The PARABOLIC TEACHING of SCRIPTURE

by G. H. LANG



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TO

MY FELLOW-WORKER UNTO THE KINGDOM

BENJAMIN HOWARD MUDDITT

WHO FIRST SUGGESTED TO ME THE NEED

OF A NEW TREATISE ON

THE PARABLES

AND THROUGH WHOSE HEARTY CO-OPERATION

THIS BOOK IS ISSUED

FOREWORD

THE Parables of the New Testament are here treated historically. It is insufficient to extract from each separately its own particular lesson or lessons. The public career of our Lord was marked by progress in both its events and His teaching. The instruction He imparted presents two governing features. First, He taught according to the capacity of the hearers. As they grasped the instruction further truth was unfolded. Second, as opposition developed in intensity so did His parables in force and solemnity.

Each parable therefore reflects the conditions which called it forth and is illuminated by the circumstances. In consequence they must be studied consecutively if the full sense and force of each is to be realized. This applies to the parables in the Epistles also.

The purpose of the parables was intensely practical: so is this exposition of them. What was then addressed to disciples is here applied to disciples, both comfort and reproof. The warnings are neither shirked nor softened, yet the truth of the everlasting security of the regenerate is firmly maintained.

The spiritually susceptible student will thus find his mind and heart being led ever forward in the knowledge of the mind of God. The kingdom of God will be opened to his gaze in its present reality and coming triumph, and the place of the Son of God in that kingdom will be the dominant single feature. This was the character of our Lord's ministry: it became that of Paul (Acts 28: 30, 31): it will be well if it more and more marks the preaching of these days. May the Spirit use these Studies unto this end, graciously correcting what is wrong and supplying what is lacking.

G. H. LANG.

CONTENTS

PAGE

FOREWORD — — — — — — — — — 7

PRELIMINARY NOTE ON SYMBOLICAL AND LITERAL LANGUAGE — — — — — — — — 11

CHAP.

I. OLD TESTAMENT PARABLES — — — — — 13
1. of Balaam (Num. 23; 24). 2. Abimelech and Shechem (Judges 9), p. 14. 3. The Vineyard (Isa. 5), p. 15 and 16. 4. Ezek. 15 and 19—10–14, p. 16. 5. Adulteresses (Ezek. 16), p. 16.

II. JOHN THE BAPTIST — — — — — — 19
Vipers and Brood; Wind and Fire; Wheat and Chaff.
The Lamb of God, p. 21. Bridegroom and bride, p. 22.

III. WATER AND WIND (John 3) — — — — — 24
Serpent of Brass, p. 30.

IV. LIVING WATER (John 4) — — — — — 33

V. THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT (Matt. 5–7) — — 38
Dual pictures—The Two Houses.

VI. THE NEW AGE — — — — — — — 43
1. The Bridegroom, p. 43. 2. The Garment, p. 44. 3. The Wine and Wineskins, p. 44. 4. The Old Wine, p. 46.

VII. THE CRISIS — — — — — — — — 47
Children at Play, p. 48. The Blasphemy against the Spirit, p. 50.

VIII. THE TEACHER: HIS OUTLOOK AND YOKE (Matt. 11: 25–30) — — — — — — — — 54

IX. THE REASON FOR PARABLES — — — — — 58

X. THE MYSTERIES OF THE KINGDOM (Matt. 13) — — 63
1. The Sower, p. 64. 2. Tares, p. 71. 3. Spontaneous Growth, p. 82. 4. Mustard Seed, p. 87. 5. Leaven and Meal, p. 93. 6. Hidden Treasure, p. 109. 7. Pearl of Great Price, p. 112. 8. Drag-net, p. 115. 9. The Instructed Scribe, p. 117.
General Remarks on Matt. 13, p. 122.

XI. THE LIVING BREAD (John 6) — — — — — 125

XII. THE CHURCH (Matt. 16 and 18) — — — — 134
Building, p. 138. Rock, p. 139. Gates, p. 140. Keys. p. 141.

XIII. THE LITTLE CHILD — — — — — — 145
Children in the Saviour's Arms.

XIV. THE UNMERCIFUL SLAVE (Matt. 18) — — — 154

XV. THE LIGHT (John 8) — — — — — — 170

XVI. THE DOOR, FOLD, SHEPHERD, SHEEP (John 9 and 10) — — — — — — — — 173
Fold and Thieves, p. 174. Door, p. 175. Good Shepherd, p. 179. Sheep, p. 185.

CHAP. PAGE

XVII. THE GOOD SAMARITAN (Luke 10) – – – – 188

XVIII. IMPORTUNATE PRAYER; THE FRIEND AT MIDNIGHT (Luke 11) – – – – – – 194

XIX. THE STRONG ONE DEFEATED (Luke 11: Matt. 12: 29) – – – – – – – – 198

XX. THE RICH FOOL (Luke 12) – – – – – 202
Covetousness.

XXI. THE HOUSEHOLD SLAVES (Luke 12) – – – 208

XXII. THE STEWARDS OF THE HOUSE (Luke 12) – – 217

XXIII. THE BARREN FIG TREE (Luke 13) – – – 229

XXIV. THE GREAT FEAST (Luke 14) – – – – 232

XXV. THREE PICTURES OF DISCIPLESHIP (Luke 14) – – 240
Tower, Battle, Salt.

XXVI. THREE PICTURES OF JOY IN HEAVEN; THE LOST SHEEP, LOST COIN, AND LOST SON (Luke 14) – 246
The Elder Brother, p. 251. The Hired Labourers, p. 252.

XXVII. THE UNFAITHFUL STEWARD (Luke 16) – – 255

XXVIII. DIVES AND LAZARUS (Luke 16) – – – – 260

XXIX. IMPORTUNATE PRAYER; WIDOW AND JUDGE (Luke 18) – – – – – – – – 269

XXX. THE PHARISEE AND THE PUBLICAN (Luke 18) – 275

XXXI. THE LABOURERS IN THE VINEYARD (Matt. 19 and 20) – – – – – – – – 279

XXXII. THE NOBLEMAN AND THE POUNDS (Luke 19) – – 283

XXXIII. THE FRUITLESS FIG TREE (Matt. 21: 18–22; Mark 11) – – – – – – – – 292

XXXIV. THE TWO SONS AND THE WICKED HUSBANDMEN (Matt. 21; etc.) – – – – – – 295

XXXV. THE WEDDING BREAKFAST (Matt. 22) – – – 301

XXXVI. THE OLIVET PARABLES (Matt. 24 and 25; etc.) – 311
1. The Fig Tree, p. 312. 2. The Master of the House, p. 313. 3. The Steward, p. 314. 4. Ten Virgins, p. 314. 5. Talents, p. 320. 6. Sheep and Goats, p. 321.

