ourselves, where another would not be allowed to make it, and fix the guilt where it is due. The duties of self-examination and amendment are thus most skillfully and agreeably taught, and the divine instructions of our heavenly Teacher become the crucible in which our thoughts and affections may be poured, and from which they must issue refined and purified.

The peculiarity of our Lord's teachings, just stated, comes forward with unusual prominence in the parable now before us. Look at the position he then occupied. The priests and the elders of the people, who were both authorized and bound to take cognizance of all religious pretensions, had asked Jesus, while he taught in the temple, as though he had not given sufficiently clear proof that his mission was from God, "By what authority doest thou these things? And who gave thee this authority?" In answer to these questions, which were so unreasonable, the Saviour asked them, "Whence was the baptism of John? Was it from

heaven or of men?"—a merely human work, or one with divine authority? The answer to this, according to the condition which was stated, would have, at the same time, furnished an answer to their own question. They clearly foresaw that if they should admit the divine character of John's baptism, they would lay themselves open to the charge of gross inconsistency in not having believed him, and in denying the Messiahship of Him whom he heralded. Equally well were they aware that if they should declare John's baptism to have been of men, they would excite the multitude against themselves, inasmuch as the people held the Baptist for a prophet. They were, consequently, in a dilemma, and in the circumstances considered it better to say, "We cannot tell."

This ignorance, however, which they avowed, was not real, but feigned for the occasion. The two possible cases lay open to their discernment, but in their depravity they could not bring themselves to give honor to the generally admitted truth. They uttered the opposite of what they both thought and felt; their internal thoughts and outward conduct were in opposition to each other, which is the essence of hypocrisy. It therefore became necessary for our Lord to rebuke this master-vice of the priests, elders and Pharisees, and to exhibit to them the impurity of their hearts, notwithstanding the high pretensions to zeal and sanctity which they made. Such a rebuke was administered in this parable, and yet it was done in so tender a manner that, whilst those to whom it was directed would feel its power, they still would not be likely to despair of salvation.

Under the image of two sons of one father two great moral divisions of men are described, in one or other

of which might be ranged almost all with whom our blessed Lord came in contact.

Go work. God assigns the sphere of our spiritual action and prescribes the nature of our employment. He calls us to *our salvation-work*. Though it is true that "he worketh in us both to will and to do of his own good pleasure," yet are we to remember that whilst he works *in* us, he also works *by* us. *He* saves us, but he effects our salvation by giving energy and application to our own powers. We are not to sit still or stand idle, but to *work*. The principle of life, light and influence is sovereign in its communication, yet it is a principle of *action*.

God has assigned us *providential work*. It has pleased him to make us the instruments of his goodness. We must "serve our generation according to his will." We must care for the suffering, the poor, the fatherless, orphans, widows, the afflicted and the oppressed—all classes and conditions of men—to promote their bodily comfort, their mental improvement, and especially their spiritual welfare.

The command to *work*, it will be observed, was *affectionate*. Here was nothing harsh or tyrannical. The precept was given with authority, but it is the authority of a parent. He addresses him as his "*Son*," and thus conveys the idea of relationship between them, as well as of community of interest. This endearing address indicates the fatherly affection of God with which he would exhort careless sinners to repentance.

Notice next *the period of labor required*: "Go work *to-day*." The word *to-day* does not imply that God's service is to be of limited duration, but conforms simply

to what actually takes place in human affairs. Nothing is more common than for the head of a family to say to his sons, Go and do such a piece of work *to-day*, and *to-morrow* do so and so. Daytime is working time. Life is the day for religious working. Jesus said, "I must work the works of Him that sent me while it is day: the night cometh, when no man can work." As the day is divided into twelve hours, so life is distributed into different ages—childhood, youth, manhood, middle age, declining years, old age. Each period requires from us different duties or kinds of work. There are in life also different states and conditions—a single, a married state, that of children, parents, servants, masters, the condition of poverty or wealth, of dependence or power. And from these, too, arise various duties. There are also different advantages, opportunities and means for acquiring knowledge and grace and becoming holy and useful, occasioning increased obligations. What a transient period is the day of life! How soon it passes away! How often interrupted and frequently curtailed by sudden and early death! How important that we should improve it, and improve it at once, for the great purpose for which it has been given!

In noticing the reception which the command of the father has, we shall consider separately the cases of the two sons, beginning with that of the second.

"And he answered, and said, I go, sir." This answer he had ready, and it was sound in substance and smooth in form. It was a model answer from a son to his parent: "I go, sir"—without hesitation or complaint. "I am not sure," says one, "that the father was overjoyed at the promptness and politeness of this reply: probably he had received as fair promises from the same

quarter before, and seen them broken. At all events, this young man's fair word was a whited sepulchre ; he did not obey his father. Whether he fell in with trivial companions on his way to the vineyard, and was induced to go with them in another direction, or thought the day too hot and postponed the labor till the morrow, I know not ; but he said, and did not. It was profession without practice. The tender vine-shoots might trail on the ground for him till their fruit-buds were blackened ; he would not put himself to the trouble of tying them up to the stakes, although the food of the family should be imperiled by his neglect."

Among those whom this second son represents are those who have a warmth of natural feeling and a great susceptibility of impression, which make them promising subjects for any stirring and touching appeal. Such persons are easily excited, and both their fears and sympathies will readily answer to a powerful address or a sorrowful narrative. They are not made of that harsh stuff which seems the predominant element in many men's constitutions, but are yielding and malleable, as though the moral artificer might work them without difficulty into what shape he would. There are many who answer this description in every congregation. It cannot but be believed that when the minister puts forth all his earnestness in some appeal to the conscience these persons will accept the deliverance proposed by the gospel, with so much interest do they listen to all that is said. What is done by a faithful sermon is done also by providential dispensations when God addresses them through some affliction. If we visit them when death has entered their households, we find nothing of the harshness and reserve of sullen grief, but all that open-

ness to counsel and all that readiness to own the mercy of the judgment which seem indicative of such a softening of the heart as promises to issue in its genuine conversion. If we treat the chastisement under which they labor as a message from God, and translate it thus into common language, "Son, go work to-day in my vineyard," we meet with no signs of reluctance, but rather with a ready assent that we give the true meaning, and with a frank resolution that God shall not speak in vain. But what do we see as we follow these excited listeners from the place of assembling and these subdued mourners from the scene of affliction? Alas! how soon it is apparent that what is easily roused may be as easily lulled! The men who have been all attention to the preacher, and whom he seemed to have brought completely under command, so that they were ready to follow him whithersoever he would lead, settle back into their listlessness when the stimulant of the sermon is withdrawn; and those whom the fires of calamity appeared to have melted harden rapidly into their old constitution when time has somewhat damped the intenseness of the flame.

Those who are possessed of a good moral character, and trust in it, are represented by the second son. The Pharisees, to whom the parable had an application, were not, as many are accustomed to think, without a certain "righteousness." By warning us that our "righteousness" must exceed theirs the Saviour implies that they had a righteousness of some sort. Their righteousness consisted in strict attention to the letter of God's law and the observance of the outward parts of religion. They abstained from open acts of vice, and practiced strictly such religious duties as were open to man's

notice. They fasted often, they made long prayers, they were strict observers of the Sabbath. They were so punctual in the payment of the temple-dues that they "tithed even mint, rue, and all manner of herbs." They made their offerings regularly at God's altar; they gave much alms.

It is true, indeed, that their righteousness was in many respects deficient; it was external. They made void the moral law by their traditions, teaching that the mere letter of the law was all that men need attend to, without troubling themselves about its spiritual meaning. It was extremely partial. They made a selection among the divine precepts, and while they scrupulously obeyed some—and those chiefly of secondary importance—they systematically violated others, and those of prime importance. It was ostentatious. All they did was "to be seen of men;" an evil motive tainted all their religious and moral duties. Still, they established a high character for being righteous—so much so as to put to shame the lax and careless lives which too many professors of Christianity lead, and the neglect which is so common even of the letter of God's commandments.

The scribes were looked up to by the Jewish people as the teachers of religious and moral duty, and the Pharisees were considered as the class which, in the most exemplary manner, reduced their lessons to practice. The highest idea which a carnal Jew could form of a religious man was a person who in his behavior conformed himself to the teaching of the scribes and to the example of the Pharisees. The first were considered as the best expounders of Scripture, the latter as the most illustrious patterns of holiness. It was a proverb

among the Jews that if but two men were to enter the kingdom of heaven, the one would be a scribe and the other a Pharisee.

Now, in view of all this, what seemed more reasonable to expect than that the scribes and Pharisees would at once fall in with the divinely-appointed plan of salvation? Yet when John came to them *in the way of righteousness*, taught them the right way and showed them how a man can be righteous before God, they scornfully rejected the message and the mercy. As our Lord on a later occasion laid to their charge, "They said, and did not." These Pharisees have still, as to reliance upon works for salvation, their representatives on earth. We find them among those who are passing through life with an unblemished reputation, attentive to all the relative duties, taking generously the lead in efforts to ameliorate the condition of their fellows, and therefore, *apparently*, the most likely to identify themselves with God's people, but who, all the while, have no consciousness of their own sinfulness, and therefore rest on their own works and not on Christ's merits.

Let us consider now the case of the first son: "*He answered and said, I will not, but afterward he repented, and went.*"

The rudeness of this answer, the total absence of any attempt to excuse his disobedience, are both characteristic; he does not take the trouble to say, like those invited guests, "I pray thee have me excused," but flatly refuses to go. It is probable that the husbandman had received a similar answer from the same quarter more than once before. This was not the first unseemly word which the young man had spoken to his father; neither himself nor his wickedness had

grown to maturity in a day. The habit of dishonoring his parents had sprung from a seed of evil in his infancy, and grown with his growth until he and it had reached full stature.

"I will not." No sooner does the son hear the command of his father than he thus answers and walks off, rebellious and insulting. To such a length of rudeness, insolence and presumption does sin sometimes carry men. Many persons, though not prepared to deny the reality of religion, yet *live* as if it were a falsehood or a fable. They scorn being identified with the atheist or infidel, and yet their life practically exhibits atheism or infidelity. They have cast off the shackles and restraints which a sense of their relation to God once imposed. They peremptorily *"refuse Him that speaketh from heaven."* Their language is, "With our tongues will we prevail; our lips are our own; who is Lord over us?"

Who says this? Yonder swearer, who never opens his mouth but to express the abomination of his heart; that drunkard, whose insatiable appetite, like the horse-leech, cries, "Give, give, and never saith, It is enough;" the fornicator, who lives in chambering and wantonness; the man who neglects all the ordinances of religion, who never calls upon the name of God, never hears his word, never honors his Sabbaths. These make no pretence to godliness, embarrass themselves with no formality, wear no disguise, use no hesitation. They openly show the image of their master impressed upon their foreheads. Actions speak louder than words, and nothing less than this is the dreadful language of their lives: "I will run the downward road; I am resolved to perish."

What then? Must it be believed that over all such

spreads a dark and dismal firmament, whose gloom is not broken by the twinkling of a single star of hope? Must it be accepted as a fixed fact that these distant and obstinate wanderers from God cannot, and never *may*, be brought back to him and crowned with his benediction? No! Even this son "afterward repented and went." He came to himself; reflection returned. Looking back, he saw the old man lifting up his hands to Heaven, and then wiping his eyes from tears. He cried, "What have I done? Is he not my father? Has he suffered me to want any proof of tenderness which he could show me? Do I thus requite his kindness and love? What was there unreasonable in the command I rejected? He that will not work should not eat. What is it for a son to work in a father's vineyard? Is it not laboring for himself? Mine is the expectation. I will go." And he *did* go. Nor was he satisfied merely with returning and confessing his offence. He proved his repentance; no sooner was he reclaimed than he was employed.

The same manifestation has often since been repeated. Caviling skeptics, scoffers, the openly profane, have heard and believed the gospel to the salvation of their souls. The chief of sinners have been brought to Christ—Zaccheus the tax-gatherer, the woman who was a sinner, the dying thief, the Corinthian converts, John Bunyan the swearing tinker, and myriads of like character and condition.

"*Whether of them twain did the will of his father? They say unto him, The first.*" The answer to this sharp question is all too easy. The light is stronger than is comfortable for those owl-eyed Pharisees, who were prowling about like night-birds in search of their

prey. They cannot profess inability to solve this question, as they had done that other (ver. 27). They could not but answer, "The first," because, though the other was false and he rude, yet his actions were better than his words, and his latter end than his beginning. And this answer suggests to us a special characteristic in the relationship between God and man. When God commands man, it is not merely such a commandment as that if man fails in his obedience to it he may yet hope to change his Father's purpose in issuing it. It is his *will* equally as his command, and it is at man's peril that this will be neglected. Nothing but misery must follow such neglect. No happiness is there but in submission to it. This view of repentance it is vastly important to observe. When the sinner truly repents before God, his mind is altered regarding this great truth. He had hitherto thought Jehovah very much such an one as himself. He measured the Infinite by his own puny standard. So it was a matter of indifference to him to pay much attention to this or that commandment, as, after all, disobedience to it might not involve so very much. But now he knows better. *God's commandment is his will*, and he now knows that resistance to that will inevitably perils the interests of his soul for ever. His mind is not only changed as to the propriety of his fulfilling a duty imposed on him, but it is also changed so as to receive the conviction that there lies in that commandment such a potency and immutability of will that eternal life or eternal death are, and must be, the alternatives of reception or refusal. The nature of true piety is obedience to the revealed will of God; and this obedience can be compensated by nothing else. The observance of all devout forms and solemnities, the most religious dis-

course, the most sanctimonious appearance, the most thorough and extensive acquaintance with Scripture, without this obedience is only a saying, but no true fear of God.

“*Verily, I say unto you, That the publicans and harlots go into the kingdom of God before you.*” “The publicans and harlots were excommunicated from the Jewish Church: the last word specializes the usual expression, *sinners*. They are represented by the first son. Their earlier relation to the requirements of the law and the prophets was a virtual *no*, which often, in the expression of unbelief, had become an actual *no*. But since the coming of John the Baptist they had repented. The contrast to them is the Sanhedrin. By their hypocritical piety they had exhibited themselves as the obedient ones, yet with a boastful *I will, sir*, and with a contemptuous look upon the disobedient son. But they were the disobedient in relation to the Baptist and the Christ; they would not be influenced even by the example of the publicans’ repentance.”

It should be noted, however, that the words “*go . . . before you*” indicate that the door of hope was not yet shut upon those to whom they were addressed—that they were not yet irreversibly excluded from that kingdom; the others, indeed, had preceded them, but they might still follow if they would.

“*For John came unto you in the way of righteousness*”—taught you the right way, showed you how a man can be righteous before God, and was himself also a pattern of a holy life—“and ye believed him not”—were not made better by his ministry; “but the publicans and harlots believed him,” and were many of them thoroughly reformed; “and ye, when ye had seen it”—had witnessed this wondrous reformation—

still remained obstinate and impenitent. *Their* repentance added greatly to the guilt of the Pharisees, for the very sight of these penitents ought to have convinced them of their own need of repentance.

There is no sin that hardens the heart so much as pride. Let us beware of it. It is Satan's first-born. It possesses the wonderful faculty of occupying the space of any other sin which is cast out of the heart. Most of all, pride dreads the entrance of the Son of God into the heart. Then it knows its reign will be at an end. How it bars and bolts the doors of the heart against the rightful Owner! Even the word of God and good example are not able to overcome it.

And are we to regard the most worthless and despised men as patterns for imitation to the self-righteous and highly-esteemed Pharisees? God forbid that we should ever plead for wickedness or intimate that immorality is preferable to morality! Our Lord intended to establish no such principle by these examples. He does not view these things as they are in their own nature, but as they are frequently found in their accidental relations and consequences. "And is it not undeniable," asks an eminent divine, "that persons possessed of distinguishing privileges and moral endowments are too often filled with pride, wrapped up in self-righteousness, lulled to sleep by carnal security, deeming themselves safe from comparisons with those who are profligate? Are they not too often offended when told that they must be indebted for salvation to grace perfectly free and unmerited, that they must be accepted on the same terms with the most vile, and that, however these things may be in themselves, they afford them no ground of dependence, yield them no claims whereof they may glory

before God? An attempt to couch the eyes of those who say 'We see,' an offer of pardon to the innocent, a communication of alms to the wealthy, would only exasperate and disgust. But would this be the case with the blind, the guilty and the poor? It is comparatively easy to convince the more criminal—how can they deny the charge? to alarm them—how can they deny the danger? Having no armor of defence, they can sooner receive a wound which will make them cry for mercy. Conscious that they have no righteousness of their own, they more readily admit that if saved at all it must be by grace. Having no shelter in which to hide, when they see the storm approaching they willingly flee for refuge to the hope set before them in the gospel."

THE * WICKED * VINE-DRESSERS.

“Jerusalem! alas! alas! of old
Deaf to whate’er prophetic seers foretold,
Assailing all whom Heaven in mercy sent,
And murdering those that warned thee to repent!
Thou, the world’s Saviour who suspendedst high,
His works reviled, and mocked his agony!
How oft hath God, still gracious, striven to bring
Thy devious brood beneath his sheltering wing,
To save thee from the hovering eagle’s power,
And shield the unequaled misery of this hour!
But no! thou wouldst not! Thence this signal fate!
Thence art thou fallen! deserted! desolate!”

33 *Hear another parable: There was a certain householder, which
planted a vineyard, and hedged it round about, and digged a wine-
press in it, and built a tower, and let it out to husbandmen, and
34 went into a far country: And when the time of the fruit drew
near, he sent his servants to the husbandmen, that they might re-
35 ceive the fruits of it. And the husbandmen took his servants, and
36 beat one, and killed another, and stoned another. Again, he sent
other servants more than the first: and they did unto them likewise.
37 But last of all he sent unto them his son, saying, They will rever-
38 ence my son. But when the husbandmen saw the son, they said
among themselves, This is the heir; come, let us kill him, and let
39 us seize on his inheritance. And they caught him, and cast him out
40 of the vineyard, and slew him. When the lord therefore of the
41 vineyard cometh, what will he do unto those husbandmen? They
say unto him, He will miserably destroy those wicked men, and will
let out his vineyard unto other husbandmen, which shall render
42 him the fruits in their seasons. Jesus saith unto them, Did ye
never read in the scriptures, The stone which the builders rejected,
the same is become the head of the corner: this is the Lord's doing,
43 and it is marvelous in our eyes? Therefore say I unto you, The
kingdom of God shall be taken from you, and given to a nation
44 bringing forth the fruits thereof. And whosoever shall fall on
this stone shall be broken: but on whomsoever it shall fall, it will
grind him to powder.*

MATT. XXI. 33-44. See also MARK XII. 1-12;

LUKE XX. 9-18.

THE WICKED VINE-DRESSERS.

THIS parable is found in all the Gospels except that of John, and with very little variation. The statement of Luke that the parable was spoken to the people might seem discrepant with the accounts of Matthew and Mark that it was addressed to the Pharisees, were it not that this evangelist also notes the presence, within hearing, of the chief priests and scribes, which shows that they were listeners also. This parable was spoken either immediately or soon after that of the "Two Sons." Hence the expression, "*Hear another parable.*" The form of this expression implies some stir and excitement among his auditors, which our Lord hushed by calling their attention to another parable. Perhaps the Pharisees were giving indications of their displeasure by rude interruptions or by preparing to leave him in order to plot his death.

In its immediate reference this parable contains, partly as a narrative of the past, partly as a discovery of the future, the history of the Jewish Church. It manifests the riches of divine love and the benefits flowing out of it to the chosen people; portrays an almost inexhaustible patience and long-suffering on the part of God toward the refractory and unthankful sinner; discloses at the same time the wickedness and

hardening of the sinful heart as rising to a fearful height, and finally closes with a threatening of certain and dreadful but most righteous judgments. But, when viewed in a more extended reference, this parable speaks also of the general truths which in Christian countries are continually unfolding themselves, and are reflected anew in the history of individuals and communities. Viewed in either light, the description given of the lord of the vineyard serves to admonish us of the union there is in God's character of merey and holiness, of goodness and righteousness, of patience and indignation.

When a proprietor has determined to appropriate as a vineyard a portion of ground which had previously lain waste or had been employed for some other purpose, his first care is to plant the vines. As some time must necessarily elapse before the young plants begin to bear fruit, he may prosecute the other departments of his undertaking at leisure. In due time he constructs a fence around the field to keep out depredators, whether men or beasts, digs a vat for receiving the juice, and prepares an apparatus above it for squeezing the clusters quickly in the hurry of the vintage, and builds a tower as at once a shelter for the keeper and an elevated standpoint for the watcher by night or day.

The Jewish Church, established by Almighty God, is represented by the vineyard which the man in the parable planted with so much care. The rest of the world was in spiritual darkness, but God chose the Jewish nation to be enlightened by his word and to enjoy religious privileges. Thus this nation occupied, as it were, an enclosed place. While the rest of the world was spiritually in a wild state, the Jews were in a vineyard

carefully prepared for them. Every provision was made for their good, their comfort and their usefulness. God gave them laws and ordinances which fenced them off from other nations and their idolatrous practices, promised them his protection and taught them to serve and please him. They were the husbandmen who were to occupy the vineyard. It was not theirs, but it was let out to them as tenants.

“The time of the fruit”—or, rather, the time for “gathering the fruits”—appears to have been the time commonly appropriated by landlords to receiving the rents. The “servants” sent to receive the fruits of the vineyard were the Jewish prophets. They were sent by God at successive epochs in the history of Israel, beginning with the first and ending with the last, to call for the fruit of the vineyard, and each in turn to make his report to God as to the fertility and the produce of that precious deposit which had been entrusted to the Jews.

This representation marks the attention which God pays to those who are favored with religious advantages. He expects fruit from them. Indeed, he investigates all his creatures to see what is in them. “His eyes are in every place, beholding the evil and the good. His eyes are upon the ways of man, and he pondereth all his goings. There is no darkness nor shadow of death where the workers of iniquity can hide themselves.” God sees how we are carrying on our business, what we are doing with our mercies and our trials; marks the manner in which we are filling up our relations in life; and observes the formation of our principles and the cultivation of our tempers. And remember, he is not, he cannot be, mistaken in his conclusions. We may err in judging ourselves, we may err in judging our fellow-creatures, but

his judgment is always according to truth. We judge after outward appearance and depend on the declaration of others; but he looketh on the heart, and "needeth not that any should testify of man, for he knows what is in man."

When God is represented as expecting fruit from the Jews, or from any of his creatures favored with religious privileges, as a man expects it from his vineyard, there is an intimation of the reasonableness of their obedience; it is what any one would expect who would judge by what is due and reasonable. Every one will admit that the *lord* of the vineyard had a *right* to demand a portion of its fruits, as rent, from the vine-dressers. So God has a *right* to all our obedience and to all our love. To him we owe all we enjoy or ever can enjoy; indeed, the very power of enjoyment comes from him. But how do men behave toward him? In the same manner that these vine-dressers behaved to their lord. They not only refuse to obey God, but are angry with those who reprove their disobedience.

"And the husbandmen took his servants, and beat one, and killed another, and stoned another." Such was the reception met with from the Jews by the extraordinary ambassadors sent from time to time in the owner's name to demand the stipulated tribute—prophets such as Elijah, Elisha, Isaiah, Jeremiah and Ezekiel, men specially commissioned by the Supreme to approach them with reproof and instruction. Some righteous doubtless there always were among them, but as a nation they rebelled against God and rejected and ill-treated his servants.

This persecution is frequently alluded to in Scripture—so frequently as to show that God laid great stress

upon it. Elijah says, "The children of Israel have forsaken thy covenant, thrown down thine altars, and slain thy prophets with the sword." The chief priests "mocked the messengers of God, and misused his prophets." We have another allusion to this very same course of treatment in the Acts of the Apostles in that striking appeal of Stephen's, where he says, "Ye stiff-necked and uncircumcised in heart and ears, ye do always resist the Holy Ghost: as your fathers did, so do ye. Which of the prophets have not your fathers persecuted? And they have slain them which showed before of the coming of the Just One, of whom ye have now been the betrayers and murderers." In Hebrews xi. 35 we have still another reference to the same treatment: "And others had trial of cruel mockings and scourgings, yea, moreover, of bonds and imprisonment: they were stoned, they were sawn asunder, were tempted, were slain with the sword: they wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins, being destitute, afflicted, tormented."

We have thus every portion of Scripture bearing testimony to the fact that the Jews maltreated, persecuted and destroyed the servants that were sent to them. Zedekiah smote the prophet Micah on the cheek and cast him into prison. Pashur, the son of Immer the priest, smote Jeremiah the prophet and put him in the stocks. Zechariah, the son of Jehoiada, testified against the wickedness of the people, and they stoned him with stones, at the commandment of the king, in the court of the house of the Lord. Isaiah was sawn asunder, Jeremiah was stoned to death, Amos was murdered with a club; and if we knew the biography of each of the rest of the prophets we should find that

they suffered in a similar manner. The apostles, at a later period, fared no better.

How often has it been the lot of God's faithful servants to be hated and persecuted by those to whom they brought the message of salvation! This was the lot of most of the first preachers of the cross of Christ—of many of the early Protestant Reformers—of the devoted Puritans, the self-denying Nonconformists, the steadfast Scotch Covenanters, the faithful French Huguenots. It was the lot of Calvin, Wesley, Whitefield and their compeers, as it has been also of many modern missionaries, whose blood has crimsoned the soil of those whom they sought to win to Jesus and point to heaven.

“Again, he sent other servants more than the first: and they did unto them likewise.” The repeated messages sent by the prophets, generation after generation, indicate not only the continued patience, long-suffering and wonderful compassion of God—a compassion not quenched by repulsion—but also the growing wantonness and wickedness of the people, by whom his servants, although sometimes effecting temporary reforms, were almost uniformly rejected and maltreated. Like these vine-dressers, who treated the servants worse and worse, sinners increase in wickedness, for every sin committed and *not* repented of prepares for the commission of a greater. The greatest share of the persecution of Christ's true disciples has, in all ages, fallen upon the ministers of his religion. But it has not checked the wheels of the chariot of salvation, nor will it ever do so. God can, and does, “make the wrath of man to praise him.” Diocletian, the last and the worst of the Roman persecuting emperors, observed that the more he sought

to blot out the name of Christ the more legible it became, and that whatever of Christ he thought to eradicate, it took the deeper root and rose the higher in the hearts and lives of men.

“But last of all he sent unto them his son.” The words as narrated by Mark are still more affecting: “Having yet therefore one son, his well-beloved, he sent him also last unto them, saying, They will reverence my son.” Both the ideas here implied were necessary to represent the love of God to sinners, his solemn earnestness in the demands he makes upon them, and how he leaves nothing untried to secure the accomplishment of his precious designs concerning them.

It is evident from the words “last of all” that the gospel scheme of salvation is the final interposition of God in our favor. It is the last effort of Heaven, the ultimate exertion of divine mercy toward the restoration of man. As Jesus is infinitely superior to all that were before him, so it may well be presumed that none will come after him, and that the message he brings, the redeeming work he has accomplished, seals God’s revelation to the children of men and finishes his intervention in their behalf. Besides, this is the constant language of Scripture: “God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son;” “For if ye believe not that I am *He*, ye shall die in your sins.” This is the reason, too, why the predictions relating to the Messiah refer his coming to the last days. These expressions, “last day,” “the end of the world,” etc., are applied to the age of the gospel, to show that it is the last dispensation God will vouchsafe to mankind. It is the final message of the Almighty.

"He sent unto them his son." After repeated trials by his servants, the great God resolves to make one trial more, and that by his own Son, his only Son, his beloved Son. Him will he send to these rebellious vine-dressers. And he presumes that, bad as they are, they would at least reverence his Son, and count themselves highly honored in having such a messenger sent to them. He might justly have sent his army to destroy them who had murdered his former servants, but instead of this he sends his Son with proposals of peace once more. What the relationship may be between the Father and the Son we know not. The expression "Son," as applied to the Lord Jesus Christ, denotes something altogether different from what it does as applied to an earthly relationship. All that we know is, that the Father is God, that the Son is God, and that the Spirit is God, and yet that God *sent* his only-begotten Son. And what does this teach us? That it is not true that God loves us because Christ died for us, but that Christ died for us because God loved us. The very common idea is, that in dealing with God the Father we have to deal with One who is reluctant to forgive us, and that we can only prevail upon him to forgive us by pressing upon his notice the sufferings of his Son. But that is not the gospel. The gospel is, that Christ is the expression of a love that was, not the creation of a love that was not. The gospel is, that Christ came and died for us, not that God might love us, but because he "*so*" loved us.

"They will reverence my son." As if he should say, "Though they have wickedly abused and slain my servants, surely they will not dare to treat my son in the same manner. Surely, the very sight of him must command awe and reverence. This will also make them

ashamed of their base ingratitude and cruelty to my former messengers." The Greek word signifies *to be flushed with shame* as well as *to reverence*; and so it may be rendered here, "They will be struck with shame at my son"—that is, at "the sight of him."

We are not to infer from this expression that God was ignorant of the manner in which his Son would be treated, or that he really expected men to receive him with reverence, for his sufferings and death were explicitly predicted long before his appearance in the world. But God here speaks after the manner of men. He is merely stating what reception it might have reasonably been expected would be given to his Son, by one who did not know, or who did not consider, the wickedness of the human heart. Such a person, on seeing Christ sent down from heaven to assist men, would have exclaimed, "Surely they will receive him with reverence and affection."

Why was it reasonable to expect that, when our Saviour visited this world, he would be received by mankind with reverential affection? 1. On account of the dignity of his person. The sublimest titles are bestowed upon him both in the Old and the New Testament. He is styled Wonderful, Counselor, The Mighty, the Father of eternal ages, the Prince of Peace, Jehovah our Righteousness, the Only-begotten of the Father, God over all, blessed for ever, Immanuel, Alpha and Omega, the perfect image or character of the invisible God, full of grace and truth, the True, the Righteous, the Holy, the One having the keys of hell and death. 2. Because he was their Creator, the Creator of the world. By him were all things created. For thousands of years he had been constantly showering down temporal blessings upon

mankind. In coming into the world, then, Immanuel came, as the apostle expresses it, "to his own," to the deeply-indebted pensioners of his bounty. 3. On account of the unsullied excellence of Christ's moral character. He was the only perfect Man whom the world has seen since the fall. He exhibited human nature in the highest degree of perfection to which it can be raised. In him goodness and greatness were not only personified, but, if we may so express it, concentrated and condensed. He was light and love clothed with a body. 4. On account of the interesting information he communicated and the excellence of the doctrines which he taught. Even his very enemies were constrained to say, "Never man spake like this man." His instructions were delivered not as mere opinions, not as the deductions of reason, but as infallible truths, as a revelation from God—a revelation attested by numberless miracles, and thus sealed with the broad seal of Heaven. Who, then, would not have expected to see the world flocking around him, and all its philosophers with their disciples sitting, like Mary, at his feet to hear his words? 5. The reasonableness of the expectation that mankind should give the Son of God a welcome reception is mainly evident from the fact that he came into the world to save sinners, to seek and to save those who were lost. Is it not reasonable that the most amazing display of love and mercy should meet with the most affectionate returns of gratitude from the party obliged? Shall the Creator die for his creatures, the Sovereign for his rebellious subjects, the great Lawgiver transfer the penalty of his own law upon himself, in order to remove it from obnoxious criminals—shall he die in extremities of torture and write his love in characters of blood,—oh, shall he do this, and is it

not infinitely reasonable that his creatures, that his rebellious subjects, that obnoxious criminals, should be transported with wonder, joy and gratitude, and that such miracles of love should engross their thoughts, their affections and their conversation?

There is a remarkable account given by Mark which shows the singular point and force of the parable, where it is said of the vine-dressers that they said one to another when the son of the lord of the vineyard came, "*This is the heir; come, let us kill him, that the inheritance may be ours.*" After the raising of Lazarus the evangelist informs us that the "chief priests and Pharisees gathered a council, and said, What do we? for this man doeth many miracles. If we let him thus alone, all men will believe in him: and the Romans will come and take away both our place and nation." The very original of the parabolic picture! "All men will believe on *him.*" Then "the Romans will come and take away *our* place and nation." Thus *our* position will be irretrievably ruined if we suffer this man to escape from us any longer. He will get the heritage if we do not take instant measures to prevent it. "It is therefore expedient *for us* that one man die for the people." "*This is the heir; come, let us kill him, and the inheritance shall be ours.*"

When the Saviour had concluded the parable he declared the punishment the lord would inflict on the vine-dressers: "He shall come and destroy these husbandmen, and shall give the vineyard to others." This prophecy was intended as a warning to the Jews, who had persecuted the prophets and were now plotting the death of the Son of God. Christ's hearers understood that the warning applied to themselves, for they exclaimed, "God forbid!" If they had been as anxious to avoid *sin* as

they were to avoid *suffering* they would have escaped both. What must have been the expression of his countenance when Jesus looked upon those who had answered, "God forbid!" for it is said, "He beheld them"! It must have been a look that seem'd to say, "Your sorrows are nearer than you suppose, and greater than you can bear."

The threatening just mentioned was soon executed. The householder came in his wrath. Jerusalem was destroyed by the Roman armies, and the wicked husbandmen either perished in the siege or were led away into captivity. The sword of the Romans was the sword of the Lord, and their armies were the instruments of his vengeance.

"It is very observable," says a distinguished scholar, "how the successive generations who for so many centuries have been filling up the measure of the iniquity of Israel are considered through the entire parable but as one body of husbandmen; and this because God's truth is everywhere opposed to that shallow nominalism which would make such a word as 'nation' a dead abstraction, a mere convenient help to the understanding. God will deal with nations as indeed *being*, as having a living unity in themselves—as, in fact, *bodies*, and not as being merely convenient mental terms to express certain aggregations of individuals."

"That people, once
So famed, whom God himself vouchsafed to call
His chosen race, and with a guardian hand
Deigned to protect, from Palestine exiled,
Are doomed to wander. Although scattered thus
Through all the globe, there is no clime which they
Can call their own, no country where their laws
Hold sovereign rule. Irrefragable proof

That every oracle of Holy Writ
Was given by Heaven itself."

"Did ye never read in the Scriptures, The stone which the builders rejected, the same is become the head of the corner: this is the Lord's doing, and it is marvelous in our eyes? Therefore say I unto you, The kingdom of God shall be taken from you, and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof. And whosoever shall fall on this stone shall be broken: but on whomsoever it shall fall, it will grind him to powder." Thus our Lord, by a new illustration, pressed the application home to them. The terrestrial fact, as exhibited in the parable, serves to show that the son, who, as we have already seen, points to Christ sent by the Father to his own Israel, was put to death by the rebels in possession of the vineyard; but there its power is exhausted; it has no means of exhibiting the other side of the scene—that this Son rose from the dead and now reigns over all. Jesus, therefore, that he might proclaim the whole truth, and leave his unrepenting hearers without excuse, referred them to a grand text from the Old Testament Scriptures, which shows that he whom the official but false builders rejected and cast down was accepted and raised up by God. The truth contained in this passage is, according to Christ, a prophecy which was to receive its fulfillment in the conduct of the Jewish rulers and of the whole people toward himself; the course and issue of the whole transaction were to become manifest as a purpose of divine wisdom and almighty power; for although the opponents of Christ had no respect but to his destruction, yet still their opposition to him, under the divine government and direction, gave occasion for the foundation of a new covenant of

grace, which should extend its blessings to the Gentiles.

Note the rapid yet harmonious changes of our Lord's illustration of the *stone*. The same *stone* is first a *rejected stone*; then, second, a *head corner-stone*; then, third, a *stumbling-stone*; and, lastly, a *stone falling from above*. Jesus becomes more and more stern as in his prophetic office he approaches the subject of his own kingly judgment. *Shall be broken—grind him to powder*. Two kinds of punishment are here referred to, not two different degrees of the same punishment. In the one the person offending is active (he stumbles and is broken); in the other passive (he is fallen upon and crushed). The one is a punishment only of this life, where alone sinners have the opportunity of stumbling on the Rock of salvation, and consists in all the loss of peace, consolation and blessing, together with all the judicial blindness, bitterness of spirit, hardness of heart and manifold disquietudes of mind, which inevitably blight and desolate the moral condition of those who resist the claims of Messiah. The other punishment belongs to eternity, and consists in the fearful and everlasting retribution which Christ will inflict upon all his adversaries when he takes to himself his power and great glory, consigning them to final perdition in utter darkness.

It is a most precious truth that the Saviour falls on no one as a judgment who has not already by unbelief stumbled at him. And it is an unspeakably solemn truth that, as Luther expresses it, "*all men must come into contact with Christ, whether for benefit or for stumbling.*"

THE * ROYAL * MARRIAGE-FEAST.

“Oft beneath
The saintly veil the votary of sin
May lurk unseen, and to that Eye alone
Which penetrates the inmost heart, revealed.”

2 *The kingdom of heaven is like unto a certain king, which made a*
3 *marriage for his son, And sent forth his servants to call them that*
4 *were bidden to the wedding: and they would not come. Again, he*
5 *sent forth other servants, saying, Tell them which are bidden, Behold,*
6 *I have prepared my dinner: my oxen and my fatlings are killed,*
7 *and all things are ready: come unto the marriage. But they made*
8 *light of it, and went their ways, one to his farm, another to his mer-*
9 *chandise: And the remnant took his servants, and entreated them*
10 *spitefully, and slew them. But when the king heard thereof, he was*
11 *wroth: and he sent forth his armies, and destroyed those murderers,*
12 *and burned up their city. Then saith he to his servants, The wed-*
13 *ding is ready, but they which were bidden were not worthy. Go ye*
14 *therefore into the highways, and as many as ye shall find, bid to the*
15 *marriage. So those servants went out into the highways, and gath-*
16 *ered together all as many as they found, both bad and good: and the*
17 *wedding was furnished with guests.*

18 *And when the king came in to see the guests, he saw there a man*
19 *which had not on a wedding-garment: And he saith unto him,*
20 *Friend, how camest thou in hither not having a wedding-garment?*
21 *And he was speechless. Then said the king to the servants, Bind*
22 *him hand and foot, and take him away, and cast him into outer*
23 *darkness: there shall he weeping and gnashing of teeth. For many*
24 *are called, but few are chosen.*

MATT. XXII. 2-14.

THE ROYAL MARRIAGE-FEAST.

THERE is one circumstance concerning this parable which renders it peculiarly solemn. It is the *last* one recorded that our Lord related in *public*. There are others which he related to his apostles in *private*, but there are no more written in the Bible which were spoken in the presence of the chief priests and the multitude.

In the present parable, as compared with the preceding one, we see how the Lord is revealing himself in ever clearer light as the central person of the kingdom, giving here a far plainer hint than there of the nobility of his descent. There he was indeed the Son, the only and beloved one, of the Householder, but here his race is royal, and he appears as himself at once the King and the King's Son.

Some regard this parable and the one given in Luke (xiv. 16-24) as one and the same, alleging that the latter is only altered from this in some unimportant particulars. But the small resemblance and strong dissimilarity between the two parables render it impossible for us to concur in this opinion. Not only are they different as to time, place and hearers, but also as to scope. That of Luke was delivered by Jesus before the last journey to Jerusalem, at a meal in a private house—

this of Matthew in the temple at Jerusalem, probably on the Tuesday before the crucifixion, and in the presence of the high priests and elders of the people. In that, as the hostility of the Pharisees was not yet so intensely expressed, there was some hope of softening down and winning them to a better state of mind, and therefore all is gentle and persuasive; in this there seems to have been left no hope, and therefore there is a tone of stern and unsparing severity. Our Lord thus adapted his teaching, not his principles, to the circumstances and the persons among whom he was placed. In the first instance the excuses wear an air of plausibility; in the second, no excuse is pleaded, but there is exhibited instead violence, insolence and contempt. In the first instance the deceived excuse-makers were excluded, but in the second the city is burned up with fire and they themselves are utterly destroyed.

And, again: while in the parable recorded by Luke nothing more is threatened than that God would turn from one portion of the Jewish people, from the priests and the Pharisees, and offer the benefits which they counted light of to another part of the same nation, the people that knew not the law, the publicans and harlots, with only a slight intimation of the call of the Gentiles,—in Matthew it is threatened that the kingdom of God shall be taken wholly away from the Jewish people, who had now proved themselves, with very few exceptions, despisers of its privileges, and should be given to the Gentiles.

“The kingdom of heaven is like unto a certain king, which made a marriage for his son, and sent forth his servants to call them that were bidden to the wedding: and they would not come.” There is no figure under

which the ample provision of spiritual blessings which is offered in the gospel is more frequently exhibited than under that of a marriage-feast. The scale of liberality and splendor on which such entertainments are generally made, the multitude of guests who are invited to attend, and the joy that pervades the whole festivities are well calculated to represent the rich store of divine grace which the gospel table has spread; and if the ordinary festivals which crown the nuptial ceremony afford a pleasing view of the exuberant provisions of the gospel, how much higher are our ideas of the inexhaustible riches of grace that are there displayed exalted when the nuptial entertainment is described as being given by a great and powerful monarch at the marriage of his son, the heir to the name and honors of his house? Such a splendid occasion, to grace which we may suppose would put in demand all the varieties of luxury and art which royal wealth could command, and in honor of which the liveliest demonstrations of joy would emanate from every breast, may be regarded as a beautiful and appropriate emblem of that vast variety and plenty of spiritual blessings which the gospel has provided for all people.

The king is represented in the parable as sending forth his servants to call them that were bidden to the wedding. This description perfectly accords with the immemorial practice of the East, where persons giving an entertainment are in the habit of despatching *two different* invitations—one when they resolve on having the banquet, mentioning the day and hour of the expected meeting; and the other sent a little before the assembly of the guests, to announce that all the preparations for the feast are completed. This second invi-

tation is sometimes, with persons of the highest rank, followed by a third, urging on the persons invited the propriety of coming without delay, and providing them with means of conveyance; and in the rare cases where such a special invitation is despatched the messenger is of a more respectable order than those who were charged with the former two. The latter invitations are given in the same form which the parable intimates was observed in ancient times: "Behold, I have prepared my dinner, my oxen and my fatlings are killed, and all things are ready"—the simple manners of the East having established the custom of mentioning the principal articles of which an entertainment is to consist.

This "marriage-supper" contains enough for all sinners, all needful spiritual blessings both for time and for eternity—mercy for the pardon of all sin, grace for the renewal and sanctification of the soul, the assurance of God's love, peace of conscience, joy in the Holy Ghost, increase of grace, perseverance therein to the end, a sure title to the kingdom of heaven, and meetness for the everlasting enjoyment of its glory and blessedness. The blessings which it provides are inestimable, having been purchased with the infinitely precious blood of the Bridegroom himself.

These blessings are also free, for all sinners throughout the world who enjoy the privilege of a preached gospel are invited to come: "Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters, and he that hath no money, come ye, buy, and eat, yea, come, buy wine and milk without money and without price;" "And the Spirit and the bride say, Come. And let him that heareth say, Come. And let him that is athirst come. And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely."

The "servants" whom "the King" sent forth first were the apostles and the seventy disciples; these were commissioned to invite those who had been already bidden to this marriage-supper—namely, the Jews in the time of our Lord, who had previously been offered the provisions of this feast by the prophecies and calls of the Old Testament Scriptures, by John the Baptist, and even by the Bridegroom himself. This peculiarity of the invitation is important in connection with the severity of the punishment which was subsequently inflicted on the recusants. They did not repudiate the invitation when it was first addressed to them. By retaining it, and enjoying the advantage of being accounted the king's guests during the interval, they pledged themselves to attend the marriage-festival and honor their sovereign by their presence. Their abrupt refusal after all was ready to receive them partook of the nature both of breach of engagement and disloyalty.

"*They would not come.*" This, as already hinted, was not through any want of knowledge of the feast or of the invitation, but the bad state of their minds kept them back; it was just as if they did not hear the call. These favored but unthankful people were not taken at their word; after the first refusal another and more urgent invitation was sent. The reiterated mission of the servants to the class who were originally invited may be understood to point to the ministry of the Lord and the Seventy until the time of the crucifixion, and the second mission of the apostles after the Pentecost and under the ministration of the Spirit.

"*All things are ready: come unto the marriage.*" Such is the language of a benignant God to a perishing world, not in that age only, but in every age and

in our own. Every urgent appeal of the ministers of Christ to their charges, every new proclamation "of the goodness and severity of God," every exhortation that, sinners themselves, they yet feel constrained to make to fellow-sinners,—all alike are reiterated utterances of the one perpetual invitation of the Lord of this everlasting festival, eager to crowd his banquet with happy and rejoicing guests. From his omnipotent throne he prays men to hear and to believe. He forces not their obedience; he beseeches them to obey. It is the mystery of the parable that God is suppliant to his creatures. He who agonized beneath created hands still in the perpetuated spirit of that miraculous love, as it were, protracts his own humiliation, and beseeches the beings he has made to make him happy by making themselves blessed.

He could compel, but he *will* not, for he understands his own glory. It is his highest glory to conciliate Divine Omnipotence with the unimpaired freedom of man, that "his people" should be "*willing* in the day of his *power*." The orbs of heaven, "the moon and the stars which he hath ordained," revolve in obedience to a command they know not. But he would be obeyed by the nobler attractions of the heart, the willing service, in which love is the all-sufficing law that preserves the spirits of his blessed ones revolving in changeless harmony around the divine centre of their regenerate life.

At all seasons and in all forms goes forth the incessant proclamation of a God who still waiteth to be gracious, the invitation of the ever-merciful King to the whole multitude of his subjects. In sacraments he solemnly delivers it, in exhortations he renews and

unfolds it, and in all the dispensations of his high providence, by blessings and by chastisements, by pressing contrasts, he emphatically enforces its need.

It is seldom that invitations to a royal feast are rejected, but, alas! the Jews rejected the invitation of the gospel: "*they made light of it.*" This implies more than when it was previously said, "they would not come." They were not now, as then, simply indifferent; they were scorers. The heart turns itself away from the gospel with the manifestation of a stronger dislike if it has been repeatedly treated with the offer of salvation in vain. The representation that these scornful guests "went their ways, one to his farm, another to his merchandise," is very significant and suggestive. The first went to his estate: he was a landholder, who went to enjoy what he had possessed by inheritance. The second went to his merchandise: he was a merchant, who went to add to his capital and gain what he had not yet reached.

These two are, in fact, the two great divisions of the men of this world—those that have and are full; those that have not, but hope and toil to have. The one is full, and feels not his need of a feast which has no attraction for his carnal and sensual appetite. The other is empty, but fancies that the supply must come from the broken cisterns of earth. On these grounds they are absorbed in the world; they cannot appreciate the gospel; they make light of the invitation, and perish ignorant of it.

They went their ways to the ordinary avocations of life. "The excessive devotion to business," it has well been said, "which occupies some men, and leaves not a shred either of their hearts or lives for Christ, may

be in many cases not a primary affection, but the secondary result of another and deeper passion. When Christ has often knocked at the door, and the inhabiting soul within has often refused to open, there is no longer peace in the dwelling which has been barred against its Lord. He who has rejected the merciful offers of a merciful God does not afterward sit at ease; every sound that in moments of solitude falls upon his ear seems the footstep of an angry God returning to inflict deserved punishment. When one has distinctly heard the Saviour's call, and deliberately refused to comply with it, he thenceforth experiences a craving for company and employment. He cannot endure silence or solitude. When he stands still he seems to hear the throbbings of his own conscience, terrible as the ticking of the clock in the chamber of death. To be alone is unendurable, because it is to be with God. To escape from this fiery furnace he hastens to plough in his field or sell in his shop. In such a case the worldliness, even when it runs to the greatest excess, is not the primary passion, but a secondary refuge—the trees of the garden among which the fallen would fain hide from the Lord God."

Behind and beyond the two classes already noticed, who seem glued to the earth and utterly lost in its supposed enjoyments, there looms into view another class, who reject the invitation on totally different grounds. "And the remnant took his servants, and entreated them spitefully, and slew them." The oppositions to the gospel are not merely natural; they are also devilish. There are other evils in man's heart besides the worldliness of it which are stirred up by the word of the truth. It wounds men's pride, it affronts their self-righteousness,

and they visit on the bringers of it the hate they bear to itself. Three forms of outrage are enumerated here: they "*took,*" or laid violent hands on "*his servants;*" they "*entreated them spitefully;*" and they "*slew them.*" How this description was realized to the very letter, the Acts of the Apostles gives large testimony. Throughout that record of the early Church we read not only of the continued and general resistance of the Jews against the truth, their constant "*contradicting and blaspheming,*" but of their determination to extirpate the very name of Christ from the earth. Stephen and James were only the first of a large "*army of martyrs*" who sealed with their blood the testimony they bore to Christ, being "*entreated spitefully and slain.*"

The king's being "*wroth,* and sending forth his armies and destroying those murderers, and burning up their city," expresses God's indignation at the obstinate unbelief and cruel outrages of the Jews in opposing and murdering his servants, who came to bring the last dispensation of his mercy to them, and his stirring up the Romans at length to make war against them. In the unerring righteousness of his providence he sent the armies of that people under Vespasian and Titus—which were in truth his armies, inasmuch as he employed them as the instruments of his vengeance—to besiege Jerusalem, destroy the city and slaughter an immense number of the inhabitants. This issue had been foretold by Christ before his death, and the prediction was literally and awfully accomplished.

Let it be well remembered that as hearers of the gospel have the same God still to deal with, so he will in like manner punish all the despisers of his well-beloved Son and all the implacable enemies of his faithful servants.

He will one day execute a just vengeance on them and consume them with unquenchable fire. "How shall we escape if we neglect so great salvation?" "The Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels, in flaming fire, taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ, who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power; when he shall come to be glorified in his saints, and to be admired in all them that believe (because our testimony among you was believed) in that day."

"Then said he 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. So those 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." It may be thought, perhaps, at the first view, that our Lord has here introduced a circumstance not very natural or probable. It may be imagined that at a magnificent royal entertainment, if any of the guests happened to fail in their attendance a great king would never think of supplying their places by sending his servants into the highways to collect together all the travelers and strangers they could meet with, and make them sit down at the marriage-feast. But, strange as this may seem, there is something that approaches very near to it in the customs of the Eastern nations even in modern times; for a traveler of great credit and reputation, Dr. Pococke, informs us that an Arab prince will often dine in the street before his door, and call to all that pass, even to beggars, in the name of God, and they

come and sit down to table; and when they have done they retire with the usual form of returning thanks. This part of the parable alludes to the calling in of the Gentiles to the privileges of the gospel after they had been rejected by the Jews. This was first done by Peter in the instance of Cornelius, and afterward extended to the Gentiles at large by him and the other apostles. In the gracious invitation no exceptions, no distinctions, were to be made. The servants gathered together *all* as many as they found, both *bad* and *good*—the manifestly wicked, whom all considered as reprobates, and those who had led an externally honorable life. Men of all characters and descriptions were to have the offers of mercy and salvation made to them, even the very worst of sinners.

“*And the wedding was furnished with guests.*” Although many had slighted the gracious designs of God, there was yet no want of such as with the greatest joy and readiness appropriated this grace, so that the table was filled.

The parable, which thus far represents the replenishing of the visible Church with professing believers, now points out the vast difference that subsists between nominal and real believers.

The king entered his feast-chamber to see the guests—that is, to give a hospitable and gracious welcome to such as had come duly attired. Among these, however, there was one who in a very essential point differed from the rest: “*he had not on the wedding-garment.*” He was not clothed in such a manner as the occasion required and custom prescribed; he was in fact an intruder, disgraced the entertainment by his presence, and had no business there.

It may perhaps be objected that this man could not have made his appearance otherwise than he did; that he was called out of the highway into the feast; that he could not reasonably be expected to carry with him a wedding-garment on the road; and consequently that it would be unjust to blame him for what he had no power to prevent or remedy. But this objection may be easily removed by adverting to a circumstance which, though not mentioned in the parable, is clearly implied in it. In those times and countries at great entertainments the master of the feast would sometimes furnish his guests with apparel suited to the occasion. We must conclude that this was done on the present occasion. The man who came to the feast without a wedding-garment had been *offered* one. But this offer he seems to have rejected. He perhaps undervalued the honor conferred on him in being asked to the feast; he had low conceptions of the dignity and majesty of the king who had invited him; so long as he obtained admission to the entertainment he cared little whether his appearance was such as in fact it ought to have been; or perhaps he was too proud to be seen in clothes which did not belong to him; or possibly he thought his own sufficiently good for the occasion, and it may be even better than those which were offered to him. It is not improbable that, while greatly inferior in quality and value, they might bear some little resemblance to them in form and color, for we do not find that his fellow-guests observed the difference between his garment and theirs. However, when the king came in to see the guests he instantly perceived the difference. His eye, glancing over the numerous visitors assembled, at once detected the offender and brought his offence to light.

The spiritual side which is here represented it is not difficult to perceive. Numbers call themselves the disciples of Christ, and outwardly embrace his religion. But, as Paul tells us was the case with the Jews, "they were not all Israel which are of Israel," so it is in the Christian Church: they are not all true Christians who profess to be so. Not all who appear desirous of sharing the feast have on the wedding-garment. The parable, indeed, describes but *one* offender among all the company assembled. In this respect, however, we are not to consider it as intending to convey an exact representation of the truth. The reason why only one is mentioned in the parable may perhaps be this: not to denote that the characters of the kind described are *few* in number and rarely to be found, but to intimate that though they should be few they will not, on that account, escape detection. Though there should be only *one* professor in the whole Church of Christ who has not on a wedding-garment, yet *that one* will surely be discovered by the piercing eye of God, which penetrates through every covering and sees distinctly every heart. One thief in the whole camp of Israel was not concealed from God, nor was one righteous man in Sodom overlooked by him. Let no one think, then, that he shall escape detection because he may stand single in iniquity. As numbers cannot protect, so neither can they hide him. Be he the only one among all the guests that has not on a wedding-garment, the Lord now surely marks him, and will eventually expose him.

What, then, is the wedding-garment of which this man was destitute? It is the robe of Christ's righteousness, implying a state of reconciliation and acceptance—that state, in short, in which the true believer is, as distin-

guished from the nominal Christian. It was in this robe that all the Old Testament saints were attired, for the Lord Jesus alone was their righteousness and their strength; and this was their song: "I will greatly rejoice in the Lord, my soul shall be joyful in my God, for he hath clothed me with the garments of salvation, he hath covered me with the robe of righteousness, as a bridegroom decketh himself with ornaments, and as a bride adorneth herself with jewels." Neither had the New Testament saints any other, as the apostle Paul declares with respect to himself and all genuine believers in his time: "What things soever were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ; yea, doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, that I may win him, and be found in him, not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ—the righteousness which is of God by faith." This is indeed the fine linen, clean and white, which constitutes the righteousness of saints, and without which we are still in a state of condemnation and lying under the wrath and curse of God.

It is not said of this man, be it observed, that he had no clothing upon him at all, but the simple fact asserted regarding him is that he had not on the wedding-garment. And so those, and those only, who put on the Lord Jesus Christ by faith, who lay hold on his righteousness and finished work,—they only have on the wedding-garment which God has provided. Whatever other righteousness we may have, or think we have, if we have not the righteousness of Immanuel, "above all and covering all, the Lord will abhor and disown us for our filthiness."

“This man,” says Trench, “lacked righteousness, both in its root of faith and flower of charity. He had not, according to the pregnant image of Paul, here peculiarly appropriate, ‘put on Christ;’ in which putting on of Christ both faith and charity are included—faith as the power putting on, charity or holiness as the thing put on. By faith we recognize a righteousness out of and above us, and which is yet akin to us, and wherewith our spirits can be clothed; which righteousness is in Christ, who is the Lord our Righteousness. And this righteousness, by the appropriative and assimilative power of faith, we also make ours; we are clothed upon with it, so that it becomes, according to that singularly expressive term, our *habit*. The righteousness imputed has become also a righteousness infused, and is in us charity or holiness, or, more accurately still, constitutes the complex of all Christian graces as they abide in the man and show themselves in his life.”

Unsuspected by his companions at the feast, the unworthy guest was doubtless promising to himself much enjoyment, when his hopes suddenly experienced the most bitter disappointment. He was awakened from his presumptuous security by a question of a kind and from a quarter which he did not expect. How, as one who had ventured, contrary to all rule and custom, to thrust himself into such an honorable position, must he have been startled by the inquiry from such a source, “Friend, how camest thou in hither not having a wedding-garment?” A follower of mine, how is it that thou hast thought to bring the defilements of the world, the “garment spotted with the flesh,” into this home of holiness? A servant of mine, where is the livery of service? A soldier of mine, where is the uniform of

the mystical warfare? Called to be a king, a sharer of the very throne of Christ, where are thy royal robes?

Mark the peculiarities of the investigation! It was *public*, before all the guests. So shall it be on the day of judgment, when hypocrites of every class will be summoned to account for their intrusion into gospel ordinances and for their usurpation of gospel privileges. Their guilt shall be exposed in the presence of an assembled world. The investigation was *reasonable*. It gave the man an opportunity to explain and account for his conduct. "*How* comest thou in hither?" So will it be at the last reckoning. A righteous God will thus interrogate every one who has received his grace in vain: "How camest thou to sit down at my feasts, when thou knewest well that thy heart was wholly unhumbled and unsanctified? How didst thou venture to sit as my people sit before me, when thy heart still swarmed and swelled with its lusts, when the world and its pursuits and profits engrossed thy thoughts and affections? How couldst thou pretend to call thyself a Christian, when thou wert secretly depending on thine own righteousness instead of on the righteousness which I had wrought out for thee? How couldst thou dare to claim an interest in the privileges and happiness of my people, when in thine heart thou retainedst iniquity and secretly lovedst the wages of unrighteousness?" The investigation was *personal*: "How camest *thou* in hither?" Many a man says, "Well, if I am unfit to be a church-member, there are a great many others who are in the same condemnation." What is that to *him*? He should see to *himself*. When the king came in to see the guests he did not say to the guilty individual, "How

came yonder persons here without the wedding-garment?" His dealings were personal with him alone: "How camest thou in hither, not having a wedding-garment?" Professor, look to thyself, look to thyself! Cast out the beam from thine own eye, and then shalt thou see clearly to cast out the mote that is in thy brother's eye. The investigation was *overwhelming*. The man was "speechless;" he had nothing to say in palliation or justification. In the presence of the king he stood mute, dumb and downcast, being convicted and condemned in his own conscience. He *might* have had on a wedding-garment if he had not willfully rejected it, for had not this been the case he would have had something to urge in his behalf. He *might*, and doubtless *would* if he could, have pleaded the impossibility of obtaining a suitable garment for the occasion. But he knew that such a plea would be of no avail. He knew that pride and obstinacy and a criminal disrespect for the king had been the secret causes of his not appearing in the dress required. Hence his mouth was stopped; he stood self-condemned. So will it be with all who live in the Church of Christ, and yet live and die without a saving interest in him; they will be speechless, they will not have one word to say for themselves in the judgment of the great day. They will not dare to address to the visible God those easy apologies for worldliness on which they were willing of old to venture their salvation. They will not dare to avow to God in person those excuses for sin which are themselves a worse sin than that which they are brought to justify, for the sin may be of sudden passion, but the excuse is of deliberate corruption. As it was the king's word which struck the intruder

speechless, so will it be the light of God shining around and shining in upon the sinner which will at the last day reveal to him all the hidden things of his heart. The vastness of the loss, the hopelessness of the doom, the infatuation of the delusion,—all will burst upon him, and, his heart withered within, he will be “speechless.”

Silent, silent he shall be when God shall thus appeal to him: “How camest thou in hither, thus unprepared, thus spurning my majesty and caring not for fitness for my presence? True, thou wert by nature carnal and unholy, and by practice thou hadst corrupted and hardened thy heart; but did I not offer to change and renew thy nature and to soften and purify thy heart? When didst thou ever earnestly pray to me to deliver thee from thy sins, and to put my fear within thee, and to sanctify thee wholly by my grace? Didst thou foolishly suppose that I could be imposed upon by outward appearances? Didst thou wickedly imagine that I would not resent or punish the iniquity of those who draw near to me with their lips, while their hearts are far from me? Do not I search the heart? Do not I require truth in the inward parts? Answer me now if thou art able, and offer some excuse for thy guilt.” These searching questions the sinner will not be able to endure. He will be speechless; guilt, conscious guilt, will palsy his tongue. Detected, exposed and confounded, he will have nothing to say.

“Then said the king to the servants, Bind him hand and foot, and take him away, and cast him into outer darkness; there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.” The ministering attendants here, who are different both in name and office from the servants who

invited and brought in the guests, can be no other than the angels, who "shall gather out of his kingdom all things that offend, and them that do iniquity." "*Bind him hand and foot,*" to show him that the night is come in which no man can work, that for him all opportunity of doing better is gone by; as well as to show the helplessness to which in a moment every proud sinner against God is reduced—the *hands* by the aid of which resistance, the *feet* by whose help escape, might have been meditated, being alike deprived of all power and motion. "*And take him away*"—away from a palace to a prison, from a feast to wretchedness, from angels to devils, from heaven to hell. Take him away from the King "in whose presence is fullness of joy, and at whose right hand are pleasures for evermore;" away from the King's Son, who has said, "Father, I will that they also whom thou hast given me be with me where I am, that they may behold my glory which thou hast given me;" away from the company of the redeemed, who "shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more; neither shall the sun light on them, nor any heat. For the Lamb who is in the midst of the throne shall feed them, and shall lead them unto living fountains of waters: and God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes." "*And cast him into outer darkness.*" Of this and the remaining portion of the fearful sentence Mr. Spurgeon gives the following solemn explanation and application: "'Cast him,' fling him like a useless, worthless thing. That wretch has dared pollute my marriage-feast; cast him away, as men fling weeds over the garden-wall or shake off vipers into the fire. There is none in heaven or earth thought more despicable, more fit to be thrown away

as rubbish and offal, than a man who had a Christian name, but had not the essentials of the Christian's nature. Cast him away. Where? 'Into outer darkness,' far from the banquet-hall where torches flame and lamps are bright; drive him out into the cold, chilly midnight air. He has once seen the light; it will be all the darker now for him when he is driven into the dark. There is no darkness so dark as the darkness of the man who once saw light. Cast him into the outer darkness. What will he do there? We are not told what would be done to him—it was not needful; we learn elsewhere as much as could be revealed to us—but we are told what he did, for 'there shall be weeping,'—not the gush of tears which gives relief, but the everlasting dropping of scalding tears which create fresh sorrow and enlarge their own source. The outcast shed no tears of regret but of sullen disappointment because he could not, after all, dishonor the king, and had even served to illustrate the royal justice and power, and so had brought glory to the king whom he hated in soul. Then came the 'gnashing of teeth,' caused by wrath and envy because he could do no more mischief. No sorrow is equal to that of a malicious spirit that, having attempted a daring deed of atrocious wickedness, has been defeated and has contributed to the triumph of the good and excellent. The misery of hell is not a misery which God arbitrarily creates; it is the necessary result of sin; it is sin itself come to ripeness. Here you see the picture of the man who was insolent enough to come into the Church without being a Christian, and now for ever he gnashes his teeth against the glorious Majesty of heaven which it will never be in his power to injure, but which

it will always be in his heart to hate ; and this will be his hell—that he hates God ; this his darkness—that he cannot see beauty in God ; and this the outerness of the darkness—that he cannot enter into God’s will. ‘Depart, ye cursed!’ is only love repelling that which is not lovely ; it is only justice giving to man what his fallen nature craved after. ‘Get away from me ! Ye did not honor me ; when ye did come to me it was with your lips only. Go where your hearts were ; depart from me, ye cursed !’ Oh, may God grant that not one here may come under the lash of this terrible parable, but may we be found of the Lord in peace in the day of his appearing !”

The proverbial saying, “For many are called, but few are chosen,” which refers back to those who first rejected the invitation to the feast, as well as to the expulsion of the guest who had not on the wedding-garment, has here a slight difference of application from that which it has in Matt. xx. 16, where it seems to refer to the grades of dignity to which Christ appoints his followers. Here the scope of the parable gives it this sense : Many are invited to the blessings and privileges of the gospel feast, but comparatively few are real participants of the grace of God. This saying is a warning given by our compassionate Saviour not to “make light” of the call to the heavenly banquet, the marriage-supper of the Lamb. How important that this warning be heeded ! We are sitting down at the gospel feast on earth, and perhaps bear the name of Christian. Oh, let us see that we have the wedding-garment ! The King has not yet come in to see the guests, the great day of reckoning has not yet arrived. Yet he does see us all continually. What robe does he

see on us? The white robe or the filthy garments? Have you any doubt? Oh, set that doubt at rest. Go to the gracious Saviour, go while yet you may, go just as you are, and ask him to wash you clean and to clothe you in white. Pray for a new heart, for the gift of the Holy Spirit. Ask for all that is meant by the wedding-garment. Ask in faith. The wedding-garment of old was free; the wedding-garment of the soul is free too. "Ask, and it shall be given you."

THE * TEN * VIRGINS.

“Lift up your heads, ye everlasting gates!
The King of glory comes! He comes to clothe
This mortal in the imperishable garb
Of immortality! Hear it, ye dead!
Hear the glad tidings, and with trembling hope
Expect that day when, at the archangel’s trump,
From the long sleep of many thousand years
Ye shall awake—awake to sleep no more.
Hear it, O living man! ere greedy death
Consigns thee to the prison of the tomb—
Hear and be wise; seek the Redeemer’s throne;
On bending knees implore his healing grace,
Chant forth his praise and venerate his Name.”

1 Then shall the kingdom of heaven be likened unto ten virgins,
2 which took their lamps, and went forth to meet the bridegroom. And
3 five of them were wise, and five were foolish. They that were fool-
4 ish took their lamps, and took no oil with them: But the wise took
5 oil in their vessels with their lamps. While the bridegroom tarried,
6 they all slumbered and slept. And at midnight there was a cry made,
7 Behold, the bridegroom cometh: go ye out to meet him. Then all those
8 virgins arose, and trimmed their lamps. And the foolish said unto
9 the wise, Give us of your oil; for our lamps are gone out. But the
wise answered, saying, Not so; lest there be not enough for us and
you: but go ye rather to them that sell, and buy for yourselves.
10 And while they went to buy, the bridegroom came; and they that
were ready went in with him to the marriage: and the door was
11 shut. Afterward came also the other virgins, saying, Lord, Lord,
12 open to us. But he answered and said, Verily I say unto you, I
13 know you not. Watch therefore, for ye know neither the day nor
the hour wherein the Son of man cometh.

MATT. XXV. 1-13.

THE TEN VIRGINS.

THE simple diction, the attractive similitude and the solemn moral of this parable invest it with peculiar interest.

The circumstances detailed in it form an exact and literal representation of the customs of the East on such joyous occasions. On the appointed day it is usual for the bridegroom to repair, late in the evening, accompanied by a few chosen friends, to the residence of his bride, and, on notice being given of their appearance, the female attendants of the bride go forth with lamps in their hands to conduct him to the home of the bride. On their return from the house of the bride's father, while she is carried in a palanquin, or walks under a canopy borne by some of her female friends or attendants, each with a lamp in her hand, the bridegroom and his friends go before, holding a great profusion of torches which spread a glare all along the route of the procession, which purposely winds through the principal streets and places on the way, and halts every now and then to hear some lively air from the musicians or to witness some feats of dexterity from the dancing-girls accompanying the nuptial party. It is generally midnight before the bridegroom makes his appearance at the house where the festivities are to be

celebrated. On the announcement of his approach a number of female friends and neighbors, who have been waiting with lighted torches, uncertain of the precise time of his arrival, sally forth to congratulate him and join the procession, after which they are entitled to enter as guests to the wedding-supper. For this latter party of females it is absolutely necessary to keep constantly on the watch, as the procession commences its return sometimes almost immediately on the arrival of the bridegroom to take away his bride. As none would presume to enter the train without bringing the indispensable accompaniment of a lighted torch, they require to supply themselves with materials for keeping up the flame until the joyous party arrive at the house.

The parable is designed to carry on the subject with which the preceding chapter concludes—namely, that of the last solemn day of retribution; and the object of it is to call our attention to that great event, and to warn us of the necessity of being always prepared for it.

“*Then,*” at that time, “*shall the kingdom of heaven,*” the gospel dispensation in its final results, “*be likened unto ten virgins, which took their lamps and went forth to meet the bridegroom.*” As the night closes in upon this dispensation, then shall those things represented in the parable take place. The future coming of Jesus, previously announced, is here set forth in lively colors as to its *certainty*, though it should be longer delayed than people would readily believe, especially such as thought he was to come in his glory *immediately* after the destruction of Jerusalem; and it is asserted that when this advent takes place different fates shall befall the watchful and the faithless.

The number of the virgins is stated to be *ten*, simply because that number was regarded as a company. It was a law in the ancient Mishnas and Gemaras and regulations of the Jews, that wherever there were ten Jews, there a synagogue should be built. We think no symbolic character should be attributed to the *virgins*, as such, in the interpretation of the parable; it is when they take their lamps and go forth to meet the bridegroom that they first acquire a spiritual significance. The whole group represents that portion of any community who profess to be the disciples of Christ. The structure of the parable required virgins in this place, in order that the picture might be true to nature; in the customs, apparently, of all times and countries this position at a marriage-feast is assigned to young unmarried women. Those who see in the special condition of these watchers a symbol of the *purity* which becomes the followers of Christ seem to overlook the fact that *the ten*—symbols of the true and the false—were in respect to this condition *all equal*.

The "*bridegroom*" represents our Lord Jesus Christ, the divine Head and loving Husband of that Church which is his bride, "the Lamb's wife"—the union which faith forms between him and his people being represented as a marriage. "It is one of love, for though a wealthy marriage to the bride, it is on her part, as well as on his, one of endearment. 'We love him because he first loved us;' 'Thy people shall be willing in the day of thy power.' It is one which grim Death shall never dissolve and leave Christ's Church a mourning widow. It is one which holy prophets sung and long ages prepared for. It is one which the Son, though stooping to the lowliest object,

entered into with his Father's full consent. It is one in which Heaven took a part and angels were wedding-guests, their harps lending the music and their wings the light. It is one over which all the hosts of heaven rejoiced in the fullness of generous love. 'I heard,' says John, 'as it were the voice of a great multitude, and as the voice of many waters, and as the voice of many thunderings, saying, Alleluia! for the Lord God omnipotent reigneth. Let us be glad and rejoice, and give honor to him, for the marriage of the Lamb is come, and his wife hath made herself ready.'"

The virgins who knew of the coming of the bridegroom went forth to meet him. It is the duty of Christians to wait for Christ. It is delightful that our Lord here makes choice of an image which raises such joyous expectations, sufficient to divest of their terror all the frightful circumstances with which his coming is connected. The believers of the old covenant looked for the coming of Messiah; the believers who live under the new covenant look for his second coming. This expectation is a powerful means in the hands of God for raising and sanctifying the heart; it springs out of faith in the promises of the Lord, and is at once the proof and nourishment of love to him. We look for him because we love him, and could not love him if we were not looking for him; we look for him because we have already experienced love to him when absent; and this expectancy toward Christ's coming, and preparation for it, are the leading purpose and main concern of all true Christians.

It will be observed that there was a common likeness between all the virgins. All were professed friends of the bridegroom; all were dressed in the garments

usually worn at such festivals; all had taken their lamps and kindled them; all had occupied the place assigned to them; and all, while the bridegroom tarried and they waited for his coming, slumbered and slept. So that, whatever real differences there were between them, there were no obvious marks of distinction. Though five were wise and five were foolish, they were not distinguished till the coming of the bridegroom. What, then, are we to understand by this? We have here a representation of the professing Church, among whose members there is a common reputation and resemblance as among men, though a hidden and radical difference as before God. Look at the visible Church. Are not all its members professedly the friends of Christ? Have they not all been baptized in the same Name? Do they not all exhibit the same general deportment? They all call Jesus Lord. They observe his Sabbaths, they assemble at his ordinances, they meet together in his Name, they profess to wait for his coming from heaven. Even in this they all agree. There is not a man who receives the Christian faith who does not believe that Christ, the Saviour of men, will come a second time to judge the world. When we approach the Lord's table it is that we may show the Lord's death till he come. Here, then, is the *agreement*.

But there was also a most serious and important *distinction*. "*Five of them were wise, and five were foolish.*" We have an analogous use of these words in the reference to the two men—the wise man that built his house upon the rock, and the foolish man that built his house upon the sand. *They* are the wise who seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness,

that all other things may be added ; and they are the foolish who seek other things, and miss both them and the kingdom of God, and his righteousness too. Yet this is not a distinction of the head, but a distinction of the heart ; it is not that the one was deficient in intellect, and the other abounded in it, but that the one had a deficiency which was moral and spiritual, and the other an excellency which was spiritual, permanent and saving. And is it thus that the visible Church is constituted ? Does the number of believers and of mere formalists thus meet in equality ? It comes not within the legitimate range of this parable to determine this point, and to the curious inquiry, " Are there few that be saved ? " we reply in the energetic language of Christ, " Strive to enter in at the strait gate, for many, I say unto you, will seek to enter in, and shall not be able. "

But whence arose the marked distinction between the foolish and the wise virgins ? "*They that were foolish took their lamps, and took no oil with them, but the wise took oil in their vessels with their lamps.*"

To have a form of godliness, but to deny its power, to have a name to live, but to be spiritually dead, to appear beautiful outwardly as whited sepulchres, but within to be full of dead men's bones and of all uncleanness,—this is the character ascribed in the revealed word to the merely nominal Christian. His religion consists in a mere external profession. Whatever may command the praise of his fellow-mortals forms the object of his zealous pursuit, while to the Christian's hidden life, to the unseen exercises of communion with God and his own soul, to secret prayer, to a ceaseless struggle with his spiritual foes, to every duty of which God and his own soul are alone cognizant, he is a stranger.

Whence arises this fearful delusion, this resting in the form instead of the reality? It arises from the want of the essential qualities that constitute the genuine Christian; it arises from the want of grace in the heart as the principle of universal devotedness to the divine will. The nominal Christian knows nothing of that deep conviction of the evil of sin and of the deceitfulness of the heart, that precedes and accompanies true conversion. He has experienced no renewal by the power of the Divine Spirit. To that living faith in Christ which directs and animates cordial obedience he is an entire stranger. He has received no supplies of spiritual strength out of the freeness that is in Christ, no illumination from the Fountain of light; and "the light that is in him is only darkness."

Not so the real Christian. "*The wise took oil in their vessels with their lamps.*" A suitable Christian profession is both a pleasing and presumptive evidence of internal holiness, but with the true believer the form is esteemed as nothing in comparison with the substance. Religion is a personal matter between his soul and God. It is the heart which is the source of natural defilement, and until the fountain be purified the streams must partake of the original impurity from which they take their rise. The believer's heart, by the power of divine grace, has undergone a decided and saving change. Though "at one time darkness, he has become light in the Lord." His mind, naturally at "enmity against God," has been enlightened by the knowledge of Christ, and a new direction has been given to the current of his affections and desires. He has been made wise unto salvation, and under the conviction of the coming of his Lord, like the wise virgins, "he takes oil in his vessel

with his lamp," lest he should be taken by surprise and left in darkness. Yes! the believer is "complete in Christ," and draws every needful supply out of his fullness. While he distrusts himself, he trusts in "the Lord his righteousness." He takes to himself the whole armor of God, and is girt with the sword of the Spirit. Under the guidance and protection of a divine power he goes forth to wrestle with those "enemies that war against the soul."

"While the bridegroom tarried, they all slumbered and slept." Whilst *all* are represented as having slumbered and slept, the *wise*, it will be observed, kept their lamps burning, though certainly not as brightly as they would have done had they been properly awake to attend to them. "It seems to be impossible," says Drummond, "to gather anything else from this very positive statement than that the whole professing Church of Christ will be found at last in the state here set forth. The kingdom of heaven will *then* be found like the ten virgins, who '*all* slumbered and slept.' Of course the sleep here spoken of is a widely different thing in the several cases of the wise and the foolish—the foolish ones sleeping in their carnal security, quite satisfied with the profession they make, deceiving themselves and 'at ease in Zion.' The wise are sleeping, overcome by their lengthened watching and because of the weakness of their faith. They are sleeping as the apostles did in the garden, 'for sorrow,' weighed down by the days of darkness and of gloom which have settled on the Church. They are sleeping, because their faith has not arisen proportionately to their Lord's demand that 'they ought always to pray and not to faint'—because when he returns he will not find that it has a strength at all com-

mensurate with his promises, or that its living energy has gone on increasing during the period when he 'bears long with them' and appears to delay his coming."

According to Calvin, the sleep that oppressed the waiting virgins intimates the necessity that lies on all of going down into the ordinary affairs of life. Disciples in the body cannot be occupied always and only with the expectation of their Lord's appearing. Sleep and food, family and business, make demands on them as well as on others—demands which they cannot and should not resist. If the coming of the Bridegroom be delayed till midnight, the virgins must slumber. This is not a special weakness of individuals; it is the common necessity of nature. So, when life is lengthened in the body, we must attend to the affairs of this world.

"The coming of the Son of man," says an eminent divine, "may surprise one at his farm and another at his merchandise, but it does not follow on that account that it will surprise them *unprepared*. Now and then in the history of the Church a Christian has been found dead in his closet and on his knees. A few years ago, in a rural district of Scotland, an elder who was leading the devotions of a district prayer-meeting suddenly ceased to speak—ceased in the middle of a sentence, in the middle of a prayer. The worshipers opened their eyes, and observed that his head and breast leant heavily on the desk; they approached and found him dead. At the moment when the Bridegroom came this watcher was wide awake, standing on tiptoe and straining forward to catch the first glimpse of the glory that should herald his approach. When the Bridegroom came this watcher went out to meet him, and went in with him to the feast: safe and happy he, but not he only!

“On the other side, we hear sometimes of a merchant who died in his counting-house, his ledger, not the Bible, the last book he had read; of a miner killed in an instant by an explosion while he was picking coals in the bowels of the earth; of a soldier falling on a battle-field while his right hand raised the sword to strike a foe: these may all seem to have been slumbering and off guard when the Bridegroom came. What of them? were they all shut out? Nay, verily. Some of them were shut out, and some were let in, according as they were ready or not ready when awaked by the coming of their Lord. The child of God who is surprised amid the toils of his daily calling goes as safely into rest as his brother of the same family who is summoned in the very act of prayer. The five wise virgins were stretched on the ground asleep when the cry arose, ‘Behold the bridegroom cometh!’ and yet there was no surprise. Although they were only awakened by his coming, they were ready to meet him when he came, and to enter with him into his rest.”

Before Christ left the world he warned his disciples of his second coming, but he fixed no time for it. When he does come he shall sit on the throne of his glory, and before him shall be gathered all nations. But even in this respect the Bridegroom has tarried beyond the expectation of the people of God in all ages. This is evident even from some passages in the writings of the apostles. Some of the first Christians believed in the speedy approach of the day of judgment. That knowledge which the Father has reserved to himself, and which was not even committed to the Son, was not possessed by the apostles. “Behold,” he said—“behold I come quickly!” and they looked for an advent speedy accord-

ing to their conceptions of speed. And the infidel scorers took advantage of what appeared to them to be delay. "Where," said they—"where is the promise of his coming?" But many ages rolled away, and still the Bridegroom tarried; and still does he delay his coming, and ages may again roll away before he appears. Come, however, he will. He is not slack concerning his promise, but we are told that "one day is with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day." The longest periods can make no alterations in his counsels and designs, nor is the difference of time of any consequence to Him who fills the vast round of eternity—to whom a space of time is but a point, a nothing.

"*But at midnight there was a cry made, Behold, the bridegroom cometh; go ye out to meet him.*" This cry we may suppose to have been made either by a part of the retinue going before, or by the applauding multitude who even till that late hour had been waiting to see the passage of the procession through the streets. But the *spiritual* signification of the cry at midnight is, in all probability, to be found in "the voice of the archangel and the trump of God," which shall be heard when the Lord shall descend from heaven with a shout. This cry is said to have been "*at midnight,*" because that is the time when commonly deep sleep falls upon men, and because thus the unexpectedness of Christ's coming, of the day of the Lord which "cometh as a thief in the night," is in a lively manner set forth.

Death, which is a coming of the Bridegroom to the individual soul, though it seem to tarry, yet will surely come, and will not tarry long. Dust we are, and unto dust we must all return. And it generally comes at *midnight*; that is, at a time when it is least expected. So it

came to the rich man mentioned in the Gospel. While he foolishly thought to satisfy his soul with earthly goods, and promised himself months and years to come of ease and pleasure, he had not another night to live. For God said to him, "Thou fool! this night shall thy soul be required of thee." So it fares with many. Death makes his appearance when they think of nothing less. "In such an hour as they think not the Son of man cometh" and demands their souls of them.

Behold, the Bridegroom cometh! Death cometh! Such rousing cries in the Church of God and in the lives of individuals are often found in great outward changes, national judgments, desolations, diseases, extreme dangers, extraordinary deliverances and other solemn occurrences, through means of which zealous and godly Christians and nominal professors of faith are constrained to think of the coming of the Son of man as near at hand. Especially is such a cry made when our friends, neighbors or relations are cut down around us.

"For us they sicken, and for us they die."

God intends their death as a warning to us, that we may be wise by their folly and may learn experience by what they suffer—that, conscious of our frailty and mortality, we may not, whatever they have done, neglect to "prepare to meet our God." Do we regard this event with a desire to realize the result it is designed and adapted to secure?

"When by the bed of languishment we sit,
And o'er our dying friends in anguish hang,
Wipe the cold dew or stay the sinking head,
Number their moments, and in every clock
Start at the voice of an eternity,

See the dim lamp of life just feebly lift
An agonizing beam, at us to gaze,
Then sink again, and quiver into death,—
How read we such sad scenes?"

"Then all those virgins arose, and trimmed their lamps. And the foolish said unto the wise, Give us of your oil, for our lamps are gone out." Both the wise and the foolish virgins had recourse to that which was fitted to give light and to conduct them safely to the home of the bridegroom. The foolish had recourse to their lamps, but discovered that they were empty; the wise had recourse to theirs, and found that, though they burned but dimly, in their vessels was oil to recruit and restore them. The wise virgins found that they had life and a fountain of it; the foolish virgins discovered that their religion was but an outward mask; that their godliness was but the form without the power; that their Christianity was but a name, whilst they themselves were dead in trespasses and in sins. What an awful discovery to make at that hour! When the darkness shall be densest how terrible to find that we have no light!—when our need shall be sorest, to feel that we have nothing to sustain and to comfort us!—when a Saviour's blood shall be felt to be the only element that can give peace and pardon and happiness, to find that we have trusted to our own works, or to our own forms, or to our own ceremonies!

"But the wise answered, saying, Not so, lest there be not enough for us and you; but go ye rather to them that sell, and buy for yourselves." How striking the refusal of the wise virgins to the foolish! It just means that no man has more grace than he needs himself—that while there is an unfailling Fountain from whence alone

every one can obtain what he requires, each as he receives has nothing to spare for another. He may direct to the source which has supplied himself, but he cannot part with any of his own. He has nothing approaching to *supererogation*; he has not "enough" for himself and another. All that the wise virgins could do in this emergency was to counsel, as they did, the foolish to go to those who sold oil and buy for themselves. So, all that God's people can do for those who will apply to them for help as the last moment approaches, and the Bridegroom is close at hand, will be to go and seek for what they need where alone it can be found.

"*And while they went to buy, the bridegroom came, and they that were ready went in with him to the marriage.*" Blessed consummation! Believers are *now betrothed* to Christ, but at his advent their espousals will be perfected with him, and he will take them to his home. Here they are one with him, and they feel at times that they are so, but even in these happy seasons they feel also that they might be nearer to him; and there are other seasons when they are ready to think themselves utterly separated from him. They cannot see him, they cannot find him. "Oh, that I knew where I might find him!" they say. "Oh, the hope of Israel!" they cry, "the Saviour thereof in time of trouble! why shouldst thou be as a stranger in the land, and as a wayfaring man that turneth aside to tarry for a night?" They feel that while they are at home in the body they are generally in a state of distance from Him whom their souls most love. But when they go in to the marriage-supper of the Lamb how different will their experience be! When they

shall meet their Saviour, not as they met him on earth at his table and in his ordinances, but personally and in all his glory; when with looks of complacency and delight he shall graciously invite them as the objects of his love, whom he acquits and confesses before an assembled world, to share his unsearchable riches and exalted dignity; and when there is "heard as it were the voice of a great multitude, and as the voice of many waters, and as the voice of mighty thunderings, saying, Alleluia: for the Lord God omnipotent reigneth. Let us be glad and rejoice, and give honor to him: for 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: for the fine linen is the righteousness of the saints;" and when he as the Bridegroom grasps them with the hand of affection, leads them within the gates to the celestial city, conducts them to his royal palace, and seats them with him at his princely table, to banquet on his rich dainties, drink the cup of his purest delights and enjoy the comfort of his infinite and unchangeable love, as wondering angels look on them all pure and glorious before his throne,—oh, *then* how different will their experience be from what it now is! how will their souls swell with gratitude and overflow with joy! and how will songs of rapture burst from their lips to Him who loved them and gave himself for them! For that day are reserved ecstasies which no human heart has ever conceived—ecstasies arising from a conscious deliverance from all doubts and fears and pains and sins and sorrows, and from the full beamings of a Saviour's countenance which are never to be eclipsed or even dimmed.

Not so those who are not united to Jesus by a living

faith. Dismal beyond conception must have been the feelings of the foolish virgins when, on their return from their errand to purchase oil, they found themselves excluded from the feast. And still more dismal, if possible, must have been their feelings when, to their earnest application for admittance, they received the reply, "Verily, I say unto you, I know you not." They could doubtless hear the sound of "joy and rejoicing" within, and they had long and confidently cherished the expectation of being partakers of it. They remembered too that that door had been open once, and stood open long, and that they had been urged to enter it without delay. Terrible reverse! "*The door was shut.*" The possibility of entrance to the light, joy, honor and abundance of the feast, which existed just before, was now gone—for ever gone! Hope gave way to darkness and despair. They were *too late*—TOO LATE!

"*Watch therefore.*" These words and those which follow in the verse are Christ's, not the bridegroom's. They form the key to the parable. The watchfulness here inculcated is that state of mind in which one is who is truly conscious to himself of his actual condition—of the aim and tendency of his life, of his relation to the things of this world and the great realities of the next, and by whom everything is so applied and used as to be of service to him for his eternal salvation.

"*For ye know neither the day nor the hour wherein the Son of man cometh.*" The ground of the watchfulness enjoined is our ignorance of the exact time for the manifestation of Christ; which uncertainty true believers improve to their salvation. The wisdom which the world calls folly consists mainly, according to this parable, in thinking of the approaching future—of death, judgment

and retribution ; and what the world calls wisdom, a mere living for the present, is folly in the eyes of the Lord. We must watch over all that is in us and what is without us, working upon us. We must watch over the world around us, over our own hearts, over those powers of darkness with which, according to the word of God, we have to contend. In every age, in every life, there are periods which more or less resemble the coming of Christ—upon which as much depends for the individual, which are just as decisive of his future condition, in which he stands just as much in need of faith and love, of watchfulness and prudence.

“In various ways it belongs,” observes an eloquent divine, “if I may say so, to the chapter of accidents whether our death may not be as sudden and unexpected as the coming of the Bridegroom here, or as the second advent in which our Lord shall appear with the surprise of a thief in the night. What may happen any day it is certainly wise to be prepared for every day. So men make their wills, but so, alas! they do not mind their souls! This ye should have done, but not have left the other undone. There is no lawyer but, if you have any property to dispose of, and would not have your death the signal for quarrels and lawsuits and heart-burnings, will advise you to make a settlement, nor delay one day to do so. Oh, how much more need to make your peace with God, and prepare your eternal rather than your temporal affairs for death—to make it all up with Him who is willing to forgive all, and is now tarrying on the road to give you time to get oil and go forth with joy to the cry, ‘Behold, the Bridegroom cometh!’ Seek Christ this day—this hour—this moment. On its decision may hang your irrevocable, fix-

ed, eternal destiny. There is hope for you now; to-morrow there may be none."

"Heir of eternal life, reflect, O man,
What to thyself thou owest, whose endless doom
Hangs on this squandered moment or the next."

THE * TALENTS.

- “In a napkin smooth and white,
Hidden from all mortal sight,
My one talent lies to-night—
- “Mine to hoard, or mine to use;
Mine to keep, or mine to lose,
May I not do what I choose?
- “Ah! the gift was only lent,
With the Giver's own intent
That it should be wisely spent;
- “And I know he will demand
Every farthing at my hand
When I in his presence stand.
- “What will be my grief and shame
When I hear my humble name,
And cannot repay his claim!
- “One poor talent—nothing more!
All the years that have gone o'er
Have not added to the store.
- “Some will double what they hold,
Others add to it tenfold,
And pay back the shining gold.
- “Would that I had toiled like them!
All my sloth I now condemn;
Guilty fears my soul o'erwhelm.
- “Lord, oh teach me what to do!
Make me faithful, make me true,
And the sacred trust renew.
- “Help me, ere too late it be,
Something yet to do for thee—
Thou who hast done all for me!”

14 For the kingdom of heaven is as a man traveling into a far country,
15 who called his own servants, and delivered unto them his goods. And
unto one he gave five talents, to another two, and to another one; to
every man according to his several ability; and straightway took his
16 journey. Then he that had received the five talents went and traded
17 with the same, and made them other five talents. And likewise he
18 that had received two, he also gained other two. But he that had
received one went and digged in the earth, and hid his lord's money.
19 After a long time the lord of those servants cometh, and reckoneth
20 with them. And so he that had received five talents came and brought
other five talents, saying, Lord, thou deliverdest unto me five talents:
21 behold, I have gained beside them five talents more. His lord said
unto him, Well done, thou good and faithful servant: thou hast been
faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things:
22 enter thou into the joy of thy lord. He also that had received two
talents came and said, Lord, thou deliverdest unto me two talents:
23 behold, I have gained two other talents beside them. His lord said
unto him, Well done, good and faithful servant: thou hast been faith-
ful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things: enter
24 thou into the joy of thy lord. Then he which had received the one
talent came and said, Lord, I knew thee that thou art an hard man,
reaping where thou hast not sown, and gathering where thou hast not
25 sowed: And I was afraid, and went and hid thy talent in the
26 earth: lo, there thou hast that is thine. His lord answered and said
unto him, Thou wicked and slothful servant, thou knewest that I reap
27 where I sowed not, and gather where I have not sowed: Thou
oughtest therefore to have put my money to the exchangers, and then
28 at my coming I should have received mine own with usury. Take
therefore the talent from him, and give it unto him which hath ten
29 talents. For unto every one that hath shall be given, and he shall
have abundance: but from him that hath not shall be taken away
30 even that which he hath. And cast ye the unprofitable servant into
outer darkness: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

MATT. XXV. 14-30.

THE TALENTS.

THE relation of this parable to the one immediately preceding is obvious. If the first portrays in more general terms the necessary readiness of the Christian for the arrival of his Lord, the latter, as having this event more immediately in prospect, speaks in particular of the fidelity that is required. This both have in common: that they refer to the same most important event, the second coming of the Lord, and call our attention to what on our part is necessary for his reception, that we may stand before him with honor and acceptance, and may not be ashamed before him at his coming. The parable of the Ten Virgins mainly teaches that there is required for that purpose a genuine persevering faith, whilst the parable of the Talents shows that such a faith must not be a dead thing, but that it binds us to make a faithful application of all the gifts bestowed on us by God and to the conscientious use of all the circumstances of our lot.

Of course we must not form our impressions of this parable from households as existing among ourselves. There is nothing in the latter at all resembling the groundwork of the parable. But servants in antiquity were often artisans or were allowed otherwise to engage freely in business, paying a fixed yearly sum to their

employer, or, as here, they had money committed to them wherewith to trade on his account or with which to enlarge their business, and to bring him in a share of their profits.

The phrase "kingdom of heaven" denotes here the divine administration under the gospel dispensation. The "man" of whom mention is made is, beyond all doubt, the Son of man—a name that appropriately expresses the relationship of Jesus to us and our relationship to him. He is connected with us by all the ties, the bonds and the sympathies of humanity. He redeems, he governs, he saves and glorifies us as God, and sympathizes with us as fellow-man.

At the close of his ministry Jesus was about to travel into "a far country," leaving his disciples and ascending to heaven. His continued presence spiritually with his people is not inconsistent with this representation, for our parable deals with the bodily and the visible. His "own servants" whom he called, like the ten virgins who went out to meet the bridegroom, represent the whole number of those who are called by his name and seem to be his disciples. The delivery of the master's goods to these servants intimates that the Lord gives to every member of the visible Church all his faculties and opportunities.

So far as we are able to discover, diversity pervades every department of creation throughout the whole universe of God. Of the various planetary orbs of which that universe is composed, even the most ignorant observer can tell that there is one glory of the sun, and another glory of the moon, and another glory of the stars, and that one star differeth from another star in glory. If, again, we turn from the survey of the

heavens to the contemplation of this lower world, we meet with the same diversity. Not only do we find in its mineral and vegetable kingdoms that endless diversity which exists between the solid and unyielding rock, for example, which the storms of a thousand winters leave unchanged, and the loose sand which is stirred by the lightest wind or washed away in a summer shower; between the hardness and brilliancy of the diamond and the dull but plastic clay; between the loveliness of the flowers of the field and the unseemliness of the rank and noxious weed; between the grandeur of the cedar that is in Lebanon and the lowliness of the hyssop that springeth out of the wall;—not only do we perceive that endless diversity which distinguishes from each other the various classes of objects of which these mineral and vegetable kingdoms are composed, but within each of these separate classes we find a variety as great as that which distinguishes one class of these objects from another. Every production and every element, indeed, whether of air or earth or sea, seems to be alike impressed with this character of diversity. The wind moves at one time with the gentleness of a zephyr, at another with the devastating fury of a hurricane. Here the earth swells into an elevation so gentle that even a child may climb to its summit; there it elevates itself in some giant mountain far into the region of the clouds, too high almost for the eagle to soar. Here the waters flow in a streamlet so small as scarcely to suffice to quench the thirst of the traveler stooping ere he steps over its narrow bed; there they roll on in some majestic river whose expanded bosom might float the fleets of an empire. And between these several extremes what endless diversities may be found!