XXXVII. CLEAN FEET (John 13) – – – – – 326

XXXVIII. THE VINE AND THE BRANCHES (John 15) – 335

XXXIX. THE BODY (I Cor. 12–14; etc.) – – – – 346

XL. THE TWO WOMEN: AN ALLEGORY ON SLAVERY OR LIBERTY (Gal. 4) – – – – – – 353

XLI. THE OLIVE TREE (Rom. 11) – – – – – 366

XLII. THE BRIDE AND THE CITY (Rev. 19–22) – – 373

PRELIMINARY NOTE
ON SYMBOLICAL AND LITERAL LANGUAGE

To employ figurative speech is a native characteristic of the human mind. It is more marked in some minds than in others, and in some races than in others. The Oriental is very prone to it, the Westerner to-day less and less so, a result perhaps of the mechanical and mathematical habit of mind induced by modern industry and science. It is a regrettable loss, and especially it disables the Westerner from penetrating easily into the deeper and higher truths taught in the Bible, this Book being pre-eminently Oriental in style and tone, and beautiful by reason of its richness in figurative language. It is highly needful that the Western mind should immerse itself in the Bible manner of speech, and endeavour resolutely to form the habit of thinking pictorially. The Book of *Proverbs* greatly aids this and the book of the *Revelation* demands it, as does our present subject.

A statement may be strictly literal, yet may be made not at all to set out the literal fact stated, but because of some unmentioned fact or truth which corresponds to the one stated and which the reader is to discover by reflection (*e.g.* Eccles. 10: 8). Neither rigid literalism nor liberal spiritualizing conforms to the persistent feature of language to *interweave* the figurative and the literal.

Of this latter feature a converted Moslem gave a good example. He was interpreting into Arabic what I was saying to another Moslem. After the way of life had been made plain I asked him to say that now it was for the other to believe upon the Son of God and be saved or to reject Him and be lost. There was no alternative. We were at the top of a four-storey dwelling. He spoke for a few minutes and then he said to me: I have told him there are two ways of getting out of this house; he can go down the staircase or throw himself out of the window: it must be one or the other. His statement was literal as to fact, figurative in sense.

Ecclesiastes 10: 8 is a good Old Testament example: "Whoso breaketh through a fence a serpent shall bite him." In hot and sandy places in the East this is so well known that the wise man could scarcely need to state it. "Tell not as new what everybody knows." He must have mentioned it for the sake of some unstated lesson; that is, the statement is literal, but there being a hidden lesson it is figurative in sense. "Thou shalt not eat of it" was a fence around the tree in Eden: in the very act of

breaking through it by disobeying, Adam and Eve were instantly infected with the moral virus of the ancient Serpent, his fatal principle of rebellion.

It is also to be observed that the figure *hyperbole* (over-statement) is used to emphasize an idea.

No rigid uniform rule can be laid down to govern interpretation. Doubtless it is safer to incline rather to a literal than to a figurative sense, but always with the large reserve and latitude that human speech is a *blend* of direct and symbolic language. And for the right comprehension of Holy Scripture the devout have the special advantage of the Spirit, Who inspired the Book, being with them to open the mind to its meaning; yet ever remembering that the thoughts of His infinite mind were caused to pass through human minds and to find expression in modes of utterance native to that vehicle.[1]

[1] The above is abridged from Preliminary Dissertation I of my treatise *The Revelation of Jesus Christ*, now out of print. But reprints of eleven principal sections are available, by post 2*s*. 6*d*. Apply to G. H. Lang, 20 Oakley Road, Wimborne, Dorset.

CHAPTER I

OLD TESTAMENT PARABLES

OUR Lord was not the first teacher to instruct by parables. Such had been used from ancient times and were to be found in the Old Testament, the text-book He so loved and honoured. The boy Jesus may be well pictured as pondering these parables and becoming familiar with this form of instruction. One of them formed the background for one of His own parables (Isa. 5: 1–7; Matt. 21: 33 ff.).

It may help to familiarize our minds also with parabolic teaching to consider some of those Old Testament parables.

1. *Numbers 23 and 24.*[1]—The prophetic utterances of Balaam are called parables. They are such because facts and prospects connected with Israel are set forth by comparisons. These are drawn chiefly from non-human realms.

(1) In 23: 10 the lesson is drawn from the *soil* beneath man's feet: "Who can count the dust of Jacob?" It points to the numerical vastness of Abraham's descendants, as does the earlier comparison of them to sand and stars (Gen. 22: 17). It has been suggested that dust and sand represent Israel, the earthly descendants of Abraham, while stars point to the church of God, his spiritual heavenly descendants. This is a warning against a fanciful treatment of parables and symbols, for three times Moses used the symbol "stars" of the earthly Israel (Deut. 1: 10; 10: 22; 28: 62. See also I Chron. 27: 23).

(2) In 23: 22, 24, and 24: 9, the lessons are brought from the world of *wild animals*. Israel has the strength of the wild ox and the terribleness of the lion and lioness.

(3) In 24:17 the picture is taken from the *sky*: "There shall come forth a star out of Jacob," that is, a ruler from heaven, which picture is carried on to Rev. 2: 28 and 22: 16.

(4) The same verse describes the powerful sovereignty of the Messiah of Israel by the common symbol of royalty, a *sceptre*.

(5) In 24: 21 the security of the Kenites is pictured by a *bird's nest set in a rock:* yet even as an eagle or a jackal might ravage a nest so placed, war should destroy that people.

Thus all nature may be made to contribute to parabolic instruction.

[1] If the expositions in this treatise are to be properly understood the reader must first read over the Scriptures named, and in the Revised Version.

2. *Judges* 9. Gideon had died. His bastard son Abimelech had persuaded the men of Shechem to murder all but one of the seventy legitimate sons of his father and appoint him their king. Jotham, the son who had escaped, spake this parable to the men of Shechem (vers. 7–20):

> Hearken unto me, ye men of Shechem, that God may hearken unto you. The trees went forth on a time to anoint a king over them; and they said unto the olive tree, Reign thou over us. But the olive tree said unto them, Should I leave my fatness, wherewith by me they honour God and man, and go to wave to and fro over the trees? And the trees said to the fig tree, Come thou, and reign over us. But the fig tree said unto them, Should I leave my sweetness, and my good fruit, and go to wave to and fro over the trees? And the trees said unto the vine, Come thou and reign over us. And the vine said unto them, Should I leave my wine, which cheereth God and man, and go to wave to and fro over the trees? Then said all the trees unto the bramble, Come thou, and reign over us. And the bramble said unto the trees, If in truth ye anoint me king over you, then come and put your trust in my shadow: and if not, let fire come out of the bramble and devour the cedars of Lebanon.
>
> Now therefore, if ye have dealt truly and uprightly, in that ye have made Abimelech king, and if ye have dealt well with Jerubbaal and his house, and have done unto him according to the deserving of his hands; (for my father fought for you, and adventured his life, and delivered you out of the hand of Midian; and ye are risen up against my father's house this day, and have slain his sons, threescore and ten persons, upon one stone, and have made Abimelech, the son of his maidservant, king over the men of Shechem, because he is your brother;) if ye then have dealt truly and uprightly with Jerubbaal and with his house this day, then rejoice ye in Abimelech, and let him also rejoice in you: but if not, let fire come out from Abimelech and devour the men of Shechem, and the house of Millo; and let fire come out from the men of Shechem, and from the house of Millo, and devour Abimelech.