Nor does this diversity belong only to the objects of the inanimate creation. The animal world is throughout all its extent pervaded by a like diversity. What an immense gradation of being between a seraph and a worm! between the intelligence that can comprehend and the moral feeling that can adore the glories of the Godhead, and the feeble and sensual capacities of the brutes that perish!

If we narrow the view still further, and from the animal world in general confine our attention to man, that variety of being to which we ourselves belong, we find in his order of existence the same all-pervading diversity, affecting its every property and its every condition. As to the bodily part of our nature, it presents every variety that can exist between the dwarf and the giant, between health and disease, between beauty and deformity. As to its spiritual part, it exhibits in one extreme, intelligence adequate to sway the counsels of a nation, in another an understanding too dull almost to be taught. And as to the condition in which this variously constituted nature may be placed, it is just as diversified as the nature itself,—it may be in circumstances of ease or of difficulty, of wealth or of poverty, of bustle and business or of quiet and seclusion, of loftiest rank or of lowliest obscurity.

With this evidence of God's sovereignty all around us, how are we prepared for the statement of revealed truth, "And unto one he gave five talents, to another two, and to another one, to every man according to his several ability"!

On this point Mr. Spurgeon says: "To the question, 'Why has not God given to all men like talents?' my first answer is, Because he is a Sovereign, and of all

attributes, next to his love, he is the most fond of displaying his sovereignty. The Lord God will have men know that he has a right to do what he wills with his own. Hence it is that in salvation he gives it to some and not to others, and his only reply to any accusation of injustice is, 'Nay, but, O man, who art thou that repliest against God? Shall the thing formed say to him that formed it, Why hast thou made me thus?' The worm is not to murmur because God did not make it an angel, and the fish that swims the sea must not complain because it hath not wings to fly into the highest heavens. God had a right to make his creatures just what he pleased, and, though men may dispute his right, he will hold and keep it inviolate against all comers. That he may hedge his right about and make vain man acknowledge it, in all his gifts he continually reminds us of his sovereignty. 'I will give to this man,' he says, 'a mind so acute that he shall pry into all secrets; I will make another so obtuse that none but the plainest elements of knowledge shall ever be attainable by him. I will give to one man such a wealth of imagination that he shall pile mountain upon mountain of imagery till his language seems to reach to celestial majesty; I will give to another man a soul so dull that he shall never be able to originate a poetic thought.' Why this, O God? The answer comes back: 'Shall I not do what I will with mine own?'

"Now, most men quarrel with this. But mark! The thing that you complain of in God is the very thing that you love in yourselves. Every man likes to feel that he has a right to do with his own as he pleases. We all like to be little sovereigns. You will give your money freely and liberally to the poor, but if any man should

impertinently urge that he had a claim upon your charity, would you give unto him? Certainly not, and who shall impeach the greatness of your generosity in so doing? It is even as that parable that we have in one of the evangelists, where, after the men had toiled, some of them twelve hours, some of them six, and some of them but one, the Lord gave every man a penny. Oh, I would meekly bow and say, 'My Lord, hast thou given me one talent? Then I bless thee for it, and I pray thee to bestow upon me grace to use it rightly. Hast thou given to my brother ten talents? I thank thee for the greatness of thy kindness toward him, but I neither envy him nor complain of thee.' Oh, for a spirit that bows before the sovereignty of God!"

The talent of silver was worth about sixteen hundred dollars. The expression "five talents" is put for an indefinitely large sum. In the parable the talents represent the gifts of Providence committed to men for improvement. Wisdom, civil privileges, wealth, power, are talents. Not our worldly advantages only, but our dispositions, our feelings, our joys, our sorrows, our trials, every circumstance of our lives which may be made "the means of good to ourselves or others,"—all these are part of the talents which the Lord has put into our hands, for the employment of which he will call us to account. That in the divine sovereignty there is an unequal distribution of these advantages, it is, as we have already seen, impossible to deny. All, however, are bound to improve their gifts, whatever they may be, for the glory of the Giver. As diversity is impressed on all the departments of the universe by the hand of God, in order that by the separate fulfillment of the various parts assigned them they might combine more perfectly to

the manifestation of their Maker's glory, so it is in the same way that man is to fulfill the ends of his being. As one plant, for example, yields its fragrance, and another its medicinal properties, and a third its nourishing, and a fourth its useful, materials for the protection and shelter of man, thereby manifesting the wisdom, power and goodness of Him by whom all these were made and bestowed, even so one man must yield his wealth, and another his influence, and a third his knowledge, and all their time and their labor, for the advancement of the common good and for promoting the glory of their common Lord.

"To every man according to his several ability." The master, at the moment of his departure, graduated his gifts according to the abilities of the servants, that he might not throw a great responsibility on a weak man or leave a man of vigor only half employed. This shows, probably, that while all the gifts that a man possesses are bestowed by God, some, such as bodily constitution and mental capacity, are conferred by God as Governor of the world, while others are subsequently conferred by the Lord Jesus as the King and Head of the Church. We are inclined to understand these latter gifts by the "goods" which the master bestowed on the eve of his departure. Through the unequal distribution of manifold gifts the Church of the Lord appears like a body composed of many members, every one of which must contribute to the good of the whole, according to the part assigned and the capacity bestowed on it. There is not a power nor a possession nor a privilege that we enjoy that is not a talent; and there is not a talent, minute or otherwise, which may not be sanctified to the Master's use and devoted to his glory. God does not

tell the man who has two talents to beg for five, nor the man who has one to ask for two; nor does he say that the one who has two should produce as much as the man who has five. He only asks for the vigorous use of that which we have, and on that he will bestow his blessing.

We have next described the different manners in which the servants employ the trust committed to them—two being conscientious and faithful, and one the reverse. The first two servants thankfully acknowledge the trust placed in them by their lord, and the gifts bestowed on them, the obligation under which they lie to serve him, and the honor and blessing it will bring to them if they act agreeably to the will of their lord; and they act accordingly. Their gain and increase of goods stand in exact proportion to the sums committed to them.

“But he that received one, went and digged in the earth, and hid his lord’s money”—not mispending, but simply making no use of it. This unworthy servant disposed of the talent as he did in order to its safe concealment. The class of men which he represents are by no means to be regarded as the naturally inactive and indolent. They are often the most diligent and enterprising. But *in their Master’s service* they manifest no energy and industry. They are as worthless to him as though they slept during their whole lives. Every man, be he ever so active and successful in his worldly pursuits, comes within this class if he does not labor for the glory of his Saviour and the good of his fellow-men.

The fact that the servant who had been entrusted with only *one talent* proved faithless is by no means to be taken as proof that the class of men which he repre-

sents are more likely to abuse their talents than those of superior attainments and capacities for doing good and evil. There is many a sad exemplification of the abuse of talents entrusted to men of great mental powers and means of usefulness. The one to whom was committed the least amount seems to have been selected as the worthless one, because it was more natural that he should be displeased at receiving no more, and thus go away sullen and discontented at his lord's partiality to his fellow-servants.

"A man who designs to be saved," says Quesnel, "must not leave the smallest talents unemployed. In the conduct of the children of Adam there is always some excess or defect, unless they are guided by the spirit of the second Adam: either they are desirous of making their talents very conspicuous if they are great, or they entirely suppress them if they are small and obscure. We must do quite the contrary—employ the greatest with humility and the least with confidence."

"*After a long time the lord of those servants cometh, and reckoneth with them.*" In the joyful coming forward of the faithful servants we see an example of "boldness in the day of judgment." They had something to show, as Paul so earnestly desired that he might have when he said to his beloved Thessalonian converts, "What is our hope, or joy, or crown of rejoicing? Are not ye in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ at his coming?" Observe, there is no pretension of merit implied in their account, for the words "*I have gained*" are preceded by those other words, "*thou deliveredst me.*" Our capital is not our own; our health and strength are not our own; and whereunto we have attained, and whatsoever we have gained, are entirely, from first to last, by the dis-

tinguishing grace of Him who makes us to differ, and who gives us grace to put our talents to their legitimate and proper use. Observe, too, that as the gain in the case of these two servants is according to the talents, five for five and two for two, so the commendation of them is expressed in exactly the same language, even as the reward to each is precisely the same.

The original word rendered "Well done" has a peculiar force, far beyond what can be exactly expressed in English. It was used by auditors or spectators in any public exercise to express the highest applause when any part had been well performed. We should not study to please men so much as to please God. It is doubtless gratifying to receive the "Well done!" of a creature, but this in some cases may arise from ignorance, in others from friendship, and in some cases men may say "Well done!" when, in the sight of Him who judges the heart and recognizes the springs of action, our work may be ill done. It is the "Well done!" *at the last day* which we should seek, and with which only we should be satisfied.

We are not only "servants" of Christ, entrusted with an important charge, but we are required to discharge that trust as "good and faithful" servants. The term "good" stands opposed to "unprofitable." A good and faithful servant is a profitable servant. True, we cannot profit Christ absolutely, but we may relatively. He has an interest in the world, and we may profit that—a people, and we may profit them; and he will consider everything done to them for his sake as done to him; and thus we may be profitable servants.

It is not enough that we do no harm. Many who are not injurious are yet "cumberers of the ground,"

and as such are unprofitable, and as such will be cast out. The servant in the parable is not cast out for what he *did*, but for *not* doing what he ought to have done. We are to be *faithful* servants of Christ. We are not required to be *successful*: our Master was not very successful, but he was faithful; and so must we be.

From the words of the lord to the servants severally, "*Thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things,*" we learn that the favor which Christ will show at last to his faithful servants will be first of all this: he will show greater *confidence* in them now than ever. They have had a certain charge committed to them; they have been faithful in *that*. He will now enlarge the trust which he will place in their hands, on the principle he himself enunciated: "He that is faithful in that which is least will be faithful also in much." If we have been "good and faithful servants" here, we shall "rule" there; and if here we have been faithful over "a *few things*," there we shall be rulers over "*many things*." There will be a glorious augmentation of honor and blessedness. The language is figurative. The idea may be expressed by an allusion to David's worthies, who followed him in his trials, and whom he promoted when he came to the throne. Those who, to procure him a little water, fought their way through the opposing army, were highly rewarded. And so Jesus assured his apostles: "Ye which have followed me, in the regeneration when the Son of man shall sit in the throne of his glory, ye also shall sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel." Of course we are not to understand this *literally*, but the

idea conveyed appears to be this: that a faithful discharge of the trust committed to us in this world will contribute to our honor and blessedness in the world to come.

From the words, "Enter thou into the joy of thy Lord," it is evident that whatever the joy is that was set before Christ and for which he endured the cross, despising the shame,—in that joy, if we have run with patience the race which is set before us, looking unto him, we shall partake. That which rejoices Christ's heart will rejoice ours—the glory of God in the salvation of sinners. He will not rejoice alone, but will admit to his joy all those who have had any share in the great work to accomplish which he humbled himself unto death. All this reward, however, will be a reward of grace, not of debt. Were it not for the sake of Christ, nothing we do could be accepted, there being so much sin cleaving even to our best services. The Lord accepted Abel and his offering. First, he accepts our persons for the sake of Christ, and then our services. Our services, being accepted, become also rewardable for his sake; our future honors are a part of Christ's reward.

There are some who maintain that all will have an equal degree of happiness in heaven. But this is an unscriptural and irrational notion. All will be perfectly happy, but some will not have so large a capacity for happiness as others. Every vessel will be full, but some vessels will contain more than others. "One star differeth from another star in glory." The apostle Paul must enjoy a higher degree of bliss in heaven than a soul caught up from infancy, since part of the happiness of heaven will consist of remembrance of the past.

But the diversity most important for *our* consideration is that which will arise from the manner in which we have performed our trust. Of this we may be sure: that in proportion to the degree of fidelity with which we have discharged the trust committed to us in this world will be the honor and happiness conferred upon us in the next.

The last servant who appears before his lord gives a very different account of himself from that given by the two others of themselves. He represents not the reckless that scatters or the infidel that denies, but the professing Christian who has a talent of some sort, an element of power of greater or less capability, but refuses, through mistaken views or indolence or shame or some other unsatisfactory reason, to make a right and diligent use of it.

“And I was afraid.” The man defended himself on the ground that he thought his master bent upon getting even more profit than could be fairly expected, and therefore little likely to make allowance for failure or loss. To guard against this he hid the money in the earth; there it would at least be safe, though it could make no profit. Obviously, the conception which this man had formed of his master’s character was the cause of his unprofitable idleness. Think of God as your Father and your Benefactor, and you will serve him joyously as children; think of God as a hard taskmaster, and you will either serve him as slaves or you will give up serving in despair. But the master replied to this servant in the way he deserved. The argument appears to have been as follows: “Though it were really true, as thou sayest, that I reap where I sow not, and thou durst not risk the money in merchandise, yet thou

oughtest to have put it out to the public money-changers, to interest; some exertion should have been made." He mentioned this use of the talent because it was the lowest that could be made, and was attended with the least trouble—to intimate that though the servant had not pursued with his lord's money that particular trade in which, according to the custom of the times, he had been instructed, yet if he had been at any pains at all to improve the stock committed to him he would not have been entirely to blame.

Ungodly men and unfaithful servants of Christ have very wrong notions of Him who is their Master. They little think how kind he is to his servants, how ready to make allowance for them and to help them. They have no gratitude and love leading them to desire to do his will; and, being thus without motive, they shrink from responsibilities which they ought to undertake, and are content to do nothing.

There is, as has justly been observed, another reason which sometimes leads people to act like the man who buried his talent. Because their gifts are small and their opportunities few, therefore they despise them. If they were richer or more learned, or if they lived in a different kind of a place, and had more people to whom they could do good, or more ways open to them of working for God, how gladly, think they, would they lead an active and useful life! But as it is, it seems to them not worth while to try. They see nothing they can do that is worth doing. Thus, having but one talent, they go and bury it in the earth. If they had five or two, they would trade with them diligently; so they think. But would they? There is no reason whatever to suppose that he who neglects

small opportunities would make use of great ones, or that one who lets his one talent go unemployed would do any better if he could exchange with his neighbor and have five. The man with one talent was just as much bound to do his best with it as the man with five. The person whose means of serving God seem the smallest is as much bound to serve him in his measure as he whose means are largest, and faithful service will receive an equal reward whether the talents have been many or few.

Now the doom of the servant who neither in one way nor the other had sought his master's interests is pronounced. And it will be noticed that he is not condemned because he has turned the talent to *bad* account, but because he has not turned it to any account at all. "*Take ye therefore the talent from him.*" All opportunity for serving Christ is now for ever withdrawn from the wicked and slothful servant. He has slighted that on earth, and he is now driven away in his wickedness out of the dwelling of his Master, wherein alone service is possible. There is something very startling in the reflected light which is thrown on this part of the parable by that other where the "rich man" is in torment. He desires a drop of water *for himself*. He cannot have it. Hope as regards himself is extinguished. But if that cannot be, he would help his brethren—he would send a message to them to warn them. *That* cannot be either. While he was on earth he buried his opportunity of serving God, in regard to these as well as other things, amid his "purple and fine linen" and "sumptuous fare." And *now* the "talent is taken from him." He wishes to do *now* what he might have done before, but the time has gone by, the

die is cast, and the "outer darkness" wraps in its eternal gloom the idle, slothful, wicked servant who hid his lord's money.

"*And give it unto him which hath ten talents.*" A deep and precious truth lies under this. The man who had *five* talents received that number "*according to his ability.*" By having another talent given to him at last it is intimated that his "*ability*" has become greater than it was before. And so will it be, indeed, with the faithful servant who shall enter into his Master's joy in heaven. His ability, his capacity, his power will be gloriously increased and enlarged, and, still "*according to that ability,*" will his divine Master place within his reach increased and enlarged opportunities of serving him.

"*For unto every one that hath shall be given, and he shall have abundance.*" Observe, it is not merely that one receives more and the other loses what he had, but *that very gift* which the one loses the other receives; he is enriched with a talent taken *from* the other, while on his part another takes *his* crown. We see this continually. By the providence of God one steps into the place and the opportunities which another left unused, and so has forfeited. "*Whosoever hath*"—has rightly employed what was committed to him, exercised his gift with the required diligence, fidelity and conscientiousness—"to him shall be given;" more shall be put into his hands, as is wont to be the rule among men. So shall it be, in the highest degree, with God. The proper use of all divine gifts multiplies them to their possessors, "*and he shall have abundance*"—a more extensive sphere of action, and therewith more opportunities for the exercise of his fidelity. "*But from him*

that hath not”—wants diligence and carefulness, therefore has not rightly executed the trust committed to him—“*shall be taken away even that which he hath*”—the just desert of his guilt and a judgment demanded alike by the wisdom and the righteousness of God.

“*And cast ye the unprofitable servant into outer darkness: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.*” It will be noticed that the reward of unfaithfulness is, “Take the talent from him and cast him out.” In both parts the sentence of condemnation corresponds to its opposite in the reception of those who had been faithful to their trust. These retain their employed gifts; from him the unused talent is taken away. These are received into their master’s favor; he is cast out of his master’s sight. The sentence, “Take it from him,” goes before the sentence, “Cast him out.” A sinner is given over to himself before he is given up to judgment. The first prepares the way for the second death; the process is now going on by which the destiny is decided. Now is the accepted time, now either salvation or condemnation is wrought out. *Outer darkness* seems a fitting retribution for those who, when light came into the world, loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. *Weeping and gnashing of teeth* is a strong image of that utter despair, darkness and death of a soul excluded from God, who “is light, and in him is no darkness at all.”

Let us not miss the lesson derivable from the sentence just noticed. It is not enough that we abstain from doing evil, if we also refrain from doing good. If we desire to avoid the punishment of the unprofitable servant, we must seek to the utmost of our

ability to possess, and act according to that whereby the Lord worketh in us and forms us for his pleasure. Let us in season prepare to avoid the dreadful destiny of the unprofitable servant. Have we *riches*? Let us not spend them in luxury and vice, but wisely use them in acts of mercy and kindness. Have we *power* and *authority*? Let us remember that we are accountable not only for our own sins, but in a great measure for those of others which we might prevent. Have we *learning* and *knowledge*? These are talents, and they are not to be put under a bed or a bushel, but must be set on a candlestick, that they may give light to others. Concealed knowledge is little better than downright ignorance. *Time* and *opportunity* are also talents, and we shall be punished for not using as well as for misusing them. "*Diem perdidit!*"—I have lost a day!—was a melancholy reflection to a heathen; and how much more should it be to one professing to be a Christian! The devil tempts other sinners, but the idle man tempts the devil. It is necessary, indeed, that we should have our recreations, for the bow cannot be always bent, the mind cannot be ever fixed and intent on business; but we should never give way to pleasure but that we may return to duty again with the greater life and vigor.

❧ THE * GROWING * SEED. ❧

“ Sow in the morn thy seed,
At eve hold not thy hand :
To doubt and fear give thou no heed ;
Broadcast it round the land.

“ Beside all waters sow,
The highway furrows stock ;
Drop it where thorns and thistles grow,
Scatter it on the rock.

“ The good, the fruitful ground
Expect not here nor there :
Air, hill and dale, by plots 'tis found :
Go forth, then, everywhere.

“ Thou knowest not which may thrive,
The late or early sown ;
Grace keeps the precious germ alive
When and wherever sown.

“ And duly shall appear,
In verdure, beauty, strength,
The tender blade, the stalk, the ear,
And one full corn at length.

“ Thou canst not toil in vain :
Cold, heat, and moist and dry,
Shall foster and mature the grain
For garner in the sky.”

26 *And he said, So is the kingdom of God, as if a man should cast*
27 *seed into the ground ; And should sleep, and rise night and day,*
28 *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
29 *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.

MARK IV. 26-29.

THE GROWING SEED.

THIS parable is peculiar to Mark. The position which it occupies throws some light upon its design. The impression which the parable of the Sower produced upon the hearts of the hearers, and especially of the apostles, might be discouraging. For if a sower, with all diligence and fidelity, had yet to find that much seed should fail to bring forth fruit to perfection, he might be tempted to think his labor had been in vain. In order to prevent such an effect, to strengthen his apostles, as well as all teachers of the gospel, with joyful hopes, stimulate them to continued faithfulness, and direct their eyes to the happy result in which their labors were certain to issue, our Lord delivered this parable, in which he shows that the announcement of divine truth should always be made with joyful confidence in its inherent vitality and the fruitful operations of the Holy Spirit. Nor need there be any surprise at the parable being in one Gospel and not in another. This may be said of others; and in truth, at the best, there could only be a very limited selection made in the reporting of what Jesus did and said, for otherwise, as John says, "I suppose that even the world itself could not contain the books that should be written."

The words "the kingdom of God" here possess the same significancy which the similar phrases have in those passages in which it is said that "the kingdom of heaven cometh not with observation" and "the kingdom of heaven is within you." What is meant in all these places is the reign of Heaven's principles over the heart of man. Let the word of God be addressed to him, and come home to his heart with a deep sense of its truth and obligation: this is the good seed taking root in it. Let his faith in the word be genuine, and have its legitimate effects on his character and walk: this is the good seed yielding in abundance the fruit of righteousness. And thus it is that while in one parable a teacher of the word is compared to a sower, in the parable before us the train of influences upon the taught is compared to a process of vegetation.

The "seed" here referred to is the truth of God. In the business of agriculture it is not the work of the husbandman to manufacture the grain which he is to sow. The seed-grain is provided for him by a higher hand. It is something different from the mass in which it is to be placed. In like manner, the gospel is not an earthly element neutralizing or dislodging a rival. It is not an influence created or excited by man. It is not machinery manufactured by philosophy or by human genius. It is no earthly force. It is a divine element, coming down from heaven and lodged in the heart of humanity.

Seed must be sown. Left in the granary it will decay, but cast into the congenial soil it will bear much fruit. As, therefore, the farmer only plants the seed which God has prepared for him, following his judgment in suiting the various kinds of seed to various soils, so the

spiritual instructor is called not to excogitate the truth he is to teach, but merely to a simple acquiescence in the Bible and a faithful exposition of it. The gospel must be preached. The winds do not chant it, the stars do not write it, the waves of the sea do not chime it. God has appointed men to preach, in order that the people may hear and be saved. The ministry is thus not a sinecure, but a work ; pastors are laborers with Christ, fellow-workmen with him. They have seed to sow ; and of all laborers they ought to be the most diligent, because upon their toils depend results that are limited only by eternity.

It is with peculiar aptness that God's word is likened to seed. Dry and dead as it seems, let a seed be planted with a stone—flashing diamond or burning ruby—and while that in the richest soil remains a stone, this awakens, and, bursting its husky shell, rises from the ground to adorn the earth with beauty, perfume the air with fragrance or enrich men with fruit. Ever should this be remembered. The minister of the gospel may speak to the people in figures so beautiful that they would be charmed, or in strains of rhetoric so impressive that they should go away like Ezekiel's hearers, having listened to him as to one who plays beautifully upon an instrument ; yet no good would be done. Figures of speech, elegant metaphors, pretty conceits, preached from the pulpit, may help the end in view as feathers do the arrow's flight, but *in themselves* or *by themselves* they are as worthless for the object proposed as pearls from the depths of the sea, sown by the farmer in the spring, with the foolish hope that they will grow up into a great and blessed harvest. It is solely to God's word, blessed by his Spirit, that sinners owe their

conversion and saints their quickening and comfort in the sanctuary. The patient is healed by the medicine, not by what gilds it; the hungry are fed by the meat, not by what garnishes it; and conversions show the life that was in the seed, not in the sower or in the soil.

There is *power of propagation* in seed. Thus, a single grain of corn would, were the produce of each season sown again, so spread from field to field, from country to country, from continent to continent, as in the course of a few years to cover the whole surface of the earth with one wide harvest—employing all the sickles, filling all the barns and feeding all the mouths in the world. Such an event, indeed, could not happen in Nature, because each latitude has its own productions, and there is no plant formed to grow alike under the sun of Africa and amid the snows of Greenland. It is the glory of the gospel, and one of the evidences of its divine origin, that it *can*, and, unless prophecy fail, that it *shall*. There is not a shore which shall not be sown with this seed, not a land but shall yield harvests of glory to God and of souls for heaven. By revolutions that are overturning all things, by war's rude and bloody share, and otherwise, God is breaking up the fallow ground and ploughing the earth for a glorious seed-time. The seed that sprang up in Bethlehem shall wave over Arctic snows and desert sands; and as every shore is washed by one sea, and every land that lies between the poles is girdled by one atmosphere, and every drop of blood that flows in human veins belongs to one great family of brothers, so in God's set time men of every color and tongue shall cherish a common faith and trust in a common Saviour. It was of that, and of this seed-time, the Psalmist spoke when, standing on the heights of prophecy and looking

along the vista of distant ages, he said, "There shall be a handful of corn in the earth on the top of the mountains; the fruit thereof shall shake like Lebanon;" "his name"—referring to Christ's—"his name shall endure for ever; men shall be blessed in him, and all nations shall call him blessed."

At the time when our Lord uttered this parable he was himself the Sower; he was eradicating the errors of the Jewish people, and sowing eternal truth in their stead; he was declaring the real nature of God's heavenly kingdom, and revealing the way which leads to it; he was opening to mankind the secrets of their own corrupt hearts and the renewing change which they required; he was explaining what is, and what is not, "true and undefiled religion." Thus he *cast seed into the ground* which should long remain. It was to remain in the memories of those who received it till called forth by the influence of the Holy Spirit, and disclosed, by a gradual development, "to the Jew first, and afterward to the Gentile." It was to be transmitted from city to town and from town to village, from province to province, from country to country.

And what Christ, the chief Husbandman, and his apostles after him, then did in person, has been carried on since, and is constantly being carried on, by those who believe his word. The sowers who *cast the seed* are of various orders. They are the ministers, to whom a field is entrusted that they should dress and keep it; they are the parents, whose duty is to imbue the infant mind with the Scriptures from its youth; they are the masters of families, who, like faithful Abraham, "command their household that they keep the way of the Lord;" they are the missionaries, who cause the heathen to hear,

“every man in his own tongue, the wonderful works of God;” they are the zealous Christians, who, in whatever station or circumstances, use their means and opportunities to drop the fructifying word into the soil of the human heart.

The husbandman having sown the seed, says our parable, eats, drinks and sleeps, and waits the issue. He cannot see how it fares with the seed; neither at this stage can he put his hand to the work to help it. At this point the likeness between the natural and the spiritual is exact and obvious. When we have made the gospel of Christ known to those in whom we are interested, we are precisely in the position of the agriculturist who has committed the grain to the ground. Thinking of the matter when we lie down or when we awake, we discover, perhaps with pain, that we do not know whether the seed is swelling and springing or not, and that, even though we knew its condition, we could not reach it to stimulate its growth. It is out of our hands and out of our sight. It is ours patiently to expect that what is sown may, through the divine blessing, grow and bring forth fruit, knowing that, though Paul may plant and Apollos water, the increase is from God.

This patient waiting, however, is not to be accompanied with inactivity. The farmer can help, and does help, the sown seed much by his care. He keeps the fences up, that the field may not be trampled by stray cattle; he keeps the drains open and the furrows clear, that water may not stand on the field, but run off as soon as it falls; he gathers off the stones, that they may not crush the seed; and pulls out the weeds, that they may not choke it. In a similar way, and with similar profit, teachers of the word may remove obstructions which

would prevent its growth. And this they are bound to do. It is true they cannot make it grow by their care, but they can make it *not* grow by their carelessness. They cannot do the saving, but they can do the destroying.

“And the seed should spring and grow up, he knoweth not how.” It is by a mysterious yet invincible power that the feeble shoot forces its way through the heavy clods which cover it. We know not how it grows. All we know is, that it does so by a secret power which we call Nature, but which is, in fact, the power of God put forth in that particular way. So frail is the forming blade that the slightest breeze threatens to beat it to the earth, while yet so strong is it that it will spring forth to the light though pressed down by an earthy covering. Thus, under the Spirit’s blessing, do the plants of righteousness, though they may be heavily weighed down by a body of sin and death, by manifold temptations and fears, nevertheless grow upward to the Source of eternal day. Satan may place the heavy foot of persecution upon the growing kingdom of Christ, but he cannot press out its life, for its roots are divine; he may endeavor to put his finger upon the rising sap in the true Vine, that so the branches may not appear, but he cannot. The life which Christ imparts to the soul will rise and rise until it bursts into life, compelling even the ungodly to admit that Christ has gained another friend and Heaven another heir.

“For the earth bringeth forth fruit of herself,” as if from a self-acting power. The growth in Nature is according to certain laws which act independently of man’s agency, though the agency of God, who established these laws and acts through them, is not denied. The same is true in the kingdom of grace: spiritual

growth is independent of human agency. That God's power is involved appears from the whole tenor of Scripture. While, therefore, the main lesson is about spiritual things, that lesson rests on an analogy of Nature, assuming that in Nature God operates through the laws he has established. The growth of the kingdom of God, *in general and in individuals*, is according to a development which is natural—*i. e.* in accordance with certain laws in the realm of grace which are analogous to what are called natural laws, and, like them, acting with a certain spontaneity, though God's constant energy is present in both.

“First the blade, then the ear, after that the full corn in the ear.” Before the blade appears above ground the seed has sprouted beneath the surface. No eye saw it then, for it was hidden in the earth. So the first work of grace in the heart is an unseen work. No human eye beholds it; no one knows the secret thoughts, the struggles, the doubts, the fears, the hopes, of one in whom the spiritual life is beginning; no ear but God's hears the prayers he puts up; no human eye marks what takes place within. This unseen work is often for a time painful work while there is conviction of sin but no clear hope of Christ. Yet it is a blessed work notwithstanding, for it is life beginning in the soul.

How silently does the green blade come forth from the bosom of the earth!—so silently that if we were to place our ear close to the soil it would bring us no intelligence of the upspringing life. And with what noiseless steps does divine mercy come to the sinner's heart to make way for the sinner's Friend! How softly does the dew of heaven steal into the heart to cause the seed of truth to germinate and grow!

The seed grows *gradually* from stage to stage. Three stages are specified: "first the blade, then the ear, then the full corn in the ear." In the first stage of growth it is not easy to distinguish with certainty between the wheat and common grass; it is when the ear is formed and filled that we know at a glance which is the fruitful and which the fruitless plant. There is a similar ambiguity, in as far as appearance is concerned, in the earliest outgrowth of convictions from the hearing of the word. Not that there is any uncertainty in the nature of the things: the wheat is wheat, and the grass is grass, from the first; but an observer cannot so surely at first determine which is wheat and which is merely grass.

Thus, many hopeful impressions that appear for a while in the young die away and bring forth no fruit; but at later stages a judgment may be formed with greater confidence. The plant assumes by degrees a more definite form and a more substantial fullness. The "ear" at once declares to man its true nature and real worth. The Christian graces begin to show themselves, knowledge becomes clearer, the character is more consolidated, and the young man in Christ appears strong to bear and to do the will of God.

The season advances, and the plant grows still. The ear that had become full and round changes its color and hardens. Many a day has the sun shone upon it, many a shower has refreshed it, many a storm perhaps has blown over it. Through all this it has been growing stronger, fuller and riper, and now at length it has reached its maturity—"the full corn in the ear." The Christian grows too, making progress in the spiritual life and bringing forth riper fruit. He also has had experience of sun and rain and storms—the grace and

love of God, the work of the Spirit, temptations and trials—and he too has thus become stronger, more deeply rooted in Christ, more humble, more loving, more zealous, more fruitful in holiness. He is now no novice. He has learned much of the spiritual life, and through grace he adorns his profession. He is known by his fruits. As those who now pass by the field say, "The corn is ripening," so do they who observe such a man's life say of him that he is ripening too. And so in truth he is—ripening for heaven and becoming meet for the inheritance of the saints in light.

The Rev. Dr. Storrs thus beautifully describes the progress of the Christian life: "The kingdom of God begins in any man in the solemn and central purpose of his soul to become like God, to honor and to serve him—the personal commitment of himself to the Father through the mediation of the Son and under the quickening influence of the Spirit. And yet this purpose is but the commencement of a course whose end is still distant. One temptation after another must be met and overcome. One desire after another, which has grown inordinate through long indulgence, must be brought into harmony with the law of holiness. The principles of action, though now pure and high, require to be confirmed by the discipline of effort; the thoughts of divine truth to be made more clear, comprehensive, controlling; above all, the affections demand to be developed, cherished, matured, until they shall answer as they ought to God's character, until they shall spring spontaneously toward Christ on his cross or his throne, until they shall purely control and impel our whole moral action, making duty a delight, privation a pleasure if borne for God, and death a sure and immeasurable gain.

“It is not until after long seasons of effort that this magnificent consummation is reached, that the world seems nothing and God all in all, that the cross becomes the summit-fact in personal experience as in the world’s history, and that heaven opens bright and near its gates of pearl. It is not until sorrows and prosperities both have brought their ministry from God to the soul; not till life has been experienced in its successes and its changes; not till sermons and treatises, works and worships, self-denials and charities, homes and teachers, the communion of the Church, contemplation, study, prayer, self-scrutiny,—all have taught and disciplined the soul and brought it in a measure to the likeness of Christ. This harvest comes after long summer—first a purpose, then a principle, then a habit, then a life, pervading, renewing, glorifying the soul; then the heavenly nature and peace.”

“But when the fruit is brought forth, immediately he putteth in the sickle, because the harvest is come.” The harvest is not only at the end of the world, nor is it, as we have just seen, even at the close of a Christian life in the world. There is a ripening and a fruit-bearing while life in the body lasts; there is also a reaping and an enjoying of the harvest by those who sow the seed or by their successors. We come to a deathbed—a Christian departs like a sheaf ripe and fit for transference into the kingdom of heaven. We sometimes see a harvest, as a foretaste of the ultimate one, in a congregation, which, after long lying fallow, scorched and parched by the sun, comes under a new birth, and its very solitary places blossom as the rose.

The harvest is sure to be reaped in all its fullness,

however, at the end of the world. How beautiful is harvest! It is only exceeded by spring. It is then that Nature sits on her golden sheaves, like a mother amidst her rejoicing offspring, and creation seems to lift up its glad anthem of praise unto Him who is the Lord of the spring and the Lord of the harvest. But all the harvests of the earth, when ripest, will be nothing to that last harvest when angels are the reapers and Jesus watches over all.

Let us have faith in God's word, sowing it whenever and wherever we have opportunity. Nor let us be impatient as to results. If there is an interval between sowing the seed and gathering the fruits in the natural world, so may there be in the spiritual. What are called instantaneous conversions are frequently the results of long-hidden processes. We are not to suppose that no good is done by a sermon or a tract because its echo does not come from every pew and every house. God *will* bless his own truth.

❧ THE * TWO * DEBTORS. ❧

“ Mercy, that wipes the penitential tear,
And dissipates the horrors of despair,
From righteous justice steals the 'vengeful hour,
Softens the dreadful attribute of power,
Disarms the wrath of an offended God,
And seals my pardon in a Saviour's blood.”

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

LUKE VII. 41-43.

THE TWO DEBTORS.

JESUS was invited to an entertainment by a Pharisee. While he sat at table in his house a woman brought a box of ointment and anointed his feet, with every manifestation of profound gratitude and admiration. Who this woman was cannot with certainty be determined. There is no reason whatever to suppose that she was either Mary Magdalene or Mary the sister of Lazarus; the latter certainly anointed our Lord's feet a few days before his crucifixion, but it is perfectly gratuitous to conclude that she anointed them twice, or that Mary Magdalene ever anointed them at all. All that is told of the woman here spoken of is, that she dwelt in "the city," most likely Nain, and that she "was a sinner." "*The sinner*" was her opprobrious epithet. The guilt of a life of shame was branded on her brow. She was probably a Gentile—one of those unhappy outcasts that had been imported by the corruption of Roman manners, the lawless vices of the capital being (as we know from contemporary history) let loose on her subject provinces.

All at once, however, her life has become changed. How she may have been prepared to undergo so vast a revolution in her history we cannot tell. For years her soul may have been struggling in vain to get

free; her heart may have been torn and tortured with the memories of a blighted past and a miserable present; and yet she may have known no faithful ear to which she could reveal her wretchedness. The recollections of joyous and innocent childhood and a happy home may have mingled sadly with the thought of the broken hearts there left. A future of desolation rose before her. No Gadarene demoniac more truly than she went about "seeking rest and finding none." But now rest she *has* found. Her base betrayers mock her tears and self-reproaches. But she has heard *one Voice* which has spoken peace to her troubled soul.

That a woman, and one of the character here represented, should have pressed into the guest-chamber uninvited, and that she should have been there permitted to offer to the Saviour the form of homage which she did, may at first sight appear strange; yet, as has well been said, this, after all, does not require the supposition of something untold for its explanation, as that she was a relation of Simon's or lived in the same house—suppositions which are altogether strange, not to say contradictory, to the narrative. A little acquaintance with the manners of the East, where meals are often almost public, where ranks are not separated with such iron barriers as with us, will make us feel with what ease such an occurrence might have taken place.

The behavior of Jesus in offering no interruption to the woman's manifestations of affectionate gratitude was to the Pharisee in the highest degree offensive, as he, in common with his sect, judged it quite unseemly for a pious man to come into near contact with persons of profligate character. This is not the spirit of the gos-

pel nor the tone or temper of a Christian. The sinner is to be pitied, however sternly the sin in which he indulges ought to be rebuked. He needs deeply to be pitied. It is not the cold, sarcastic remark, nor the bitter theological rancor, nor the ceremonial and sectarian repugnance, that will do him good.

The conclusion arrived at by the pharisaical Simon, that Christ could not be a prophet, besides implying that all intercourse with sinners is in every respect blameworthy, proceeds also upon the false presumption that the prophets must have known the entire condition of the persons with whom they conversed; which indeed they did in some particular cases, but not generally. Then, too, Simon improperly took the woman for what she had been at an earlier period, an open and abandoned sinner, which she no longer was. For, though called "sinner," this was no more evidence of her continuance in her former state, and against her having experienced divine grace, than Matthew's being called a publican long after his conversion is proof that he had not abandoned his vocation. Against this false conclusion, though affecting himself, Jesus did not immediately direct himself, but rather aimed to justify the conduct of the woman as quite natural, and as flowing from the woman's inward experience. At the same time, his words were intended to press on the Pharisee, by way of application, the impropriety of his behavior, and of awakening him to a better knowledge of himself.

Though Simon did not speak aloud, Jesus saw those disparaging thoughts which were kindling in his self-righteous heart, and opened the conversation thus: "Simon, I have somewhat to say unto thee." The Pharisee answered, "Master, say on." Though the host had just

pronounced his guest to be an impostor, the worthless courtesy of the lips proclaimed him "Master" still.

The creditor in the parable is God, in whom we live and move and have our being—from whom we derive all, and to whom we must account for all. The debtors are sinful men, and the debts the sins which they have severally done.

Of the two debtors mentioned in the parable, while both are in debt, one owes ten times as much as the other. There is a great difference between the two sums. The disproportion, we think, would not have been so great as it is stated to have been if it had been the design of the Lord here to teach us how much the guilt of one man may exceed that of another in the sight of God. From the circumstances of this case we may safely gather that these sums represent not the absolute quantity of sin-debt that stood against these debtors in the book of divine justice, but the estimate which they made of their own shortcomings. The plan of Providence in the present life permits every man to keep his own accounts of debt to God; no neighbor is empowered to record the items and sum them up, unless the owner of the account-book opens it of his own accord for the inspection of his neighbor.

From the expression, "*And when they had nothing to pay, he frankly forgave them both,*" two things on the part of the debtors are indubitable—the certainty of their debt and their incapacity to make restitution; while on the part of the creditor there appears in the remission of the debt a very great goodness, and that goodness perfectly free. Such also is the relation of the sinner to God. Man is irritable, revengeful and stands out against forgiving those that have offended

him ; but God forgives the greatest and the least sins. "My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways," says He whose forgiveness extends to all sin. The mercy of God is free and unmerited. So, too, the forgiveness of God is unchangeable and irreversible. He blots out our sins, and lest they should be seen he covers them. To show how completely he does so, it is said he casts them behind his back ; and, lest this should not be expressive enough, he is said to fling them into the depths of the sea ; and, lest even this should not be expressive enough, he says, "Their sins shall be sought, and shall not be found."

There are those who maintain that love to the Saviour forms no necessary part of our religion—that it is the mere effect of high-wrought imaginations. Is this so? Why, then, the inquiry, "Which of them will love him most?" To determine this matter it would be enough to let an unprejudiced person read the incident before us without one word of comment, and then inquire of him, What is the state of heart which a Saviour who spoke and acted thus while here below, and who is "the same yesterday, and to-day, and for ever," most values now? Can it be believed that such a man would hesitate in his reply? Can it be imagined that he would question the necessity of every thought and feeling and affection of the soul being devoted to the love of that blessed Being who has redeemed it? No. The answer of every simple-minded reader of such an incident must be, "If any man love not the Lord Jesus Christ, let him be Anathema Maran-atha."

There is some little difficulty in the *general* inference which our Lord draws from the parable, after Simon acknowledged that he who was forgiven most was under

the greater obligation, and must reasonably be supposed to feel the greater affection for his merciful and generous creditor. At first it looks, from the words, "*Thou hast rightly judged,*" as if the amount of loving gratitude to him must depend upon the amount of our guilt, and as if we must love him all the more because of the depth of ungodliness into which we have been previously sunk; and so one might be tempted to say, Better to sin "earnestly with both hands," in order that when much is forgiven we may love the more. Such a view is altogether opposed, however, to the meaning of the parable when fairly considered. It need hardly be said that it is opposed to the whole teaching of the word of God, which condemns in unmeasured terms sinning that "grace may abound," and which certainly gives us no reason to suppose that the penitent robber on the cross loved Christ *more* than John or Mary or the mother of our Lord.

The truth is, as already hinted, that the meaning of the parable turns on the *sense* on the part of the debtors of the greatness of the debt which is remitted. They are both supposed to know exactly what has been remitted to them; they are sensible of it. It is this which underlies the whole parable, and so the general inference is very clear: *That sinner loves Christ most who is the most sensible of what Christ has done for him.* If one man feels that he has been forgiven, as it were, to the amount of "*five hundred pence,*" he will love more deeply and more gratefully than the man who is only *conscious* of forgiveness to the extent of "*fifty pence.*" In other words, the more tender the conscience of a child of God, the more alive he has become to all that he is in himself, and all that God

has done for him and is ready to do for him still, the deeper he will feel himself in debt to his Lord, the larger the amount which he will reckon as owing by him to this gracious Friend, and therefore the more full and deep will be his love for the frank forgiveness of One from whom he had no right to expect the remission of one farthing.

Simon himself was an example of one who thus loved little—who, having little sense of sin, felt little his need of a Redeemer, and therefore loved that Redeemer but little; and he had betrayed this his lack of love in small yet significant matters. Of this Jesus reminds him. Turning round in meek majesty to the penitent, he applies to the Pharisee the simple but expressive rebuke: "Seest thou this woman? I entered, a weary stranger, into thy house. In accordance with customary wont, thou or thy servants should have afforded me water for my feet: this was denied me; but *thy* neglect or inconsideration was more than supplied by *her*. From the welling fountains of her grief she has bathed my feet with her tears and wiped them with the hair of her head. *Thou* gavest me no kiss: this wonted courtesy to a Jewish rabbi thou hast, from motives of calculating prudence, withheld from me; but she, ever since she crept behind this table, has not ceased to kiss my feet. My head even with common olive oil thou didst not anoint; but this woman hath anointed not my head, but my very feet, and that, too, with costliest spikenard."

In the act of this woman on this occasion we have an unfailling characteristic of a pardoned sinner—his unfeigned preference for the low places in the grateful service of his Lord; that is, for those pious and useful

but unobtrusive engagements which bring with them no worldly note or repute, but rest for their reward on the divine approbation. Mark: she sits unobtrusively behind our Lord at his feet; her chosen position is there. There also are her chosen engagements. When Abigail was called to a high place by David, "she arose and bowed herself on her face to the earth, and said, Behold, let thine handmaid be a servant to wash the feet of the servants of my lord." Paul chose for himself the title "the chief of sinners." This characteristic of this pardoned woman must not be forgotten. Her affection was ardent but lowly. It was active, self-denying, unaspiring in itself, yet delightful to her. The pardon of sin will be known by its fruits. Where these fruits are there is a pardoned sinner. He may be ignorant of his own state; he may not even understand the significance of humility, contrition and love in determining his own character; he may be following on, now weeping, now trembling, now rejoicing. We can readily conceive the vicissitudes of his frames of feeling, but his character with God is superior to and independent of them all. He is a man serving the Lord in all humility, and sooner or later he will have the precious assurance of his interest in the divine favor.

The words, "*Wherefore, I say unto thee, Her sins, which are many, are forgiven, for she loved much,*" do not mean that the woman was forgiven because she loved, but that she loved because she was forgiven. First she was forgiven, and then she loved. "Although," says an able expositor, "in sentences of this form it is more common to express the effect in the first clause, and the cause, introduced by a 'for,' in the latter, yet the converse method is frequently employed,

and is perfectly correct. You may say, 'Tan-waste is strewn on the street opposite this mansion, for a member of the family lies within it sick,' or, 'A member of the family lies sick within this mansion, for tan-waste is strewn on the contiguous street.' In the first instance you place the cause last, and in the second instance the effect, using precisely the same formula in both. Nor is it difficult to perceive why Jesus places the effect of forgiveness in the prominent position here, for it is the only thing that is visible to the Pharisee whom he desires to instruct. The pardon which this woman had obtained, Simon did not and could not see, but her love, being embodied in action, was palpable to his senses. It was as though our Lord had said, 'Do not despise this woman, nor wonder that I let her come near to me; do not suppose that I am not aware who and what she is. I know her well—far better than you do. I know all her past history; I know her present feelings and her present state. She is penitent; she is forgiven; she loves me because I have forgiven her. You might have known the happy change in her by what you have seen her do. You have seen her show me every proof of affection. Nothing could have made her love me so but gratitude for sins forgiven. Her sins, which are many, are forgiven, for she loved much.'"