This shows

i. That the material of a parable may be real, as trees are actual objects.

ii. That the use made of the material may be wholly fanciful; as when trees were pictured as holding a conclave, proposing to elect a king, inviting low growing trees—the olive, fig, vine, and bramble, to wave to and fro over far loftier trees, as the cedar.

iii. That the purely fanciful details may correspond accurately to the men who are to be instructed, and to their doings. Thus

(1) As the bramble was a lowly and noxious plant, so was Abimelech the son of a concubine and also a despicable and

harmful man, shown in the proposal to murder all his father's sons.

(2) As the cedar was a tall and lofty tree, so were the men of Shechem strong enough to carry out that horrid massacre. But

(3) As a burning bramble might set on fire a forest of cedars, or as a burning cedar would cause the destruction of all brambles around it, so could Abimelech and the men of Shechem prove destructive of each other and inflict on one another the due reward of their common ingratitude and violence.

This third element shows that a parable may be a prophecy, for it was fulfilled.

3. *Isaiah 5. The Vineyard.* This parable repays detail study, being, as remarked above, the background of parables by Christ (Matt. 21; John 15). It reads (vers. 1–7):

> Let me sing for my wellbeloved a song of my beloved touching his vineyard. My beloved had a vineyard in a very fruitful hill;[1] (ver. 2) and he made a trench about it, and gathered out the stones thereof, and planted it with the choicest vine, and built a tower in the midst of it, and also hewed out a winepress therein: and he looked that it should bring forth grapes, and it brought forth wild grapes. And now, O inhabitants of Jerusalem and men of Judah, judge, I pray you, betwixt me and my vineyard. What could have been done more to my vineyard, that I have not done in it? wherefore, when I looked that it should bring forth grapes brought it forth wild grapes? And now go to; I will tell you what I will do to my vineyard: I will take away the hedge thereof, and it shall be eaten up; I will break down the fence thereof, and it shall be trodden down; and I will lay it waste; it shall not be pruned nor hoed; but there shall come up briers and thorns: I will also command the clouds that they rain no rain upon it. For the vineyard of Jehovah of hosts is the house of Israel, and the men of Judah His pleasant plant: and He looked for judgment, and behold oppression; for righteousness, but behold a cry.

It is to be observed:

(1) That the many details in ver. 2 are given to afford a full sense of the adequate care taken by the owner to make his vineyard to prosper; "What more could I have done to my vineyard?" But

(2) Not every detail is shown as having separate significance,

[1] Lit. *a horn, a son of oil,* itself a picture phrase to be studied. Delitzsch writes, "The vineyard was situated upon a *keren,* that is, upon a prominent mountain peak projecting like a horn, and therefore open to the sun on all sides.... This mountain horn was a *ben-shemen,* a child of fatness: the fatness was innate, it belonged to it by nature (*shemen* is used, as in ch. 28: 1, to denote the fertility of a nutritive loamy soil)."

only the one detail of protection from outside dangers being explained. This is most important. The primary lesson or lessons of a parable must be grasped but not each and every detail is always to be forced to yield a distinct lesson. Parables are like pictures, in that they require details to make up the general picture but without each detail having of necessity a special and separate lesson. It may or may not be so.

(3) Both the vineyard and the vine in it point to but one object, the people of Israel; yet with this distinction, that the whole nation was the vineyard, while (ever since the apostasy of the northern kingdom) the southern kingdom of Judah had been God's special care and hope, His vine.

(4) The sole purpose of a vine is to bear fruit.

(5) The nature of sin is degeneration—a good vine becoming a wild vine and producing fruit distasteful to the owner and useless.

(6) The punishment of sin is the withdrawal of Divine protection and supplies (rain), so that thieves can rob and wild beasts devour, as Assyria and Babylon did in Israel.

4. *Ezekiel 15 and 19: 10–14.* Isaiah's parable was supplemented later in these utterances. Ch. 15 emphasizes the uselessness of the wood of the vine. It can be turned to no account; its sole value lies in fruit-bearing. In ch. 19 the stronger branches represent the sceptres of the princes, the authority of rulers being so indispensable to the well-being of a people; and part of the punishment of rebellion is that the people are left unguided and unprotected.

5. *Ezekiel 16. Adulteresses.* The essential evil in departure from God is like the wickedness of a woman unfaithful to a good husband. The general lesson is addressed, therefore, to persons who have been in close and happy fellowship with God, for, while those never married can commit fornication, only the married can commit adultery. This is the basis of James 4: 4, addressed to Christians: "Ye adulteresses, know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God? Whosoever therefore is minded to be (*boulēthē*) a friend of the world constitutes himself (*kathistatai*) an enemy of God."

Ezekiel's picture is composite: to grasp its meanings is a valuable education in the study of parables.

(1) Three cities, Jerusalem, Samaria, Sodom, are three "sisters," all guilty of "adultery," of apostasy from the true God and from morality. This was true of even Sodom, for in the early period after the Flood, when that city was founded, mankind

still had the knowledge of God Most High (see Gen. 14: 8–120), of both His goodness and His wrath, but they were ungrateful for the one and despised the other. Romans 1: 18–2: 16 gives the moral history of that apostasy and its consequences.

(2) The spiritual history of Jerusalem, past and future, is set out in a series of pictures.

a. A girl infant exposed at birth, cast out to die (vers. 1–5), suggesting the precarious situation of the new settlement founded by an Amorite and a Hittite.

b. A passer-by pitying her, and then caring for and rearing her (vers. 6, 7). The true God deciding that Ursalim (as the place was at first called) should be His centre on earth.

c. In due time her benefactor "marries" her, bestowing on her every possible ornament and luxury (vers. 8–14). God establishing Jerusalem and dwelling there.

d. But she proves ungrateful and unfaithful, bestows upon false lovers the lavish gifts of her husband, nor merely yielding to their seductions but herself seducing and attracting them, like a common harlot (vers. 15–25). Israel rejecting Jehovah to worship false gods.

e. This iniquity increased by political alliances with foreign nations whose religions had been copied (vers. 26–34). Israel bribing the Egyptians and Assyrians to render her political help, showing thus her distrust of Jehovah.

f. But these false lovers turn against her and become her destroyers (vers. 35–43). This picture is repeated in Rev. 17: 16, 17, in relation to corrupt Christendom at the close of the present age.

g. The grossness of Jerusalem's iniquity intensified by comparison with that of her sisters Sodom and Samaria, for they had never been so highly honoured and enriched by God as to be His personal centre (vers. 44–49).

h. At the last, however, the three sisters shall profit from their severe punishments, shall repent, return, and be restored. So shall grace reign through righteousness on the part of the injured "husband" (vers. 60–63).

To discern the history and the prophecy declared in this allegory is to hold a key to the past, present, and future as seen by God, and so to understand the chief parts of the Old Testament as the background and basis of the New Testament.

These examples will suffice for the present purpose. They show that

i. The material of parables may be real or fictitious, and that

ii. It may be borrowed from nature or from human life.

iii. The essential lesson taught is the main matter; details may or may not have separate significance.

iv. Application of details not explained must be on the lines of explanations given; then they will be sober and valuable, not fanciful or idle. Then also they will harmonize naturally with the whole picture, will add to its completeness, heighten its effect, and will not be foreign to it or irrelevant to the main lesson.

CHAPTER II

JOHN THE BAPTIST

> All the prophets and the law prophesied until John . . . The law and the prophets were until John: from that time the good tidings of the kingdom of God is preached (Matt. 11: 13; Luke 16: 16).

THUS did the Lord twice indicate distinctly the point at which the former dispensation gave place to the present age. It was with the arising and preaching of John the Baptist. Neither Calvary, Pentecost, nor Paul's period in Rome was that turning point. The former age lasted "until John"; from that time the new era set in.

The statement further defines the major differences between the two ages. One was characterized by law and prophesying; the other by the proclaiming of good tidings. The law set up God's standard of life for man, and condemned him for failing to reach it. The prophets declared God's thoughts about sinful man, and set forth in advance God's purposes and plans concerning him, plans of judgment and mercy.

The prophets directed men's minds to the coming to the earth of God's Saviour and Sovereign, and declared that a time would come when, on this rebel-ruled earth, "the God of the heavens shall set up a kingdom" (Dan. 2: 44). This will involve the destruction of the wicked and the blessedness of the righteous. To this grand goal the prophets could only point forward, but John thrilled men with the announcement, "Repent ye, for the kingdom of the heavens has drawn near" (Matt. 3: 2); which announcement Christ continued after John had been silenced, saying, "Repent ye, for the kingdom of the heavens has drawn near" (Matt. 4: 17).

Neither John nor Christ said that that kingdom "is at hand," in the sense that the kingdom of glory could be at once ushered in. The Greek perfect tense cannot be translated by the English present tense. They said that "the kingdom has drawn near," in the sense that a king is the essence and embodiment of his kingdom, and the kingdom visits a region when he visits it.

This, then, was the inclusive theme of John and Christ. All their teaching was concerned with this kingdom of God and heaven, which is the case with their pictures and parables. Only there were two aspects and periods of this kingdom, as foretold

by the prophets and as was the necessity of the case; an inward and an outward, a spiritual in the hearts of men, an outward in human affairs; and the latter must wait on the former.

The earlier kingdom of God in Israel had collapsed as to outward display because in their hearts the people forsook God. Without a living kernel the shell withers and cracks. Therefore the heart must be renewed before the outward kingdom can be re-established. This may be learned from Jer. 32: 37 ff. Verses 38–40 describe the renewal of heart; verses 41–44, with ch. 33, detail the renewal of the land and its affairs. It is thus in Ezekiel 36. Verses 26 and 27 describe the new heart, and the prophecy then adds the promise of outward prosperity.

It was the former work which John and Christ set before men as necessary and as then possible. Comparison of John 3: 24 with Matt. 4: 12 shows that the talk with Nicodemus is the first example of the instruction the Lord gave. He drove home the truth that a new nature from above is the prerequisite to seeing or entering the kingdom of God (John 3). Later teaching must be construed in harmony with this example, in which the Lord taught the necessity for His death, that "the Son of man *must* be lifted up" (vers. 14, 15).

That He was not proposing to set up then a visible kingdom the Lord made plain when He assured the Pharisees that "the kingdom of God cometh not with observation" (Luke 17: 20). The physician can see the disease by its outward symptoms: you cannot, Christ taught, see the kingdom of God thus: that is not the present manner of its existence on earth. Yet He affirmed that "the kingdom of God is in the midst of you." But obviously it was not then there in outward pomp, but only in the sense that its King was there exercising His authority upon human hearts.

That He will return in glory, and sit on the throne of His glory, Christ declared unequivocally and repeatedly (Matt. 16: 27; 25: 31; etc.). That will bring fulfilment of the prophecies that had so announced. But the Lord knew and taught that He must first die, return to His Father, and later come back to the earth to establish that visible kingdom.

These two aspects of the kingdom must be kept fully in mind as the parables and other Scriptures are studied, for sometimes the one aspect is in view, sometimes the other.

In addition to teaching by plain instruction, as in reference to baptism and its practical fruits, John drew striking pictures, worthy of much study.

1. The nature of his hearers, especially some of them. He

called them an "offspring of vipers" (Matt. 3: 7; Luke 3: 7). They inherited a vicious spirit entirely useless, eminently dangerous, capable only of causing pain and death. They were the true descendants of their forefathers described by Isaiah (59: 1–8).

2. The axe lying at the foot of the tree, ready to be used on the fruitless: a judgment ready to fall, and to last till completed.

3. The work of Messiah would be twofold: He would effect a double baptism, in Spirit and fire (Matt. 3: 11; Luke 3: 16). The Greek conjoins the two operations as one; and at the first fulfilment, Pentecost (Acts 2), both wind and fire displayed the presence of the Spirit; the one interpenetrating the whole man with sanctifying, energizing grace, the other making their tongues to utter burning words; so that they, as Christ, cast fire on the earth which searched and separated among men (Luke 12: 49–53).

4. Here is the value of seeing the double aspect mentioned. For Pentecost was only the beginning of a process to be completed at the end of the age. John's fourth picture is of a harvest at the time when the reapers have gathered into one spot all that has been reaped and the winnowing proceeds. There is a steady, strong wind. By his shovel the man throws against the wind all that lies on the heap, grain and chaff alike. The wheat being heavy falls back at or near the same spot, the chaff being light is blown further around on the threshing floor. The separation completed, first the wheat is removed to the safety of the garner, and then the dusty useless chaff is set on fire. The chaff being dry and flimsy, and the wind being fresh, the fire is so fierce that nothing could quench it.

Thus in this final outworking, as in the first at Pentecost, both wind and fire are associated and the operation is one, as John accurately pictured it.

These four double pictures are arresting: (1) Vipers and their progeny; (2) axe and trees; (3) wind and fire; (4) wheat and chaff. They call for detail study and understanding, for they will recur.

John further sets forth truth concerning Christ by two other significant comparisons. For knowledge of these we are indebted to his namesake, John the apostle.