Let it ever be remembered that the Redeemer's forgiving love to sinners is the only cause of all their love to him: "We love him because he first loved us." Have you seen a broad path of silver brightness lying by night upon a smooth sea and stretching from your feet away until it was lost in the distance—a path that seemed to have been trodden by the feet of all the

saints who have ever passed through a shifting world to their eternal home? Oh, that silver path by night across the sea! It glittered much, but it was not its brightness that lighted up the moon in the sky. Neither was it the love to Jesus trembling in a believer's heart that kindled forgiving love in him. We love him because he first loved us. The love that makes bright a forgiven sinner's path across the world was kindled by the light of life in the face of Jesus. From him and to him are all things.

"And he said unto her, Thy sins are forgiven thee." The woman was really forgiven *before* she came to Christ, but now she received an authoritative declaration of it before many witnesses as a reward for her open expression of love and gratitude. Before, she had hope through grace; now, she received the assurance of hope. Before, she was justified before God; now, Jesus has justified her before men, before this pharisaic company, by declaring that her sins had been forgiven.

Not only forgiveness, but the sense of forgiveness, is revealed in the word of God as the believer's privilege. We should pray for it as necessary to our own happiness and to our Saviour's glory. We should not rest until, by persevering prayer, we have obtained it. For never is Christ more honored than by the love and happiness of his people. How closely these are connected with the pardon of sin we need not tell. Nor need there be fear that the knowledge of our forgiveness, the consciousness of our acceptance with God, will breed presumption, for in a real child of God it invariably begets humility.

"Thy faith hath saved thee." Observe, the Saviour does not say, "thy love," but "thy faith," hath saved

thee. Through it she had obtained the forgiveness of her sins. This sense of the miserable emptiness of the creature—this acknowledgment that a life apart from God is not life, but death, with the conviction that in God there is fullness of grace and blessing, and that he is willing to impart of this fullness to all who bring the empty vessel of the heart to be filled by him,—this faith, which alone makes man receptive of any divine gift, this is what that Pharisee, in his legal righteousness, in his self-sufficiency and pride, possessed scarcely at all, and therefore he derived little or no good from communion with Christ. But that woman had it in a large measure, and therefore she bore away the largest and best blessing which the Son of God had to bestow, even the forgiveness of her sins. To her those blessed words were spoken: "Thy faith hath saved thee, go in peace;" and in her it was proved true that "where sin abounded, grace did much more abound."

How lovely this picture of the Saviour of the world with that despised, downtrodden, forlorn woman at his feet! We have here a living type and embodiment of what Christianity has done to wipe the tears from degraded womanhood and raise her from the dust to which paganism had doomed her. What is the chivalry of the Middle Ages but the legitimate effect of the elevating spirit of Christianity? Wherever Christianity is *not*, there is woman found with the curse of bondage and degradation resting upon her—the drudge instead of the helpmeet and companion of man. The first words that our Lord uttered when he rose from the grave were addressed to a whole world in tears: "*Woman!* why weepest thou?" He could point to that vacant sepulchre he had just left as the certain pledge

that ere long these tears would be dried. O Jesus! *woman* (personated by that poor penitent) may well come and lie adoring at thy feet. Thy religion has been the breaker of her chains and the balm of her sorrows: we cease now to wonder that she was last at thy cross and first at thy tomb.

“How evident is it from this narrative,” says Mr. Jay, “that we should consider none of our fellow-creatures as entirely abandoned!”

We grant that there are some for whom we feel, and ought to feel, great alarm. There are some who seem to have sinned away everything like conscience, and to have gone such lengths in wickedness that only a divine arm can reach them. But let us remember there is such an arm. And what this arm can do is not left for conjecture to determine. We know what it can do from what it has done, for “his hand is not shortened, that it cannot save, neither his ear heavy, that it cannot hear.”

Think of this, ye parents, who, after all your prayers and efforts and tears, see your children walking the downward road! Think of this, ye ministers, who, after preaching for long years, see no religious movement among many of your gospel-hardened hearers! “God is able of these stones to raise up children unto Abraham.”

THE * GOOD * SAMARITAN.

“Love never fails: though knowledge cease,
Though prophecies decay,
Love, Christian Love, shall still increase,
Shall still extend her sway.
Here dimly, through life’s shadowy glass,
We strain our infant eyes;
Soon shall the earth-born vapors pass,
And light, unclouded, rise;
Then Hope shall sink in changeless doom,
Then Faith’s bright race be o’er,
But thou, eternal Love, shalt bloom
More glorious than before.”

25 And, behold, a certain lawyer stood up, and tempted him, saying,
26 Master, what shall I do to inherit eternal life? He said unto him,
27 What is written in the law? how readest thou? And he answering
said, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with
all thy soul, and with all thy strength, and with all thy mind; and thy
28 neighbor as thyself. And he said unto him, Thou hast answered right:
29 this do, and thou shalt live. But he, willing to justify himself, said
30 unto Jesus, And who is my neighbor? And Jesus answering said, A
certain man went down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell among
thieves, which stripped him of his raiment, and wounded him, and
31 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
32 the other side. And likewise a Levite, when he was at the place,
33 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
34 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
35 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 what-
soever thou spendest more, when I come again, I will repay thee.
36 Which now of these three, thinkest thou, was neighbor unto him that
37 fell among the thieves? And he said, He that showed mercy on
him. Then said Jesus unto him, Go, and do thou likewise.

THE GOOD SAMARITAN.

THE office of Christ as a Teacher was not only to reveal what was unknown, to give men commandments and to establish new doctrines, but to exhibit the former communications of heavenly wisdom in their primitive simplicity and meaning. A great part of his Sermon on the Mount is taken up with such corrections, and in this parable of "The Good Samaritan" he disencumbers the second great commandment of the law, "Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself," of the interpretations with which bigotry and selfishness had veiled its meaning, and presents it in its original comprehensiveness of obligation.

"A certain lawyer stood up"—in all likelihood within some synagogue upon a Sabbath day—and said to Jesus, "Master, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?" Something more than a desire to test the extent of Christ's knowledge appears to have prompted his question. It is not presented in an abstract form. It is not, "Master, what should be done that eternal life may be inherited?" but, "Master, what *shall I do* to inherit eternal life?" It looks as if it came from one feeling a deep, personal interest in the inquiry. The manner in which our Lord entertained it confirms this impression.

"What is written in the law? how readeest thou?"

This reply of the Saviour is as much as to say, "The question you ask is already answered. What need to make further inquiries when the answer is contained in the words of that very law of which you profess to be a searcher and expounder? What is written there concerning this great question?" That the lawyer should at once quote, as he did, the great commandment from Deut. vi. 5 in connection with Lev. xix. 18 proved that he was superior to the common range of his countrymen. This reply was an answer to his own question. For there is no entrance into life or inheritance in heaven for an unloving spirit. Whatever be the means by which that love to God and man is to be produced, one thing is clear: that unless it does exist there can be no eternal life, for "God is love," and to love God is to live.

In this view our Lord's reply, "Thou hast answered right; this do, and thou shalt live," is to be accepted in all simplicity as the great universal, cardinal truth in the case. Life was offered at first, and life is offered still, as the reward of obedience. It is not needful to apologize for this statement or to explain it away. It is not contrary to evangelical doctrine. It is true that the fulfilling of God's law will secure his favor. Obedience deserves life, and disobedience deserves death. Mankind have disobeyed; we all have sinned, and are therefore all under condemnation. Nothing but a perfect obedience can gain God's favor. Hence the incarnation and sacrifice of Christ; hence the substitution of the just for the unjust. The gospel is not an exception to the law, "This, do and thou shalt live;" the gospel is founded on that law. This law Christ came not to destroy, but to fulfill.

What Jesus said to the lawyer was, in substance, this: "Your knowledge is correct and admirable; just convert it into action. You have plenty of light; now let it shine through every act of your life and every utterance of your lips. Your answer is admirable; only let your head and your heart and your hand be in perfect harmony, and the whole law will attest that you have fulfilled it. If you do perfectly fulfill it you shall live, but this cannot be done by you nor by others, and therefore life must be sought elsewhere."

But, much as the lawyer might have deceived himself as to his loving God, he knew, as we all do, many cases in which he had not loved his neighbor as he loved himself. How could he escape from the dilemma in which he was placed? He wished to *justify himself* in regard to these violations of the law, and to remove the blame from himself, on the ground that it might be laid upon the law itself and its divine Author, who had not sufficiently explained what he had meant by the term *neighbor*, and had thus given occasion to disobedience against this command. Hence his question, "And who is my neighbor?" and hence the parable which follows.

The "certain man" was evidently a Jew. It could not be said of a Samaritan, who was not permitted to go to Jerusalem, that he was departing thence to another place. Besides, unless we suppose this man to have been a Jew, having acknowledged claims upon the kindness and protection of the priest and Levite, the point of the parable is lost.

How fitly the road from Jerusalem to Jericho was made the scene of this story will appear when it is understood that this road has always been infested by daring and desperate robbers. "It passes," says Dr.

Hanna, "through the heart of the eastern division of the wilderness of Judaea, and runs for a considerable space along the abrupt and winding sides of a deep and rocky ravine, offering the greatest facilities for concealment and attack. From the number of robberies and murders committed in it Jews of old called it 'the Bloody Road,' and it retains its character still. We traveled it guarded by a dozen Arabs, who told by the way of an English party that the year before had been attacked and plundered and stripped; and we were kept in constant alarm by the scouts sent out beforehand announcing the distant sight of dangerous-looking Bedouins. All the way from Bethany to the plain of Jordan is utter solitude—one single ruin, perhaps that of the very inn to which the wounded Jew was carried, being the only sign of human habitation that meets the eye. Somewhere along this road the solitary traveler of whom Jesus speaks is attacked. Perhaps he carries his all along with him, and, unwilling to part with it, stands upon his defence, wishing to sell life and property as dearly as he can. Perhaps he carries but little—nothing that the thievish band into whose hands he falls much value. Whether it is that a struggle has taken place, or that exasperation at disappointment whets their wrath, the robbers of the wilderness strip their victim of his raiment, wound him and leave him there 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." Nothing happens by chance, in the sense of an accident without a cause. It was not by chance in this sense that the priest came by that road at that time; the expression simply means, "it so happened." It was by

that *concurrency* of events which is so often to be seen distinguishing the acts of God's providence. Many good opportunities are concealed under those events which to us appear to be *fortuitous*. If we happen to come in view of a man in distress, that is just the intimation of God that we must help him as much as we can, and not to regard such an intimation is not the humane disposition which our Lord so highly praises.

Twelve thousand priests and Levites were stationed at Jericho with a view to the rotation of service at Jerusalem. Hence the peculiar propriety with which our Lord introduces the priest and Levite as passing this way. Whether the priest was traveling to discharge his office or returning from the performance of its duties, we are unavoidably led to expect, on account of his standing and office, that he would be disposed to manifest a compassionate feeling. But, although he was a man consecrated to the service of God, and even now on his way from his turn of office in the temple, the sight of his countryman and fellow-worshiper moved in him no compassion: he passed by, cold and unconcerned, without so much as coming near to help or even console the unhappy sufferer.

The expression, "He passed by on the other side," marks an intentional turning away and going past on the other side, that he might not be moved by a nearer view or suffer any sort of detention. We are not informed what his excuses were, but we may be quite sure he had plenty. Those who seek an excuse for neglecting the labor of love always find one. He was alone; he could neither cure the unfortunate man there nor carry him away. To make the attempt might bring the robbers down upon himself, and thus

he should throw away a good life after a damaged one. Love saw no excuses for leaving the man lying in his blood, for it was not looking for them, but selfishness saw them at a glance, and would have created them in abundance if there *had been none at hand*.

“And likewise a Levite, when he was at the place, came and looked on him, and passed by on the other side.” Levites were a class who served at the temple, assisting the priests in sacrifices and other services. They belonged to the tribe of Levi, which was set apart to religion. Priests were of the family of Aaron in that tribe. The Levites performed the humbler services of the temple, as cleaning, carrying fuel and acting as choristers. They were also writers, teachers, preachers and *literati*. This Levite also was probably returning from the temple-service to Jericho when he fell in with this wounded man. Curiosity led him near, but, though he obtained a more exact knowledge of the sufferer’s helpless condition, he yet passed by without helping him, and thus manifested a still greater inhumanity, for whilst the first exhibited selfishness instinctively, the second did so upon calculation.

Thus did the priest and the Levite, who made their boast in that law which was so careful in pressing the duties of humanity that twice it had said, “Thou shalt not see thy brother’s ass or his ox fall down by the way, and hide thyself from them: thou shalt surely help him to lift them up again.” Here not a brother’s ox or his ass, but a brother himself, was lying in his blood, and they hid themselves from him. These men had not learned that God “will have mercy rather than sacrifice;” they had not yet felt that to pour oil into the wounds of the sufferer is more acceptable to God

than to raise the richest incense or to perform with the most mechanical precision all the rites and ceremonies of the temple-worship. How prone is religion to become a religion of rites and ceremonies, of fasting and feasting, and not a religion of mercy, of love and of goodwill!

“But a certain Samaritan, as he journeyed, came where he was, and when he saw him, he had compassion on him.” The Samaritans sprang from the mixture of races that took place at the time of the Captivity between the children of Israel who still remained in their land and the heathenish Assyrians and Babylonians who had been there colonized. National hatred kept Jews and Samaritans still apart even at the time of Christ. That a Samaritan is here represented as the deliverer was directed against this national bigotry, and was meant to teach that one often finds in men from whom nothing is expected more humane feeling than in hypocritical believers. The force and appositeness of the parable are enhanced by contrasting the conduct of the despised Samaritan with men of such public reputation as a priest and a Levite.

How many excuses might this Samaritan have framed for neglecting the sufferer before him! He might have pleaded the traditional enmity between the Jews and Samaritans, and besides that he could ill afford the expense or loss of time to which his benevolence subjected him; that he had reason to apprehend danger from robbers lurking in the vicinity; and that, for whatever he did for the sufferer, he would get no thanks, for the man was a Jew, whilst *he* was a Samaritan.

But instead of doing this, conquering his prejudices and those fears for his safety which, amid such scenes

and with such a sight before him, were not unnatural, he hastened to the rescue. He first *saw* him at a distance as lying in his blood, yet living, then *had compassion on him*, then *went to him*, and bending over the bleeding form applied such remedies as circumstances permitted and his skill suggested. He closed the lips of the sufferer's gashes and bound them up, doubtless with strips from his own garments; then *poured in oil and wine*, a common remedial application at that time for wounds, with which, as a traveler, he seems to have been provided—the wine probably to cleanse the wounds, and the oil to allay the pain.

There are many persons who on beginning a good work go at it at first with zeal, but, lacking perseverance and loving change, they soon turn to something else. But the Samaritan stuck by the cause in which he had embarked. He did not bind up and anoint the wounds of the man, and then think that his work of benevolence was done, but he *set him on his own beast and brought him to an inn*, over rough and steep declivities, probably being obliged to sustain and support him to prevent his falling from the animal, *and took care of him*. The residue of that day and the whole of the following night he attended to the wants of the wounded man, denying himself the usual repose so necessary to a traveler.

The morning sees his rescued brother better. Now he may depart. Yes, but not till he has done all he can to make it sure that he be properly cared for till all danger is over. He may be a humane enough man, the keeper of this inn, but days will pass before the sufferer can safely travel, and it may not be wise to count upon the continuance of his kindness. The

Samaritan gives the innkeeper enough to keep his guest for six or seven days, and tells him that whatever he spends more will be repaid. Having thus done all that the most thoughtful kindness could suggest to promote and secure recovery, he goes to bid his rescued brother farewell. Perhaps those pale lips are still unable to articulate his thanks, but that parting look in which a heart's whole swelling gratitude goes out,—it goes with him and kindles a strange joy. He never saw the sun look half so bright, he never saw the plain of Jordan look half so fair; a happier man than he never trod the road to Jericho. True, he had lost a day, but he had saved a brother; and while many a time in after life the look of that stark and bleeding body as he first saw it lying on the roadside would come to haunt his fancy, ever behind it would there come that look of love and gratitude to chase the spectral form away and fill his heart with light and joy.

It is difficult to admire enough the wisdom with which the Saviour, having brought to an end this affecting parable, reverses the question of the lawyer. He had asked, "Who is the neighbor to whom I am bound to show the service of love?" but the Lord asks, "Who is a neighbor?—he who shows love or he who shows it not?" The parable is a reply not to the question, but to the spirit out of which the question proceeded. It says, "You ask who is your neighbor. I will show you a man who *asked not* that question, and then your own breast shall be judge between you and him which had most of the mind of God, which was most truly the doer of his will, the imitator of his perfections."

It will be noticed that in his answer the lawyer did not mention the name of the Samaritan, but adopted

the circumlocutory phrase, *He that showed mercy on him*. This answer, drawn by our Lord from him, was virtually, *The Samaritan is my neighbor*, since, if this man's compassionate service to the Jew was such as to entitle him, in the lawyer's estimation, to be regarded as the Jew's neighbor, then, by a parity of reasoning, the conduct of the lawyer to a Samaritan should answer to the relationship which he had just acknowledged. In other words, the obligation and exercise of kindness were to be mutual. Hence our Lord closes with the brief but pertinent direction, *Go, and do thou likewise*. Deal with a Samaritan as this Samaritan dealt with a Jew, and so will you, Jew and Samaritan, be neighbors.

We ought to account every man our neighbor, though a stranger, one of a different sect and persuasion, an enemy or a sinner. Let him be what he will, he is a human creature, and as such he is entitled to humanity, to direction and instruction if he asks them, and to assistance if he is in distress. But in representing every man of every country as our neighbor, did Christ intend to break down all those peculiar regards which spring out of intercourse and kind offices, and render our affections equal toward all mankind? We presume not. This is a refinement of modern times. What is called the "citizenship of the world" is recommended so as to destroy patriotism, and it would destroy all domestic ties which are founded upon the same associations. The advocates for this system are noted for their unfeelingness. The idea intended to be conveyed by Christ seems to be that we are neighbor to every man in distress, in danger and liability to suffering, and that this ought to operate more powerfully upon our feelings of compassion than mere proximity of place. Thus the

Samaritan was neighbor to the man who fell among thieves. He saw his suffering in a nature common to them both—suffering an accident which he himself might suffer, needing comforts which he himself might need—and in the spirit of neighborhood, his proximity to the same condition, he relieved him.

An apostle enjoins sympathy toward persons in suffering circumstances as knowing that we ourselves also “are in the body.” This consideration will always have its full effect upon the considerate mind. We are neighbors to the distresses of every man. Amidst all the sad variety of human woe which comes under our notice what kind of distress is there to which any of us can say, “We are not liable to it”? Have we a charter of exemption from poverty, from calumny, from ingratitude? Can we tell that we shall not outlive our friends and our comforts? Carry we not about with us the seeds of disease? Do not distressing accidents every day prowl about our path? View the changing scene of things in which you live, and say how near are we to every man’s distresses, however distant our rank.

Let our liability to suffering teach us sympathy, for we ourselves “are yet in the body.” But sympathy with those who are in *temporal* distress is by no means all that is required of the disciple of Jesus. Wherever through the wide world he beholds his fellow-creature suffering under the greater and more appalling calamity of *spiritual* distress, bleeding and dying of the wounds inflicted by sin, asking, as it were, in piteous wailing, whether any man will care for his soul,—there, there too he must give good heed that he is like the Samaritan, stranger as he was, rather than as the priest and Levite, who by their wicked neglect trampled on the union which

binds all mankind in a common brotherhood for mutual kindness, benevolence and charity.

Beyond all question a benevolent spirit is in conformity with the best principles of that nature which we have received from our Creator, and tends to promote even the personal happiness and comfort of the benevolent individual. Goodwill to men is sown in our constitution by the hands of our Maker, and it will spring up wherever it is not overborne by prejudice and passion. This is the voice of God proclaiming to us, by the very principles of our frame, that we are, one and all, intended to be partakers of each other's fortune, and that it is the will of our Father that we should be mutual supports to each other in the pilgrimage of life. We may differ in accidental circumstances—in the place that gave us birth, in the ceremonies of worship, in the creed we adopt—but we agree in many more important particulars. We are all children of the same heavenly Father, we are all born of the same image, we are all members of the same great community, we are all fellow-travelers in the same weary pilgrimage on earth, and we are all expectants of the same immortality.

What, then, follows but that we should be willing, even at personal sacrifice, to assist each other, overlooking the trifling differences by which we may be now distinguished, and be anxious for each other's happiness and comfort? The tender mercies of our heavenly Father extend to all his creatures, and why should our affections be confined within a narrow circle?

Besides, God has so constituted us that the exercise of the spirit of benevolence yields satisfaction to ourselves in addition to the advantages which it confers on others. The sensibilities of virtuous affection have a charm which

he who experiences them would not exchange for all the wealth which the world can bestow. The man of a feeling heart rejoices ever in the cultivation and exercise of these sensibilities. They enable him to participate in the joys of every happy man, and when his tears fall at the sight of human sorrow they are precious drops which abundantly repay his grief.

As the tender affections are delightful, even in themselves, so are they the source of many solid advantages in the intercourse of life. They promote our reputation, they ensure the reciprocal affection of our brethren. Who is the man that enjoys the goodwill of every neighbor and is followed to his grave by the lamentations of the district, village or city in which he lived? It is he who had a heart to feel the distress of the unfortunate, and a hand open to relieve them. "I was eyes to the blind, and feet was I to the lame, I was a father to the poor, and the cause which I knew not I searched out. Therefore, when the young saw me they hid themselves, the aged arose and stood up, the blessing of him that was ready to perish came upon me, and the widow's heart sang for joy." Such were the consolations that cheered the heart of Job amid the heavy load of his afflictions—consolations which were not to perish with his body, but to follow him into the land of spirits.

Then, again, it must be remembered that benevolence is the temper of the blessed in heaven, and the more we cultivate it here, the nearer we here approach to the perfections of the glorified, the better qualified shall we be for their society. Many of our other accomplishments and attainments shall leave us on this side of the grave. "Whether there be prophecies, they shall fail, whether there be tongues, they shall cease, whether there be

knowledge, it shall vanish away ;” but “charity never faileth.” It will be our song of rejoicing in the house of our earthly pilgrimage ; it will visit us like an angel of mercy on a bed of sickness ; it will support our hearts amid the waters of the Jordan of death, and prepare us for that happy country where love, harmony and peace shall reign for ever. Beneficence is, indeed, one of the virtues for which Heaven appears to have reserved the richest recompense. The sacred writers seem in difficulty to express with exactness the acceptableness of this virtue to God. Listen to Isaiah : “Is not this the fast that I have chosen, to deal thy bread to the hungry, and that thou bring the poor that are cast out into thy house ; when thou seest the naked, that thou cover him ? *then* shall thy light break forth as the morning, and thy righteousness shall go before thee ; the glory of the Lord shall follow thee.” Listen to Paul : “To do good, and to communicate, forget not, for with such sacrifices God is well pleased.”

Let us, then, try to catch the spirit of the Good Samaritan, and imitate his example. He wasted no needless sympathy, he shed no idle tears. There were wounds to be dressed ; he put forth his own hand to the dressing of them. There was a life that might be saved ; he set himself to use every method by which it might be saved. He gave more than time, more than money ; he gave personal service. And that is the true human charity that shows itself by prompt, efficient, self-forgetful, self-sacrificing help. It is not those who will weep the readiest over the sorrow who will do the most to relieve it. Tears will fill the eye, should fill the eye, but the hand of active help will brush them away, that the eye may see more clearly what the hand has to do.

THE ✧ IMPORTUNATE ✧ FRIEND. †

“Petitions yet remain,
Which Heaven may hear, nor deem religion vain.
Still raise for good the supplicating voice,
But leave to Heaven the measures and the choice,
Safe in His power whose eyes discern afar
The secret ambush of a specious prayer;
Implore his aid, in his decisions rest,
Secure, whate'er he gives, he gives the best.”

5 And he said unto them, Which of you shall have a friend, and shall go unto him at midnight, and say unto him, Friend, lend me
6 three loaves: For a friend of mine in his journey is come to me,
7 and I have nothing to set before him? And he from within shall answer and say, Trouble me not: the door is now shut, and my children are with me in bed; I cannot rise and give thee. I say unto you, Though he will not rise and give him, because he is his friend, yet because of his importunity he will rise and give him as many as he needeth.

LUKE XI. 5-8.

THE IMPORTUNATE FRIEND.

HOW blessed must have been those seasons in which the Saviour engaged in prayer with his beloved disciples! On the occasion on which this parable was spoken we are told that he prayed, but the name of the place is not recorded. After hearing his prayer the disciples felt conscious of their own inability to pray. They were, like us, compassed with infirmities, and knew not what to pray for as they ought. Moved by his blessed example, therefore, in the spirit of little children they said to their Master, "Teach us to pray;" and in answer to their request he gave that form of prayer which has ever since been the treasure of the Church—a form so simple that the merest child may use it "with the heart and with the understanding also," and yet so sublime that the most mature in grace and virtue and knowledge need nothing more.

Having given this form, Jesus proceeded to give them further directions upon prayer generally, both in the short parable of the Importunate Friend and in the direct admonitions that follow. Whilst he teaches them how to pray, he also excites and encourages them to do so. He argues from the less to the greater, and makes the contrast as well as the comparison conduce to his aim. If a man indisposed to the thing himself, and

even complaining of the application, may yet grant a request to importunity, how much more may we hope to succeed with God, whose goodness, like his power, is infinite! In this view it becomes distinguished from the similar parable in Luke xviii. 1-8, not merely by the form, but by an essential point of difference. *Here* it is prayer for the needs of others in which we are bidden to be instant; *there* it is rather for our own needs.

This parable contains more details characteristic of Eastern manners than many similar narratives of greater length. The arrival at so late an hour is a most natural circumstance, as journeys in the East are in the summer months largely performed at night. At that season the daily journey of the caravans, which is suspended during the heat of the day, terminates at midnight, and to represent a solitary stranger, therefore, as arriving at a friend's house at such an hour, however unseasonable it may seem to us, would appear to the hearers of this parable a familiar occurrence.

The friend at whose house the application was made does not seem to have been of high rank or to have had a large establishment of servants, for he is represented as excusing himself on the ground that his children were with him in bed—an expression which does not mean that they were all crowded into the same couch, but merely perhaps that they were sleeping in the same room with him. It is quite common, amongst people in the humbler ranks in the East, for a whole family to occupy the same room during the night.

The fact that the applicant had nothing to set before his friend was no evidence either of poverty or want of economical management, for, liberal as is the

hospitality shown in the East to strangers, the bread, of which the greater part of the entertainment always consists, has often to be baked after their arrival. The traveler's friend, having none with which he could treat a respectable guest, and no meal to bake with—the grinding of the corn for daily consumption being the first work of the morning—applied to a neighbor, who, having a family of children, might be in the habit of baking a fresh supply of bread at a later hour of the day. It was a common practice among the Jews, as it is among the Orientals of the present day, to borrow bread from each other on any sudden emergency, to be repaid the next morning or on the first convenient opportunity. As the loaves were generally thin cakes, three being the ordinary allowance of a single person, the knowledge of this circumstance will determine the reason for limiting the request to that number. The continued knocking at the neighbor's door after the owner had announced that he and his family had gone to bed and did not wish to be disturbed is not the least characteristic circumstance in this narrative. It is almost incredible with what importunity a native of the East will urge his application for whatever he wants; and the result almost always proves successful, as the person applied to is glad to grant the petition to get rid of his importunities.

This man, whose house the traveler visited, was benevolently disposed toward him. "My friend," says he, "is come to me." Though the hour of his arrival was unseasonable, still he extended to him a cordial welcome, and anxiously strove to minister to his comfort. He appreciated his condition as one who was benighted and had providentially reached his house, and

therefore he was not only willing but solicitous to do all he could to relieve his destitute condition. Are there not those about us whom we know to be on their journey to the eternal world, who have lost their way in the darkness of sin, and who by their very silence make to us a most tender and touching appeal? Is it not true, also, that though we have nothing to set before these needy and perishing souls, yet we know where the Bread of life can be had? It is ours, therefore, to bear them upon our hearts before God, and entreat *him* to bestow what we are unable to give. Humanity—and, much more, Christianity—requires this. And the duty is the more palpable and obligatory the nearer those who need the Bread of life are to us. Intercession on behalf of a fellow-sinner can be of no avail after he leaves this world of thick darkness. But *now* such intercession may prevail. No one going to God on this errand need be afraid of coming to him unseasonably. He that keeps Israel slumbers not nor sleeps. Come we early, he is awake; come we late, even at “midnight,” he has not retired to rest; come we to present a case on which the dark shadows of aggravated guilt have accumulated, still we need not despair, knowing that we plead with One whose grace is able to make scarlet sins as wool, and crimson sins whiter than snow.

It is of great importance to remember that, as the parable intimates, in prayer we may go to God in the character of “a friend.” There are some who conceive of prayer as an overcoming of God’s reluctance to give. There is reason for fearing that this is the idea which many have of it. Such persons, when thinking of salvation, conceive of it as purchased from God the Father

by a price paid to him by the Son, and which he could not refuse. They forget that it was love on the part of the Eternal Father that led him to give his Son to die, no less than love on the part of the Son himself to die. They forget that the gift of the Saviour was just the *expression* or the *exponent* of that love, and the magnitude of the gift was the measure of the original love of God. On the same principle precisely these persons imagine that in prayer God must first of all be made willing to give, forgetting that prayer is, in fact, a laying hold of his highest willingness.

How beautifully and touchingly is this taught by the Saviour in the thirteenth verse of this chapter!—"If ye, then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him!" There is nothing more deeply founded in truth than the assumption there made. All creatures, by an instinct of their nature, are characterized by tenderness to their young, and this propensity rises in strength according as the order of being is more noble in which it is found, until it culminates in man, and shows itself in him as perhaps the most ardent and forceful of his affections. Man will not turn away with an unfeeling heart and unopened hand from the entreaties of his offspring. There may, indeed, be occasions on which a parent cannot minister gratification or relief. Thus was it with Hagar in the wilderness, when, her bread being consumed and the bottle of water spent, she laid her child under one of the shrubs that she might not see his death, and went and sat over against him and lifted up her voice and wept. Thus was it with the parents of Moses when the alternative presented to them was to

see him murdered or to lay him in the little ark in the flaps by the river's brink. Thus was it also in the case of the Shunammite's son, whom neither his touching complaint to his father, "My head! my head!" nor his being carried to his mother's lap, could deliver from the fatal malady with which he had been seized. But where it is possible and proper the parent will satisfy the demands of his children. "For them," says one who sustained and adorned this relation—"for them he will make the largest surrenders of ease and time and fortune. He will compass sea and land in quest of provision for them, and for their sakes nerve himself against the buffeting of all the elements, at one time adventurously ploughing the ocean in their behalf, and at another living for years in the exile and estrangement of a foreign clime, with naught to soothe him in the midst of his fatigues but the imagery of his dear and far-distant home."

Thus is it with earthly parents. So strong, so enduring, is this propensity of their nature that it will prompt them to any reasonable liberality which will promote the happiness of their children, if it rise not to such control over them that they will say when death has carried them away, even though they have been rebellious and profligate, "Would God I had died for thee, O my son! my son!" This is true of parents also, notwithstanding their depravity which cleaves to them, blinds their judgments, makes them defective in moral purity, and tends to make them weary through repeated provocations, and selfish, so that they shall feel averse to the self-denial to which they have often to be subjected in order that the wants of their children may be supplied.

Now, as from the parental relation thus blooming and fruitful in the wilderness of the human heart, notwithstanding the unfriendly soil in which it exists and the blighting atmosphere of evil influences with which it is surrounded, the Saviour reasons up to our Father in heaven to demonstrate his willingness to "give good things to them that ask him," how broad and deep a foundation does he lay for our confidence in prayer! Who does not feel the touching allusion that is made? Whose heart is not moved with sensibility as memory bears him back to the old homestead that is identified in his recollections with all that is gentle, loving and kind? Who can forget the parent's eye that beamed with affection, and the parent's hand ready to meet each uttered want? Who does not remember how readily each urged necessity was relieved for him by the guides and guardians of his childhood?

The Saviour's imagery assures us that there is a fondness which far surpasses theirs now beckoning and beaming upon us from heaven. It gives us this blessed encouragement that, whatever freedom of access a son has to an earthly father to ask for the necessaries of life, the children of God in applying to him for spiritual blessings have more, because their wants are greater; because He who gives is wiser and better and more willing to bestow; because he has pledged himself by the word of his promise; and because the very circumstances of the several natures of God and man, in their relation to each other, create the moral necessity for God to give. If an earthly parent answers the cravings of an earthly child, much more will it be the case that when a finite being, bowed down with a sense of want, weakness and guilt, comes before his heavenly Father,

and asks those good gifts which his necessity demands,—much more will he answer. It cannot be that the perishing soul of man should plead for pardon and renewing grace, and Infinite Goodness refuse to give. What an earthly father will rarely fail to do, though he is evil, God will never fail to do, because he is good.

In this parable we find that delay in answering prayer is not its denial. In all such cases God has an ulterior object in view more important than the one which the petitioner directly desires. Whenever he apparently does not hear he tries the faith and patience of the believer. There are wisdom and love which we shall hereafter adore in God's withholding from us for a time the boon which we ask. Such delay increases our confidence, leads us to a higher appreciation of the gift when it is received, and draws us nearer and still nearer to the Fountain from which we seek to be supplied.

“When I was a little child,” says an eminent divine, “I often stood near a forge and watched a blacksmith at work, admiring the skill and the strength of the wonder-working man. When two pieces of iron, placed in the fire in order to be welded together, became red, I thought and said he should take them out and join them, but he left them lying still in the fire without speaking a word. They grew redder, hotter; they threw out angry sparks: Now, thought I, he should certainly lay them together and strike; but the skillful man left them still lying in the fire, and meantime fanned it into a fiercer glow. Not till they were white, and bending with their own weight, when lifted, like lilies on their stalks—not till they were at the point of becoming liquid, did he lay the two pieces alongside of each other, and by a few gentle strokes weld them into

one. Had he laid them together sooner, however vigorously he had beaten, they would have fallen asunder in his hands. The Lord knows, as we know not, what preparation we need in order that we may be brought into union with himself. He refuses, delays, disappoints, all in wise love, that he may bring the seeker's heart up to such a glow of desire as will suffice to unite it permanently with his own."

The importance of importunity in prayer is here inculcated. The poor Mohammedan, in company as in solitude, on the mart of commerce or on the muddy street, on the slippery rock or in the sandy desert, wherever he is and before whomsoever he is, drops on his knees at sundown to offer his devotions. A traveler who was recently exploring the mountains of Northern India found a tribe which followed the practice of praying by machinery. Certain prayers were placed on a revolving cylinder, and as the wheel went round and the prayer came up, each time its face was turned to heaven God was supposed to read it. It was as good as spoken by living lips. While engaged in his work or passing the cylinder at intervals, the worshiper from time to time gave it a turn, so as to keep it constantly spinning on its axis. Others still more ingenious set the cylinder in the run of a stream, that, as it turned like a mill-wheel, prayer might be offered day and night continually. Now, whilst, of course, we are to shun the lifeless formality of *such* prayers, yet here is a glimmering of what is meant by the Scripture exhortations to "be instant in prayer" and to "pray always and not faint." We believe it is possible to fulfill these injunctions. Our heart may be like the sacred altar of the Jews, on which the fire never ceased to burn, or like an æolian harp, on

whose strings, by night or day, the wind has but to breathe to wake up sweet and plaintive music.

Oh, how apt we are to faint in our supplications if we receive not soon the blessing we ask! We are tempted to abandon our seeking. Satan whispers, "What profit shall you have if you pray unto him?" "Where is God, thy Maker, that giveth songs in the night?" and our faithless hearts sink under the suggestion. But God is pleased with importunity. We honor him thus by the estimation in which we show that we are holding his blessing, and by the strong confidence which we indicate that we are exercising in his covenant promise. Why would we ask if we did not prize the favor solicited? and why would we persist if we had not faith of final success? This earnest entreaty will prevail when that of an opposite kind would fail. The Angel of the Lord, the great Covenant Angel, contended with Jacob and wrestled with him all the night, yet allowed himself at the last to be overcome by him, and left a blessing behind; and Jacob thenceforth was Israel—that is, was permanently lifted up through that conflict into a higher state, marked by that nobler name which thenceforth he bore, "for as a *prince* hast thou power with God and with men, and hast prevailed." The Syro-Phœnician woman, though kept by Jesus waiting almost hopelessly, as far as his disposition was indicated, for the blessing which she sought, finally obtained it. God is still the same. He is pleased with our much asking, instead of wearied with it. He exhibits to us with joy his people as crying unto him day and night. Man's life should be one unintermitting prayer. He may not, indeed, and need not, always occupy the attitude of supplication, neither is he required to merge entirely the active duties

of the station to which God has appointed him in services of devotion. His habitual frame of soul, however, should be one of dependence and desire in the direction of heaven, ready, like the expanded flower, to receive the cheering light and refreshing shower that will descend upon it from above.

“Because of his importunity he will rise and give him as many as he needeth.” This is an amazing revelation of the manner in which God regards suppliant disciples; and the best of it is its truth. The spirit in man that will take no denial is God’s special delight; the spirit that asks once and ceases he cannot approve. As the Lord loveth a cheerful giver, he loveth too an eager, persevering asker. Never does a Christian rise to the due appreciation of his privileges and responsibilities unless he attains to that sanctified energy of will which presses a suit before the throne till God bid him cease to pray. It ought to be one of our most firmly-settled convictions not only that God hears prayer, but that perseverance has peculiar power. No music—not the deep bass of the cataract, not the joyful concert of winged tribes, not the choir and organ of our sanctuaries, not the loudest, longest hallelujahs of earth, not even the songs of angels—is so grateful to the ear of the God of Sabaoth as the untiring supplications of his children. Importunity will prevail. Nature herself prompts to this. The babe cries till it gets a mother’s breast; the power of importunity is one of the first lessons a child learns and proceeds to practice; the boy keeps harping on his father, harping on the same string, giving him no rest or peace, now pleading with winning smiles and now with tears, returning after every defeat to renew the attack, till, worn out, he yields assent; and thus by im-

portunity, in a sense, the weak things of the world confound the mighty, and foolish things the wise.

What Nature thus teaches, revelation confirms. According to the divine command, we are to "ask," "seek," "knock." What wonderful words are these! We are not to regard the three rehearsals of the command as mere repetitions, for they are more, since to seek is more than to ask, and to knock than to seek; and thus, in this ascending scale of earnestness, an exhortation is given not merely to prayer, but to increasing urgency in prayer. If we ask as does the beggar who in his palpable destitution at the street-corner extends his hand for alms, we are also to seek most earnestly, as does the loser of a most precious treasure; and to knock most violently, as does the father at the midnight hour at the door of the physician whom he summons to the bedside of his child that is seized with sudden and alarming illness. Thus praying, we shall not, we cannot, fail, for so is it promised: "*Every one that asketh receiveth, and he that seeketh findeth, and to him that knocketh it shall be opened.*" We often talk of holding a man by his word, and if he be an honest man we have nothing by which we can hold him more firmly. Here we have the assurance of Truth itself. He cannot deny himself. Let us therefore take *him* at his word; and, relying on his engagement, *whoever* we are, *whatever* be our character and condition, draw near in full assurance of faith, and be filled with all joy and peace in believing, that we may abound in hope through the power of the Holy Ghost.

THE * RICH * FOOL.

“The miser comes, his heart to mammon sold;
His life, his hope, his god, his all is gold.
‘To-morrow, and to-morrow,’ he will say;
‘Soul, take thine ease, for thou hast many a day
Whose smiling dawns will make thee to rejoice.’
Hush! Hark the echoes of that awful voice!—
‘Thou fool! This night yield up thy earthly trust!’
Gaze once again, his treasures are but dust!”

16 And he spake a parable unto them, saying, The ground of a certain
17 rich man brought forth plentifully: And he thought within himself,
saying, What shall I do, because I have no room where to bestow my
18 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
19 goods. And I will say to my soul, Soul, thou hast much goods laid
20 up for many years; take thine ease, eat, drink, and be merry. But
God said unto him, Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required
of thee: then whose shall those things be, which thou hast provided?
21 So is he that layeth up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward
God.

LUKE XII. 16-21.

THE RICH FOOL.

WHEN Jesus was instructing his disciples in the presence of the multitude, he was interrupted by a man applying to him with this request: "Speak to my brother, that he divide the inheritance with me." It seems there was a contention between the two concerning their proper shares of their common inheritance. We do not know which of them was in the right, this man or his brother, but very likely he who spoke to our Lord was; certainly, there is not a word in the answer of Christ that calls in question the justice of his claim. But if he was in the right about his property, how was the state of his heart? His thoughts were engrossed by a perishing inheritance, while Jesus was pointing to that which fadeth not away.

Now, to have complied with this solicitation, our Lord well knew, would have been a direct departure from the spiritual province which he came to occupy, and hence his declination: "Man, who made me a judge or a divider over you?" or, in other words, "I am not sent for the purpose of settling earthly transactions."

But it would not do to dismiss the case with this refusal to interfere in it. Here was an instance that required instruction and admonition. Manifestly, a covetous, selfish disposition had taken possession of the ap-

plicant's mind, or he would not have interrupted the "words of eternal life" which were issuing from the Saviour's mouth in order to promote his petty interests—words in which he, as one of the hearers, ought to have felt a deep personal concern. Jesus therefore said, "Take heed, and beware of covetousness: for a man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth."

"The word here rendered 'covetousness' is a peculiar and very expressive one; it means the spirit of greed, that ever-restless, ever-craving, ever-unsatisfied spirit, which, whatever a man has, is ever wanting more, and the more he gets still thirsts for more—a passion which has a strange history: often of honest enough birth, the child of forethought, but changing its character rapidly with its growth—losing sight of the end in the means, till wealth is loved and sought and grasped, not for the advantages it confers, the enjoyment it purchases, but simply for itself—to gratify that lust of possession which has seized upon the soul and makes it all its own." How much needed, on every side, is the Saviour's warning against this fearful evil! It is a word more in season for the members of Christian churches than an exhortation to beware of theft. We are deceived in regard to the empire which covetousness holds among men. There is perhaps no sin more ignored by those who give themselves up to it than this. "No one confesses the sin of covetousness," said a bishop who had long officiated at the confessional. The drunkard cannot conceal his infractions of the law of God, the proud man even, or the vindictive man, can perceive and condemn the passions which govern him; but the covetous man scarcely ever knows himself. The object desired by the

drunkard and the adulterer, being bad in itself, they are treated as open enemies. It is not so with the love of money. Money is good in itself, money is necessary for the preservation of life, money is useful even in doing good. But how great the danger that it may monopolize the heart! No wonder, therefore, that Jesus used such emphatic fullness of expression in bidding the people to be on their guard against covetousness, adding as the reason or ground of this injunction that riches by no means secure for us, of themselves, a life of satisfaction upon earth, nor do they ensure to us eternal blessedness.

The parable of the Rich Fool is added to inculcate still further the warning just noticed, and expose in more vivid colors the mournful deceitfulness of riches. Before proceeding to its exposition it is well to remember that here, as in all the other narratives of the Bible, there is necessity for accurate discrimination. If we would not fail to perceive the precise truths which they are intended to inculcate, we must not make the characters which they represent worse than they are described, for this would be to make the delineation inapplicable just where it is intended to apply.

There were some things about this "certain rich man" which were not wrong and cannot be condemned.

He was prudent and industrious. In the account given of him we find no reason for belief that he was unjust or an extortioner; neither that he was a rash adventurer whose good fortune, indeed, might enlarge himself, but whose failure would be attended to others with crushing disaster; neither that he was indolent, for he was attentive to his landed estate and diligently active in the improvement of it.

He was a rich man. But it is no sin to be rich. Cornelius was a rich man, and yet he was not sinful because he was so. We read of Gaius, who exercised hospitality to the saints. Joseph of Arimathæa was a wealthy man, and yet he was a good man. It is possible to be as poor as Lazarus and to be the most covetous wretch in Christendom. It is not, as we have already seen, what a man has that makes the covetousness, but it is the concentrating all his thoughts upon it, and drawing from it the main elements of his joy, his comfort, his satisfaction, his repose. No, the possessor of wealth is not sinful. God, as Agur showed in his prayer, is the Giver both of poverty and riches.

This rich man obtained his wealth fairly—"not," as Augustine says, "by removing landmarks, not by robbing the poor, not by overreaching the simple." He seems to have been a farmer. And there was an obvious reason why our Lord chose an individual of this vocation. Had he merely brought under our notice the case of a wealthy man adding daily to his already large stores, a wide margin would have been left us to suppose that he had been doing this by unfair means. Christ was not aiming his rebuke against what is regarded as fraudulent between man and man. What he had before him was to illustrate the case of one who by no improper means was increasing in riches, but who, as they increased, had "set his heart upon them" and neglected God. So he tells us that it was not by fraud, but by the rains and sun and fertile soil, by cold and heat, summer and winter, that the stores of this man were continually becoming greater. It was *by God's blessing* that his riches increased, which might have been a *real* blessing if he had known how to use them.

Again: this man was prosperous in his business. The earth acknowledged his culture, and by plentiful returns compensated largely his active skill. All his calculations were not only realized, but exceeded. The sun of prosperity shone brightly upon him.

Outward prosperity, it is true, is not evidence that a man is in favor with God. We cannot judge that men are good because their ground brings forth plentifully and their merchandise succeeds; neither can we judge that others are bad because their property is swept away or their riches have vanished. Here, it is to be feared, many make a fatal mistake. They infer from their success in business that they are in favor with Heaven, forgetting that we are not to judge of what we are by what God's providence does to us, but by what God's word says respecting us. Still, it is true that prosperity is not in itself necessarily sinful, and hence this man could not be condemned because his ground produced largely.

Once more: there was nothing wrong in the forethought which this man exercised about taking care of his fruits. It is a sad thought indeed that anxieties are generally in proportion to the amount of our earthly possessions. And this fact, that riches and cares are inseparably wedded together, ought surely to go far to reconcile the poor to their poverty, whatever may be the pains, mortifications and inconveniences of that condition in life. But then we know of no law which forbids that a man shall take a prudent care of his property, and see, as his substance increases, that it does not suffer from neglect or waste, even though that care should require him to enlarge his buildings for this purpose.

The first fault in this rich man's character was a con-

trolling selfishness. "He thought within himself." How expressive of the internal working of covetousness, that dares not utter itself in words, but that plots its plans in the recesses of the heart, away from the sight of men, but not away from the eyes of God! "What shall I do, because I have no room where to bestow my fruits?" In proposing this question the man was exemplifying the truth that it is not when riches are "making to themselves wings" and departing from us that we cling to them most, but when they are increasing in our possession. He was showing what has been so often shown since—that while the drying up of the springs of earthly prosperity is often accompanied by the opening of the affections toward God, the increase which God gives not unfrequently shuts up the heart against himself. This man did not ask how best to use the means, the talents, God gave him; he did not sit down to examine into his duty as a steward of these things; he did not look around him for fitting objects on which to spend his wealth. No! The increase was to be wholly for himself, for his own comfort and luxury.