(1) John 1: 29, 36. "John [the Baptist] seeth Jesus coming to him, and saith, Behold, the lamb of God, that taketh away the sin of the world. . . . Behold, the lamb of God!" John recognized in Jesus the fulfilment of that prophetic word of Abraham, "God will Himself provide the lamb for a burnt offering" (Gen. 22: 8). That and all subsequent lambs and goats drew their limited virtue from this Lamb of God to Whom they pointed

forward. He was the fulfilment of the double picture on the annual day of atonement, when one goat bore the sin of all the people and died, whilst its companion took *away* the guilt into a land of forgetfulness (Lev. 16).

Thus it was a cardinal point in the ministry of John the Baptist that Jesus the Son of God must die for the sin of the world. This completely sets aside the idea that the Lord would have then and there set up the kingdom in glory had the Jews accepted Him. It could not be. Sin must be put away from before God ere His grace and glory can be manifested.

(2) John's other instructive picture is drawn in the words: "He that hath the bride is the bridegroom; but the friend of the bridegroom, that standeth and heareth him, rejoiceth greatly because of the bridegroom's voice: this my joy therefore is fulfilled. He must increase, but I must decrease" (John 3: 29, 30).

John had gathered this sweet picture from the Old Testament passages which described Jehovah as the husband, and humble, pardoned, sanctified men as the wife: "Thy Maker is thy husband; Jehovah of hosts is His name" (Isa. 54: 5; etc.). In this so intimate and holy union Jesus was the one party. Therefore the application of the picture to Him meant that John knew Jesus to be the Jehovah of the Old Testament; and in this place in John 3 he goes on to speak of the Father, the Son of His love, and the Spirit of God, which is the earliest declaration of the triune Being of God (vers. 34–36). John knows that the eternal condition of each sinner is determined by his attitude of faith in or disobedience to the Son of God.

And his words intimate more. He who will rejoice greatly at the Bridegroom's voice is he who has filled the part of "the friend of the Bridegroom," that is, he who, after the Oriental custom, has sought for the bride and brought her to the bridegroom.

Thus did Abraham's servant seek and find Rebekah; with zealous fidelity he filled her heart with thoughts of Isaac, not thoughts about himself; and with watchful care he protected her on the long journey until he presented her to Isaac. This servant is not a picture of the Holy Spirit, but rather of such as John, ever pointing men to Jesus, attracting their affections to Him, so that many an Andrew, hearing a John, follows Jesus.

Paul applies to himself the same accurate picture of a servant of God, saying, "I espoused you to one husband, that I might present you as a pure virgin to Christ." He had caused them to fall in love with Christ, and was "jealous over them with a jealousy of God . . . lest by any means, as the serpent beguiled

Eve in his craftiness, your thoughts should be corrupted from the simplicity and purity that is toward Christ" (II Cor. 11: 2, 3). Satan dearly loves that our hearts should dote on some other object than our heavenly Lover. It matters not who or what that object is. The friend of the Bridegroom has even greater concern to keep hearts engaged with Christ. This is our true and blessed work—to cause others to love Christ and to keep them satisfied with Him. The means to this Paul indicates in his words: "We preach not ourselves, but Christ Jesus as Lord, and ourselves as your slaves for Jesus' sake" (II Cor. 4: 5). "I am Abraham's slave" (Gen. 24: 34). As John said: "He must increase, I must decrease" (John 3: 30).

It is worth noting that one and the same person may fall within two figures of speech. As to service, John and Paul are "friends of the bridegroom" bringing the bride to Christ. As to position, they will be part of the company afterward shown as the heavenly Bride (Rev. 19: 7, 8; 21: 9).

CHAPTER III

WATER AND WIND. SERPENTS

John 3

AFTER the conversation with Nicodemus Jesus spent some time in Judea. John was still baptizing, not having been yet imprisoned by Herod (John 3: 22–24).

This shows that the interview with Nicodemus preceded the imprisonment of John.

Matt. 4: 12, 17, states that it was "When He heard that John was delivered up" that "from that time Jesus began to preach." This is repeated in Mark 1: 14, 15. This shows that the whole of His ministry given in Matthew and Mark followed upon John being put in prison. Both these Gospels put the beginning of Christ's public ministry at that juncture and as in Galilee. Luke 4: 14, 15 is to the same effect: He returned into Galilee and taught in the synagogues.

As stated in the preceding chapter, this establishes that the instruction given to Nicodemus in private and in Jerusalem is the very first sample preserved to us of the teaching of the Lord. This instruction forms a sort of preamble, and all that follows must be read in the light of it and construed in harmony with it.

A learned Rabbi, a public teacher of religion, a member of the chief council of the nation (John 7: 50), seeks a private interview with Jesus by night. He commences the conversation with an admission which condemned in advance his circle for their subsequent rejection of the Lord. He said, "We know that Thou art a teacher come from God" (John 3: 2).

At once the Lord takes him to His dominant subject, the kingdom of God, and presses upon him that a new nature is indispensable to any one entering that kingdom. Human nature has been thoroughly poisoned by the Devil with his virus of sin: that other kingdom is of God, Who is without sin. Man is death-stricken and cannot share the kingdom of the Living One. Man is of the earth; that other kingdom is of the heavens. Man is perishing, passing away, and *must* receive a life that is eternal if he is to share in the eternal kingdom. "Ye *must* be born from above"; you *must* partake in the vital force and nature of the kingdom if you are to see and enter it.

The kingdom of mankind is neither perceived nor entered by the lower creatures, for they have not the human nature. The

kingdom of the beasts is neither understood nor shared by man. But in the one striking instance of Nebuchadnezzar the Creator took from him his human nature and put in him the heart of a beast, and immediately upon that birth from *below* the great emperor entered the bestial kingdom and lived with and like the beasts (Dan. 4: 16, 25, 32, 33).

Thus *must* man receive the life of God, of the heavens, if he is to share in the kingdom of the heavens.

To show the mode of this new birth Christ employed two pictures, one from nature, the other from history.

The new birth is but one divine operation, yet has two distinct yet inseparable phases, cleansing and quickening. These are indicated in the double term "water and spirit," the oneness of the process being shown in the Greek by there being no article before either word and by both being governed by one and the same preposition. Therefore both must be taken in the same sense, either literally or figuratively; "for when two words of the same clause are joined by a copulative and governed by the same preposition, it is impossible to take one of them in a literal and the other in a figurative signification" (G. H. Pember). The construction is very frequent in the New Testament and I know of no exception to this rule.

It is also to be remembered that in the Hebrew and Greek languages the same term did duty for "spirit," "wind," and "breath"; and the element water having been just brought to mind, the next term would most naturally raise the notion of another element and be taken in its sense of wind. To the Eastern ear, so habituated to figurative language, there would be nothing strange in the phrase "born of water and wind," nor would there be to our ears only that we are accustomed to the word "spirit." What, then, is it to be born of "water and wind"? And first, what part in the process is supplied by the water? and what water is in question?