"What shall I do?" How well is it said that this question was proposed after he had "thought within himself"! Surely it was *in* himself, *of* himself and *to* himself. Self was its source; self was its end; self was its centre, and self was its circumference. "What shall I do?" How many answers to this inquiry might have come back, if only time had been given, from many an object of compassion, many an orphan, many a widow, many an ignorant family, many an avenue for doing good! But no such answer was wanted by him, and hence he soon reached

the foregone conclusion — as certain to rise in such a heart with its ruling selfishness as a spark is to fly upward or a stone cast into the air to fall back upon the ground: “This will I do: I will pull down my barns, and build greater, and there will I bestow all my fruits and my goods.” This is the turning-point, and on it the poor man turns aside into error. When God’s goodness was showered upon him in such abundance he should have opened his treasures and permitted them to flow: for this end his riches had been bestowed upon him. When rain from heaven has filled a basin on the mountain-top, the reservoir overflows, and so sends down a stream to refresh the valley below. It is for similar purposes that God in his providential government fills the cup of those who stand on the high places of the earth, that they may distribute the blessing among those who occupy a lower place in the scale of prosperity. But self was this man’s pole-star: he cared for himself, and for none besides. Mark the expression, “*all* my fruits and my goods”! Thus is it evident that he had no heart to feel for others, no thought or purpose beyond his own aggrandizement. Self was his god, for to please himself was practically the chief end of his existence.

Atheistical independence and ingratitude were also bad elements of this man’s character. Men in every department of labor are dependent upon God for their success. What are all our best plans, what are all our most vigorous exertions, without the blessing of the Almighty? But it would seem that, of all others, those who ought to *feel* this dependence the most (though it is in reality not greater in their case than in that of others) are the tillers of the soil. What can they do without

the refreshing showers and the cheering rays of the sun? How helpless are they forced to feel themselves as they go and cast the seed into the ground, and then return to their homes to wait for that sprouting and maturing of the grain which can only be produced by causes over which they have no control—agencies which can only be applied by Him who settles the furrows and waters the hills and fashions first the blade, then the ear, and after that the full corn in the ear! Now, as this man belonged to this class of laborers, what an appeal to his thankfulness was made by the very fact that whilst he was sleeping or eating or reading or walking, at home or abroad, still were the breezes of heaven blowing over his fields, the dews of heaven moistening his fields, and those numerous agencies at work which alone can bring the buried seed to perfection.

But how was this appeal responded to? Let the man's own words answer: "All *my* fruits and *my* goods." He ignored the providence of that very God to whom he was, and to whom he ought to have felt himself, indebted. "God was not in all his thoughts." He regarded himself in no other light than that which the civil law shed around him, forgetting that whilst legally he could say, "*My* barns, *my* goods and *my* fruits," he ought not thus to speak of himself in view of the law of God, but to speak of himself as a trustee having these things committed to his stewardship.

Besides, he looked upon himself as the only party capable of deciding how these goods should be stored away and for what purpose. He never thinks of consulting God—no, never. "*I* will do this and that—*I* will pull down—*I* will build, and *I* will bestow all my goods there," and so forth.

Another bad element in this man's character was a false view of true enjoyment. He felt a sensual complacency in the possession of fortune. When he looked around and surveyed the superabundance which, like so many streams, poured in upon him, a glow of unsanctified complacency seized upon his bosom and flushed the very spirit within him. Had he, indeed, amassed this treasure by vile or unlawful means; had his lands been wrenched by fraud or violence from their rightful owners; or had his laborers been oppressed or curtailed in their reasonable claims,—some painful misgivings might have poisoned his self-gratulation. But, as already hinted, there is no reason to believe that this man was otherwise than honorable in his feelings and upright in his pursuit of gain. His folly seems to have been wholly spiritual in its nature, attended in the world with no disgrace, and therefore the more perilous to his soul. He thought he was now secure against everything that could disturb his felicity, and he determined to rest from his labors.

But, alas! how sad the mistake which he made in regard to what he supposed would be suitable provision for his enjoyment! Everything which God has made requires a good suited to its nature. So with the bird; it seeks and must have its native air. So with the fish; it exists, and only can exist, in the water. So with the body; it cannot subsist on ideas, but must have earthly food. So with the mind; it must receive suitable nourishment. Oh, what ignorance, then, was here! How could mere material things satisfy the desires of an immortal spirit? How could it be imagined that the fruits of the earth, adapted though they are to meet many physical necessities, could possibly meet the bound-

less longings of a deathless soul? How could this man, who was wise enough to make money, ever hope to extract from wealth light for his understanding, truth for his judgment, peace for his conscience, or solid bliss for his immortal desires? What stupidity! what infatuation!

And yet, alas! how many follow this man in his infatuation, seeking good in the creature and not in the Creator, and striving to fill with earth's pleasures a mind whose emptiness can alone be filled by God its Maker and its proper portion! Let us never suppose for a moment that earthly possessions can satisfy the soul.

Still another element of this rich man's character was his miscalculating spirit. He felt as if he could control the term of his probation as he controlled his possessions. He talks to himself of many years. A long season of plenty and enjoyment, he flatters himself, is before him. "Be content, be satisfied, be happy. All things are right and secure; no interruption shall befall me, no molestation shall affect me." "They that trust in their wealth," says David, "and boast themselves in the multitude of their riches, their inward thought is that their houses shall continue for ever, and their dwelling-places to all generations." But what is the comment of Scripture on this inward delusion?—"Like sheep they are laid in the grave, death shall feed on them, and their beauty shall consume in the grave." Our own observation has often confirmed this truth, but it receives a signal attestation in the sequel of the parable.

Perhaps the man's colloquy with himself had taken place on his bed. He had finished his purposes and resolves, and now he had laid him down to think over

his improvements to be commenced on the morrow. Soon is he disturbed by the voice of God. He is made to hear the announcement, "Thou fool! this night thy soul shall be required of thee, then whose shall those things be which thou hast provided?" Oh, what an interruption to his castle-buildings! what a leveler to his plans! How soon the aspect of the whole scene is changed! An hour ago the man was surrounded with opulence and abundance, and lauded perhaps by the vulgar herd as a wise man, having most extensive possessions. But now, by the whisper that comes from unseen lips and falls in the stillness of his chamber upon his ear, he is called a "fool," and a summons to go hence—a summons he must obey—is placed in his hands.

What a terrible announcement was that! "Thy race is run, thy probation is ended; thou art on the verge of the eternal world." He may weep, tremble, rage, but he must go, and go at once. The call came just when it was least to be desired, finding the man in the midst of riches which he had long been accumulating, in the midst of plans which he had just been forming, and in the midst of hopes which he had been fondly cherishing. It was an end that in the very method of its announcement carried with it some expression of the divine displeasure. It was by force that he was to be taken away.

It was a saying of some of the Jewish doctors that the angel Gabriel drew out the souls of the righteous by a gentle kiss upon their mouths; but not thus gentle was the death of the rich fool, for, in the language of Theophylact, "terrible angels, like pitiless exactors of tribute, *required* of him, as a disobedient debtor, his soul." The man had en fleshed that soul, he had embodied it, he had made it earthy, and thus had prepared to render its divul-

sion from the body most hard. He was not as a ship which has long been waiting, and joyfully, when the signal is given, lifts its anchor and makes sail for its destination, but like the ship which by some fierce wind is dragged from its moorings and driven furiously to perish on the rocks.

“How shocking must thy summons be, O Death,
 To him that is at ease in his possessions,
 Who, counting on long years of pleasure here,
 Is quite unfurnished for the world to come!
 In that dread moment how the frantic soul
 Raves round the wall of her clay tenement,
 Runs to each avenue and shrieks for help,
 But shrieks in vain! How wishfully she looks
 On all she’s leaving, now no longer hers!
 A little longer, yet a little longer!

Mournful sight!

Her eyes weep blood, and every groan
 She heaves is big with horror. But the foe,
 Like a staunch murderer, steady to his purpose,
 Pursues her close through every lane of life,
 Nor misses once the track, but presses on,
 Till, forced at last to the tremendous verge,
 At once she sinks to everlasting ruin.”

“So,” says our Lord, thus foolish and destitute, even though the hour of his awaking from the dream of wisdom and wealth has not yet come, “*is*”—not “*will be*,” for a terrible every-day fact is set forth—“*he that layeth up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God.*” He who is rich *for himself*, laying up treasure *for himself*, is by so much robbing his real inward life, his life in and toward God, of its resources; he is laying up store for the *flesh*, but the *spirit*, that which God looketh into and searcheth, is stripped of all its riches.

☞ THE * FRUITLESS * FIG * TREE. ☞

“ God is much displeas'd
That you take with unthankfulness his doing.
In common, worldly things 'tis call'd ungrateful
With dull unwillingness to repay a debt
Which with a bounteous hand was kindly lent ;
Much more to be thus opposite with Heaven,
For it requires the debt it lent you !”

6 *He spake also this parable; A certain man had a fig tree planted*
in his vineyard: and he came and sought fruit thereon, and found
7 *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
8 *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
9 *dung it: And if it bear fruit, well: and if not, then after that thou*
shalt cut it down.

THE FRUITLESS FIG TREE.

THE Lord Jehovah is frequently pictured in Scripture as the lord of a vineyard. In the fifth chapter of Isaiah the prophet represents him as the proprietor of a vineyard, and states what great care he had bestowed upon it, but because it was unfruitful, or fruitful only in wild grapes, in briars and thorns, it was to be laid waste. Hence, as by the "certain man" in the parable now to be considered is meant the Lord of hosts, so by the "fig tree" we may understand the Jewish nation, which the Lord transplanted out of Egypt into the land of Canaan, and from which, when he sought fruit, he found none, for when our Saviour came unto his own, his own received him not.

Nor should it be overlooked how significantly typical was the figure which Jesus employed to represent the rapidly-approaching overthrow of the Jewish nation in righteous vengeance for their deep and widespread corruption and their obstinate impenitence, notwithstanding the many provisions made by God for their improvement. For, though that fig tree, the Jewish nation, has been cut down, the *roots* are yet left in the earth, and the words of Job may be applied to that afflicted people: "There is hope of a tree, if it be cut down, that it will sprout again, and that the tender

branch thereof will not cease. Though the root thereof wax old in the earth, and the stock thereof die in the ground; yet through the scent of water it will bud, and bring forth boughs like a plant."

But whilst this parable referred to the Jews as a nation, it refers as well to every individual in every age and in every country enjoying the means of grace. Indeed, there is a personal application made of the image which supplies the groundwork of the parable, by John the Baptist, when he says: "And now also the axe is laid unto the root of the trees; therefore every tree which bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire;" and of an image very nearly the same by Christ himself in the language, "Every branch in me that beareth not fruit he taketh away: and every branch that beareth fruit, he purgeth it, that it may bring forth more fruit."

Notice, first, *the situation of the tree*, the place where it stands. It is in God's vineyard, and our Lord tells us how it came there. It did not spring up there, nor was it brought there by accident: God himself had it planted there.

We are in God's vineyard. We are standing in the midst of God's Church, and it is God himself who has placed us in it. Our spiritual privileges are not, like the air and the light, our natural inheritance, the common bounties of God's providence. Look through the world: how many of our fellow-creatures can we find who are blessed as we are? The heart aches as we attempt to answer the question. It is no vineyard, it is a wilderness, in which the great mass of our fellow-sinners are standing, whereas we, in Christian America, are in a cultivated and fertile field, or rather in a garden

which the Lord has separated from that wilderness and set apart for himself.

Notice, next, that God requires, and has a right to expect, that those who are so highly favored should bring forth fruits of a corresponding kind. It is the peculiarity of the gospel that privilege precedes duty, but it is always taken for granted that duty shall follow. The wrath of God having been revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, God has a right to expect that all men should repent. Having sent his Son into the world, and having revealed the way of life and salvation, and having assured us that there is not a name under heaven by which men can be saved but the name of Jesus, he has a right to expect that men shall obey, and thus come into communion with him. And surely he has a right to expect that the professors of the gospel shall bring forth fruits meet for repentance. He has a right to expect that they will glorify him in their bodies and spirits, which he hath redeemed with an inestimable price.

Is it asked what those fruits are which we are to bring forth under the means of grace which we enjoy? In general, we find them described in the Bible as the "fruits of righteousness" and "the fruit of the Spirit." The apostle Paul requires those to whom he had preached the gospel to "increase in the knowledge of God, walking in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Ghost, being filled with the fruits of righteousness, which are to the praise of God by Jesus Christ." "And," says he, "the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance: against such there is no law." The apostle Peter also gives us an account of

that fruit which God expects of those who enjoy the gospel. "Giving all diligence," says he, "add to your faith virtue; and to virtue knowledge; and to knowledge temperance; and to temperance patience; and to patience godliness; and to godliness brotherly-kindness; and to brotherly-kindness charity. For if these things be in you, and abound, they make you that ye shall neither be barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ." It is expected also, be it remembered, that persons will abound in these fruits in proportion to the means of grace which they have enjoyed and to the period of time in which they have enjoyed them.

"Behold, these three years I come seeking fruit on this fig tree, and find none." This was the third year of raised expectation, and had been preceded, with like disappointment, by two annual visitations. It should be observed that, however lightly regarded by their subject and allowed to pass unimproved, these visitations were registered. God comes again and again. He searches; he finds no fruit; he complains not; he says nothing; he goes away. So true is it that in all the dealings of Almighty God with sinners, however these may be allowed by us to pass without observation, there is a silent but sure process of judgment at work—an undercurrent, flowing quietly but steadily, which bears on the soul to the destinies of the eternal world. We make light, we indulge a sportive fancy, we plunge into the absorptions of business or pleasure, we drown compunction in excess; but this undercurrent sets steadily in its appointed course. The soul is borne onward to the great tribunal, where books are to be opened and where every registry of the past which faith in Christ

has not blotted out is destined to unfold. Oh, where are the sinner and the ungodly to appear? Where is he to appear who now scoffs at the visitations of Almighty God, who in the natural effect of his crimes loses sight of the divine displeasure, who construes the stillness of judgment as oversight or disregard of his impenitence? One of the most afflictive spectacles which has ever pained the heart of the godly is that of a sinner awakening on the margin of eternity to his guilt and danger. Hitherto he had silenced in day-dreams the misgivings of the soul which lead to serious inquiry, but now he is awakened to the most fearful convictions of his swift and unalterable destinies.

How do *we* bear in mind these silent but affecting visitations of the Lord to his vineyard? They came not with observation. Some of them were joyous to our hearts; others are even now more painful in the remembrance than at the time. Some of them affected our outward condition in life; others reached deeper and stirred chords of emotion which had long slumbered. Many have held them only as joys or sorrows springing out of the earth, while new scenes and rarer incidents have soon banished from the mind every vestige of their remembrance. But how differently in our parable are these visitations regarded! The visitor was He who is unseen by the natural eye, discernible only by faith. It was God, now shrouded in providence, now in grace, with whom we had to do. He it was who came seeking the fruits of righteousness that are by Jesus Christ, to his own praise and glory. He it was who, surely with no unreasonable expectations, came again and again to find something answerable to the grace and mercy so largely expended upon the tree.

“Cut it down; why cumbereth it the ground?” Though the “three years” primarily mean the appointed time which God had allowed the Jewish nation in which to bring forth fruits meet for repentance, before the sceptre should depart from Judah and the national polity be destroyed, yet the parable exhibits a law and a limit observed in the dispensations of Providence which should overwhelm with terror all who possess spiritual privileges without improving them. Every man has a certain time of probation allotted to him wherein he is required to work the work of Him who sent him, and to bring forth the fruits of righteousness. There is a time to every purpose under the heaven, and to us *now* is the accepted time, now is the day of salvation. If we remain ignorant of the day of our merciful visitation, if we despise the riches of God’s grace, if we persevere in our alienation from him, and obstinately continue in sin, the advantages which we now possess will be taken away from us; the utmost term of God’s patience will expire; the Holy Spirit, grieved, will strive no longer with us; we shall be given over to a reprobate mind. The length of time that has been allowed us to produce fruit while we still continue barren is too probable an indication that we shall never bring forth fruit. As the owner of the vineyard said of the fig tree, “Cut it down, why cumbereth it the ground?” so there is reason to fear it will be said of us, “Cast ye the unprofitable servant into outer darkness, there shall be weeping, and wailing, and gnashing of teeth.” The fig tree was not only barren, but a “cumberer of the ground.” It occupied that place in the vineyard which was intended for a fruitful tree, and therefore it was necessary that it should be removed

Not only are the lives of unconverted men useless as regards their souls, but they are also cumberers or wasters of the ground. Their lives and their influence prove a hindrance to the gospel. They oppose its progress in their own hearts, and throw the whole weight of their example upon the side of the world and the opposers of God. Every unrenewed man virtually declares that he is opposed to the religion of Jesus Christ. This is the language of his daily life. This may seem a harsh judgment, but it is only plain Bible truth.

Observe next the intercession of the vine-dresser: "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." Whose language is this? It is the language of a Christian in favor of an irreligious friend or relative—of a father pleading for a child, a sister for a brother, a wife for a husband—all saying with Esther, "How can I bear the destruction of my kindred?" It is the language of a minister pleading for his people. Such a man not only preaches, but prays. He knows what it is to weep in secret for their unbelief, and he engages to use renewed and increasing diligence in future. Above all, it is the language of Jesus, the Mediator of the New Covenant, the Mediator between God and man. He makes intercession for the transgressors; he prayed for his murderers even in death: "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do."

First: He pleads for the suspension of the stroke: "Let it alone this year also." Thou hast borne with it long, I own, already; oh, bear with it a little longer. And why is he so desirous of sparing the sinner a little

longer in this world? Because in order to our having the grace of repentance it is necessary that we should have space *for* repentance; because while there is life there is hope.

Secondly: He engages to use additional means to produce fertility: "Till I shall dig about it and dung it." It is as if he had said, "Leave this sinner in my hands one year more. I have sent him warnings, but I will send him now plainer and louder warnings. I have visited him with afflictions; I will visit him now with sharper and more cutting sorrows. The spade shall go deeper; it shall disturb the man's very roots. His conscience too I have disquieted, but now I will make his conscience a daily scourge to him. I have told him of my great salvation; I have offered it to him times out of number, without money or price: he shall hear of it in the coming year yet more often; it shall be pressed on his acceptance with greater earnestness and force. Lord, let him alone. It may be that he will at last bring forth the fruits thou hast so long desired of him."

Third: Here is the supposition of future produce: "If it bear fruit, well." The word *well* is not in the original: there we find nothing but an awful pause. If it bear fruit— "*Then,*" it might be said, "thy design will be fulfilled, my prayer will be answered, the tree will be continued." Our translators have properly enough supplied the word *well*. Well for the owner: "for herein is my Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit." Well for the vine-dresser, as his labors will be rewarded. Well for the vineyard: it will be adorned and enriched where it was cumbered before. Well for the tree itself, as it will escape the

punishment of barrenness and obtain the blessing of fruitfulness.

Fourthly: Here is the doom of final impenitence: "If not—then, after that, thou shalt cut it down." If all these means prove ineffectual, if it still continues unfruitful, it is fit for nothing but the fire; yet let not *my* hand be upon it. I have interceded for it; I have been at much pains about it; I would have rejoiced to see it bearing fruit: even yet I cannot put forth my hand against it. But it is a cumberer of the ground; its presence is injurious to the fruitful trees; the attentions lavished upon it will be much more profitably bestowed upon them; and therefore "*thou shalt cut it down.*"

There seems to be something very fearful in this language. Who is it that promises here to acquiesce after a little in the entire destruction of every unfruitful hearer of God's truth? It is none other than He who has shed his heart's blood for our salvation, and who has all our life long been pleading that we may be spared. It is painful to have a kind earthly friend give us up, but to be given up, and given up to certain destruction, by the blessed Jesus, the kindest of all friends—one who bears with and loves us as none but himself can bear and love,—think what we will of it, there is something appalling in this. It is like a father who has cherished fondly a son, a worthless son, while all around have been calling out for justice on him; it is like that father's being at last forced to say, "I can hold out no longer; I can do no more. Let justice have him."

"After that thou shalt cut it down." When Jesus lets a sinner go, who shall take him up? But there

is love even in this last stern word. Love intercedes for a time of trial, an opportunity of turning; and love too, after securing sufficient opportunity, lets go its hold and leaves all hopeless beyond. It is the terrible concession, "thou shalt cut it down," issuing from the Intercessor's lips, that gives power to the invitation, "Now is the accepted time." To warn me now that if I let the day of grace run waste even Jesus on the morning of the judgment will not plead for me any more, is surely the most effectual means of urging me to close with his offer to-day.

Then, reader, pause and consider that if the Saviour's love has been recklessly slighted, the day in which the terrible consequences of this shall appear will be specially marked by the presence of the Lord of the vineyard once more—not now as one who gave all he had in order to purchase the vineyard and reclaim it from desolation—not now as one who may be, for another year, induced to pause in his final decision; but on the throne, with the books opened before him, and the very hand that was nailed on the cross in redeeming love will fall with resistless, terrible weight on the barren fig tree, as the voice of Him whose gentlest whisper is love itself shall be heard, "Cut it down. why cumbereth it the ground?"

Ah! wait not for *that* day. Such waiting will be fatal. Rise and call upon God. Seek Christ as your Saviour. Seek him in earnest; seek him as your only refuge; seek him as one ought to seek him who has long neglected him, but who has been spared to seek him at last.

THE * GREAT * SUPPER.

“The gospel's glorious hope,
Its rule of purity, its eye of prayer,
Its fort of firmness on temptation's steep,
Its bark that fails not 'mid the storm of death,
He spread before them, and with gentlest tone,
Such as a brother to his sister breathes—
His little sister, simple and untaught—
Did urge them to the shelter of that ark
Which rides the wrathful deluge.”

15 *And when one of them that sat at meat with him heard these*
things, he said unto him, Blessed is he that shall eat bread in the
16 *kingdom of God. Then said he unto him, A certain man made a*
17 *great supper, and bade many: And sent his servant at supper-time*
to say to them that were bidden, Come; for all things are now ready.
18 *And they all with one consent began to make excuse. The first said*
unto him, I have bought a piece of ground, and I must needs go and
19 *see it: I pray thee have me excused. And another said, I have*
bought five yoke of oxen, and I go to prove them: I pray thee have
20 *me excused. And another said, I have married a wife, and there-*
21 *fore I cannot come. So that servant came, and showed his lord*
these things. Then the master of the house being angry said to his
servant, Go out quickly into the streets and lanes of the city, and
bring in hither the poor, and the maimed, and the halt, and the
22 *blind. And the servant said, Lord, it is done as thou hast com-*
23 *manded, and yet there is room. And the Lord said unto the ser-*
vant, Go out into the highways and hedges, and compel them to
24 *come in, that my house may be filled. For I say unto you, That*
none of those men which were bidden shall taste of my supper.

LUKE XIV. 15-24.

THE GREAT SUPPER.

MAN has two appetites, or two great necessities. We not only need bread for the body that this outward medium of communication with the outward world may be adequate to its demands, but we need also that nutriment for our immortal souls, the absence of which will not be their annihilation, but their pining and conscious agony throughout the ages that are to come. It must be regarded as a strong evidence of God's unwillingness that any shall perish that we are so frequently reminded in the Scriptures of these spiritual wants, and of the provision which has been made for them under the attractive symbol of a feast.

The word "supper" in this parable is not to be pressed. The original word thus rendered denotes a *banquet*; hence it is not a warrantable inference which some have drawn that because supper takes place at evening, so it was in the evening of time, the last hour, that Christ came and invited men to the fullness of gospel blessings. A great feast, and nothing more, is signified.

The preparation of this feast has its ground in the love of God. How appropriately is it denominated "great"! What do we need that is not here to be

found? Is it plenitude? Here we have it. We read of "abundant mercy," of "plenteous redemption," of a Saviour "full of grace and truth," of "all the fullness of God." Is it variety? Here we have it. Here is light for our darkness, righteousness for our guilt, strength for our weakness, renovation for the heart, peace for the conscience, the supply of the Spirit, the comforts of the Holy Ghost. Is it richness of entertainment? What else can be the meaning of the expressions, "a feast of fat things, a feast of wines on the lees, of fat things full of marrow, of wines on the lees well refined"? God prepares dainties for his guests, and they are all supreme in their kind, and infinitely expensive. The Jews did eat "angels' food," but what was the manna compared with the Bread of life? He that eateth of this Bread shall live for ever. "Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him." Is it fellowship? A feast is not a private meal, but an entertainment designed to promote social intercourse and gratification. We are not solitary partakers, but have companions the most agreeable and excellent and numerous. We sit down with Abraham and Isaac and Jacob, with prophets and apostles, with the noble army of martyrs, with the general assembly and Church of the first-born, whose names are written in heaven. Is it enjoyment? A man at a feast discharges himself from anxieties and gives up himself to pleasure and delight. "Joy becomes a feast," and is promoted by it. But no pleasure, no delight, can resemble that which results from an experience of divine grace. "Blessed is the people that know the joyful sound."

Observe the invitation to partake of this provision. It was general; he "bade many." The feast was "prepared for all people." Mankind had been invited by the works of creation, by the dispensations of God's providence, by the light of reason and conscience, by the secret influences of the Spirit; and the whole nation of the Jews had been especially and particularly invited by his servants the prophets. Afterward came John the Baptist, the harbinger of the Messiah, and the Messiah himself, with the same invitation. Nor has this bidding been hushed by the lapse of eighteen centuries. Jesus still bids many, just as truly, as really, as if he were by our side and was heard saying, "Whosoever will, let him take of the water of life freely."

There need be no surprise that, after an invitation was given to the supper, servants were sent forth "at supper-time to say to them that were bidden, Come, for all things are now ready." This is in strict accordance with Eastern custom. Servants having gone from house to house, and returned with assurance from the invited friends of their intention to come, a messenger is again despatched for them at the appointed time to inform them that all the preparations for the banquet are completed.

We are not to suppose that our Lord meant absolutely that *all* the leading men among the Pharisees (with whom he was then chiefly dealing) "began to make excuse." There may have been some exceptions—such as Nicodemus, for example. But these were so rare, and so great was the variety of feeling existing in individuals to whom the message of the gospel came, that Christ was justified in grouping them in one class under

this general character. Neither are we to understand by the phrase, "with one consent," that the parties met and consulted together regarding the terms of their answers with a view of insulting their entertainer. There was no concerted action on their part. The servant saw them separately, and received their answers. The meaning is, that *with one voice*, or unanimously, they excused themselves. The probability is, as already hinted, that they accepted the first invitation, gave no intimation that they intended to decline, but when the moment arrived to be present they were unwilling to go. Let it be observed that none of these men gave a plain and flat denial; they simply "made excuse," or begged off. They acknowledged the necessity of an excuse in some manner plausible, and thereby indirectly established the fact that they were under obligation to appear. It is to the honor of Christianity that its claims are denied only by a very few bold, bad men. The great mass of mankind admit that they are bound to consecrate themselves to the service of God and accept the salvation revealed in the gospel, and hence they only ask to be excused from attending to the matter *now*. Thus in the very form of their request they recognize the obligation of the duty the performance of which they ask permission to delay; thus, also, they pay a just and honorable tribute to the gospel—a tribute all the more to be prized, too, because as yet they have not, and are not willing to have, any personal interest in its admitted and inestimable blessings.

In relation to the reasons assigned by these men for absenting themselves from the feast let the following things be observed:

1. These excuses, though variant in *form*, were the

same in *substance* and *origin*. They were all taken from one carnal instinct. As birds of the same species build their nests of the same material and the same form without deliberation or concert, so the carnal mind, being in its own nature enmity against God, produces, wherever it operates, substantially the same fruits. In an alienated heart there is an unwillingness to be or to abide near to God, and there is consequently a great tendency to build up innumerable partition-walls to shield the conscience from the glances of his holiness. This may be illustrated in the following manner :

We are invited to a neighbor's house : we do not like to go, and we determine that we *will not* go. Forthwith our wits go to work to discover an excuse, and we soon find that which we seek for. We must travel on business that day, or some other excuse equally convenient and plausible occurs. We are invited to the house of *another* neighbor ; difficulties unforeseen spring up, but, being bent on accepting this invitation, we brush them all aside, and continue to reserve the evening for the company that we love. It is not to be doubted that the grand reason why men do not become Christians lies in the depravity of the heart. All who have yielded to the divine claims have felt the power of this native opposition to holiness, and have been willing to confess that in their case this was the reason why they did not sooner yield to God.

2. Times most seasonable for grace and most urgent calls of worldly business often meet together. These men alleged pressing engagements *just when* the time for attendance at the feast had arrived. Often when God's Spirit presses a call to salvation on a man's

conscience with special power, it so happens, as he says, that there is some worldly interest urgently demanding his attention. The "convenient season" has not yet come.

3. There was an ascending scale of contumacy in these men, similar to that in the bearing of the guests in the parable related by Matthew, some of whom made light of the message, and others killed the messengers. The evil did not grow to the same enormous height, but there was the same ascending scale. The *first* man had "bought a piece of ground," and "he must needs go and see it." He pleads the *necessity* of his case. He is sorry not to attend, but he has what is more urgent, as he thinks, on hand. The *second* says, "I have bought five yoke of oxen, and I go to prove them." This man does not plead the necessity of the case as the other. He goes to prove his yoke of oxen simply because he *chooses* to do this rather than go to the feast. The *third* says, "I have married a wife, and therefore I cannot come." This is a rude, point-blank refusal. A sinner's experience in rejecting the gospel passes through these various stages. First, he *walks* in the counsel of the ungodly, then *stands* in the way of sinners, then *sits* in the seat of the scornful. The young man who reaches the period of life that places him beyond parental control and sends him into secular pursuits, as he feels the religious training of his early years still lingering about him will plead something for his neglect of personal Christianity that seems to justify it; but if he be not careful he will find himself after a while, when the world has practiced upon him its treacherous arts, unwilling to assign any reason for walking in the broad road that leads to death. Still farther on in his history, as the cradle-hymns and scenes

of worship in the old mansion fade from his heart, he will surprise no one if, in departing from God, he also becomes bold enough to ask God to depart from him.

4. All these excuses were based on things lawful in themselves. It is not sinful for a man to buy property or carry on business or enter into the matrimonial relation, but it is sinful to be controlled by these things so as to let them hinder us from coming to the gospel feast. In point of fact, acts and habits of positive vice keep many back from this feast, but (as has well been said) it is not with these cases that the parable deals; and if we overlook this we shall miss half the value of the lesson it teaches. The lesson here is not, "A drunkard shall not inherit the kingdom of heaven," but, "How shall we escape if we neglect so great salvation?" More persons, perhaps, are ruined by the abuse of lawful things than by indulgence in practices inherently vicious. When the material of the temptation is lawful and honorable the temptation is less suspected and the tempted is more easily thrown off his guard. Let the field and the oxen be bought and used, and the affections of the family be cherished, but woe to the man who permits these seemly plants to grow so rank that the soul's life shall be overlaid beneath their weight!

5. All these excuses were false. It is not likely that the men who bought the ground and the oxen would have done so without seeing and trying them before the purchase; they were too sagacious for that. Their excuses were mere pretexts for evading what did not suit their taste. The same thing is true of him who had "married a wife." According to the Levitical law, this reason of his would have been a sufficient one why he should not have gone to the battle, but it was none why

he should not come the feast. Even admitting, however, that these excuses were not really false *in themselves*, it is far more than likely that a *false use* was made of them. As it is true in the highest matters, as well as in lower, that "where there's a will there's a way," it seems scarcely to admit of a doubt that these men gave the excuses which they did to conceal others which they did not wish to offer. The *real* reason why men do not become Christians is certainly not always avowed, and men are strongly tempted to suggest others. A man that is proud or sensual or ambitious or profane, or who has embarked in some yet unexecuted plan of iniquity, would be slow to avow these reasons for not becoming a disciple of Christ, though these may be in fact the real causes. He would be much more likely to assign reasons plausible or difficult to deny.

6. Even if these excuses were neither false nor falsely applied, it is evident that they were grounded in mistake. The *first* was that of a man whose heart was elate with the acquisition of possessions. The *second* was that of a man who was careful and anxious about his business. The *third* was the domestic man's excuse—the excuse of the father, mother, sister, brother, son, daughter, who have so many cares and anxieties about their home as to have no time for religion. Now, in all these excuses it was sadly forgotten by those who presented them that the admission of religion into all their concerns, instead of adding to the load, would positively lighten it—instead of making them less active, would have made them more so; for no man walks his fields or treads his floor with so elastic a footstep as he who sees God's goodness and presence over all. No man transacts the world's business with

so bounding a heart as he who knows that God is his Father and that his strength is made perfect in weakness. No home is lighted up with so beautiful a halo as that whose day begins with prayer and ends with praise, and where Christ is all and in all.

Well would it be for all men who are asking to be excused from becoming Christians to reflect that their request rests on an error. They are acting as if religion consisted in poverty and disgrace, anguish of spirit and remorse, the loss of the favor of friends and of the world. But it is of a directly opposite character. It is the hope of heaven through Jesus Christ. It is loving God and keeping his commandments. It is peace of mind, support in trial, consolation on a bed of death and the prospect of immortal glory beyond. It is that which is fitted to make a man more useful, respected and beloved in life, remembered with deeper affection when he is dead, and honored for ever in heaven. It is the brightest ornament of his character while living, and the sweetest consolation to his friends when his body is slumbering in the tomb and his soul is shining in the realms of glory. It is surely, then, a mistake for men (whether they know it or not) to ask to be excused from partaking of these privileges and enjoying these inestimable blessings.

“So that servant came, and showed his lord these things.” The slighting and neglect of the invitation were laid before the master of the house. Ministers must lay before their Lord their good or bad success. They must do it now at the throne of grace. If they have good success and see the fruit of their labor, they must go to God with thanksgivings, and if they labor in vain they must go to him with complaints. They

will do it hereafter at the judgment-seat of Christ; there they will be produced as witnesses against those who persist in unbelief, to prove that they were fairly invited, and as witnesses for those that accept the call.

“Then the master of the house, being angry, said to his servant, Go out quickly into the streets and lanes of the city, and bring in hither the poor, and the maimed, and the halt, and the blind.” The righteous displeasure of God toward the conduct of the guests shows his earnest desire for their welfare, the unsatisfactoriness of all their excuses, and the justness of his expectation that the invited would accept the invitation.

In the descriptive words which the Saviour here employs there would seem to be a distinct reminiscence of the precept which he had just before given to him at whose table he was sitting, “Call thou the poor, the maimed, the lame, the blind.” He would encourage him to this by showing him that it is even thus with the great Giver of the heavenly feast. *He* calls the spiritually sick, the spiritually needy, while the rich in their own merits at once exclude themselves and are excluded by him. He calls these poor to sit down at his table. The people whom the Pharisees accounted cursed, the despised and outcasts of the nation, the publicans and sinners, *they* should enter into the kingdom of God before the great, the wise, the proud—before those who thanked God they were not as other men.

Go out quickly. The case is too urgent to admit of delay. Without immediate provision the poor outcasts will perish; therefore make haste to find them out wherever they lie, and think it no hardship or indignity to you to go to the meanest places in quest of them. Go through the streets and alleys of the city,

and search the hedges and highways in the country, *and bring them in*. Urge them to come, insist upon their compliance, take no denial. Bring them in *hither*—hither, into my favor; hither, into my Church, the apartment appointed for the celebration of this entertainment; hither, into the society of the most honorable guests and into a participation of the richest blessings. Bring them in hither, *poor, maimed, halt, blind*, as they are. They are all welcome. *Him that cometh unto me*, though clothed in rags and destitute of all things, *I will in no wise cast out*. Thus, this parable is *prophetical* as well as *historical*. It contemplates the extension of the kingdom of God to the whole world, and *spiritually* directs the gospel invitations to be carried to the lowest strata, and to be brought in contact with the outermost circles of human society.

The command of the Lord was instantly obeyed by his ministering servant, and when he returned he said, "It is done as thou hast commanded, and yet there is room." Blessed be God, we are yet lingering where these precious words fall upon our ears! There is room for us in the Saviour's sacrifice, for his blood cleanseth from all sin all that trust in him. There is room for us in the Father's bosom; he waits to welcome and receive us. There is room for us all in heaven; there are harps that are not yet touched; there are mansions that are not yet full of happy tenantry.

"All things are ready." It is not a brand of reprobation upon any man's brow that keeps him from Jesus, for there is an invitation of welcome lying at every man's door, and if any find their everlasting abode to be in the depths of ruin, they will never feel that they could not get to heaven because there was no room, but

solely that they would not go to heaven, because they loved sin better than holiness, the world better than Christ. The grand amnesty that is to be proclaimed from the pulpit every time it is entered is that God waits for men, that they have not to wait for *him*, and that there is room for all who are willing to be saved on his terms.

Why was it *declared* that none of the men who first were bidden should taste of the supper? Had they not refused to come? What need, then, was there to affirm that they should not come? We are to see in this declaration an intimation that a time would arrive when they who had made excuses would repent of their folly and seek to be admitted to the feast. But they would find the door shut against them. When they knocked they would hear a voice within, saying, "I know you not."

So will it be with the despiser of Christ and his gospel: he will change his mind when he beholds afar off the glories of the blessed in the kingdom of God. When all his earthly delights have perished he will wish for a place at the heavenly banquet, but he will find that no place is reserved for him among the happy guests. Oh, what will then be the bitterness of his disappointment and the agony of his regret! Terribly does our Lord describe the final condition of those who had trifled away their day of grace, when he says, "There shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth, when ye shall see Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, and all the prophets, in the kingdom of God, and you yourselves *thrust out*."

❧ THE * LOST * SHEEP, ❧

“There were ninety-and-nine that safely lay
In the shelter of the fold,
But one was out on the hills away,
Far off from the gates of gold—
Away on the mountains wild and bare,
Away from the tender Shepherd’s care.

“‘Lord, thou hast here thy ninety-and-nine;
Are they not enough for thee?’
But the Shepherd made answer: ‘’Tis of mine
Has wandered away from me;
And, although the road be rough and steep,
I go to the desert to find my sheep.’

“‘But none of the ransomed ever knew
How deep were the waters crossed,
Nor how dark was the night that the Lord passed through
Ere he found his sheep that was lost.
Out in the desert he heard its cry—
Sick and helpless, and ready to die.

“‘Lord, whence are those blood-drops all the way
That mark out the mountain’s track?’

‘They were shed for one who had gone astray
Ere the Shepherd could bring him back.’

‘Lord, whence are thy hands so rent and torn?’

‘They are pierced to-night by many a thorn.’

“‘But all through the mountains, thunder-riven,
And up from the rocky steep,

There rose a cry to the gate of heaven:

‘Rejoice; I have found my sheep!’

And the angels echoed around the throne,

‘Rejoice, for the Lord brings back his own!’”

3, 4 *And he spake this parable unto them, saying, 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 is lost, 5 until he find it? And when he hath found it, he layeth it on his 6 shoulders, rejoicing. And when he cometh home, he calleth together his friends and neighbors, saying unto them, Rejoice with me; for I 7 have found my sheep which was lost. I say unto you, that likewise joy shall be in heaven over one sinner that repenteth, more than over ninety-and-nine just persons, which need no repentance.*

LUKE XV. 3-7.

THE LOST SHEEP.

THE gospel, in all its parts and provisions, is a manifestation in Christ of the divine condescension and mercy in behalf of sinners. But the scribes and Pharisees, who in Scripture represent the self-justifying principle of our fallen nature, were able neither to appreciate nor to understand this saving manifestation. They, for themselves, disclaimed the character of sinners. They trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and despised others. One chief exception taken by them to our Lord was grounded on the kindness he evinced in his intercourse with those whom they looked down upon with contempt. It was in vindicating his character in this particular that this parable was spoken.

The same truths are taught in it as in the two which follow it in the chapter. The three are one in their general scope and design. They would have seemed incomplete without one another, but together form a perfect and harmonious whole.

In the first two parables Jesus vindicates himself from the accusation of the Pharisees in regard to his conduct toward publicans and sinners, thus showing his disciples the kind of procedure and conduct they had to pursue toward sinners. This he does by pressing the conclusion that if it were quite natural for a

sheep and a piece of silver to be sought with so much trouble, how much more ought a man to be, in like manner, sought for! And in the parable of the Prodigal Son he defends his conduct by disclosing the state of mind which belonged to those sinners to whom he showed so much love.

The first two parables set forth to us mainly the *seeking* love of God; the third describes to us the rise and growth, responsive to that love, of repentance in the heart of man. In other words, in the former we are shown what God must do to bring back to true piety and blessedness the sinner who has wandered from the way of eternal life; but the latter shows us what the sinner who really desires to be blessed, and who has a penitent and believing spirit, has reason to expect of him—namely, a ready and most welcome reception.

THE LOST SHEEP.

That the Shepherd referred to in the parable is Christ there can be no doubt. His own assumption of this character and name in the tenth chapter of John is conclusive on this point. And the presentation which he here made of himself to the spiritual rulers of the Jewish people had a peculiar fitness for them, inasmuch as they too were shepherds—continually charged, rebuked and warned in the Old Testament under this same title—yet now finding fault with Christ for doing that very thing which they ought, and which the name they bore should have reminded them that they ought, to have done.

Man, in his original state, enjoyed the fullness of his Maker's favor. God's delight was with him. He lived in the element of holiness. Happiness, peace, joy, life, were secured to him if he continued obedient. He

walked with God, and God with him, in want of nothing, for God was with him as his Shepherd. But a cloud soon turns the brightness of his condition into the shadow of death. One moment, as it were, we see him in Eden, amid bowers of beauty and unutterable loveliness; the next we find him dwelling in a world which is accursed, thorns and thistles springing up around him, the nobleness of his image changed, and darkness, thick darkness, all around him.

“I have gone astray,” says the Psalmist, “like a sheep that is lost.” This, indeed, is the constant emblem in Scripture of our condition as estranged from God and seeking happiness from the world. Other views of our state and character show our criminality as apostates, rebels and enemies to God, and are suited to humble us before him; but this illustrates rather our blind and stupid ignorance, our misery and our danger.

What weakness does the sheep indicate in wandering from its companions! and how unutterable is man’s folly in bartering heaven for the trifles of earth! How will the wandering sheep continue to stray, ever increasing its distance from the flock! and how does fallen man wander farther and farther from God continually! What more helpless and exposed than a lost sheep! It can neither flee from its enemies nor resist them. It is surrounded with dangers against which it can take no precaution, and unless again brought under the care of the shepherd it must at length be destroyed. Now, in such a world of temptation as this, where “our adversary, the devil, like a roaring lion, goeth about seeking whom he may devour,” and, as “transformed into an angel of light,” uses with immense success a vast variety of artifices to deceive men, we are exposed to numberless

dangers of which few are at all aware, and from which none, left to themselves, could possibly escape.

This is a true representation of every man's condition by nature. Having forsaken God, living impenitent, and continuing to walk according to the course of this world, we are lost sheep; and as such we have lost all. We have lost God; we have lost his image; we have lost righteousness; we have lost the way to heaven, and are walking in the road to everlasting ruin.

Observe, the shepherd misses one sheep when it has strayed from the flock. A careless shepherd would never have noticed that one in a hundred was wanting, but the instant that this sheep wandered away this shepherd missed it. The Redeemer's knowledge is infinite. When the mighty volume is coursing along its channel toward the ocean, as has been beautifully said, he marks every drop that leaps aside in spray. So he looks not only over the human race generally, but upon each individual. He missed a world when it fell, although his worlds were scattered like grains of golden dust on the blue field of heaven. With equal perfection of knowledge he misses one human being who has been formed by his hand, but fails to hang by faith upon his love. The Bible speaks of "falling *into* the hands of the living God," and calls it "a fearful thing;" but an equally fearful thing happened before it; we fell *out* of the bosom of the living God.

The eye of Jesus is upon every stray sinner in all his wanderings, in all his departure and apostasy from God; and this wandering he counts *his* loss. He cannot regard it in any other light. Whatever be the ruin and wretchedness man has brought upon himself, still let it be remembered that by his fall the great King has been deprived

of a bright jewel. The fine gold which he had prepared of honor and glory unto himself in this lower world has become dim, and he sees the sad change, and feels it too.

No sooner does the shepherd in the parable miss the sheep than he goes after it. No sooner did this world fall than Jesus came after it. The glorious promise sounding amid the wrecks of Paradise was the first footfall of the Son of God coming after the lost sheep. Those prophecies spread through four thousand years, those calls, remonstrances and warnings lifted up in the successive centuries of the past, were the voices of the Shepherd sounding in the wilderness after the lost sheep. Those types and symbols and sacrifices and shadows, those ceremonies and institutions of the Mosaic dispensation,—what were they but the footprints upon the sands of time of the great Good Shepherd in his compassionate march from heaven to earth on the grand errand of man's redemption?

It is, however, in the sufferings of Christ's life especially that we see him going forth after the lost soul. He had, in leaving the throne of heaven, counted the cost; and who can describe what that cost must have been? We behold it in terrible distinctness at Calvary, with the darkness and sorrow of the accursed tree, the hiding of his Father's face, the desertion of his friends, the bitter spite of enemies and the faintness of bodily suffering. We see it too in the garden of Gethsemane, when not even his truest followers could watch with him one hour in his agony. Yet these were but the closing scenes of his long journey after the lost one. His whole course from first to last was but one continued contradiction of sinners against himself. He toiled and labored and struggled as a man of sorrows and acquainted with

grief. He bent his steps in one way to find the lost, but each of these steps was one of untold sadness, suffering, reproach and trouble to the loving Shepherd.

Jesus still continues to seek the wandering sheep. What is the faithful preaching of the gospel, what are all the dispensations of Providence, what is that sense of want, what is that dissatisfaction with self, what are those checks, those remonstrances, those inward twinges of which we are sometimes conscious, what is that terrible looking-for of judgment and fiery indignation which we have when disease is upon us and death seems possible or probable,—what are all these but Jesus seeking the lost sheep to restore it to the fold?

The shepherd, not halting at the greatness of the way, not shrinking when the thorns wounded his feet and tore his flesh, followed on till he found the wanderer, and, having found it, *he laid it on his shoulders*. It will be perceived that so far as saving the lost is portrayed in this similitude the work is done by the Saviour alone. First and last, the sinner does nothing but destroy himself: all the saving work is done for him, none of it by him. This is one side of salvation, and it is the only side that is represented here. Nor does this fundamental truth, that salvation is begun, carried on and completed by the Saviour alone, at all come into collision with another fundamental truth in the parable of the Prodigal Son, in which the *other* side of salvation is represented, and in which we are taught that except the sinful do themselves repent and come to the Father they shall perish in their sins.