The common view is that the term is to be taken literally, and that it is the water of baptism to which Christ referred. But what baptism? Not to the Christian rite, for at the time in question that ordinance had not been instituted, and of it Nicodemus had necessarily no knowledge. Christ's unqualified "any one" applies the statement as much to men who had gone before, and to the men of His time, as to those of the then future; and His imperative "must" meant that Nicodemus himself, as well as all other men, depended upon that new birth for entrance into the kingdom. The entrance thereinto of men of that day could not have been dependent upon a rite not then instituted. Otherwise Christ's teaching remained inoperative until Pentecost

(Acts 2) when Christian baptism commenced, and such as heard Him, but died ere that day, had no new birth and no hope of the kingdom, which is contrary to fact.

That the baptism of John was not equivalent to the Christian ordinance is shown by the fact that some who had submitted to the former were afterwards subjected by Paul to the latter (Acts 19: 1–7). Incidentally it may be learned from this that re-baptism may be scripturally required in certain cases, and hence is not in itself the sin that some proclaim it.

At the time Christ spoke there were two baptisms in vogue: (1) that of a Gentile when he became a proselyte to the Jewish religion; and (2) that of John the Immerser who was just then calling men to repentance in expectation of the coming of God's kingdom, and baptizing (immersing) such as heeded his message. It is to this latter baptism that many suppose our Lord to have referred.

But serious difficulties confront this theory. First, it is but a *theory*. It is purely a supposition that our Lord had baptism in mind, and it is a wholly unsupported inference that Nicodemus on his part would think of the baptismal water as that water of which the Lord spoke. Nor does there seem any good reason why our Lord should not have stated plainly that the new birth was by baptism and the Spirit had He meant that.

Moreover, Christ immediately proceeded to reprove Nicodemus for that he, being a Teacher of Israel, misunderstood these statements. Now the only ground for this reproof lay in the fact that a Teacher of Israel was one presumed to be well versed in the Old Testament Scriptures, for these constituted the only source of Divine learning as a Teacher. But inasmuch as the baptism of John was not a subject upon which those Scriptures gave any information, a want of perception on the part of Nicodemus of a connexion between that baptism and a spiritual birth from above were scarcely a matter for just rebuke.[1]

It seems, then, to be evident that our Lord when speaking here of water referred to something upon which the Old Testament would have enlightened Nicodemus had he possessed spiritual discernment. Nor would every reference in those Scriptures to water suit our Lord's thought; it must be water spoken of in connexion with a new life and a new spirit being given to man. And it were surely easy for any Teacher of Israel to have at once

[1] We do not make light of the ordinance of baptism. It is our conviction that every person that has believed on Jesus as his personal Redeemer is expected to own Him as Lord by submitting to His command to be baptized. Our present plea is only that it was not to this ordinance that Christ referred in His talk with Nicodemus.

recalled the following all-prominent promises of Israel's God found in Ezek. 36: 25–27:

> And I will sprinkle clean water upon you, and ye shall be clean; from all your filthiness and from all your idols will I cleanse you. A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you: and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you a heart of flesh. And I will put My spirit within you, and cause you to walk in My statutes, and ye shall keep My judgments, and do them.

In the first instance this great prophecy points to the time of Israel's coming national restoration, when the nation shall "be born in a day" (Isa. 66: 8), and their being received again into the favour of God shall be "life from the dead" for themselves and the rest of the peoples (Rom. 11: 15). These terms are strikingly appropriate to the subject of the new birth, and in the next chapter Ezekiel pictures this great national reviving as being the starting of the dead into new life at the word of the Lord, and employs the figure of the wind to picture the life-giving activity of the Spirit of God. Thus in the first part of this prophecy the figure of water is employed in connexion with the cleansing away of filthiness, and in the latter portion the figure of wind is employed for the giving of new life; the process, as the result, thus corresponding to that of being born again. Christ conjoined both figures in His one sentence "born of water and wind." Now inasmuch as the regenerating of a nation can only be effected by the new birth of its members individually, it is plain that the processes of the quickening will apply to each individual case, and hence Nicodemus ought to have been acquainted with the truths the Lord set before him.

For the whole matter is here opened up. There is the same reference to water and wind (or spirit) in the same conjunction with the creation of a new heart producing a new life of obedience. It is to be observed that the water has to do with the cleansing away of past guilt, whilst the creating of a new heart and the bestowing of a new spirit has for its end the assuring of a new outward life. The former work is an indispensable preliminary to the latter. For before God can construct in the sinner a temple for His own indwelling the ground must be cleared of the ruins that bestrew it and be cleansed from the unhealthy conditions that infect decayed and unused places. That is to say, the sinner must be forgiven his past offences, and be purified from the guilt and defilement of them, before he can be made a partaker of the divine nature (II Pet. 1: 4). The past must be dealt with effectively before the future can be assured.

This was exactly what was typified to the mind of the instructed Israelite by the being sprinkled with "clean water." There were two forms of this rite. In Lev. 14 we learn that when a leper had been healed, and wished to *re-start life* in fellowship with God and with His people, the first ceremony to be observed was that a bird be killed over a vessel containing "living water," so that the blood dripped into the water. This water enriched with the blood was sprinkled liberally upon the cleansed leper. This is the central point, namely, that the water carried the blood of atonement, and the sinner was thus marked out as one to whom the benefit had been granted of a living substitute having suffered the punishment by which his defilement must needs be purged. Thus the water cleansed by applying the atoning blood.

Again, in Numbers 19 there is a ceremony that is explained in Heb. 9: 13. For the freeing of one from the consequences of certain forms of defilement, so that he might continue to live when in strict law he ought to die, a red heifer was to be killed and its body consumed to ashes. These ashes were, when required, to be mingled with "living water," which was to be sprinkled upon the person to be cleansed from the defilement that forbade fellowship with God. Here also the vital matter was that the water had virtue to cleanse because it conveyed to the sinner the ashes that spoke of the death of a substitute on behalf of the man liable to die.

These ceremonies cannot picture baptism; for, according to the New Testament, baptism requires the *immersion* of the whole person in water, the word *bapto* meaning *to dip*, whereas in these rites the water was *sprinkled* upon the person.

There was thus a literal cleansing to which the Lord referred Nicodemus; yet he, as an instructed Teacher, was expected to know that it was not in the actual water, nor in the blood or ashes that were commingled therewith, that the purifying virtue lay, but that this was to be found in the good things that were to come of which these were but shadows (Heb. 9: 11). It was the blood that Jesus the Son of God should afterwards shed for sinners, when upon the cross He should "pour out His soul unto death" (Isa. 53: 12), to which God always had regard and which would truly cleanse from sin, as is explained in Heb. 9: 13, 14: "For if the blood of goats and bulls, and the ashes of a heifer, sprinkling them that have been defiled, sanctify unto the cleanness of the flesh; how much more shall the blood of Christ, Who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without blemish unto God, cleanse your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?"