How refreshing and how full of consolation the picture which is given us of the shepherd's tender treatment of the sheep which had cost him so much labor

and fatigue, in not punishing it, not even driving it back to the fold, but placing it upon his shoulder! So Jesus, instead of venting reproaches, lightens the sinner's load, helps him to overcome hindrances, removes difficulties, and strengthens weakness with divine power. This bearing of us secures that we be kept safe, so that, abiding in faith, we need not be afraid of becoming lost; for we are not then pursuing our own course, not even walking upon our own feet, but hanging upon the neck of our beloved Shepherd. "The phrase," says Melancthon, "contains a sweet intimation of the passion of Christ. He places the found sheep upon his shoulders—that is, he transfers our burden to himself, becomes a victim for us; thence bearing us, he carries us to his own flock, bears, feeds, sustains and governs us." How complete is our salvation! How complete a Saviour is Christ!

Nor let it be overlooked that in seeking and saving, whatever it may cost him, Jesus does it with joy. See him at the well of Sychar. The disciples had left him hungry, and had gone away into the city to buy meat. But when they returned and spread the entertainment before him, and said, "Master, eat," he said, "I have meat to eat that ye know not of." He referred to the pleasure he had just experienced in the conversion of the woman of Samaria and in the approaching salvation of her neighbors by her instrumentality: this was his repast. "My meat is to do the will of Him that sent me, and to finish his work." So here, *he layeth the found sheep on his shoulders rejoicing.*

What joy is it that he experienced? It is the joy of *success*. How pleasing and delightful is it to see the fruit of our exertions! How delighted is the soldier,

after his marchings, privations, hardships, conflicts and wounds, to retire in peace and share the honors of victory and the applause of his country! Paul and his companions call the Thessalonians their "glory and joy." Yet they were only ministers by whom they believed. If converts are the glory and joy of those who are only the *instruments* of their conversion, how much more are they the glory and joy of Him who is the *Author of it!*

The joy of Jesus is also one of *benevolence*. No pleasure is so unselfish, so pure, so blissful in prospect and in review, as the pleasure of doing good. But this pleasure will always be in proportion to the degree of benevolent disposition in the benefactor. Who, then, can imagine the measure of delight in the communication of his favors *He* must enjoy "whose heart is made of tenderness" —who, when he was rich, for our sakes became poor, and died that we might live!

Mark the issue! The shepherd is seen wending his way homeward through the wilderness by a pathway of his own. Within his embrace and reclining on his shoulder we discover the sheep which had wandered and now was found.

Two home-comings are recognized in the Bible in the history of every one who becomes a Christian. "The exile, discovered and borne back by the discriminating mercy of the Redeemer, comes home when through the regeneration he enters a state of grace and is received into the Church; and he comes home under the leading of the same Chief when in the resurrection he enters a state of perfect glory." If the first of these is here mainly meant, the second is included.

"*Rejoice with me,*" says the Good Shepherd, "for I

have found my sheep which was lost." The sinner, penitent and believing, is now regarded with the profoundest interest. A veil is thrown over his past career, which conceals from our view the aggravations of his case. With whatever displeasure regarded while in the heedlessness of his wanderings, yet now that the grace of his Redeemer has sought out and found him, humbled and returned him, the whole aspect of his case is changed.

"Rejoice with me." How natural the representation! *Grief retires from observation.* "Hiding herself, she conceals rather than proclaims the sorrows that she feeds on, as the stricken deer leaves the herd, and the bereaved court retirement that they may weep in secret over their bleeding wounds. *It is otherwise with joy.* The Greek, on making a discovery of which he had long been in pursuit, was so transported as to rush from his bath naked into the street, and, leading the people to believe him mad, cry, *Eureka! Eureka!*—I have found it! I have found it!" Joy *must* have vent. A fountain which not only flows, but overflows, it bursts up and out, seeking to communicate its own happiness to others. How true, then, to Nature the feature of the parable in which the Good Shepherd is represented as not concealing his joy, nor wishing to conceal it! How encouraging! The awakened and convinced sinner feels his need of strong consolation; and here he has it. Why should he ask, "Will Jesus receive me if I apply to him?" How can he doubt when the Saviour thus assures him that his application will give him pleasure?

This, however, is not the only lesson which this joy teaches. All this joy was for *one* sheep that was lost. What an impression of the individuality of the soul is

thus made! How, too, is its worth exhibited! One soul is beyond all price. It is so in God's sight; it ought to be so in ours. Think of it with its vast capacity and endless duration. How shall we grasp its importance? how shall we estimate its value? What minister or missionary should not feel that his whole life would be well spent if he should be the instrument in God's hands of bringing only a single soul into the way of life—of saving it from the intensity of indescribable agony in the realms of everlasting pain, and causing it to feel the intensity of endless joy amid the splendors of the beatific vision?

“I say unto you, That likewise joy shall be in heaven over one sinner that repenteth more than over ninety-and-nine just persons which need no repentance.”

Here we see that heaven and earth are united by a chord of sympathy. Every penitent sinner among men produces a sensation of gladness among the angels that dwell in the eternal city. Though they have scenes of beauty, magnificence and splendor spread out before them, yet they turn aside from all the splendors of their glorious home to see, as the most beautiful diamond that sparkles on the brow of heaven, the tear that drops from a penitent's eye.

Who are the “ninety-and-nine just persons which need no repentance”? They cannot be the Pharisees and others of kindred self-righteous spirit, to whom, as some maintain, our Lord refers in severe but loving irony. For though it must be acknowledged that Jesus sometimes spoke of men not as they really were, but as they vainly imagined themselves to be, yet there is no sufficient evidence that the Saviour was at this time speaking hypothetically, and by any peculiar mode of statement even seeming to give credit to the pretensions to right-

eousness made by persons before whom the publicans and harlots would enter into the kingdom of heaven.

Neither by any just rule of interpretation can "the ninety-and-nine just persons" be regarded as intended to designate those who in the days of Christ's ministry had a righteousness which was merely legal—that is, persons for whom the law had done part of its work, keeping them from gross transgressions of its enactments, and yet had not done another part of its work for them, in convincing them of sin and preparing them to receive Christ, and gladly to embrace his salvation. There is no reason to believe that such persons, lingering in the vestibule and refusing to enter into the sanctuary of faith, occasion *any* gladness in heaven; and yet, as will be noticed, the "ninety-and-nine" are represented as occasioning rejoicing, only this rejoicing is not *so great* as that which takes place over the "one."

It is evident, therefore, that by those who "need no repentance" are meant those who are the children of God by faith in Jesus Christ; those who now are walking in the commandments and ordinances of the Lord: those who, though they find in their daily sins daily need for penitence, yet, having returned to God with contrition, need not that kind and degree of godly sorrow which they experienced at the beginning, but are, as an apostle enjoins, to "go on to perfection, not laying again the foundation of repentance."

Now, as thus explained, how strange is the announcement here made! In one view, we grant, it is not. Let the "one sinner" in question be one who is destined to extensive usefulness—a Paul, a Luther, a Howard, a Payson, a Brainerd, a McCheyne, any one who includes in his own conversion, so to speak, the conver-

sion of many—and then there can be no difficulty in imagining why his repentance should occasion greater joy in heaven than the conversion of many others who would not fill so exalted a station, wield so potent an influence or receive so glorious a reward. But this is not the case here presented. It is that of “one sinner”—*any* one, however obscure, illiterate or uninfluential he may be. Does it not, then, *seem* strange that such an one—just, too, when he has become a penitent, has planted his first footstep in the path of life, and has long years perhaps through which to pass before he is made perfect through suffering,—that such an one should occasion more joy than ninety-and-nine righteous persons, not only enjoying an amount of good intrinsically greater, but having it diffused among so many, in a confirmed and advanced state of happiness?

Let us see how this fact may be accounted for. It is a law of our nature that *uncertainty* works up our feelings to the highest degree of intensity concerning the object involved. We see it in the mother as she concentrates for the moment all her affections on her sick child, and seems to love none but that one only, and rejoices at its recovery more than at the uninterrupted health of all her other children. We see it in the father, who, when the midnight storm makes him think of the mountain-waves and the tossed and creaking vessel, fixes more of his wakeful solicitude upon his sailor-boy than upon all his children who are sleeping safely under his roof. We feel it when a friend is sick and his pulse threatens danger, and when, being kept painfully alive to every turn and to every symptom in the progress of the disease, and earnestly longing for his restoration to health, we seem to have forgotten the many

other friends who in other circumstances as strongly drew our affections to them as did then this wasting sufferer. Now, if the angels are under the same law—as they appear to be from the gradual development to them of the scheme of redemption—and if they gaze on the sinner from the first moment of his impression through all his doubts, struggles and fears, until he comes to know in whom he has believed,—if they look upon him when he kneels in sadness and rises in peace, how far does this go toward accounting for their “more joy”!

We mention also *the power of the recency of events*. When a child is born into the world it alone of all the domestic group draws to it every eye and kindles a smile upon every lip. When nations contend, as they often do, for the possession of a small territory, and armed men come into deadly conflict, the acclamations of joy which resound through the length and breadth of the country whose fleets have been victorious are louder far than those which are heard over conquests previously made—conquests, too, far more extensive and important than that which has just decided their claim to the solitary island.

Now, there is a mighty contest for the human soul going on in the unseen world. Noiseless as that world may be to us, no sound of trumpet or clangor of arms being heard, it is the theatre of a most earnest struggle. On the one hand is God's enemy and ours, employing every device and sharpening every weapon for the attainment of his purpose. On the other the sacred persons of the Trinity are described as contriving and as carrying into effect the plan for man's redemption. The hosts of heaven also, sympathizing in the awful

struggle, are represented as surveying it from the heights of glory, and as following "Him whose eyes are as a flame of fire, and on whose head are many crowns," to the conflict with the malignant and artful foe. Such, then, being the case, it is but natural that these celestial hosts should feel a deeper thrill of ecstasy at each successive triumph of their King than over many previously achieved. This we affirm, on the assumption that angels, like ourselves, are differently impressed by an event as it is more or less distant in point of time. And this assumption is manifestly not without warrant, for there is every probability that it is the prerogative of God alone to be affected by things according to their real, absolute magnitude and importance. God, whose mind is omnipresent in immensity, grasps all things as in a point, and to him "a thousand years are as one day, and one day is as a thousand years."

There are three instances in which we read of joy among the angels. The first was when the world was made; the next, when Jesus was born; and the third is when a sinner repents. Thus, as is evident, three great things, which the natural man would be the last to place in the same category, are so placed by God—the creation of the world, the incarnation of a God and the regeneration of a lost and ruined soul.

Angels fathom the soul's capacity, and when they rejoice in seeing such a magnificent thing retrieved from wreck, their joy is profoundly significant. For, be it remembered, theirs is a joy in the midst of joys; it is the bright stream that rolls through heaven swollen over its common boundaries. It is a joy that is not slight and transient, but deep and permanent, not be-

coming common by repetition as all things else do, but retaining its freshness and power from age to age, so that the restoration of a lost soul is in the nineteenth century as electrifying a phenomenon among the angels as it was when the first soul repented and the first sinner was born again. This joy, too, is not confined to a few, but is universal, one feeling and one expression of feeling pervading the heavenly host. How plain, then, is it, that if one sinner, whose repentance would produce such an effect, should die in his sins, there would be an inadequate expression of grief over the irreparable loss, even though the heavens should be clothed in blackness, and the oceans, lakes and rivers should drop their waters in tears, and ten thousand volcanoes should unite their deep groanings to tell what had been done!

At this point the solemn question suggests itself: Have *we* been brought to repentance, not merely to sorrow for sin, which we all need continually, but to a change of heart—that very change over which there is joy in heaven in the case of the one sinner? Have we ever learnt that by nature we are lost? Has not Jesus sought us? Has he not sought us again and again? Is it not true that our soul is not uncared for above? Have we come back to God at the Saviour's call? Oh, how delightful it will be in ages to come, if we are numbered among the saints, to see the angels who rejoiced over *our* conversion! They will not forget the happiness they experienced on such occasions, and they will feel their joy complete when they see the pardoned sinner saved from all his enemies, comforted after all his sorrows, and enclosed in the everlasting arms of his almighty Saviour.

“As the fond sheep that idly strays,
With wanton play, through devious ways,
Which never hits the road of home,
O'er wilds of danger learns to roam,
Till, wearied out with idle fear,
And passing there and turning here,
He will, for rest, to covert run,
And meet the wolf he strove to shun :
Thus wretched I, through wanton will,
Ran blind and headlong on in ill.
'Twas thus from sin to sin I flew,
And thus I might have perished too ;
But mercy dropped the likeness here,
And showed and saved me from my fear,
While o'er the darkness of my mind
The sacred Spirit purely shined,
And marked and brightened all the way
Which leads to everlasting day,
And broke the thickening clouds of sin,
And fixed the light of love within.”

THE * LOST * COIN.

“Oh, listen, man!

A voice within us speaks the startling word,
‘Man, thou shalt never die!’ Celestial voices
Hymn it around our souls: according harps,
By angel fingers touched when the mild stars
Of morning sang together, sound forth still
The song of our great immortality!”

8 *Either what woman having ten pieces of silver, if she lose one
piece, doth not light a candle, and sweep the house, and seek dili-
9 gently till she find it? And when she hath found it, she calleth her
friends and her neighbors together, saying, Rejoice with me; for I
10 have found the piece which I had lost. Likewise, I say unto you,
there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner
that repenteth.*

LUKE XV. 8-10.

THE LOST COIN.

“**T**HAT our Lord,” says Luther, “did not stop with the one parable of the Shepherd, but went on to give another, showed his will that others also should follow his example—not vilely casting away sinners, but seeking to bring them to repentance.”* The change of imagery here adopted by the Saviour is an effort, by a different representation, to make the truth intelligible in order to salvation. Some men understand one thing, some another. To talk to a tradesman in a city about scenes in the country and shepherds and sheep is to speak almost in an unknown tongue to him, but to talk to him of something connected with trade, with the transactions of commerce, is to bring the matter within the range of his comprehension and to render it probable that he will be profited by what we say.

We are not, however, to regard this parable and the preceding one as being identical. The one is not a mere repetition of the other. They are not, like the reverberations of thunder, mere echoes of one peal, nor are they merely repeated blows of the same hammer to drive a nail in to the head. This parable, indeed, presents the same truth as the preceding one, but it is in another form, enabling us to look at it at another angle,

* See introduction to the parable of “The Lost Sheep.”

and with new features calculated still further to interest and impress.

The *loser* here is represented as a woman, who will more passionately grieve for her loss, and rejoice in the finding of what she lost, than perhaps a man would do, and therefore better serves the purpose of the parable. The "ten pieces of silver" the woman had may have been all she possessed, and hence, although of comparatively small value, these pieces were carefully treasured up, and the loss of one would be a serious affliction.

The lost coin represents man's soul. In its primeval dignity, in its original state, the soul had the image of the great Sovereign of the universe stamped upon it. "God made man upright," "in his own image," bearing resemblance to himself in his intellectual and moral attributes, and capable of an endless progress toward perfection. The soul then reflected the perfections of its Maker, as the mirror does the brightness of the sun. But man, being left to the freedom of his will, degenerated from the rectitude of his nature, so that his original glory is departed from him.

It is true, indeed, that the soul still retains some traces of the mint from which it proceeded—something of its pristine greatness. Just as, when we gaze upon the evening sky overspread with the splendors of the vast luminary which has sunk behind the distant hills, we catch a glimpse of its magnificence by the lustrous beams which linger, so when we look at the spirit that is in man, even with all the dreadful darkness that overshadows it, we still perceive in its powers the vestiges of its former beauty and glory. Or as when we stand by some temple in ruin, its pillars and capitals crushed and broken, its walls shattered, and venomous reptiles crawling and hiss-

ing where loveliness once reveled and the voice of melody was once heard, we can yet form some conception of the size, symmetry and grandeur of the majestic edifice as it once stood, so, as we think of the marvelous capacity and powers of man—his memory, judgment, imagination, conscience, will—we get an idea, faint though it be, of the original excellence of his soul, in which, as a temple, the great God delighted to dwell. Still, with all its lingering faculties and powers, that soul is *lost*—it is lost to the original end of its being; it is lost for all useful purposes to its rightful owner. Whatever else it may do, it does not glorify God, the very end for which it was called into being, and hence it is lost.

Not only this. Was not that coin possessed of *inherent* value? Wherever it was, was it not still a piece of precious metal? And is not man's soul still invested with a matchless worth? What but this did Jesus mean when he said, not of the Christian, but of any one, of all, "What shall *a man* give in exchange for his soul?" How aptly, therefore, is the human spirit in its darkness and corruption compared to a piece of silver! And as we contemplate it, with its superscription effaced and its lustre blurred and miserably tarnished, what sad reason have we to take up the prophet's lamentation, "How is the gold become dim! how is the most fine gold changed!"

The coin was lost *in the house*; and here is hope for the sinner. It makes a vast difference as to the recuperableness of a thing that is missing whether it disappeared in one place or another. Let a man mislay a precious jewel in his domicil, and far different is his experience from what it *would* be if that treasure,

as he was crossing the wide ocean, had accidentally dropped from his fingers down to the bottom of the mighty deep. We know what is lost in a house can be found if only proper search is made. And so we despair not of the salvation of any who are within the boundaries in which the gospel is preached. Though his sins be as scarlet, yet may they be as white as snow; and though they be red like crimson, yet may they become as wool. Man, of course, never will recover himself. This he can no more do than an inanimate, inert coin that is lost can recover itself. Divine grace must kindle in the sinner's heart the first desire of salvation, and conduct him through the process of restoration to the divine favor.

In Eastern countries, where comfort lies rather in excluding than admitting the rays of a burning sun, the houses are built of dead walls, and the rooms in consequence are dark even in the daytime. The floors, too, being formed of dried mud, are dusty. The picture, then, is true to nature, of the woman *lighting the candle* and *sweeping the house*. We read in the Bible that "the spirit of a man is the candle of the Lord," and, oh! how that candle searches us! It throws its light upon all our thoughts and ways, showing us our relation to Him who made us, and revealing to us, as it scatters even the darkness of the grave, the immortality which awaits us beyond. Often would we obscure its shining, but, faithful to itself, it continues to shed its radiance around and above us, reminding us of our dignity and urging us to our duty. We may say to the living principle within us, "Soul, take thine ease," but that soul feels, and shows that it feels, that there are higher interests than those which pertain to

earth, and holier interests than those which lead to sinful indulgences of the body.

“The candle of the Lord” here referred to is not the spirit of man, however, but the word of God, which is so beautifully and significantly represented by itself as “a light shining in a dark place.” “The first promise pronounced amid the ruins of Eden, the woman’s ‘Seed shall bruise the serpent’s head,’ was the first spark from which this candle was lighted, and was the promise of a Saviour: this light gleamed brighter in the days of Abraham, brighter still in the days of Moses, till every type and shadow and symbol and sacrifice and person became a candlestick, and the whole earth and sky were illumined by altar-candles lit for blessed mysteries. The whole land of Judæa was irradiated by this light, and at last the Sun himself came—that Sun which now rises above the horizon, tipping every event with his light and every dispensation with his beams.” This truth the Holy Spirit causes to illuminate the sinner’s soul, so that it sees its condemned, polluted and lost condition.

Many, we are aware, regard the phrase, “swept the house,” as only a pictorial representation, falling in with the figure employed, and therefore inserted by a sort of necessity. But we do not so understand these words. In the process of sweeping what a deranging of the house is there for a time! How does the dust which had been allowed to accumulate begin to rise and fly about in every direction! how unwelcome that which is going forward to any that may be in the house and have no interest in the finding of that which has been lost! Thus, precisely, is it with God’s word. Evermore has the charge been made against it that it turns

the world upside down ; and so indeed it does. For only let that word be proclaimed, and how much of latent aversion to the truth becomes now open enmity ! how much of torpid alienation from God is changed into active hostility to him ! what an outcry is there against the troublers of Israel, against the witnesses that torment the dwellers upon earth, the men that will not let the world alone !

And what is true of the world at large is true of every individual heart in it. Men are not prepared to receive the "truth as it is in Jesus." Tell them of the things which do not touch their pride or condemn their passions, and they will listen to them with at least indifference. Tell them that there is a God whose sustaining providence extends to all the workmanship of his hands, tell them there is a world of light and glory where "the wicked cease from troubling and the weary are at rest," and they may receive the announcement with satisfaction if not with joy. But say to them that God's law is holy, that it takes cognizance of words as well as deeds, motives as well as actions ; say to them that "the heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked"—that the soul that sinneth shall die,—say these things to them, and at once the resistance and rebellion that belong to the carnal mind will begin to show themselves.

The application of divine truth to the heart of the sinner produces agitation, alarm, excitement. His prejudices are aroused, his passions stirred, his fears awakened. There is, by the operation of this truth upon his soul, an interference with his cherished habits, an upturning of his indifference to God and spiritual things, and the revelation of a depravity which perhaps as long as

it was unstirred was unsuspected, and the man, astounded, alarmed, confused, is led to ask, "What shall I do to be saved?"

The woman *sought diligently* for the lost piece of silver. It is encouraging to think that she even *missed* it. This of itself should carry a beam of joy into the heart of the wanderer from God. Whilst it should *grieve* it should also *gladden* him that he is not regarded as without value in heaven, where the true standard of value only is to be found. The entire representation of lighting the candle, sweeping the house and seeking diligently teaches us that the woman's whole thoughts were upon the lost coin. It was not for mere pastime or curiosity that she was engaged as she was. She spared no pains to recover what she missed. Every part of the house was searched with great care and minuteness. Every dark nook and corner in which the lost treasure perchance might lie concealed was examined.

What an exhibition is here of "the love of the Spirit"! Think how much resistance and insult is offered to him, think how often his gracious calls are slighted, and you will be ready, judging him by the manner of men, to see him abandon his pursuit. But no! On he goes in his effort to save. From the first man who fell and was brought back, to the last soul that shall be saved, the loving Spirit never ceases his earnest and merciful search. No amount of ignorance, darkness or corruption has stayed his progress. Though grieved and rebelled against every hour, yet has he not tarried in his diligent search. He has left nothing undone that could be done to discover the lost one, to bring him into light, to free him from the pollutions

which have gathered around him, and to give him a name and a place in the kingdom of God.

It should not be overlooked that all the woman's trouble was taken for but *one* missing piece of money. This shows us the preciousness of one soul. People sometimes talk slightly of missionary-work and of other efforts to do good to souls, because, say they, the success is so small. If they thought aright of the value of a soul, they would not speak thus. Let it be granted that the number of the heathen converted by the preaching of the gospel is but small compared with the vast number that remain heathen still, and that in all gospel-work, whether at home or abroad, we should gladly see hundreds and thousands turned to God instead of tens or ones. Yet even one soul is beyond all price. It is so in God's sight; it ought to be so in ours. Is not each soul to live for ever? Must it not be in endless misery if not in endless happiness? Then how can it be a light thing that even one soul should be saved?

Mark the joy that was experienced at the finding of the lost coin. The woman "calleth her friends and her neighbors together, saying, Rejoice with me, for I have found the piece which was lost." There is no room left for us to guess or conjecture to whom the words "friends" and "neighbors" point, for the Great Teacher has immediately added an exposition of them, saying, "*Likewise* I say unto you, There is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth."

With equal plainness does the phrase, "when she hath found it," teach us when the joy in question is experienced. It is not when the sinner is received into glory; it is when he has, through the grace of God,

passed from death into life—when he has only entered the way to Zion, and has yet to make progress in it. *Then* it is, even then, ere the ransomed one has risen from his knees or wiped his tears away, ere he has had time to sing a hymn or sit down at the communion table on earth, that the Holy Spirit rejoices, and calls upon the angels to rejoice, that the dead is alive and the lost is found.

How do the angels acquire a knowledge of the conversion of the sinner? It is assumed by some that they do this in the exercise of their inherent faculties: and this assumed fact is alleged as a reason in support of prayers addressed to unseen created spirits. But this idea rests upon an exegesis that is demonstrably erroneous. The comparison which is introduced by the term "*likewise*" evidently indicates that there is joy among the angels in the manner of the rejoicing which took place after the piece of money was found. What was that? The woman, after recovering the coin, not contented with rejoicing herself, *told* her neighbors about her happiness and its cause, manifested her joy in their presence, and invited them to rejoice in sympathy with her. It is after this manner that joy in heaven over a repenting sinner begins and spreads. The neighbors and friends did not know the fact that the lost silver was found until the finder *told them* and invited them to participate in the joy. So the angels do not become aware of the sinner's repentance by a species of subordinate omniscience. He who saved the sinner knows that the sinner is saved; rejoicing in the fact, he makes it known to his attendants and invites them to share in his joy.

But it is with *the fact* of the rejoicing, rather than

the manner of it, that we are mainly concerned. The Holy Spirit and the angelic throng, as we see, all rejoice. Those blessed spirits, who occupy the highest rank in the scale of creatureship, and who, though they dwell in the heaven of heavens, yet visit our world and the innumerable planets which steal along the face of the sky, and thus have the most ample opportunity of understanding the endless multitude and the astonishing character of the works of creation and providence, all rejoice "over one sinner that repenteth."

And let it be observed the "one sinner" whose conversion is the electrifying phenomenon that generates this joy is not necessarily one who is destined to extensive usefulness, but *any* sinner—any one, in a cottage or an almshouse, a palace or a prison—any one, though his condition be so low and his abilities so mean that his conversion stops in his own soul's salvation. At any such one's conversion it is said the Holy Spirit rejoices and the angels burst forth in tones of ecstasy.

Here, again, we are thrown back upon the greatness of the soul. The more we think of it, the more we must be convinced that it is the most magnificent created thing in the earth. What capacity of woe! What susceptibility of joy! What latent powers to be developed! What giant faculties! How worthy of a God to make it! how needful the interposition of a God to redeem it! The soul—

"That mysterious thing
Which hath no limits from the walls of sense,
No chill from hoary time—with pale decay
No fellowship, but shall stand forth unchanged,
Unscorched amid the resurrection-fires,
To bear its boundless lot of good or ill."

Oh, the willingness of God to save! "As I live," saith he, "I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked." "What," he asks, "could have been done more for my vineyard that I have not done in it?" To the edge of the grave, to the brink of perdition, we see him following the most obstinate and headstrong sinners with the earnest entreaty, "Turn ye! turn ye! why will ye die?" Do not, then, fellow-sinner, run away from God and seek to avoid his distinguishing mercy. Do not run from the reading of the Bible and the faithful preaching of the gospel. Do not try to escape from a twinge of conscience that you do not like. Do not try to banish any convictions of sin that rankle in your mind. What would you think of a physician who would try to remove a disease by deadening the feeling of it, not by striking at the root and essence of it? Take care, then, how you suffer your passions, prejudices and pleasures to rise up and drown the voice of the Eternal Spirit as his tones of warning and invitation echo through the chambers of your soul.

Let the people of God learn to think more of their heavenly home. We see here the angels having new joy from events occurring in our world. Should we not try to bring some joy into our hearts from the contemplation of their world? We know, indeed, little about heaven, but one reason is, we are content to know little; we do not stretch our minds to enter into what the Holy Scriptures tell us of heaven. Many glimpses of its glory are to be discovered there: let us look for them as the mariner scans the distant horizon for the wished-for land. They are like a ray from the midday sun penetrating a fissure in a dark room: the room is still dark, but that one ray serves to show what a bright

sunshine there is without. Yet a little and we shall be in that sunshine. The joy which we have been reading of will be known to us by actual experience. Oh, what a scene will that be when the last sinner is housed in heaven—when

“All the ransomed Church of God
Are saved, to sin no more”!

What an amazing song will be raised then, and what a shout of joy! May we hear it! May we join in it! May all the blessedness of the angels, yea, may the joy of the Lord himself, be ours!

☞ THE * PRODIGAL * SON. ☞

“Oh, turn, and be thou turned! The selfish tear,
In bitter thoughts of low-born care begun,—
Let it flow on, but flow refined and clear,
The turbid waters brightening as they run.

“Let it flow on, till all thine earthly heart
In penitential drops have ebbed away;
Then, fearless, turn where Heaven hath set thy part,
Nor shudder at the eye that saw thee stray.

“O lost and found! all gentle souls below
Their dearest welcome shall prepare, and prove
Such joy o'er thee as raptured seraphs know,
Who learn their lesson at the throne of love.”

11, 12 *And he said, A certain man had two sons: And the younger of them said to his father, Father, give me the portion of goods that*
13 *falleth to me. And he divided unto them his living. And not many days after the younger son gathered all together, and took his*
14 *journey into a far country, and there wasted his substance with*
15 *riotous living. And when he had spent all, there arose a mighty*
16 *famine in that land; and he began to be in want. And he went and joined himself to a citizen of that country; and he sent him*
17 *into his fields to feed swine. And he would fain have filled his belly with the husks that the swine did eat: and no man gave unto him.*
18 *And when he came to himself, he said, How many hired servants of my father's have bread enough and to spare, and I perish with hunger! I will arise and go to my father, and will say unto him,*
19 *Father, I have sinned against heaven, and before thee, And am no more worthy to be called thy son: make me as one of thy hired ser-*
20 *vants. And he arose, and came to his father. But when he was yet a great way off, his father saw him, and had compassion, and*
21 *ran, and fell on his neck, and kissed him. And the son said unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven, and in thy sight, and*
22 *am no more worthy to be called thy son. But the father said to his servants, Bring forth the best robe, and put it on him; and put a*
23 *ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet: And bring hither the fatted calf, and kill it; and let us eat, and be merry: For this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found. And they*
24 *began to be merry. Now his elder son was in the field: and as he came and drew nigh to the house, he heard music and dancing. And he called one of the servants, and asked what these things meant.*
25 *And he said unto him, Thy brother is come; and thy father hath killed the fatted calf, because he hath received him safe and sound.*
26 *And he was angry, and would not go in: therefore came his father out, and entreated him. And he answering said to his father, Lo, these many years do I serve thee, neither transgressed I at any time thy commandment: and yet thou never gavest me a kid, that I might*
27 *make merry with my friends: But as soon as this thy son was come, which hath devoured thy living with harlots, thou hast killed for him*
28 *the fatted calf. And he said unto him, Son, thou art ever with me, and all that I have is thine. It was meet that we should make merry, and be glad: for this thy brother was dead, and is alive again; and was lost, and is found.*

LUKE XV. 11-31.

THE PRODIGAL SON.

TRENCH calls this "the pearl and crown of all the parables of the Scripture." Others denominate it "A Gospel in the Gospel." Lavater says, "Had Christ only come to earth for the purpose of delivering this parable, on that account alone should all mortal and immortal beings have concurred in bending the knee before him." It is universally admitted to be one of the most beautiful and affecting pieces of composition which can anywhere be found.

It has been suggested that the name by which the parable is generally known is not the most appropriate that could have been employed. True, it is applicable, inasmuch as the history is one of a youth who acted as a *prodigal*. But it will be observed that the leading subject of *this* and the two preceding parables is the lost soul of man, guilty, sinful man. The great truths concerning this are taught us, first, by the figure of a "lost sheep," then, by that of a "lost piece of money," and now, by that of a "lost son." "This my son was *lost* and is found." Just, then, as we call the first the "Parable of the Lost Sheep," so, it seems to us, might we fitly call the last the "Parable of the Lost Son."

At Christ's advent the Jewish state was merged into the Roman empire, and was, in consequence, taxed to

maintain a foreign, and, what was particularly offensive to the Jews, a heathen, government. The parties employed in raising this public revenue, and who were therefore called "publicans," were obnoxious to every pious and patriotic Jew. Men of character would not accept the office. Excluded from the ranks of respectable society, the publicans acquired the habits of that class into which they sank. Hence we find them in the Gospels frequently associated with "sinners"—"publicans and sinners."

At the time this parable was spoken a multitude of these persons, notorious for their vices, gathered around Jesus "to hear him"—a phrase in which there is an implied contrast between the object for which they sought the Saviour's presence and the mere motive of curiosity which appears to have actuated the multitudes who approached him on some other occasions. A deep sense of their need of just such instruction as he imparted was the cause of their assembling in such numbers to hear him, although it would be too much to suppose that they were all free from the motives of curiosity which drew many to Jesus after his fame had become public. The Pharisee, who swept in full sail to the temple to thank God that he was not as these publicans, dreading their touch, said, "Stand aside, I am holier than thou!" His proud and self-righteous sect could not comprehend how one who claimed to be a religious teacher should be willing to associate with and teach such lost reprobates. Not so Jesus Christ, abhorrent to his holy nature as were their impiety and impurity. Passing like a sunbeam through the foulest atmosphere without pollution, breathing infected air, but proof against contagion, he rather sought than

shunned the company of publicans and sinners. It was to reveal the riches of gospel grace, God's purpose of mercy and the delight he has in converting such sinners, even the greatest sinners, that Jesus added the story of the Prodigal to the other parables preceding it in the chapter.

Observe the desire of the younger of the two sons for freedom from control. His situation was one of ease and enjoyment. Living in the house of his indulgent father, he knew not the want of anything which was good and proper for him. If the "hired servants" were so well taken care of and so plentifully supplied, we may be sure that the son was not neglected. He was treated with kindness, and abundantly provided with everything which could contribute to his comfort and happiness. But amid all these advantages he was restless and uneasy. The sober, rational enjoyments of his father's family did not suit his turn of mind. He found them dull and insipid, and he sighed after other amusements and pleasures more congenial to his taste. He was anxious to see the world, to live without restraint and to be his own master. Home, which was the sweet asylum of his first years and the happy scene of his simple and regulated habits, had become a prison to his vitiated desires. We have more than an intimation of the entire alienation from domestic affections which had already found place in his heart in the almost legal form in which he claimed his share of the estate: "Give me the portion of goods that falleth to me." Thus, by speaking as a suitor-at-law, he indicated that he had cast off from him the tender and touching associations of childhood, and was determined to live in a state of independence and to be governed by his own corrupt judgment.

How different was this state of heart from the true godly feeling expressed in that petition, "Give us this day our daily bread," in which we acknowledge that we desire to wait continually upon God for the supply of our needs, and that we recognize our dependence upon him as our true blessedness! Yet this is the state of heart in which every sinner is by nature. He might be happy in the family and favor of his heavenly Father; he is invited to choose the ways of religion, and is assured that he shall find them to be the ways of pleasantness and peace. He is told, on the authority of Him who is Truth itself, that if he will fear God and keep his commandments he shall want no good thing. But he wishes to be independent of God, and to take the ordering of his life into his own hands, believing that he can be a fountain of blessedness to himself; and in *this*—man's spirit of self-sufficiency and insubordination—is to be found the *germ* of which all his other sins are but the natural sequences or developments.

Having succeeded in obtaining the provision which he demanded (and, as is most probable, too, under some such false pretence as that of entering into trade or of improving himself by traveling), the unhappy youth, who had listened only to the calls of appetite and pleasure, did not find it compatible with his spirit and his plans to continue his residence under the paternal roof. Even the reverend presence of his father, which was a source of happiness in the period of his innocence, had come to be irksome. Some remaining sentiments of duty still existed in the midst of his follies, which rendered it painful to know that that good man was acquainted with his evil tendencies. He hastened, therefore, to

escape from the restraints of an authority, a veneration for which his vices had not entirely extinguished in his heart. True, indeed, as if to show how the apostasy of the *heart* will often precede the apostasy of the *life*, a few days intervened between his obtaining his portion and his leaving home. But when this period of delay had passed, which a regard to external propriety called for, he "gathered all together, and took his journey into a far country, and there wasted his substance with riotous living."

This was a most interesting juncture in his history, and by an easy effort of the imagination we can bring it before us. He is secretly exulting at the success of his solicitation, little reflecting that it would have profited nothing to retain him at home against his will who had already become strange to that home. He moves through the old mansion and about it with hurried steps, carefully concealing his ultimate design, yet rapidly converting his share of goods into money or valuables which he can carry with him. A scene of fancied pleasures, to which his youthful imagination gives its own coloring, is rising and shining before him. He sets off with only an affection of parting regret, and with a parade of magnificence, upon his projected journey. He is now master of his own fortune, he is free from every inconvenient restriction, his health is vigorous and his resources are abundant and available. What more is needed to fill his cup of happiness to the brim?

The adventurous youth reaches the place of his destination. He is admired, caressed, flattered. His arrival has produced a sensation in the community which largely ministers to his vanity. Headlong he rushes into the pleasures before him, with no other study but how to

vary them. He is engaged in a whirl of folly which hardly leaves his intoxicated heart one moment for reflection. He gives the reign to his evil inclinations. His enjoyments gradually become of a more reckless and depraved character. He drives from his mind all remembrance of his indulgent parent; he forgets his pious instructions; he thinks not of the pain which he would feel should the tidings of his son's misconduct reach him. Onward he goes, pursuing his pleasure with greediness and becoming altogether sunk in sensual lusts. By degrees extravagance consumes his riches, riot undermines his health, debauch weakens the faculties of his mind, excess exhausts the powers of enjoyment, diseases settle upon the abused and shattered frame, and peace of mind and self-respect are lost in the gulf of the passions, supplanted by remorse and sunk in the humiliating conviction of the forfeited esteem of the world.

“Wretched object! Stripped of his money, shrunken with hunger, turned out as a swineherd into the fields, and more than willing to eat the pods of the carob tree used only as fodder for beasts, a beggar and a stranger in a far-off land, with the glad remembrances of a former and happy life making more vivid and sorrowful his present wretchedness,—there he lies, the younger son of a liberal and bountiful father, loathsome, degraded, wretched! *His substance* was wasted! What a melancholy picture of self-begotten misery and woe!”

How faithful a representation is this of unconverted men! God has given them life, reason, health, strength, time, influence, but all these gifts, all these energies and powers, they “gather together” with the determination of getting, through their help, all the gratification they can out of the world. With this intent they travel

away from God. They consult not his wishes; they employ their talents, whatever they may be, according to the "devices and desires of their own hearts," and not in obedience to his commands and fatherly wishes. It is only when God's awful holiness, when the majesty of his perfection, when all his relations to us as our Father, our Judge and the Avenger of our crimes, are forgotten or pushed from our thoughts, that conscience is rendered silent, that the fears of guilt are laid asleep, and that reason dares to betray its sacred trust, and become the pander of lust or the advocate of passion.

Men thus try to get at a distance from God. They openly prefer the creature to the Creator. They put away serious thoughts; they stifle the voice of conscience; they blot from their memory the impressions which a religious education has made; they turn a deaf ear to admonition, from whatever quarter it may come; and thus, in fact, say to the Almighty, "Depart from me, for I desire not the knowledge of thy ways."

Every sinner, indeed, may not run the same particular course with the Prodigal, but each one is characterized by this—the manifest turning of his back upon God. He is pursuing that path, amid the many on the broad road, to which his depraved disposition leads him. In some way or other he is serving sin and walking after the course of this present evil world. He is forgetting God and minding earthly things. He is separating his heart from God. Physically and mechanically, of course, this is impossible. But morally, spiritually, every one of us by nature is an apostate, and our course, if unchecked, is one of constant retrogression from God.

Nor can this backward movement fail at every stage

of it to present a new spring of misery. The "deceitfulness of sin" may lead us to think otherwise, but such a result is sure to come. How unlikely that the ample provision which this wayward youth received, and which might have procured him a virtuous and happy independence, would become the fatal instrument of his shame and ruin! All appeared smiling around him, and he seemed to himself to be in the morning of a fair and beautiful day that would never be obscured by a cloud. It may be he counted that he had done wisely in claiming liberty for himself. Doubtless, he never dreamed that he who was once rich would become poor; that he who was the member of a noble family would be doomed to an employment than which, to him as a Jew, none could be more odious and abominable; that he who was surrounded with abundance and variety should ever fail to receive a remuneration sufficient to satisfy his hunger even with the coarsest food; that he who had friends in his prosperity to assist him in spending his portion should ever be left alone to battle with adversity in its most humiliating forms. But all these sad changes came. And such is the fruit which sin naturally tends to produce. It attracts by flattery, it destroys by delusion. It presents the bait, but hides the hook. It promises much, yet how does it perform? "Though wickedness be sweet in his mouth, though he hide it under his tongue, though he spare it, and forsake it not, but keep it still within his mouth, yet his meat in his bowels is turned, it is the gall of asps within him." "The way of the transgressor" must ever be "hard." A great English poet, with everything that fortune, rank and genius could give, and who had laid out his whole life for pleasure,

and not for duty, before he had reached half the allotted period of man exclaimed,

“My days are in the yellow leaf,
The flowers, the fruits, of love are gone;
The worm, the canker, and the grief
Are mine alone:
The fire that on my bosom preys
Is lone as some volcanic isle;
No torch is lighted at its blaze,
A funeral pile!”

And this sense of misery must, in a greater or less degree, be the experience of every man in departing from the living God. In this the soul is true to itself. It will not be satisfied without its proper nourishment. Man sighs for the bread in his Father's house. There is a good which he finds not. He looks abroad, he joins himself to one creature or another, but he finds it to be a broken cistern, and soon abandons it.

Nothing but the enjoyment of God can satisfy the mind of man. All things beside this are mere husks that the swine eat.

True, this yearning of the soul for its proper portion may be to some extent repressed or subdued. Amidst the levity of youth or the conflicts of ambition or the excitement of business man may not hear, so as to be much disturbed by it, the cry of his famishing spirit. The world having still its attractions, and the flesh its pleasures, and the sources of natural delight still being open, he may not feel keenly the pinching of spiritual destitution. But come the period will, even though his sins should not (as in the case before us) bear all their legitimate fruit of distress, disease and disgrace, when by the failure of all his efforts after happiness, or by

the strokes of Providence, or by the decays of Nature, or by personal affliction, or by death staring him in the face, he shall be made to feel *in want*—made to feel the vanity of all earthly resources, whilst his soul is bereft of God, its true and proper good.

There is a blank in the Prodigal's history at the point up to which we have considered it. The later stages of his misery are not exhibited; fully exposed, they might have been shocking rather than impressive. How the Prodigal fared under that veil as his misery day by day increased to its climax we know not; but at length he suddenly emerged another man. "He came to himself." The foul stream that had sunk into the earth and flowed for a space under ground burst to the surface again, agitated still indeed, but comparatively pure. We learn for the first time that the man has been mad by learning that his reason is restored. It is characteristic of the insane man that he never knows or confesses his insanity until it has passed away. It is when he has come to himself that he first discovers that he has been beside himself. "Madness," says Solomon, "is in the heart of the sinner." As madness is a disease of the rational powers, so vice is of the moral powers. Sin unhinges the whole frame of the moral being, tinges every sentiment of the heart and presents to view a being made after the image of God sinking that image into the resemblance of a brute or the character of a fiend. Men of the world deny this: they boast of their reason, but their boasting is folly. Every wicked man is beside himself; he acts the part of a fool. He risks his eternal salvation for the momentary pleasures of sin.

It is another characteristic of insanity that when the man is restored to reason the mind annihilates the inter-

val and resumes the train of ideas it had pursued in its sound state. Thus, the penitent in the parable, recovering as from a delirium, transports himself into the time past. His former life recurs to his mind; his father's house rises to view; he recalls the happy days before he went astray, and draws a comparison with his present situation.

“He came to himself.” Hitherto he had been a man “beside himself,” “out of his mind,” acting without reason, moving in the somnambulism of some wild and wretched dream. But that dream was now breaking. He saw himself as he had been—a young man rich in money, in friends, in social influence and position, in appliances of mental and moral culture. He saw himself as he might have been—in the full career of successful manhood, his eyes flashing with intellect and eloquent with genius, walking bravely, grandly, among the multitude. He saw himself as he was—a wretched outcast, his brow matted with shaggy hair, his dark eyes sunken and heavy, his face bloated, his eloquent lips swollen, his form bent and crouching and covered with tattered rags, wasted, famishing, munching the unseemly husks whereon the swine fattened. A beloved son—a spurned menial! A glorious man—forlorn, ruined, lost!

And all this in the midst of God's fair world—the summer hills all around him waving their palms as brave banners; the winds, as they wrestle even with his tangled locks, shouting their watchwords; the great blue heaven above thrilling with voices, inspiring immortal man to life's brave struggles and grand rewards! And yet he, amid all this, a discord among Nature's harmonies, a blot on Nature's writings, a spirit fallen

from life's high places—something meant to be a man, but now only a wreck, a desolation!

Such was the effect of consideration. It is for the want of this that the sinner goes forward in the error of his ways. "Consider your ways" is the admonition which God addresses to mankind in every age; and unless we *consider*, the calls of the gospel and the offers of grace are made to no purpose. The world to come has no existence to us but what we give it ourselves. The eternity that is before us, the happiness of heaven and the misery of hell, are no more than dreams unless we realize them to ourselves—unless we give them their full force by bringing them home to the heart. Reflection and thought are most important steps toward reformation of the error of our life. "I thought upon my ways," says the Psalmist; and what was the consequence?—"I turned my feet unto thy testimonies."

"I will arise and go to my father, and will say unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven, and before thee, and am no more worthy to be called thy son: make me as one of thy hired servants." The change is wrought *immediately* within him. But what change? Not a change of place; he has done nothing yet but think and feel. Not a change in his outer man: neither time nor miracle has repaired the waste of dissipation in his body. Not a complete revolution yet in all the courses and tendencies of his thoughts and desires, for it takes time to swing all these round in the new-born man, so that they shall play spontaneously and harmoniously with the motions of the Spirit in the "new creature." But *a change in his relations to his father and his father's house*. In that point, which is the decisive point in every character, the change is entire. Before, every longing impulse, passion,

from intellectual curiosity down to fleshly lust, looked for its indulgence *away* from home, which means away from God. Obeying that choice, every step bore him literally *away*. Place is not essential at first, but *destination* is essential. Distance is not the principal thing; *direction* is. The first sign and proof of the inward transformation is in the character of the *first* thought and desire. Before, it was to get away from the father and forget him; now, it is to get home and abide with him.

Mark the spirit with which the young man returns! He does not feign an excuse and go with a falsehood in his mouth. He does not say, "I have been very unfortunate; I have been robbed of my property, have been deceived by swindlers, or had a shipwreck at sea." Nor does he plead his youth and indiscretion, and say, "Though I have done wrong, I have a good heart." No such wretched excuses as unhumiliated sinners make does he purpose to present. He sees that while sin injures the sinner himself, its main heinousness lies in the fact that it is committed "*against heaven*," the God of heaven—against the high authority of God and against the wonderful goodness of God. Hence he will own his guilt, and in true repentance he will say, "Against thee, thee only have I sinned, and done this evil in thy sight."

He feels also that he has justly forfeited all claim to a filial relation, and acknowledges this with shame and sorrow. And yet, let it be observed, he does not abjure, or even ignore, his sonship, but only denies his worthiness to be recognized as a son. This is evident from the repetition of the word *father*, the utterance of which *now* is so unlike the hypocritical use of it when he

claimed his portion of the estate, as well as from the clause, "make me *as* one of thy hired servants." For the first time a filial spirit is awakened in him, and although the terms of his request look to being treated as a hired servant, yet there is evidently a yearning desire to be received again to the bosom of his father, that he may share in his affection, if not retrieve the position which he formerly occupied in the family. Thus will he come, feeling the plague of his heart, "poor in spirit," with genuine conviction and humility, and hoping in the mercy of him who is still his father. And thus will, and thus does, every true penitent come, making full confession of his sin, sincerely admitting that he is unworthy of the divine mercy and grace, and yet hoping through that mercy to receive the adoption of son or daughter of the Lord God Almighty.

"*And he arose, and came to his father.*" The coming is the giving back of his love and allegiance to his heavenly Father—the surrender to God of the sovereignty of his soul, which, in the outset, he had determined to retain to himself. No doubt the Spirit is in it all, yet the soul *gives itself up*. The Spirit works for us by working in us and through us, and his agency is not such as we can distinguish apart from the common operation of our faculties. Hence, if we wish the Spirit to lead us to give back our souls to God, we must ourselves seek to make this spiritual surrender. When we do we shall discover that he has been beforehand with us—has already anticipated us with his quickening grace.

Love, deep love, often led the father's steps to some rising ground, where he repaired, and, with a heart yearning for his son, turned his eyes in the direction in

which the Prodigal went off, hoping to see him return. One day, when on his watch-post, he descries a new object in the distance. He watches it. It moves, it advances. It is a man: it may be his son. His heart beats quick. One long, earnest, steadfast gaze, and—joy of joys! happy hour, often prayed for and come at last!—the keen eye of love recognizes him: it is the Prodigal coming back. “And when he was yet a great way off, his father saw him, and had compassion, and ran and fell on his neck, and kissed him. And the son said unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven and before thee, and am no more worthy to be called thy son. But the father said to his servants, Bring forth the best robe and put it on him, and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet, and bring hither the fatted calf and kill it, and let us eat and be merry. For this my son was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.”

Every circumstance here mentioned shows the mercy and kindness of the tender-hearted father. Even when he saw his son *a great way off* he *had compassion*. He had grieved over his lost one. The pity with which he regarded him as he set forth is doubled now when he sees him returning. He knew well what would surely happen to his child as he saw him go, but now he beholds him in the depth of his trouble, weariness, faintness and misery, and his compassion arises with double tenderness in his heart. Regardless of his own age and dignity, *he runs* to meet him.

How exquisite is this touch of simple story in the parable! Think of the Prodigal. The last few steps will not only be when he is wearied with his journey, but just as he approaches his home misgivings may

arise: "Will my father receive me? Even as a hired servant? Will he admit me? What if, after all, I be turned away from his door? It is what I may justly expect, for it is what I merit; but if it be so my heart will break, and I must lie down and die."

His loving, pitying father spared him this. He prevented these thickly-gathering thoughts from pressing still more deeply on his heart, and without a word, but in the tenderness of that silent love which is often more eloquent than language, he *fell on his neck and kissed him*.*

The loving reception of the Prodigal by his father—so unexpected, so undeserved—does not change his mind from its new and blessed condition of repentance. This abounding goodness of his parent does not quench his purpose of sin-confession. No! Even with his father's arms around him, and the soft kiss of love and forgiveness on his cheek, he breaks forth into his heartfelt acknowledgment of his sin: "*Father, I have sinned against heaven, and in thy sight, and am no more worthy to be called thy son.*" He did not, indeed, as one has observed, say all that he once intended; he did not say, *make me as one of thy hired servants*; for this was the one troubled element of his repentance, this purpose of

* Admirably has one said here: "The coming out of the father to meet his son figuratively exhibits the sending of the Son." All the way to the cross of Calvary has God come, running to meet sinners. The cross is the meeting-place between the righteous God and the repentant prodigal. *In Christ* the Father has come as far as he righteously can come to save sinners, and when the sinner is by faith *in Christ* also, then is he received by God. *In him!* mark that! Till we are "in him" God has not met us, but when we unite ourselves to him by simple trust, then we too are *in him*, and the Father embraces us.

shrinking back from his father's love and from the free grace which would restore to him all. In his dropping of these words, in his willingness to be blessed by his father to the uttermost if such was his father's pleasure, there is beautiful evidence that the grace which he had already received he had not received in vain.

Let us not fail to perceive the important truth which is taught by the Prodigal's confessing and deploring his sin even when it was forgiven and he was assured of his father's love. It is *this*: a sense of God's kindness is the spring of deepest sorrow, and the repentance that succeeds forgiveness is truer and deeper than any which precedes it. "The repentance that needeth not to be repented of" has its truest emblem in the rivers that, lending flowers and emerald verdure to their banks, wind through the valleys of the Alps. It is not when stern winter howls, but in spring and the sweet summertime, when birds are singing, and flowers are breathing odors, and the sun from azure skies pours down his beams on the icy blossoms of the mountains, that the rivers, fed by melted snows, rising and overflowing all their banks, roll their mightiest torrents to the lakes. And so it is when a sense of God's love and peace and forgiveness is poured into our hearts that they thaw and soften and melt into streams of fullest sorrow.

It would seem that the father interrupted his son in his confession. While yet he has scarcely acknowledged his sin the father issues a joyful command to the servants: *Bring forth the best robe and put it on him, and put a ring on his hand and shoes on his feet*, these all being the ornaments not of the slave, but of the free—all, therefore, speaking of his restoration to his former dignity and his lost privileges. Or if we cannot suppose

the Roman custom which accompanied the lifting up of a slave to a freeman's rank to have been familiarly known in Palestine, or to be here alluded to, yet the giving of the robe and ring were ever accounted, in the East, amongst the highest tokens of favor and honor. The *fatted calf* must be killed and all must rejoice. Was there not a cause? *This my son*, said the happy father, *was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found.*

Thus is it with the penitent sinner. God sees him *while yet a great way off*. He sees the tear which he hastily wipes away as if he were ashamed of it; he hears the prayer which he breathes so faintly and with such little faith; he sees him when just beginning to repent. He has been looking on him in all his sin and in all his sorrow, hoping that he would repent; and now he sees the first gleam of grace, and he beholds it with joy. Never warder on the lonely castle-top saw the first gray light of morning with more joy than that with which God beholds the first desire in the penitent's heart. Never physician rejoiced more when he saw the first heaving of the lungs in one that was supposed to be dead than God rejoices over such a sinner, now that he sees the first token for good. "He looketh upon men, and if any say, 'I have sinned and perverted that which was right, and it profited me not,' he will deliver his soul from going into the pit." Ephraim bemoaned himself thus: "Thou hast chastised me, and I was chastised, as a bullock unaccustomed to the yoke: turn thou me, and I shall be turned, for thou art the Lord my God. Surely after that I was turned I repented, and after that I was instructed I smote upon my thigh: I was ashamed, yea, even confounded, because I did bear the reproach of my youth." In what language did the Lord notice this

self-condemned penitent? "Is Ephraim my dear son? Is he a pleasant child? For since I spake against him, I do earnestly remember him still: therefore my bowels are troubled for him, I will surely have mercy upon him, saith the Lord." The divine conduct as displayed in this passage is a direct counterpart to that of the father in the parable. The Lord deals with repentant Ephraim as the father deals with his returning Prodigal. He gives him a name and a place among his children.

So, we repeat, God deals with every repentant sinner. When the heart is broken and contrite, when it cries for mercy and pleads nothing but the blood of Jesus Christ in its favor,—then the controversy between God and the sinner is over. The sinner submits to the righteousness of God, and the Lord, who delighteth in mercy, can then show mercy to him consistently with his other glorious perfections. The breach is healed, peace is restored. The sinner is pardoned and accepted in the Beloved, and all the glorious blessings and privileges of the gospel, the children's portion, are conferred upon him. His rags of degradation disappear, and he is by the ministering hand of faith clothed in the robe, "the best robe," of Christ's perfect righteousness, so that he can exclaim with Isaiah, "I will greatly rejoice in the Lord; my soul shall be joyful in my God; for he hath clothed me with the garments of salvation, he hath covered me with the robe of righteousness."

Does it seem strange that God should do so much for sinners? Strange as it may seem, it is strangely true, for this is what the parable teaches. The worst sinners may be saved if they will come to God in contrition and faith in Jesus, in whom we are accepted. Look at the staggering drunkard in the alehouse. Is there a possi-

bility that one day he shall stand among the fairest sons of light? Possibility? Ay, certainty, if he repents and turns from the error of his ways. Hear you yon curser and swearer? See you the man who labels himself as a servant of hell, and is not ashamed to do so? Is it possible that he shall one day share the bliss of the redeemed? Possible? Ay, more; it is sure if he turneth from his wickedness. Such is the promise of a God that "doeth wonders:" "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."

Turn now to a sad contrast. The *elder son was in the field*, busied about earthly things, and in the experience of his own heart far removed from the feelings of a pardoned sinner. He knew nothing of this joy in his father's house, which, however, was not concealed from him, for the sound of it broke upon his ears. When told by the servants the cause of the rejoicing, *he was angry*, from envy and heartlessness toward his brother—full of indignation at the tender love of the father, into whose state of feeling he could not transport himself because of his cold, selfish and contracted disposition. He complained that his father treated the returning Prodigal too well, and that he himself had not been treated so well as his merits deserved. He could not prevail upon himself to call his brother by the name of "brother." He thinks the worst of his brother, and describes his guilt in the grossest manner, so that the kindness shown him by his father might appear the highest injustice, partiality and unfairness toward himself. It is a painful picture, but a very instructive one.

For one thing, this elder brother is an exact picture

of the Jews of our Lord's time, who could not bear the idea of their Gentile younger brother being made partaker of their privileges. For another thing, the elder brother is an exact type of the scribes and Pharisees of our Lord's time, for they objected that he received sinners and ate with them, and they murmured because he opened the door of salvation to publicans and harlots. Last, but not least, the elder brother is an exact type of a large class in the Church of Christ in the present day. There are thousands on every side who dislike a free, full, unfettered gospel to be preached. They are always complaining that ministers throw the door too wide open, and that the doctrine of grace tends to promote licentiousness. Whenever we come across such persons let us remember that their voice is the voice of the "elder brother."

Let us beware of this spirit infecting our own hearts. It arises partly from ignorance. Men begin by not seeing their own sinfulness and unworthiness, and then they fancy that they are much better than others, and that nobody is worthy to be put by their side. It arises partly from lack of charity: men are wanting in kind feeling toward others, and then they are unable to take pleasure when others are saved. Above all, it arises from a thorough misunderstanding of the true nature of gospel forgiveness: the man who really feels that we all stand by grace and are all debtors, and that the best of us has nothing to boast of, and has nothing which he has not received,—such a man will not be found talking like the "elder brother."

In the words, *Son, thou art ever with me, and all that I have is thine*, the Saviour argues from what was granted, as we say, although he by no means allowed

that which for the sake of conviction he had yielded. But that he might convince them the more of error he grants, as it were, that they did excel in every virtuous pursuit, yet that, even this being granted, it was improper and unjust to pursue with malevolent and bitter feeling publicans and sinners when they became truly penitent and returned to a better course.

Let the man who is afraid to repent consider well the parable now under view, and be afraid no more. There is nothing on God's part to justify his fears. An open door is set before him, a free pardon awaits him. "If we confess our sins, God is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and cleanse us from all unrighteousness." Let also the man who is ashamed to repent consider this precious utterance of the Saviour, and cast shame aside. What though the world mocks and jests at his repentance? While man is mocking angels are rejoicing.

Have we repented ourselves? This, after all, is the principal question which concerns us. What shall it profit us to know Christ's love if we do not use it? "If ye know these things, happy are ye if ye do them."

"Lo, through the gloom of guilty fears
My faith discerns a dawn of grace;
The Sun of Righteousness appears
In Jesus' reconciling face.

"My suffering, slain and risen Lord!
In deep distress I turn to thee;
I claim acceptance in thy word;
My God! my God! forsake not me!"

THE * UNJUST * STEWARD.

“ Here, in our souls, we treasure up the wealth
Fraud cannot filch nor waste destroy. The more
'Tis spent, the more we have—the sweet affections,
The heart's religion, the diviner instincts
Of what we shall be when the world is dust.”

1 And he said also unto his disciples, There was a certain rich man
which had a steward ; and the same was accused unto him that he had
2 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
3 mayest be no longer steward. Then the steward said within himself,
What shall I do ? for my lord taketh away from me the stewardship :
4 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
5 houses. So he called every one of his lord's debtors unto him, and
6 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
7 thy bill, and sit down quickly, and write fifty. Then said he to an-
other, And how much owest thou ? And he said, An hundred meas-
ures of wheat. And he said unto him, Take thy bill, and write
8 four-score. And the lord commended the unjust steward, because he
had done wisely : for the children of this world are in their genera-
9 tion wiser than the children of light. And I say unto you, Make to
yourselves friends of the mammon of unrighteousness ; that when ye
10 fail, they may receive you into everlasting habitations. He that is
faithful in that which is least, is faithful also in much ; and he that
11 is unjust in the least, is unjust also in much. If therefore ye have
not been faithful in the unrighteous mammon, who will commit to
12 your trust the true riches ? And if ye have not been faithful in that
which is another man's, who shall give you that which is your own ?

LUKE XVI. 1-12.

THE UNJUST STEWARD.

THOSE who, in the preceding parables, are regarded as being *found* and restored to their Father's favor and protection are now taught how they are to fulfill the obligations and duties growing out of their new relationship to God. The entrance upon the divine life is the theme of the preceding parables; the duty and ultimate reward of active fidelity constitute the theme of the one before us.

Our Lord's design was to set forth the impossibility of "serving God and mammon;" also to show the right use of wealth and the superiority of the claims of the future world to those of the present.

The Master speaks now more solemnly *with* his disciples, who had been publicans and sinners, and more severely than he had done *for* them to others. He shows to the lost but now recovered sons of the house how the Father, it is true, at their return gives a feast, but how they also, after having been refreshed at the table, must return to an immediate and faithful fulfillment of the obligations imposed upon them. If they formerly had been hirelings of the Romans, the Saviour will now have them consider themselves as stewards of God, to administer faithfully in their earthly treasure *his* property.

The "certain rich man" here mentioned is not such a rich man as we read of in another parable, preparing to build new barns and storehouses in the miserable hope of a future of peace, prosperity and comfort; nor such a rich man as is set forth in the parable at the close of this chapter, who was "clothed in purple and fine linen, and fared sumptuously every day;" but a rich man who was careful of "his goods." He does not appear to be exceedingly anxious as to their increase, nor yet lavish and luxurious in their expenditure, but he takes good care not to lose sight of them. He is obliged to trust in others so far, but his is no blind confidence. He keeps his ears and his eyes open to all that concerns his affairs, and it will not be long before he detects what is wrong, nor will he lose time in punishing the wrong-doer. He is, in fact, in the worldly sense of the term, a careful man, one who looks well after his own interests, and is not the less fond of "his goods" because he does not appear to be in such a hurry as some to increase them or as others to spend them.

The "steward" of this great man was an agent who received his master's rents, which were paid in kind and not in money, and through whose hands all his master's receipts passed. In the fact of his having to employ such an officer we learn incidentally how evenly balanced are the various conditions of life in a community, and how little of substantial advantage wealth can confer on its possessor. As your property increases your personal control over it diminishes; the more you possess, the more you must entrust to others. Those who do their own work are not troubled with disobedient servants; those who look after their own affairs are not troubled with unfaithful overseers.

Truly solemn is the representation of man's relation to God which is here made. We are his stewards. Everything that man has, especially in earthly goods, whether it may have come to him by inheritance, industry or any turn of fortune, is a gift committed to him by God, not a property with which he can do after the will of his own heart.

It is more easy to understand this with regard to a rich man than a poor man, especially for those who are poor themselves. We sometimes hear it said about one who is very rich, "He does not do much good with his money," as if he were bound to do good with his money *because* he has so much. But why the rich man only? Why not the poor also? Both are God's stewards. To the rich man God has committed much, to the poor man little; but the poor man is just as much bound to spend his little aright as the rich man is to spend his wealth. Besides, money is not all: time and health and strength are goods also. Every one has something; every one is a steward of God.

It is not to be expected that we should affix a distinct idea to every term in a parable. There are some parts of almost every composition of this kind which belong to what may be called the *drapery* of it; and were we to attempt to interpret them we should soon run into the mazes of folly. Hence the words, "the same was accused unto him that he had wasted his goods," which represent the master as needing that the ill-conduct of his steward should come to his ears through a third party, must be regarded as belonging to the earthly setting forth of the truth, because no such necessity exists on God's part in relation to the conduct of his creatures. The accusation brought against the steward

was that he wasted or scattered his master's goods—that he administered them without due fidelity, turning them to private ends—*wasting* them, perverting them from their intended purpose.

The master, or the lord of the steward, sends for him, and addresses him in language severe from its gentleness: "How is it that I hear this of thee?" Never is rebuke so poignant as when it is conveyed in gentle accents. That rebuke pierces the deepest which is clothed in the language of love. "How is it that I hear this of thee?"—thee, whom I had entrusted with all; thee, whom I have treated as a confidential servant; thee, whom I have selected for thine honesty and placed at my right hand? How is it that I hear this of *thee*? I am surprised, I am disappointed, I am grieved. It is in sorrow that I find thee guilty. We must part. Give an account of thy stewardship; thou mayest no longer remain in the office the responsibilities of which thou hast violated. Get ready, therefore, all thine accounts and lay them before me without delay.

Miserable must have been that man's feeling. Honesty has within it an inner radiance that makes the blackest clouds of affliction bright, but conscious crime, with desolation without and no compensatory joy within, must be misery.

When the steward rendered his account a short respite was still allowed him which he might employ, and which is to be referred to the period of life granted to every one, always uncertain and never long in continuance. This respite the man occupied in an effort to protect himself from impending ruin. He had no sense of the baseness of his conduct and ingratitude to so affectionate a master, but in the exercise of intense

selfishness he sets about making the best of the circumstances, and trying from the wreck to get something that would float him to a quiet and peaceful haven.

Mark the traits that indicate the man's shrewdness! He counsels with himself: "*What shall I do?*" Here is the *first* trait. He is now no longer careless about his future state.

"*My lord taketh away from me the stewardship.*" He does not conceal from himself the greatness and nearness of the danger; he sees his criminality, together with the righteousness of his master; he believes also the word spoken to him, that he could no longer be steward.

"*I cannot dig; to beg I am ashamed.*" He casts about for other means and ways of doing for himself, but throws them away as not suitable. He could not dig; he was ashamed to beg, his pride not permitting him.

"*That they may receive me into their houses.*" He knows what he desires—namely, an easy securement of his future support.

"*So he called every one of his lord's debtors.*" He does not stand with mere resolutions and purposes; what he has conceived he executes.

"*How much owest thou unto my lord?*" He knew well enough, but put the question in order that the debtor by his answer might be made to acknowledge the greatness of his debt (his rent), and consequently afterward the greatness of the part remitted to him, the greatness of the favor shown him, that he might also feel himself the more distinctly bound to a grateful requital.

"*Sit down quickly.*" He rightly understood and employed his short time. "*Take thy bill*"—thy bond, thy lease, which demonstrates the strictness of thy obligation and the largeness of the sums remitted. "*Write fifty*"—

the new act of unrighteousness flows from the earlier; the sinner will help himself by sin, and thus sinks always the deeper, for every sin becomes the seed of another, while the moral feeling always gets more hardened, conscience less tender.

A similar course was taken by the steward with the other debtors. Whether this deceiver was again deceived by his accomplices in guilt, whether he actually attained his end or not, whether the deceit practiced by him and discovered by his master was punished so as to disappoint him of his design, we must not inquire into, as the parable here ends.

“And the lord commended the unjust steward, because he had done wisely.” It should always be noted in reading this parable that the expression “lord” here does not mean the Lord Jesus Christ. It is the “master” or “lord” of the unjust steward. It should be remembered that the steward whom our Lord describes is not set before us as a pattern of morality. He is distinctly called the “unjust steward.” The Lord Jesus never meant to sanction unfair dealing between man and man. This steward cheated his master. It was his shrewd forethought that struck his master and led to his commendation of him as a far-seeing man. But there is no proof that his master was *pleased* with his conduct. He did not praise the servant for faithfulness, but for the cleverness with which he had managed his case. It is the commendation which one whose house has been robbed during the night might bestow in the morning upon the robber after noticing how adroitly he had opened the locks and carried off the booty. Above all, we should not fail to notice that there is not a word to show that the man was praised by Christ. The parable is in this

respect entirely equivalent to that of the Friend at Midnight and that of the Unjust Judge. As in those two parables the efficacy of prayer is the thing that is unfolded, so *here* prudence is enforced by a similar conclusion. The argument is, "If an unjust prudence is commended by men, how much more will the Lord commend a holy prudence!"

We come now to the keynote of the parable: "The children of this world are in their generation wiser than the children of light." The expression here used is one very common in Scripture. We read of the "children of disobedience," "the children of wrath." Nor is there any difficulty in understanding these phrases. By the "children of disobedience" are clearly meant the disobedient. The "children of wrath" are such as by sin have incurred the wrath of God. So by "the children of this world" we understand *worldly* persons—those who are devoted to the cares, the pleasures or the pursuits of the present life. By "the children of light" are meant *religious* persons—those who, having been "some time in darkness, are now light in the Lord," whose understandings have been enlightened to see the truth as it is in Jesus—who, no longer walking after the course of this world, profess to be seeking a better country, that is, a heavenly. Such are the persons of whom our Lord says, "The children of this world are in their generation wiser than the children of light." They are wiser *in their way*; with the end they have before them they show much more shrewdness and cleverness in their efforts to attain that end than do the children of light.

Alas! how true is this! And how sad a proof does it furnish of the imperfect influence which belief in eternal things has upon the heart! You see one man rising early

and late, and eating the bread of carefulness, for the sake of some little present object of desire; he is sagacious in planning how to get it, diligent in pursuing it, devoting every faculty of mind and body to the ensurance of success. The chemist in his laboratory from morning's dawn till midnight hour is pursuing his analyses and combinations. The astronomer, in his observatory morning, noon and night, if a comet is in the remote horizon catches the first beam of it. The lawyer, the physician, the sailor, the soldier—with what unflagging energy do they prosecute the objects that are important in their judgment!

Turning now to those who profess to be, and who really are, aiming at an incorruptible inheritance, how are they found? Too often languid in prayer; backward in addressing themselves to duty, and soon wearied in discharging it; slow to resolve on self-denial, and too glad of any excuse to escape from it. Is not this too faithful a picture of our negligence in that work which we yet believe to be all-important? Instead of "pressing forward" with a noble zeal to lay up large treasure in heaven, the utmost we aspire to is but to escape from hell. Well may we take a lesson from the sagacity and diligence with which the steward provided against the reverse with which he was threatened, and which the children of this world show in seeking those pleasures on which they set their minds. How are we reproached by their untiring activity! How they pain us with the sight of our spiritual indolence! How sluggish we are touching "the vast concerns of an eternal state"!

"We, for whose sake all Nature stands,
And stars their courses move—
We for whose sake the angel-bands
Come flying from above,—

“We for whom God the Son came down,
And labored for our good,—
How careless to secure the crown
He purchased with his blood!”

We ought not to forget, either, a more special lesson which our Lord draws from this parable: “Make to yourselves friends of the mammon of unrighteousness, that when ye fail, they may receive you into everlasting habitations.” The word “mammon” is Syriac, or, according to Augustine, Punic. Riches, here termed “the mammon of unrighteousness,” or the false, fleeting, uncertain riches of earth, are, so long as unused, passive: it is riches in motion which gives them a definite character. They move under two laws and in two directions—the law of selfishness and the law of love; the direction toward God and whatever tends to advance his glory, and the direction toward earth and whatever abets its lusts and pleasures. As, then, we cannot live in the world without making use of “mammon” after some sort, we must use it so as to make friends by it—not consuming it upon our lusts, not squandering it in frivolous schemes and pursuits, not hoarding it up for family aggrandizement, for then it truly becomes unrighteous mammon; but we must appropriate it to the works of mercy, feeding the hungry, relieving the poor, ministering to the heirs of salvation, extending the gospel of Christ, thus putting it out to interest in God’s service, so that in the end we shall receive unfading riches in heaven. We are, as Christians, to make such a use of all worldly things that they shall not rise up in judgment against us to condemn us, but be an evidence in our favor that we sought to serve God with the very things which men

reserve to themselves. *That when ye fail—die, or leave life—death is for the temporal life what the dismissal from office was to the steward, a termination of the calling hitherto maintained—they* (that is, the friends you have made by the sanctified use of your earthly resources) may welcome you *into everlasting habitations*. Not into a temporary shelter, which was all the steward procured for himself, but into the building of God, the “house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.”

It is right for us to oppose the superstition that expects by alms and by money paid for masses to smooth the spirit's path to peace beyond the grave; but when we have refused to make money directly the price of our admission into heaven, we have not exhausted our duty in regard to its bearing on our eternal weal. The property and money and occupations of time may instrumentally affect for good or evil our efforts to lay up the true riches. According as they are employed, they may become a stumbling-stone over which their possessor shall fall, or a shield to cover his head from some fiery darts of the wicked one.

What though mammon—the world—be adverse to the interests of our souls? If we are believers in Christ, adversary though it be, we may make it our friend. A skillful seaman, when once fairly out to sea, can make the wind that blows right in his face bear him onward to the very point from which it blows. Thus, if we were skillful, watchful and earnest we might make the unrighteous mammon our friend; we might so turn our side to each of its impulses that, willing or unwilling, conscious or unconscious, it should from day to day drive us nearer home, the blessed world above which God has prepared for his people.

“He that is faithful in that which is least is faithful also in much; and he that is unjust in the least is unjust also in much. 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, who shall give you that which is your own?” *That which is least* is the deceitful mammon; *that which is another man’s* is the *wealth of this present world*, which is not the Christian’s own nor his proper inheritance. The “much,” the “true riches,” is *that which is your own*, the true riches of God’s inheritance. The wealth of this world is “another’s,” forfeited by sin—only put into our hands to be accounted for. Jesus here speaks from a heavenly point of view. He calls the blessings of salvation by antithesis *the true*, because they are not, like the unrighteous mammon, untrustworthy and unsatisfying, but fully deserve the name of genuine and true good. He who is dishonest and unfaithful in the discharge of his duties on earth must not expect to have heavenly treasures or to be saved.

In regard to the expression, “*faithful in that which is least*,” it has well been observed that true faithfulness knows no distinction between great and small duties. From the highest point of view—that is, from God’s point of view—nothing is great, nothing small, as *we* measure. The worth and the quality of an action depend on its motive only, and not at all on its prominence or on any other of the accidents which we are always apt to adopt as the tests of the greatness of our deeds. The largeness of the consequences of anything that we do is no measure of the true greatness or true value of it. Nothing is small that a spirit can do;

nothing is small that can be done from a mighty motive. The least action of life can be as surely done from the loftiest motive as the highest and the noblest. Faithfulness measures acts as God measures them. True conscientiousness deals with our duties as God deals with them.

☞ THE * RICH * MAN * AND * LAZARUS. ☞

“Yet know, vain skeptics—know the Almighty mind,
Who breathed on man a portion of his fire,
Bade his free soul, by earth nor time confined,
To heaven, to immortality, aspire.

“Nor shall the pile of hope his mercy reared
By vain philosophy be e'er destroyed:
Eternity, by all or wished or feared,
Shall be by all or suffered or enjoyed.”

19 *There was a certain rich man, which was clothed in purple and*
20 *fine linen, and fared sumptuously every day: And there was a*
21 *certain beggar named Lazarus, which was laid at his gate, full of*
22 *sores, And desiring to be fed with the crumbs which fell from the*
23 *rich man's table: moreover, the dogs came and licked his sores.*
24 *And it came to pass, that the beggar died, and was carried by the*
25 *angels into Abraham's bosom: the rich man also died, and was*
26 *buried. And in hell he lift up his eyes, being in torments, and*
27 *seeth Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom. And he cried*
28 *and said, Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus,*
29 *that he may dip the tip of his finger in water, and cool my tongue:*
30 *for I am tormented in this flame. But Abraham said, Son, re-*
31 *member that thou in thy lifetime receivedst thy good things, and*
likewise Lazarus evil things: but now he is comforted, and thou
art tormented. And beside all this, between us and you there is a
great gulf fixed: so that they which would pass from hence to you
cannot; neither can they pass to us, that would come from thence.
Then he said, I pray thee therefore, father, that thou wouldest
send him to my father's house: For I have five brethren; that he
may testify unto them, lest they also come into this place of torment.
Abraham saith unto him, They have Moses and the prophets; let
them hear them. And he said, Nay, father Abraham: but if one
went unto them from the dead, they will repent. And he said unto
him, If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be
persuaded, though one rose from the dead.

LUKE XVI. 19-31.

THE RICH MAN AND LAZARUS.

FROM the very earliest days it has been a matter of dispute whether this portion of our Lord's teaching ought to be regarded as a parable or a real history. It is, however, of no real importance to inquire whether this is the history of men who actually lived at Jerusalem, or whether our Lord borrowed only general characters and worked them into a parable. In either case the moral is the same. It cannot for a moment be supposed that Jesus would use any embellishment, even in a parable, that would leave any impression on an honest mind inconsistent with truth. If the parable in part consists of drapery, it is not the drapery of error, but of truth.

This "certain rich man" was "clothed in purple"—which was the color in that age appropriate to princely rank—and "fine linen," which was then, because the manufacture of it was in its infancy, considered a proof of the greatest wealth or greatest luxury. He also "fared sumptuously." Not that he was a glutton or recklessly extravagant, but he lived well, as a rich man could afford to do. And this rich display was not reserved for special days or festivals; it was his ordinary style.

It is important, in order that the edge of the parable

may be retained, that the character of this man, as evil, should not be exaggerated. He is not said to have been dishonest, or a false accuser, or an oppressor of the poor, or avaricious, or a spendthrift, or an adulterer, or a criminal. There is not exhibited to us any peculiar wickedness in his conduct. The design of the parable is to admonish us, not that a monster of wickedness shall be punished in another world, but that the man who does little or no good, and who, though not perhaps intemperate or sensual, is yet careless about the situation of others and exists only for the indulgence of his own appetites and vanity, shall not escape punishment. It shows the danger of living in the *neglect of duties*, though not chargeable with the *commission of crimes*, and particularly the danger of considering the gifts of Providence as our own *property*, and not as a *trust* from our Creator to be employed in his service (*i. e.* in doing his will), and for which we are accountable to him.

Three circumstances aggravate the rich man's uncharitableness. There was presented to him at his very gate such an object as would have moved any one's pity, a fellow-creature reduced to extreme misery and necessity, whom a very little relief would have contented. Trench says: "This man neglected his fellow-man, beheld his sufferings with a careless eye and an unmoved heart, yet it was a misery which even the beasts had pity on, so that what little they could they did to alleviate his sufferings. We have, in fact, in the two descriptions stroke for stroke. Dives is covered with purple and fine linen, Lazarus is covered only with sores; the one fares sumptuously, the other desires to be fed with crumbs; the one has numerous attendants to wait on

his least caprice, the other only dogs to tend his sores."

Poverty, the neglect and desertion of men, afflictions and diseases, form a condition very grievous to nature. But how advantageous is this condition with regard to heaven! How much is it to be preferred to that of a wicked rich man when God enables us to bear it humbly and patiently by his grace! How many wounds in the soul do these sores of the body heal, when the hand of the sovereign Physician applies them as a remedy to the diseases of the heart!

It is one of the blessed fruits of the gospel that it provides for the poor and suffering. We are apt to wonder at the ways of Heaven, and perhaps tempted to arraign the conduct of Providence, in endowing so worthless a man as Dives with wealth and prosperity, whilst all that diversified the lot of Lazarus was scene after scene of poverty and pain. But let us suspend our judgment. We see but one link in the great chain of providence. We live but in the infancy of being; the great drama of life is but begun. When the curtain between the two worlds is withdrawn, the morn will arise which will light the Almighty's footsteps in the deep and pour full day upon all the paths of his providence. In the mean time the true Christian must be ready not only to *do*, but to *suffer*. He must make up his mind to a cheerful acquiescence in the will of God, even if God shall be pleased to send him manifold "evil things" in his outward lot.

The scene changes, and brings us to the *close* of the lives of these two men. Lazarus died first. No mention is made of his being buried. His poor diseased body was probably hid out of sight in any obscure grave

which the hand of charity might provide for it. But his dust was precious in the sight of that God in whom he trusted, and in the resurrection morning God will show him how much.

"The rich man also died, and was buried." Death is no respecter of persons. No earthly resources, however great or grand, can shield us from the assault of the destroyer. The rich man was buried, we may suppose, with much pageantry and pomp. What a contrast in the death-scenes here recorded! The one dies surrounded by skillful physicians, faithful nurses, officious attendants, and is borne to the costly tomb with all the insignia of courtly grief; the other passes away alone, is confined in his rags, and, without a mourner to drop a tear, is buried out of sight. Thus closes the earthly history of the rich man and Lazarus. Here the curtain of life drops, and corruption and the worm return both to their native dust.

The scene again changes, and the future, with its vast consequences, opens before us. The soul of Lazarus *"was carried by the angels into Abraham's bosom."* The Jews expressed the happiness of the righteous at death in three ways: "They go to the garden of Eden," "They go to be under the throne of glory," "They go to the bosom of Abraham;" and it was in reference to this general idea that our Lord introduced this expression to denote the future happiness of Lazarus. He was in the bosom of Abraham, "the father of the faithful." The poor wretch whom the rich man scorned to have at his table was received into the arms of Abraham, "the friend of God," resting in the highest felicity which the Jewish mind could imagine. He was in the Father's house and had joined the company of the holy.

No so with Dives. He "*lifted up his eyes, being in torments.*" The ungodly gravitated, according to his kind, into the place of woe. And there he "*saw Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom.*" The Jewish rabbis say that the place of torment and paradise are so situated that what is done in one may be seen from the other. The Grecian poets represent the abodes of the blest as lying contiguous to the regions of the lost, and separated only by a great, impassable river or gulf, in such a way that the spirits could talk with one another from its opposite banks. Grecian mythologists also tell us that the souls of wicked men lie in a river of fire, where they suffer the same torments they would have suffered while alive had their bodies been burned. It does not follow, however, from these resemblances that the parable is formed on the Grecian mythology, or that our Lord approved of what the common people thought or spoke concerning these matters. In parables, provided the doctrines inculcated are strictly true, the terms in which they are inculcated may be such as are most familiar to the ears of mankind, and the images made use of such as they will most readily apprehend.

Hearken to the cry of the rich man in his anguish! He asks for "*a drop of water, that his tongue may be cooled*" under the intense agony he is suffering, and of which only a "*flame*" could be the proper image. He begs, not for entire deliverance, but only for alleviation. He sues for mercy who himself had been so unmerciful.

How impressive the reply of Abraham!—"Son, remember, that thou, in thy lifetime, receivedst thy good things." "*His good things* they are called emphatically

—his by peculiar choice. They were the things he chiefly valued and pitched upon as the most likely to make him happy. Having enjoyed them, and actually compassed the utmost of his desires, his happiness was at an end. He had had his option, and there was no further provision for him in the other world. Nor indeed was it possible that he should find any where he had laid up none. Only where men sow may they expect to reap, it being infinitely absurd to bury their seed in the earth and to expect a crop in heaven.”

“And likewise Lazarus, evil things; but now he is comforted.” His afflictions are all past; he has exchanged his place at the gate for a home in heaven, his want for abundant satisfaction, his rags for a robe of glory, his obscure and despised condition for the sweet society of God and angels and the spirits of the just made perfect.

“*And thou art tormented.*” Thy gorgeous attire has given place to a robe of flame; instead of sumptuous fare thou art fed with bitter tears and art gnawed continually by a condemning conscience; and instead of thy past elegancies and comforts, nothing but torment and anguish surround thee.

Are we, then, to understand the statement that the rich man had received his good things in his lifetime, and likewise Lazarus evil things, as intimating that there is a certain proportion of good and evil allotted to each individual by some arbitrary decree of the great Sovereign of the universe, and that where the good has been bestowed during the term of our earthly existence the evil should, as matter of course, be anticipated in the life that is to come? By no means. To put such an interpretation upon the words were to make caprice

the distinguishing characteristic of that God of whom it is testified that "justice and judgment are the habitation of his throne, yea, that righteousness goeth continually before his face." Worldly prosperity is a good which many men enjoy independently even of their own choice. It may have been their birthright, of which they had come into the possession before they were in circumstances either to form a wish or to put forth an effort for its attainment, or it may have been acquired as the result of honest industry. Worldly adversity, on the other hand, is an evil which no one would choose for its own sake, but which, on the contrary, all men, were it in their power, would studiously avoid. To make, then, the bestowment of a temporal good a reason for the subsequent bestowment of eternal misery, or to make the mere infliction of an earthly evil a reason for the conferring of an eternal blessing, were to destroy the very foundation of the moral government of the world.

The words of Abraham to which we now refer have a different meaning. They, as well as the glimpse of the rich man's previous history given in the parable, show that he was mindful only of present enjoyment, and was regardless of the wants of his immortal soul. Of earthly goods he was in abundant possession. But when he bade these adieu he had nothing left. Happiness forsook him for ever. Not so with Lazarus. On earth he was the poorest of the poor; he had nothing which he could call his own. But he had made wise provision for the future; he had laid up treasures in heaven. Now he had entered upon their possession. He was no longer *Lazarus the poor*, but *Lazarus the rich*, reclining at the banquet of bliss with Abraham himself, the father

of the faithful and the friend of God. His state was then one of fixed blessedness, while that of the rich man was its very opposite.

This was not an arbitrary or chance arrangement. It resulted from the very nature of the habits, affections and moral affinities which marked their earthly life. Stier well and strikingly remarks: "The pious Lazarus would have remained undamned in patient endurance even in these *torments*; but even at Abraham's table the rich man would have been ill at ease, so that its provisions would only have added to his raging fire."

Memory will follow the soul into the future state. In the coming world of vivid intellection and endless meditation

"The *past* lives o'er again
In its effects, and to the guilty spirit
The ever-frowning *present* is its image."

"And beside all this," continued Abraham, "between us and you there is a great gulf fixed"—a great chasm or void is established—"so that they which would pass from hence to you cannot"—if any should be so compassionate as to desire to help you, they are not able—"neither can they pass to us that would come from thence." "We must still continue in an unapproachable distance from each other; the passage is for ever closed; the *great gulf* is for ever *fixed*." The righteous will be "for ever with the Lord." The wicked shall be "unjust *still*"—shall "go away into *everlasting* punishment. The same word, "eternal," is written on the gate of heaven and the gate of hell. There is nothing intermediate between heaven and hell. How the doctrine of a *purgatory* can be reconciled with the verse now under notice it is impossible to imagine. How solemn the thought

that whether a person be happy or miserable in the future world, his state is unchangeable!

The first prayer of the rich man being refused, he offered another petition. Having given himself up to his fate, he now appeals from justice to mercy, and begs that Lazarus might be sent to his brethren to warn them, *to testify unto them*, the certain truth of the immortality of the soul and of a future state of rewards and punishments. Some have inferred from this request that in the future world some good and kind sentiments may remain in those who are themselves for ever lost. It is more reasonable to suppose that there was in this request of the rich man the tormenting thought that he had himself been the means, by his example and his life, of leading his brothers into careless, irreligious habits which were most likely to involve them in eternal ruin, and that their presence with him in torment would increase his misery. He dreaded the reproaches of those whom he had loved in a wrong manner, and thereby made companions in his misery. How important it is to consider what kind of influence we are exercising on the community at large, and especially on those whom Providence has placed under our immediate supervision and control! Well will it be for us to inquire how we stand in respect of our example. What is its character? Is it such as commends itself to the gospel of Christ? or is it such as may implicate our own souls in the final destruction of the impenitent? Is it such as in that mild tendency which God has ordained serves to draw those whom we love and who return our affection into a personal acquaintance with God, with a Redeemer, with his Church, with his blessed Spirit? Is it such as may serve to open the path before them, and determine

their course heavenward? or is it such as by a process no less certain serves to obliterate from their minds the very remembrance of these things, and to impart to the world around them a vehemence of attraction which they are in no wise able to resist? We say not now, How terrible is the thought of exposing our own souls to the terror of God's righteous indignation and wrath! We say not, How terrible is the thought of terminating our career in that dreary chamber where hope dies and the soul shrivels amidst an all-pervading desolation! But in view of what is said in the portion of the parable now under notice, How terrible is the thought of encountering, in addition to our own personal miseries, the agonizing reflection of having been accessory in any form to the ruin of others!

“Abraham said unto him, They have Moses and the prophets, let them hear them.” From these they might learn—not that it is wicked to be rich and blessed to be a beggar, but—that a godless, selfish, sensual worldliness meets a terrible retribution from a just God. From this answer of Abraham it would seem that these five brethren were all Jewish believers; they had these writings in their hands, but they did not permit them to influence their lives.

The language of Christ here is a remarkable testimony from him that the canon of the Old Testament is what it was believed by the Jews to be—the word of God speaking by Moses and the prophets—and that it had been preserved by the Jewish Church to our Lord's age (whence it has come down to our own) in purity and integrity, and that it is genuine, authentic and divine. It is often asserted that the doctrine of future punishment is not taught in the Old Testament. Doubtless, like the correlative doctrine of heavenly reward, it was

not announced in terms as distinctly as in the New. But the doctrine of *retribution*, both for the righteous and the wicked, is abundantly taught there, so that, as the reply of Abraham indicates, men were by it sufficiently warned of the coming wrath.

Whatever aspect of sympathy the rich man's prayer may have worn, it is plain that it breathed the spirit of audacity. It was a reflection on the wisdom of God, inasmuch as he had made a revelation unaccompanied with evidence adequate to produce conviction of its divine origin, or so obscure as not to be intelligible for practical purposes. And it was a reflection on his justice, because it had doomed *him* to suffering for not yielding to the influence of a system of truth thus imperfectly attended with marks and means of credibility. It was, indeed, an effort on his part for tacit exculpation of himself by taxing God with having formerly used only imperfect and improper means for his conversion. Thus is it evident that the sinner carries with him to his cheerless abode the same disparaging thoughts he had of the Bible when on earth, and the same conceit of wisdom superior to the divine which supposes itself competent to dictate a more effectual method of salvation than God was pleased to appoint. Thus regarded, therefore, we are prepared for the disposition which was made of this prayer.

"They will repent," says the rich man, but Abraham replies, "They will not even be persuaded." "They will repent," says Dives, "if one went unto them from the dead," but Abraham, with a prophetic glance at the world's unbelief in a far greater matter, further replies, "No, not if one rose from the dead;" as if he had said, "A far greater act than you demand would be ineffectual

for producing a far slighter effect. You suppose that wicked men would repent on the return of a spirit; I tell you they would not even be persuaded by the rising of one from the dead." The state of heart in which the Bible is rejected is such that it would not be overcome or changed by any external evidence. This was the point which Jesus had mainly in view in this part of the parable. He wished to explain the nature of faith, to show that it is a moral act—an act of the will and affections no less than of the understanding, something, therefore, which cannot be enforced by signs and miracles; for where there is a determined alienation of the will and affections from the truth, no impressions which these miracles will make, even if they be allowed to be genuine, will be more than transitory.

"He who gives no credit to the Scripture gives none to miracles, since it is filled with those of Christ and his apostles. Passion has no other design but to gain time, and to get rid of those proofs which press too hard upon and incommode it, under pretence of desiring better; and when such are produced, they serve only to provoke and harden it the more. Christ did raise another Lazarus, and the Jews would fain have sent him back to the grave, and from that very time resolved upon the death of Christ himself. This Saviour rose from the dead, and it was this very resurrection which hardened that perfidious people and served to fill up the measure of their sins. In vain does the Sun of truth shine upon him who is blinded by passion. Let this but cease, and everything will appear plain. Faith is satisfied with such proofs as God vouchsafes to afford it; incredulity never has enough."

A recent writer says: "Let no one flatter himself that

he will stand excused at God's bar for his rejection of Christ, on the ground that the evidences of Christianity are insufficient or because the facts of the eternal world are not clearly enough revealed. There are many to-day who give as a reason for their delay to receive Christ that they are not yet satisfied on certain points of Christian doctrine. They raise questions concerning this or that phase of revelation. They are apt to stumble thus over matters which are not so fully revealed, and definite knowledge of which is not essential to salvation. Yet in the vagueness of the Bible teaching on these points they find plea enough to excuse them, in their own minds, from humbly accepting Christianity and enrolling themselves as Christians. They cannot do this until these obscure matters are made more plain. The teaching of this parable is that no such plea will avail at the bar of God. The revelation which has been made is sufficient, and leaves men without excuse. There is no vagueness or indefiniteness in the teachings that tell men how to be saved and how to live so as to glorify God. The plea for fuller revelation is only a pillow for a conscience that is uneasy over its rejection of Christ. It is not clearer teaching that is needed, but a humbling of heart to accept Christ and to bow to his will. In this dispensation of the Spirit it is far more true than even when this parable was uttered, that if men will not believe Moses and the prophets, and Christ and his apostles, neither would they be persuaded though one rose from the dead."

"Let us lay this solemn parable to heart." There is none more solemn; for here our Lord, as it were, lifts the veil that hides from our view the world to come. The rich man and Lazarus had their time on earth, and

each had his appointed lot and means and opportunities; and then they died, and were separated for ever. We are now passing through life, and each of us has his own peculiar lot, and before us lies the eternal world and the great separation. Where are our hearts? what is our life? Whether we be rich or poor, strong or sickly, is a question of comparatively little moment. The great question is, What is the state of our souls in the sight of God?

They of old time had "Moses and the prophets;" we have far more, for we have Jesus and the gospel. "How shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation?" There is a happy place to which all true believers go when they die, and there is an endless separation between them and all others. The only safety is to flee in faith to the Lord Jesus Christ, and then, in watchfulness and prayer and in the daily endeavor to do the will of God, to wait for his appearing. "Blessed is that servant whom his Lord when he cometh shall find so doing."

THE * IMPORTUNATE * WIDOW.

“ Man's plea to man is that he never more
Will beg, and that he never begged before;
Man's plea to God is, that he did obtain
A former suit, and therefore sues again.
How good a God we serve, that, when we sue,
Makes his old gifts the examples of his new!”

1 And he spake a parable unto them to this end, that men ought
2 always to pray, and not to faint; Saying, There was in a city a
3 judge, which feared not God, neither regarded man. And there was
4 a widow in that city; and she came unto him, saying, Avenge me of
5 mine adversary. And he would not for a while: but afterward he
6 said within himself, Though I fear not God, nor regard man, Yet,
7 because this widow troubleth me, I will avenge her, lest by her contin-
8 ual coming she weary me. And the Lord said, Hear what the un-
just judge saith. And shall not God avenge his own elect, which
cry day and night unto him, though he bear long with them? I tell
you that he will avenge them speedily. Nevertheless, when the Son of
man cometh, shall he find faith on the earth?