The guilty man, conscious of his sin, and fearing his doom,

dared not so much as lift up his eyes unto heaven (Luke 18: 13); but upon learning that a substitute had borne his punishment, and had satisfied justice, such an one, upon believing the good news, would naturally find the load lifted from the conscience and the fear of doom removed.

As to what was foreshadowed by the "living water" we are plainly informed in John 7: 38, 39. For on a certain great festival, when the Jews were accustomed to pour out living water before the temple of God, Jesus stood and proclaimed to such as would unite themselves to Him by a vital faith that appropriates His person and work (as a thirsty man makes his own the water he drinks), that out of such an one should "flow rivers of living water"; but, adds the Scripture, "this spake He *concerning the Spirit*, which they that believed on Him were to receive."

Thus living water was a type of the Holy Spirit, and this because it is by His gracious inward activity that the virtue of the blood of Jesus is applied effectively to the conscience and for the cleansing of the guilty, but now believing sinner. And because there simply is no other way of being cleansed from the defilement of sin, and freed from its burden and doom, except by trusting to the merit of the death of Christ on our behalf, and because the Holy Spirit alone can apply that saving death to the conscience of man, therefore must a man be born again of water, that is, by means of all that of which the water of cleansing spoke according to the mind of God.

Of course, the use of actual water was binding upon the Jew alone, and upon him only till the realities had come to which the ceremonies pointed, that is, until the Lamb of God had shed His precious blood and the Holy Spirit had been sent forth from heaven; for to us who are called to share in the heavenly and eternal realities the earthly and temporary types are no more required, nor are they any longer in force (Heb., chs. 9 and 10).

In response to our trust in His death as the ground of our freedom from punishment (since He bore for us the whole punishment due), the Holy Spirit makes good to our heart the saving power of that death and we pass out of death into life. The water has brought to us the blood; we are cleansed and at liberty; and now the sovereign power of God can immediately continue the work intended and create in us a new nature, by sending His own Spirit to dwell and work within us: "I will sprinkle clean water upon you, and ye shall be clean . . . I will put My Spirit within you, and [so] cause you to walk in My statutes."

This, and nothing less, is to be "born from above." The immediate effect is the creation in man of a truly new heart:

"I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and will give you a heart of flesh." A stone is insensible to surrounding conditions; it is unresponsive to either gentleness or hardness of treatment. The unregenerate heart is thus towards God, His kingdom and providences. His love and care, His chastisements and warnings, are without influence, and draw out no loving response, as long as the man is untouched by the Holy Spirit. But all this God alters whensoever a man turns to Him in penitence and puts a heart-trust in the Redeemer and His sacrifice as the means of pardon. With the new life there is given also this "heart of flesh," responsive to God's love, appreciative of the goodness of His ways, and delighted with His holy will.

The picture that the Lord drew from history is the well-known scene of Israel in the desert attacked by fiery serpents (Num. 21: 4–9).

They were grumbling against their gracious God and wishing they had never left Egypt; so God as good as said to them that, as they were not pleased with Him and His ways as their God, they would pass under the power of the great deity of Egypt, the Serpent god. They knew how that false and cruel god had sway in that demon-driven land. They had seen his image twined up the pillars of the temples, starting out from the frontal plate of the royal head-dress, and following the dead down into the tombs in the bowels of the earth, as if to continue his ruthless tyranny in that lower world. Now he should deal with them, and may be they would learn that Jehovah was far better than the Serpent.

They should not get back to Egypt, even though they wished this; for no soul that has been redeemed by the passover blood can resume its unredeemed position before God; yet Egypt should come to them in practical experience.

The lesson is for all people of all ages. The Devil has the power of death (Heb. 2: 14, 15). He is Executioner-in-chief of the universe. He is granted power over the bodies of the God-fearing if they need chastisement (Job 1 and 2), or if they choose to walk in his ways. Thus Paul delivered to Satan a sinning Christian, for the cutting short of his bodily life, yet not unto his final perdition, but, on the contrary, to the salvation of his spirit in the day of the Lord Jesus (I Cor. 5: 3–5; and see 11: 28–32; I Tim. 1: 20; Jas. 5: 19, 20; I John 5: 16, 17). This warning Paul stated most explicitly to the carnal Christians at Corinth, saying: "Neither let us make trial of the Lord, as some of them made trial, and perished by the serpents" (I Cor. 10: 9).

The Lord showed to Nicodemus that there is also corres-

pondence between the temporal and the eternal. The bitten Israelites perished as to their bodily life, but there is no warrant to infer from this that these are lost eternally. Yet there *is* a perishing eternally, and against this Christ set the receiving of eternal life. It will be one or the other.

The mercy of God provided for Israel a way of healing, so that their bodies need not then die. The love of God has provided for all men a way of salvation from perishing eternally, even the gift of eternal life. The serpent of brass on a camp standard was the means of the former, the Son of God on the cross of the latter.

In each case the conditions are the same, repentance and faith. "The people came unto Moses and said, We have sinned" (Num. 21: 7). John and the Lord both insisted upon repentance as an imperative preliminary on the sinner's part to entering the kingdom.

A rationalist of that day (had there been then such irrational creatures) might have objected that it was beyond reason that a piece of dead metal could antidote the virus of a living serpent coursing in the veins. The rationalist to-day scoffs at the idea that a dead man on a cross can be the ground of eternal salvation: "The message concerning the cross is to them that are perishing foolishness" (I Cor. 1: 18). Yet in fact he who looked at the serpent was healed, and he who looks to Christ receives the new, eternal life.

The dead serpent on the pole was God's intimation that He could put the living serpent out of action. When Christ died our judicial death He cancelled our guilt by paying its penalty. The bailiff loses right of execution against the debtor immediately another settles the claim. Thus was the Son of God manifested on earth "that He might undo the works of the devil" (I John 3: 8), and thus put him out of action as the tormentor and executioner (Heb. 2: 14). Satan and his forces fought fiercely to destroy their Destroyer and retain their power; but, by His cross and resurrection, the Son of God despoiled them, and made captive them who had held sinners captive (Col. 2: 13–15).

Christ's redeeming death frees from guilt and death the one who repents and believes; it warrants the free gift to him of the life that is eternal; and it sets him at peace in the realm of resurrection life where Satan and death have neither power nor place. The Israelite who believed God's promise about the serpent looked at it with expectation. The sinner who believes God's promises concerning Christ looks to Him with confidence, and God keeps His word.

For the study of Christ's further teachings it is absolutely

necessary to grasp intelligently this His first instruction, for it is the irremovable basis of all that follows concerning the kingdom of God. Therefore it is here treated at some length.

It cannot be too heavily emphasized that, just as John taught that Jesus must die as the Lamb of God to take away the sin of the world, so the Lord also taught from the first that He, the Son of man, "*must* be lifted up, in order that whosoever believeth may in Him have eternal life," and so have part in the eternal kingdom (John 3: 14, 15).