THE IMPORTUNATE WIDOW.

ALTHOUGH it is possible that between this and the immediately preceding discourse of the Saviour some intervening discourses were delivered, the connection of the parable of the Unjust Judge with the foregoing discourse about the second coming of Christ strikes the eye at once. The Saviour had long before announced that heavy times were coming, in which conflicts and oppression would by no means be wanting to his people; what could he now do better than to admonish them to persevering prayer, that at last the long-sighed-for vindication might become their happy lot? But a deeper and more enlarged significancy of what is taught is to be sought in its application to all believers in a state of discouragement and despondency in regard to the evils which beset them and the apparent fruitlessness of their prayers.

The parable in one particular bears a close resemblance to that of the Unjust Steward. In *that*, an illustration of the wisdom, energy and forethought with which men should fulfill the duties of their stewardship to God is drawn from the example of an unjust but shrewd and energetic steward. In *this*, the power of importunate prayer is illustrated by the effect which the importunity of a widow had upon an unjust judge.

In neither case is any palliation offered for injustice. The reference in the one case was simply to the prompt action of the steward, and in the other to the power of importunity over the unjust judge.

We are not to understand by the expression, "men ought always to pray," that a man should be incessantly performing the *act* of prayer. The life of Christ was a prayer, yet there were seasons in which he especially applied himself to prayer with his heavenly Father. Men ought to pray constantly at stated times, to be habitually in that spirit of humble dependence and expectation which gives life to prayer, to be frequently offering ejaculatory petitions, and to be always ready for prayer, secret, social or public, when opportunity is afforded. Nor should they flag or become remiss in this spirit and exercise. "In this precept, to pray *always*," says Trench, "there is nothing of exaggeration, nothing commanded which may not be fulfilled, when we understand prayer as the continual desire of the soul after God, having indeed its times of intensity, seasons of an intenser concentration of the spiritual life, but not being confined to those times, since the whole life of the faithful should be, in Origen's beautiful words, 'one great connected prayer,' or, as St. Basil expresses it, 'prayer should be the salt which is to salt everything besides.'" "That soul," says Donne, "that is accustomed to direct herself to God upon every occasion, that, as a flower at sunrising, conceives a sense of God in every beam of his, and spreads and dilates itself toward him, in a thankfulness, in every small blessing that he sheds upon her, . . . that soul who, whatsoever string be stricken in her, bass or treble, her high or her low estate, is ever turned toward God,—that soul prays sometimes when it

does not know that it prays. . . . But He who knew how easily we are put off from prayer, and under what continual temptations we are to grow slack in it, especially if we find not at once the answer we expect, warns us against this very thing, bidding us to pray always, and not to faint, not to grow weary, since in due season we shall reap if we faint not."

The character of the judge is such that one could look for no good from him. He had no regard to the divine laws, nor did he fear the displeasure of Jehovah. So abandoned was he as to have no self-respect or care for the esteem of those around him. Popular favor had no attractions for him, popular indignation no influence with him. He was lost to all sense of right and wrong—one who debased his office and made self and iniquity the occupants of the judicial seat.

The applicant to this judge was a widow—one of a helpless and friendless class in Eastern countries and Bible times. The judge had doubtless seen her very frequently; she was no stranger to him. He could more easily put aside her claims than those of one who had a stranger's acknowledged right to receive a redress of wrongs. Having no friends to assist her, she could neither defend herself from injuries nor obtain satisfaction for them when committed; hence in an instance where she was greatly oppressed she found herself obliged to petition the judge for redress. She came to him to be "avenged of her adversary." The old English writers use the words *avenge* and *revenge* to signify not evil intent and malice, as the terms now import, but simply the assigning to a plaintiff what is just, and thereby delivering him from the evil acts or purposes of his adversary. This poor widow, then, came to the

unjust judge for simple justice; and he, by the law of God and man, was bound to give it to her. Either through indifference or indolence, for a long time he refused to give her audience. But, put off once, she came again; rebuffed to-day, she returned to-morrow; and with an energy born amidst sorrow and nursed by oppression she persisted in her appeal until the judge listened to her cry.

Now, mark the encouragement which is here given to the believer to pray! Was this judge thoroughly, radically unjust? Jehovah "is just and true in *all* his ways." His every act is in strict conformity with his own most holy law, and through the whole course of his government the Judge of all the earth doeth right. Did this woman come to the judge in her own name? The elect of God come all in the name of the great Mediator and Intercessor. They come in the name of Him who is most nearly related to the Judge and to them. "We have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous." It is said indefinitely "with the Father"—not his or our Father, but the common Father of him and us, as we are to understand it. And since with him we have such an Advocate, may we not expect to prevail?

Did the unjust judge take no pains to discover whether the widow's cause was right or not? Was it a matter of perfect indifference to him whether she were the injured party or not—whether she really needed to be defended from another or was herself only anxious to inflict an injury? Was his sole reason for yielding assent to the woman's petition the fear of being constantly troubled by her importunity—"lest by her continual coming she weary me"? When God hears the

prayer of his elect, and answers it, he proceeds on the strictest principles of law and justice. Not a single petition is granted to his people which is not stamped with the image and superscription of that King "the girdle of whose loins is *righteousness*."

Did the unjust judge grant the widow's claim with no regard to the poor suppliant herself? Was she an object of perfect indifference to him? Did he care nothing for her happiness and prosperity on the one hand, or her misery and wretchedness on the other? Well may our Lord mark *this* contrast so emphatically as he does: "*Hear what the unjust judge saith, And shall not God avenge HIS OWN ELECT?*" How these words, "his own elect," touch in the tenderest manner the great and eternal contrast between this unjust judge and God! The latter yields to the prayer of the suppliants—first, because it is *right* to do so, and then he does it with his whole heart; it is his joy and delight to do so. The suppliants are his own beloved people, very precious in his sight—so precious, indeed, that it is said of them, "He that toucheth you, toucheth the apple of his eye." So his gift comes to them distinguished by the tokens of that "holiness which becometh God's house for ever," as well as of "a love which passeth knowledge."

The words, "*Though he bear long with them,*" mean, Though he delays to help them. To the inquiry, Why does God delay at all to answer the prayers of his people? it may be replied that this is done with wisdom and love combined. It would be, so to speak, easier for a father who is at once rich and benevolent to comply immediately and fully with all his child demands; but it requires a deeper, stronger love to leave the child

knocking for a time in vain, that the bounty given at the proper time may in the end be a greater boon.

“I once knew two men who lived near each other in similar worldly circumstances,” says Dr. Arnot, “but adopted opposite methods in the treatment of their children. The boys of this family obtained money from their father when they asked it, and spent it according to their own pleasure, without his knowledge or control: the boys of that family often asked, but seldom received, a similar supply. The father who frequently thwarted his children’s desires loved his children more deeply and, as the result showed, more wisely, than the father who could not summon courage sufficient to say ‘No.’ The wise parent bore with his own when they pleaded for some dangerous indulgence, and the bearing wounded his tender heart, but by reason of his greater love he bore the pain of hearing their cry without granting their request. The other parent was too indolent and self-pleasing to endure such a strain, and he lived to taste bitter fruit from the evil seed which his own hand had sown.”

For the same reason and in the same manner our Father in heaven bears with his own when they cry night and day to him for something on which their hearts are set. Because he loves us he endures to hear our cry and see our tears. We do not certainly know what thorn it was that penetrated Paul’s flesh, but we know that it pained him much, that he eagerly desired to be quit of it, and that he besought the Lord thrice to take it away. From the fact that the child pleaded three times for the same boon we learn that the Father bore with him a while—bore, so to speak, the pain of refusing, because he knew that the refusal was needful

for him. The thorn was left in the flesh until its discipline was done, and then it was plucked out by a strong and gentle hand. "My grace is sufficient for thee." There are no thorns in Paul's flesh now.

"The case of the Syro-Phœnician woman runs parallel with this as well as with the Friend at Midnight. Mark how the Lord bore with the woman! He delighted in her faith; it was his happiness to give, and yet he refused; in denying her he denied himself. But by withholding a while he kindled her love into a brighter, stronger flame. By refusing what she asked he reduplicated her asking; this is profitable to her. By the long delay on his part, and the consequent eager repetition of the request on her part, a rich boon was prepared and bestowed. Her appetite was greatly quickened and her satisfying was more full. Who shall be filled most abundantly from the treasures of divine mercy at last? Those who hungered and thirsted most for these treasures in the house of their pilgrimage."

"I tell you that he will avenge them speedily." This is the last ground of confidence and continued prayer—the true and faithful promise of divine help. He is to interpose speedily—that is, suddenly, unexpectedly, before they, with their weak faith, look for it. "He will speedily deliver them," which is opposed to the bearing long; nor are we called to depart from this very plain interpretation by the fact that God sometimes suffers his people to be for a time oppressed by the wicked; for that period, though it may seem long to the sufferers, is yet of very short continuance, only momentary; and hence Paul speaks of the season of tribulation as "but for a moment." It will tend much

to encourage us to diligence in prayer if we can rest in confidence, not only that we shall be delivered, but that we shall quickly be delivered, although it may still be delayed.

“ Nevertheless, when the Son of man cometh, shall he find faith on the earth ?” What faith does our Lord mean? If he means saving faith in himself, then the question points not only to the speedy falling away of many who heard him then, but also to the great apostasy which will precede his coming (2 Thess. ii. 3). But it is more probable that he refers to the kind of faith set forth in the parable—faith which endures in importunate prayer. The question, then, implies that the trials of the faith and patience of the Church during the Lord’s delay will be so great as to make it doubtful whether such importunity for the Lord’s return will be the rule in the day of his appearing.

This view does not encourage the over-gloomy view that the day of Christ’s triumph will be when his people have become very few in number. On the other hand, it agrees with the representations repeatedly made, that the coming will be an unexpected one even to real believers. The special form of faith which will be lacking is faith in the return of the Lord, as evidenced by importunate prayer for the hastening of that event.

Let not the *earnestness* which is ascribed to the prayer of God’s people in the parable be overlooked. It is a “*cry unto him.*” A few formal phrases, a few languid petitions, a few ascriptions of praise and a few acknowledgments of mercies are not the kind of prayers which are pleasing to God. He requires heart-prayers, the wellings-up of desires from souls that feel their sin and their need of a Saviour. It is not “*eloquent prayers,*”

elaborately carved and polished by the tools of rhetoric for ears refined, that are pleasing to God. It is not a harangue addressed to men under the form of prayer to God that he approves, neither is it "much speaking" or "vain repetitions" that engage his attention. Do you wish to pray aright? Go to God as a sinful child; go to him as your Father, reconciled by the death of his Son; go in faith and hope, in love and adoration. Tell him your fears, your trials, your doubts, your sins. Unburden your soul at the gate of his ear. Go with a broken and a contrite heart, looking only for acceptance in and through the merits and sacrifice of Jesus Christ, and you shall assuredly be heard. The word of his promise is, "Whatsoever ye shall ask in my name, believing, ye shall receive," and "Him that cometh unto me I will in no wise cast out."

Let us not, either, overlook the *importunity* in prayer which the parable calls for. "So soon as the unjust judge took his seat at the gate of the city, where in the East courts are held and causes heard, his eye fell on the widow who wished to be avenged of her adversary. There she was, and always was—sorrow in her dress, but determination in her eye; her form bent with grief, but her spirit unbroken; resolved to give that judge no rest till he had granted her request. Now she is on her feet passionately demanding justice, and now, stretched on the ground at his feet, she piteously implores it. Nor can he shake her off. Denied her suit in court, she follows him to his house to interrupt his leisure and embitter his pleasures. She bursts into his presence, and is dragged away by the servants and thrust out, but only to return. As by constant dashing the waves in time cut into the cliff, which, yielding to the

incessant action of a weaker element, some day bows its proud head, and, precipitating itself forward, falls into the sea, so the persistence of the widow overcomes the resistance of the judge. So must *we* be importunate at the throne of grace. To pray as one of the elect it is necessary that our prayer be not only like a cry by its strength, fervency and elevation toward God, but also be persevering and continual."

"We are," says Hone, "to take heed that we 'faint not,' and we must know that fainting may be either when faith languisheth or desire. It is faint praying when we pray as if we cared not whether we prayed or not. The word in the parable rendered 'faint' is the same with that which elsewhere is rendered 'weary:' 'Let us not *be weary* in well-doing, for in due season we shall reap if we faint not;' that is, if we be not sluggish in the course of well-doing. Take heed, therefore, of praying the sluggard's prayer or at the sluggard's rate. 'The desire of the slothful kills him, because his hands refuse to labor.' His own desires carry no life in them; they are even death to his very heart—cold things that strike death into the soul, and put no life into it."

And then, too, when faith languisheth it is faint praying. What! come to God as if we did not expect to get anything from God? Go heartlessly into the divine presence? Give way to a cold, dull spirit in the very performance of the duty, and never look after the success of it when it is over? Let not such think they shall receive anything at the hands of God.

THE * PHARISEE * AND * THE * PUBLICAN.

“Humble we must be if to heaven we go;
High is the roof there, but the gate is low.
Whene'er thou speakest, look with a lowly eye—
Grace is increased by humility.”

9 *And he spake this parable unto certain which trusted in themselves*
10 *that they were righteous, and despised others: Two men went up*
into the temple to pray; the one a Pharisee, and the other a pub-
11 *lican. The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, God, I*
thank thee, that I am not as other men are, extortioners, unjust,
12 *adulterers, or even as this publican. I fast twice in the week, I give*
13 *tithes of all that I possess. And the publican, standing afar off,*
would not lift up so much as his eyes unto heaven, but smote upon
14 *his breast, saying, God be merciful to me a sinner. I tell you, this*
man went down to his house justified rather than the other: for
every one that exalteth himself shall be abased; and he that hum-
bleth himself shall be exalted.

LUKE XVIII. 9-14.

1

THE
PHARISEE AND THE PUBLICAN.

THIS parable, like the last, treats of prayer, but presents a different aspect of the subject. *That* recommends generally the duty of prayer; *this* gives us to understand the property of a right prayer. *That* teaches that prayer must be earnest and persevering; *this*, that it must also be humble. *That* dissuades from indolence; *this*, from confidence in ourselves.

This parable was addressed to the multitude, among whom were doubtless persons belonging to both the classes here represented. Stier contends that the words *certain which trusted in themselves* are not to be referred to the Pharisees as an exclusive class, but to some even of our Lord's disciples who were in the company, and who, hearing what efficacy was inherent in importunate prayer, were puffed up with the conceit of their good works as the basis on which they could offer to great advantage this sort of prayer. To this Dr. John J. Owen adds that if the Pharisees had been particularly addressed our Lord would hardly have rebuked them by an example drawn from one of their own class; and indeed such a reference would have taken away the very feature which constitutes the parable. It would have been a plain and open charge against the self-righteous spirit of that sect, instead of a parabolic representation of the fact.

But if the Pharisees were not particularly addressed, the parable is aimed directly against the pharisaic spirit, which has always been prevalent in the world, and even in the Church of Christ. The lesson of the parable is one of general application, and is at war with every assumption of superior holiness from a comparison of ourselves with our fellow-men.

It was usual with pious people to *go up into the temple to pray*. This was fitting, for there God was publicly worshiped, and there he manifested himself to his faithful ones. Solomon, at the dedication of the former temple, had asked that whatever prayer should be offered in a right manner in that house, or toward it, should be accepted. In this the two men did not differ. Nor did they differ in that both were sinners. Their sins as to outward form were diverse, but in essential character the sinfulness was the same in both. Both adopted the same attitude in prayer, both alike looked into their own hearts and lives, and both permitted the judgment thus formed to determine the form and matter of their prayer.

Let us note the subject-matter of the Pharisee's prayer. Why! he is not, as a suppliant, asking at the hands of God what he needs! He stands as one in need of nothing—as one rich in every spiritual gift and grace. In the full tide of self-righteous feeling he pours out a series of thanksgivings for what he is and what he does. His is not a humble prayer for what he requires; it is an arrogant, self-satisfied enumeration of what he vainly thinks that he possesses.

What is so broadly expressed in this part of the parable is just what exists in reality in unconverted minds. They pray, it may be; they may pray often. Their place of devotion may be a distinguished one, but if the

inward bearing of the heart could be noticed it would be found to be breathing such a self-righteous spirit as that before us—contentment with its present spiritual condition, satisfaction with what it *fancies* that it has rather than earnestly seeking what it has not.

Then, see further how this spirit is expressed in the parable. The Pharisee not only enumerates a long list of excellent graces which he possesses; he also with great complacency regards himself as very superior to others. He thanks God that he is not “as other men are.” He forms two classes, into the one of which he throws the whole human race, he himself appearing to constitute the other and better one. He twice errs—first, in that he reckons it matter of great praise not to be among the most depraved; then in judging so harshly of other men, the greater part of whom were not known to him. Heartlessly he both judges and condemns. He recounts before God his excellences, that God might know how to recompense him, as his like was not to be found in the world.

On this point of the parable Dr. Guthrie observes: “To entertain a bad opinion of others without sufficient evidence proves more than the lack of charity which hopeth all things and believeth all things. Who does not believe others virtuous would be found, were the secrets of his heart and life known, to be himself vicious. We may lay it down as an axiom that those who are ready to suspect others of being actuated by a regard to self-interest are themselves selfish. Thieves do not believe in the existence of honesty, nor rakes in virtue, nor mercenary politicians in patriotism. The reason why worldlings regard religious people as hypocrites is their own want of religion; knowing that were

they to profess a warm regard for Christ, the glory of God and the salvation of souls, they would be hypocrites, they conclude others to be so. Hence also you find many novelists representing every man into whose mouth they put the language of piety as either a rogue or a fool, most commonly a rogue—a very unsound but not unnatural conclusion on their part, for prejudices resemble the fogs that turn the bright sun into a dull copper ball, and a bad heart is like the jaundice, that sees its own dingy yellow in the purest lily. I conclude, therefore, however fair the whited sepulchre looked, that in his heart at least this Pharisee was what he took other men to be—an extortioner, unjust and an adulterer. He had no right to put on such airs, or, as his eyes fell on him, to make a footstool of the publican to stand higher before God, saying by way of climax, ‘nor as this publican.’”

Thus was the character of the Pharisee sadly defective. It was not wrong in him to begin his prayer as he did; it is right to thank God. Neither would there have been anything wrong in what he said about not being as other men if it had sprung from a proper feeling—if he had been conscious of his unworthiness and amazed at God’s long-suffering. Then, too, to fast is right and to give tithes is right, but this Pharisee spoiled all he had done by his self-righteous pretensions. His thoughts of others excited in his heart the very opposite of that real gratitude which was expressed by one who, seeing a felon led to the gallows, exclaimed, speaking for himself, “But for the grace of God there goes John Bradford!” His prayer exhibits no sense of sin and need, contains no confession and no petition for mercy and grace. It is, as already stated,

a mere boasting recital of fancied merits, accompanied by an uncharitable reflection on a brother-sinner.

“He trusted in himself that he was righteous.” True, everything around him declared the reverse. There before him, in the temple, were the priests supplicating the pardon of the nation’s transgressions; there stood the altar of burnt-offering directly within his sight; either the morning or the evening sacrifice had probably at this time just been slain: look where he would, the whole temple proclaimed itself a temple built for sinners; it proclaimed to this Pharisee the divine holiness and man’s great guilt; yet he feels as he stands in it no guilt; he prays in this temple as a righteous man.

“Exemption from gross faults, and the external performance of good works,” says Quesnel, “are a source of pride and complacency in those who have not laid a foundation of humility. Bodily mortification and liberality in alms are apt to puff men up, and do sometimes cause more hurt and prejudice to a soul than it would receive either from luxury or avarice. A fault which truly humbles is more useful and profitable than a virtue which puffs up with pride, because a false virtue is a veil which hides our vices from us. It is a very miserable condition in which we are here below, where we have as much to do to secure ourselves from the sight which the devil gives us of our own goodness as from the evil which he earnestly endeavors to put into our hearts.”

“And the publican, standing afar off, would not lift up so much as his eyes unto heaven, but smote upon his breast, saying, God be merciful to me a sinner.” The difference between the men does not lie in that this was

a good man, while the other was bad. This is a sinner too, but he has come to know it, and therein lies the distinction between him and the Pharisee. Mark the peculiarities of his case!

“He stood afar off,” doubtless because he felt himself utterly unworthy to be near the seemingly righteous Pharisee or near any one who appeared really to love God. Here was one proof of his deep humility, and now see another. There is a Being in heaven far holier than the holiest of mortals, and this the man knew. Mark the abasement of his soul before him! He comes into his presence in his temple, but when there he feels as though he could hardly bear his presence—“he would not lift up so much as his eyes unto heaven.” He could not. He was like an offending child that comes humbled and heartbroken to a forgiving father, and covers his face in shame and confusion as he comes, not daring to meet his father’s glance. Then, how earnestly he prayed! He “smote upon his breast.” No matter what led him to do so. It was doubtless a mixture of feelings. Indignation against himself, a sense of his own pollution and misery, a thrilling apprehension of coming wrath,—these things took possession of his mind; they agitated him, and, like a man driven to extremities, he could not restrain his agitation; he smote himself as he cried for mercy. He became exceedingly earnest in his prayer for it. He prayed for nothing else, he thought of nothing else. Mercy is everything with him. “God be merciful to me a sinner.”

“This expression of conscious unworthiness,” says one, “is simply the irrepressible confession of sincerity, pressed out of the soul by a longing for forgiveness—short because so terribly sincere. The straitened spirit

in its anguish has no room for particulars. The very sound of the words, the downcast look, the withdrawn position, the agonized gesture, as well as the character Christ puts upon these things, betray the reality of the man's repentance. The thing they expose to us is human sin—its self-conviction, its wretchedness, its way of relief."

Mark now the issue! "I tell you, this man went down to his house justified *rather* than the other." He was accepted and approved in the sight of God. Of course it is not meant that the prayer of the publican justified him. That the man who pleaded merely for mercy should be justified merely by his prayer is absurd. He was justified, forgiven, his sin pardoned, his guilt remitted, by that mercy which he had invoked, but it was mercy in answer to prayer. Neither are we to suppose that the Pharisee was a little justified, and the publican very much, and that the difference between them was only one of degree. There are no degrees in justification. The Pharisee was not justified at all except by and before himself. The idea designed to be conveyed by the words just quoted is, that there was such essential difference in the religious act of these two men that one only could be acceptable with God, and that such was the deep self-abasement of the publican that his was the prayer which was accepted *rather than* the one so offensive to God as that of the Pharisee.

We might have looked for some trial or process to be gone through before the publican should be fully pardoned. He himself perhaps, when he asked for mercy, was looking forward to some distant day, and praying that he might find mercy then—the mercy that Paul prayed for at Rome for his friend Onesiphorus, mercy

“in that day.” “But there is mercy for him *now*,” says Jehovah; “I interpose no delay.” An hour ago he was indeed a sinner; the iniquities of a whole life were on him and hell was beneath him, but now he is cleansed, and cleansed for ever, from all sin. One look at the slain sacrifice, one cry for mercy, has made that miserable sinner a child of God and an heir of heaven.

Not merely was he justified in the secret counsels of God, but he returned to his home with a sweet sense of a received forgiveness shed abroad in his heart. As a justified man he sat in the circle of his family, retired to his rest at night, rose in the morning to his labor, at peace with God. “On the morrow he looked on the sunlight without being in terror of the Mighty One whose word had made it shine; he walked abroad in the fields in conscious, loving companionship with Him who spread them out and covered them with green; he looked from the mountain-side on the great sea when ‘it wrought and was tempestuous,’ the confiding child of Him who holds its waters in the hollow of his hand; and when again he laid his head upon the pillow for rest to his wearied body, he laid his soul on the love of his Saviour as an infant leans on a mother’s breast. When the Hand that led him through the wilderness leads him at length down the dark sides of the swelling Jordan, he looks up with languid eye but bright, burning spirit, and whispers to his guide, ‘I will not fear, for thou art with me.’ When the judgment is set and the books are opened, he stands before the Judge in white clothing, accepted in the Beloved; the voice of the Eternal, tenderly human, yet clothed with divine authority, utters the welcome ‘Come, thou blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom.’”

“For every one that exalteth himself shall be abased: and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted.” In this sentiment, often repeated, and on very different occasions announced by our Lord, there is contained a general fundamental principle of the divine kingdom, according to which God regulates his procedure. Here, in particular, it forms the ground why the publican, but not the Pharisee, was justified. The haughtiness of the latter excluded him from the enjoyment of the divine favor; the humility of the former rendered him a fit recipient of grace. What is meant by exalting one’s self the Pharisee’s prayer shows to be an overvaluing of real or only fancied excellences. He who exalts himself shall receive a treatment from God quite opposite to the judgment of men, whereby he shall be humbled. The prayer, as well as the entire behavior, of the publican, springing from the deepest feelings of the heart, is the self-humiliation which pleases the Lord. Whosoever so humbles himself shall elicit both from men and from God a judgment and a dealing which are accordant with his graces.

The publican’s success is a great encouragement to every sinner, convinced of his sins, who is seeking for mercy. Truly cheering is it, as we look at the parable, to see how well the Lord Jesus understands all the workings of the human heart. He could never have felt as this sinful publican felt; he had never known sin, and could not know what shame and humiliation in his Father’s presence were; yet here he describes them as naturally as though he had experienced them. All may take comfort from this who are bowed down by these feelings. Though they cannot look up to God, though they scarcely dare even to pray to him, so hateful and

loathsome do they deem themselves in his sight, yet God knows well the workings of their souls. He looks on them, though they dare not look on him, and never again will he take from them that look of kindness. "To this man," he says, "will I look," and look with all the care and pity and tenderness of my soul, "even to him that is poor, and of a contrite spirit, and that trembleth at my word."

THE * POUNDS.

11 And as they heard these things, he added and spake a parable, be-
cause he was nigh to Jerusalem, and because they thought that the
12 kingdom of God should immediately appear. He said therefore, A
certain nobleman went into a far country to receive for himself a
13 kingdom, and to return. And he called his ten servants, and deliv-
14 ered them ten pounds, and said unto them, Occupy till I come. But
his citizens hated him, and sent a message after him, saying, We will
15 not have this man to reign over us. And it came to pass, that when
he was returned, having received the kingdom, then he commanded
these servants to be called unto him, to whom he had given the money,
that he might know how much every man had gained by trading.
16 Then came the first, saying, Lord, thy pound hath gained ten pounds.
17 And he said unto him, Well, thou good servant : because thou hast
18 been faithful in a very little, have thou authority over ten cities. And
the second came, saying, Lord, thy pound hath gained five pounds.
19, 20 And he said likewise to him, Be thou also over five cities. And
another came, saying, Lord, behold, here is thy pound, which I have
21 kept laid up in a napkin : For I feared thee, because thou art an
austere man : thou takest up that thou layedst not down, and reapest
22 that thou didst not sow. And he saith unto him, Out of thine own
mouth will I judge thee, thou wicked servant. Thou knewest that I
was an austere man, taking up that I laid not down, and reaping
23 that I did not sow : Wherefore then gavest not thou my money into
the bank, that at my coming I might have required mine own with
24 usury ? And he said unto them that stood by, Take from him the
25 pound, and give it to him that hath ten pounds. (And they said unto
26 him, Lord, he hath ten pounds.) For I say unto you, That unto
every one which hath shall be given ; and from him that hath not
27 even that he hath shall be taken away from him. But those mine
enemies, which would not that I should reign over them, bring hither,
and slay them before me.

LUKE XIX. 11-27.

THE POUNDS.

THIS parable was related to correct a mistake into which many of the Lord's disciples had fallen. They thought that the kingdom of God should *immediately* appear. They were not wrong in supposing that this kingdom would one day be established upon the earth, for it will be set up with power and great glory, but they were wrong in supposing that the time was *already* come. There will be great voices in heaven, saying, "The kingdoms of this world are become the kingdoms of our Lord and of his Christ, and he shall reign for ever and ever." But before those acclamations will be heard many events must take place. The Lord had already prepared James and John for enduring *sufferings* before they could be exalted to *honor*, and now he prepared all his disciples for performing *services* before they could partake of *rewards*. Zaccheus, in whose house at Jericho this parable was spoken, had just shown his willingness to serve the Lord by making promises of restitution to the injured and of liberality to the poor. *His* spirit ought to be the spirit of all the followers of Christ. Though we can only be saved by grace, yet must we show our gratitude for this free salvation by our *works*.

Some have regarded this parable and that of the

Talents as one and the same. But they are not so. Although in many of their features there is a strong resemblance, in others there is a decided difference. *This* parable was, as just intimated, spoken in Jericho; *that*, while Christ was seated on the Mount of Olives. *This* was addressed to a mixed multitude; *that*, to Christ's own immediate disciples. In *this* there are ten servants; in *that* there are *three*. *This* shows that Christians differ in the diligence they display; *that* shows that they differ in the amount of gifts they receive.

By the "nobleman" is meant our Lord himself, who, after the flesh, was of kingly origin, and was besides the Son of God. The "far country" is that spoken of by Isaiah the prophet, "the land that is afar off"—the Holy Place, from which sin has projected us to an almost infinite distance, a chasm being created between us and the holy place where God reigns. Had not Christ come from it to us we had never known the way or traveled along it to heaven. The first movement was made on his part toward us, and our movement is wholly responsive to his. We are morally, rather than physically, far off. So far off are we from its happiness and holiness that neither wealth nor science nor sail nor wing can ever help us to draw near to God and reconstitute ourselves in our forfeited relationship. But we may be brought so near by grace that the humblest child or the greatest of sinners, believing and repenting, may touch its shores, having traveled thither along the new and living Way.

Those in Judæa who by hereditary succession or by interest had pretensions to the Jewish throne traveled to Rome to have it confirmed to them. Jesus ascended

into heaven to "receive"—that is, to take possession of—the "kingdom," the right to which, as Messiah, he had acquired, and the foundation of which he had laid by his obedience and sufferings. All power was given to him in heaven and on earth. He was invested with the kingdom of God his Father.

This kingdom is an invisible kingdom; and if there must always be something visible in this kingdom, it is only the power which may be seen and felt in the actings of the Christian Church, in the exercises of individual souls and in the exalted visions of a John. The possession of the kingdom consists mainly in the execution of the great plan of the Father in Jesus Christ; in the deliverance of mankind from the power of darkness; in opening up to them an entrance into the kingdom of light, and at last entirely translating them into it. But the chief development of this great work takes place in the kingdom of spirits, and but rarely manifests its influence in the great transactions of the world in a manner fitted to strike the eyes of men groveling in the dust. As soon, however, as it is accomplished the nobleman shall return again.

"And he called his ten servants, and delivered them ten pounds, and said unto them, Occupy till I come." A pound was the sixtieth part of a talent, or about fifteen dollars. The Greek word translated "occupy" is found only here. It means, literally, "employ in business or trading." "The sum here delivered to the servants," says Trench, "is very much smaller than that which, in St. Matthew, the man who was traveling into a far country committed to *his* servants' keeping. This is at once explained if we keep in mind how that parable was spoken to the apostles, who of course

had received infinitely the largest gifts of any from Christ, while this is spoken to the disciples generally, whose faculties were comparatively fewer. How remarkable is this still ministry, these occupations of peace in which the servants of the future King should be engaged, and that too while a rebellion was going on! A caviler, remarkably enough, asks, 'Why did he not distribute weapons to his servants? Such would have been under present circumstances the most natural thing to have done.' Doubtless the *most natural*, as Peter felt when he cut off the ear of the servant of the high priest—as all have felt who have sought to fight the world with its own weapons, and by the wrath of man to work the righteousness of God. Such identifying of the Church with a worldly kingdom has been the idea of the Papacy, such of the Anabaptists."

The place and age in which our lot has been cast, our early education, our bodily members and mental powers, our station in society and the circle of our homes, money, time, health, wealth and influence, and, in addition, the graces of the Spirit in whatever measure they may have been conferred,—all that we are and have belongs to God, and must be used for his glory and the good of our fellow-creatures. For the use we make of all our gifts, graces and opportunities we are to give account. Our belief in the return of Christ, and the uncertainty as to the time of his coming, ought to make us diligent in improving the sacred trust which he has committed to us in whatever way this can best be done.

"But his citizens hated him, and sent a message after him, saying, We will not have this man to reign over us." This verse is parenthetical, and refers to the

settled opposition of those who were adverse to the government of the prince, now on a visit to a higher potentate to be confirmed in his kingdom. They went so far as to send a counter-embassy to prejudice the claim of the nobleman by declaring their unwillingness to receive him as their sovereign. How applicable this was to the Jews, who rejected their Messianic King, is obvious to all. In the whole line of their history, which was that of a rebellious and stiffnecked people, in their persecution and rejection of God's messengers the prophets, and their subsequent rejection of the Messiah himself, their cry had gone up to heaven, "We will not have this man to reign over us." Those who base this parable on the visit of Archelaus to Rome find the groundwork of this message in the deputation of fifty persons sent by the Jews to Cæsar Augustus to complain against Archelaus. In regard to the verb *hated*, the tense in the original refers it to a permanent, settled hatred, entertained toward the prince even before he set out on his journey. So the hatred to Christ was deep-seated in the Jewish nation, and increased in virulence, under every effort which divine love and forbearance put forth for its removal, until it reached its culminating point in the crucifixion of Him who was their rightful Prince and Messiah.

The word *citizens* in the parable was well chosen to represent the citizens of Jerusalem, who were the chief actors in the apprehension and crucifixion of Jesus.

In the message sent by this counter-embassy the verb *will* loses much of its force by being mistaken for the auxiliary verb "will." The expression should rather be rendered, "We *will* that this man shall not reign over us." It is a wicked, insulting *will* that originates

and continues the rebellion. This is no more than a shadow of the rebellion of a sinner against his God.

“And it came to pass, that when he was returned, having received the kingdom, then he commanded those servants to be called unto him, to whom he had given the money, that he might know how much every man had gained by trading.” There is reference here to the general judgment. As the Omniscient, Christ knows all things, but the conduct of one and all must be made known before the whole world, as also the righteousness of the Lord be acknowledged in rewarding and punishing.

The inquiry made was twofold: first, as to who had been diligent; and, next, as to the gain that had been made. On the day of final reckoning all shall give their account to the Judge. The dead shall be raised from their graves; the living shall all be summoned to the bar. The books shall be opened. High and low, rich and poor, shall stand “before the judgment-seat of Christ” to account for the privileges and opportunities with which they were favored in the time of their probation. “How great,” says an old writer, “will the sinner’s despair be when he must give an account of the employment of his time and of the use of his understanding, will and senses—of all his substance, of all the graces he has received, and even of the blood of Jesus Christ! The account which pastors must give will be, without comparison, much more dreadful. Souls are the treasure of Christ: it is in these he desires to grow rich. A pastor who neglects them, and does not employ his ministry and authority, his time and talents, his industry and labors, to gain them for God,—alas! what answer will he be able to make to Him who has entrusted them to his care?”

“Then came the first, saying, Lord, thy pound hath gained ten pounds. And he said unto him, Well, thou good servant: because thou hast been faithful in a very little, have thou authority over ten cities.” With a sweet and cheerful boldness does the servant come before his Lord. The investigation is carried on with each one separately. Each must stand or fall on his own merits. He acknowledges that the gain is not his own, but the Lord’s; therefore, he says, with emphasis, *Thy* pound. So Paul speaks: “I, yet not I, but the grace of God that was in me.”

He is not said to have *doubled* his pound, but, instead of this, to have gained *ten* pounds by his *one*. Note the unbounded power of expansion in the gift of God’s grace in Christ when faithfully improved by his servants! Such a result may be reached by a minister in the Church of God who faithfully discharges his office, or by the faithful Sabbath-school teacher or tract-distributor, or by the man who liberally distributes his means for the good of man and the glory of God, or by the magistrate who, in the fear of God, well discharges the duty of guarding the morals and peace of society. How great will be the consolation of the Christian whose conscience shall give testimony of his fidelity at the hour of death and at the coming of Christ!

The sum entrusted to this servant was comparatively small, but it served to test his industry and fidelity, and therefore was not permitted to limit his reward. However small a man’s gifts and opportunities, he is as much accountable for using them rightly as if they were very great. The poorest and the humblest Christian, if he use his one pound well, shall be as carefully noticed and as fully rewarded as the mightiest king.

In the words, "Have thou authority over ten cities," there is an allusion to the custom formerly prevalent in the East of assigning the government and revenues of a certain number of towns as a reward to favorites and faithful officers. The favor which Christ will show at last to his faithful servants will be, first of all, this: he will show greater *confidence* in them now than ever. They have had a certain charge committed to them; they have been faithful in *that*; he will now enlarge his trust exceedingly which he will place in their hands, on the principle he himself enunciated: "He that is faithful in that which is least, will be faithful also in much." All the faithful are made great, but the greatest worker is the greatest winner when the accounts are closed. He who has made the best use of grace on earth is, on that very account, fitted for the highest place in heaven.

Let us not pass without remarking the brief but generous commendation which is expressed in the "Well, thou good servant." Doubtless there had been deficiencies: this servant had not always been as diligent as he might have been; many an opportunity had he let slip unimproved; but his generous Lord does not in the day of reckoning go back thus upon the past to drag out of it all that could be brought up against him. He takes the gross result, and sees in it the evidence of a prevailing fidelity. Ungrudgingly and without any drawback he pronounces his sentence of commendation and bestows his rich reward. No earthly lord or master, in fable or in fact, on any day of reckoning ever dealt so generously with those who had tried to serve him as our heavenly Lord and Master will deal with us if honestly and sincerely, though with manifold

imperfections, we give ourselves to the doing of his will.

“And the second came, saying, Lord, thy pound hath gained five pounds. And he said likewise to him, Be thou also over five cities.” The fullness of commendation bestowed on the first servant is withheld from the second, who with the same amount had only gained the half of what the first had gained. This intimates that the reward should be different in just that proportion in which the profit of the labor is greater or less. The gain, indeed, creates the capacity for the reward. The honor, riches, power and authority of a temporal government are but a faint shadow of that which he shall receive at the hands of God who has faithfully managed and improved the wealth of his sovereign Master. The doctrine of reward according to works is here plainly taught, as it is also in other places in the Scripture: “Every man shall receive his own reward according to his own labor.” There are degrees of glory in heaven. Every vessel will be alike full, but not alike large. The degree of glory there will be according to the degree of usefulness here.

“And another came, saying, Lord, behold, here is thy pound, which I have kept laid up in a napkin: for I feared thee, because thou art an austere man: thou takest up that thou layedst not down, and reapest that thou didst not sow.

“And he saith unto him, Out of thine own mouth will I judge thee, thou wicked servant. Thou knewest that I was an austere man, taking up that I laid not down, and reaping that I did not sow: wherefore then gavest not thou my money into the bank, that at my coming I might have required mine own with usury?”

And he said unto them that stood by, Take from him the pound, and give it to him that hath ten pounds." We can well understand why this servant who kept the pound in the napkin lingered to the last, reluctant to appear in the presence of his Lord. He had not improved the gifts bestowed upon him.

"The case of the servant who allowed his pound to lie unused," says Dr. Arnot, "is not different from the corresponding case in the parable of the Talents, except in one thing. In this parable the pound which the indolent servant had permitted to lie idle is simply taken out of his hands; while in the other parable the unprofitable servant is cast into outer darkness. The lesson, in as far as it is the same in both, is, that not only those who do positive wickedness, but those also who fail to do good, are counted guilty in God's sight. Inasmuch as in this parable no other punishment is inflicted on the indolent servant than the deprivation of his capital, it may possibly be intended to intimate that culpable unfaithfulness in a true believer may sometimes descend so far as to be undistinguishable by human eyes from the entire neglect of the unbelieving. There is, however, in all cases, a dividing-line, although we may not be able to trace it: 'The Lord knoweth them that are his.' Nor does this conception really weaken the motive to diligence, for if any one should slacken in his efforts to serve the Lord on the ground that a great degree of negligence, although it may diminish his reward, does not imperil his safety, this very thing would conclusively prove that he has no part in Christ. It is the nature of the new creature to be forgetting the things behind, and reaching forth to those that are before, when the leaning of a man's heart

goes in the opposite direction ; that is, when he deliberately endeavors to make matters as pleasant as possible for himself by escaping from all service to Christ except as much as is necessary to carry him safe to heaven, he certainly has not yet been born again, and in this state shall not see the kingdom. He who sails along the sea of Christian profession, loving the neighborhood land of worldly indulgence, and therefore hugging the shore as closely as he thinks consistent with safety, will certainly make shipwreck. Ah! the ship that thus seeks the shore is drawn by the unseen power of a magnet-mountain—drawn directly to her doom. He who is truly bound for the better land gives these treacherous headlands a wide berth.”

In the taking of the pound from the idle, suspicious, unfaithful servant, who otherwise might have had that and much more allotted to him, we see how strikingly the lesson is taught in the parable that while each man's proper and direct reward shall exactly tally with his proper and individual work and its results, yet that in the distribution of extra or additional favors regard shall be had to existing position, existing possessions and existing capability.

In the saying of our Lord, “That unto every one which hath shall be given: and from him that hath not, even that he hath shall be taken away from him,” he unfolds the deep ground of his procedure, which, so far from being arbitrary, consists in the highest righteousness. Obviously, the words “which hath” mean “which possesseth and useth aright.” The wicked servant was distinguished from the others, not by not having, but by *not using*. The law announced here is that they who employ well what they have shall retain

it all, and receive more in addition; whereas they who do not rightly employ what they have will be deprived of that which they possess and do not use. "The earth which bringeth forth herbs, meet for them by whom it is dressed, receiveth blessing;" that is, a further blessing—the gift of a continued fruitfulness "from God." Nor is it merely that the one receives more, and the other loses what he had, but *that very gift* which the one loses the other receives.

We see this continually. One, by the providence of God, steps into the place and the opportunities which another left unused, and so has forfeited (1 Sam. xv. 28). The words, "from him that hath not," mean "from him that does not use." This is a natural as well as a penal effect of not using what we were bound to turn to proper account. If we cease to use a limb, its muscles shrivel and its strength departs. Corn hoarded up in the granary is soon destroyed. Intellect not drawn on soon flags. This taking away is a process. It is steadily going forward in this world. It will be completed in the next, where all further probation and chance for doing service will utterly and eternally cease.

"But those mine enemies, which would not that I should reign over them, bring hither, and slay *them* before me." It can hardly be questioned that the destruction of Jerusalem is primarily intended in this verse, but it would deprive the passage of its principal force to limit it to the temporal punishment of Christ's enemies. The language has a more extensive signification, and includes the final overthrow and punishment of all the enemies of truth in the world to come. The "enemies" are here named contemptuously, as they

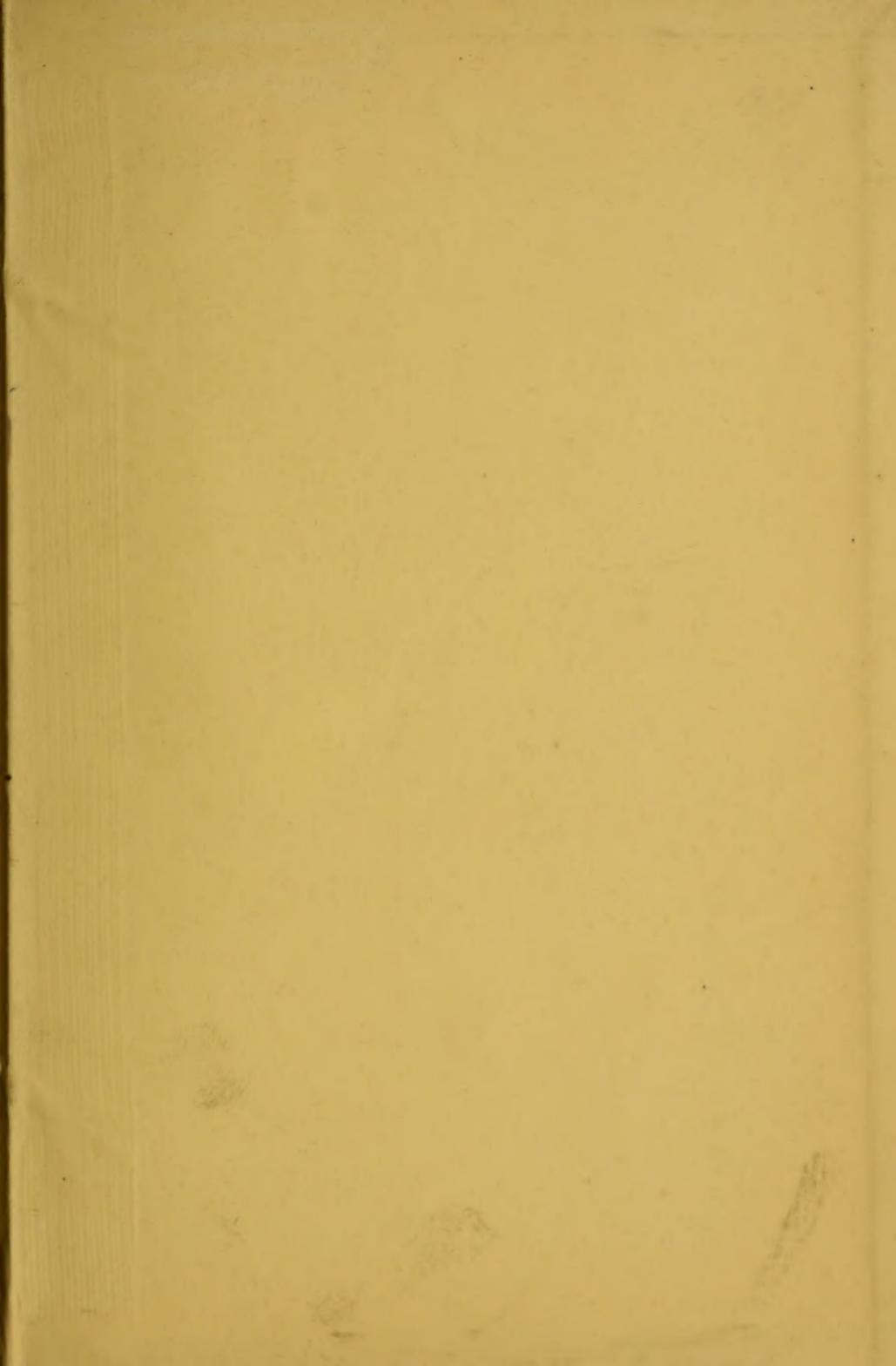
previously had named their lawful king. The command, "bring hither, and slay them before me," is given to those who were addressed in verse 24, and expresses strongly the severity and hopelessness of the coming retribution. The sudden breaking off of the parable heightens not a little its impressiveness. They who will not submit to Christ the Crucified will be crushed by Christ the King. Every eye shall see him, they also who pierced him. Meekly now he stands at the door and knocks; then he comes as the lightning comes. Those who surrender to him *now* will be his friends *then*.

THE END.

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