No theory ever invented by godly men is more flatly contrary to Scripture than that of the alleged offer at first of the visible kingdom, if the Jews would have accepted Jesus as Messiah, and the withdrawal of that offer when they rejected Him. It may be compared to that confusing misunderstanding of the Old Testament by other godly men, that the stone cut out of the mountain, that crushes the image and then fills the earth, pictures the gradual peaceful conquest of the nations by the gospel until all mankind shall be saved (Dan. 2: 34, 35). Both of these perversions warn us as devout students of prophecy to "take heed that ye be not led astray" (Luke 21: 8). Piety does not of itself assure safety.

John and Jesus both knew that Psalm 22, Isaiah 53, and all similar passages, with all the types, *must* be fulfilled by God's Servant. So the Lord summarized all Scripture in the words, "Behoved it not the Messiah to suffer these things, and to enter into His glory?" (Luke 24: 26). The Spirit of Christ in the prophets "testified beforehand the sufferings of [which should come unto] Messiah, and the glories that should *follow* them" (I Pet. 1: 11). It was impossible that the order should be reversed if the love and justice of God were to combine to save the perishing and to establish His kingdom.

CHAPTER IV

LIVING WATER

John 4: 1–42

IN the last preceding chapter reference has been made to "living water" as the vehicle by which atoning death was applied to a sinner, the water pointing to the gracious work of the Holy Spirit in making good to the conscience of the repentant and believing sinner the virtue of the death of Christ.

Because the water was a type of the Spirit of holiness it had to be living water, that is, running water taken from a fresh clean supply, not from a stagnant pool or tank. But the Spirit of God does much more than bring judicial cleansing to the defiled: He can satisfy the heart. This the Lord taught to the woman at the well.

It is regrettable that many get as far as the new birth by the Spirit without gaining the enrichment promised to the woman. Yet without the personal experience of the indwelling heavenly life which satisfies, the believer finds in the kingdom of heaven but an earthly struggle instead of a heavenly victory, with cravings and longings unmet, with murmurings arising in his heart. Then is he tempted with the Israelites to wish that he had never left Egypt to walk with God in a desert. Such unsatisfied souls find little joy in the new realm, are little credit to the kingdom of God, and cannot introduce others to its life and riches.

Jacob's well was a noble piece of beneficial work. Deep, and wide, and lined with stones, it supplied, and still supplies, pure and cool water. But it has two defects: it requires a bucket, a long rope, and corresponding labour to lift the water from the depths; and it is not an ever-rising, overflowing spring. Secondly, sweet, cool, and refreshing as the draught is at the time, under the Eastern sun the drinker soon thirsts again.

This is a natural picture of the sorrowful spiritual fact that even the proper God-given resources and pleasures of life are matters of toil and care, nor can they grant full and permanent satisfaction. Much more is this true of things sinful, the poisoned waters of the kingdom of Satan.

The woman who that day encountered Jesus had drunk deeply of both these types of supply, the allowable and the evil, and she

was deeply dissatisfied. To her the Lord from heaven spake these wondrous words:

> If thou knewest the gift of God, and who it is that says to thee, Give me to drink, thou wouldest have asked of Him, and He would have given thee *living* water . . . whosoever drinks of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst for ever; but the water which I shall give him shall become in him a fountain of water springing up into eternal life. (Darby.)

The woman knew enough of the Old Testament to know that Messiah was to come. The Stranger's words recall to us, if not to her, Jeremiah 2: 13 and 17: 13, where the God of Israel described Himself as "the fountain of waters of life." What precisely she needed to know and believe was that the One speaking to her was in truth that very God of Israel, Messiah, Himself that Fountain ever overflowing with that life in the Spirit which meets fully every true inward need of all His creatures.

The preliminary to getting to know Him thus is that He shall convict the soul of its sin, searching to its depths, revealing the whole of its depravity: "Go, call thy husband." Had the woman resented the Stranger's exposure, she would have left the well as she came, only with a still deeper sense of dissatisfaction and rebellion. But the light thus suddenly flashed upon her life revealed Who was speaking to her, and convinced her that the One who knew all that she had ever done was indeed the Christ of God, the Source of cleansing, renewal, peace, satisfaction. She who had thus by faith entered the kingdom of God became at once its ambassador to others and brought them to the Saviour of the world. Thus does the Spirit of life prove Himself to be first the Satisfier and then the Impeller unto effective witness-bearing, so that the kingdom of heaven is extended on earth.

In Eastern lands the larger houses are commonly built round the sides of a square plot, with doors and windows opening only on to the central court, save the one door to the street, and this is heavy, strong, and well barred within. Should a riot rage the occupants can retire within, bar the one door, and wait till the trouble subsides. But it is indispensable to have always at hand a sufficient stock of food as well as of water. For the latter purpose such large houses have their own well in the central court, and so are independent of external supplies, whereas the poor must face the turmoil without to fetch water from the public supply.

Many believers are in this last case, so very dependent upon friends, pastor, meetings, visitors, books, or the soul languishes. God be thanked for quiet times and the public well; but Christ

promised that the water should become *in* the believer a perennial fountain, giving inward satisfaction, rendering him independent of external aids, though duly grateful for them.

Drinking from this Fountain, living in the communion of the Holy Spirit, martyrs came forth from long solitary confinement to sing at the stake. While the common means of grace are available we should by all means use them, so cultivating the fellowship of the Spirit in the saints. Yet should the believer enjoy directly the indwelling Water of life, ever careful that the heavenly Fountain be not choked with the cares of life or the vanities of the worldling; for then he can be safe and satisfied when trials and temptations are as a town in turmoil around the dwelling of his inner man. Such contented souls are a strength to the kingdom.

A poor travelling preacher led to the Lord a young worldling. At parting the latter wished to give his spiritual father a token of love and was surprised, even amused, to have met a man who did not know that he was in want of anything.

On the two occasions when I drank from Jacob's well access was unhindered. Later the monks of the Greek Orthodox Church surrounded it with a wall and access was by their permission. Which thing is an allegory. Ecclesiasticism is a wall to hinder free general access to the Well and the Water of life, to Christ and His Spirit. Progress of the soul Christward is blocked by the "Church," with its priests, ceremonies, and charges, so that free access to the Saviour of the world is withdrawn. This is of the Devil. Almost the last sight presented in the Book of God is a river of Water of life, proceeding out of the throne of God and the Lamb; and among the last things spoken from heaven by the Man of Sychar's well, the Lord of glory, are the words, "*I will give* unto him that is athirst of the fountain of the water of life *freely*. . . . And he that is athirst let him come: he that will, *let him take* the water of life *freely* (Rev. 21: 6; 22: 17).

Alas that some have tasted of this sweet and heavenly water but have not thenceforth confined their drinking to it, but have mingled therewith the concoctions of the worldly and so have spoiled the heavenly draught. One drop of ink will spoil a quart of water.

But when God brought a redeemed people out of Egypt they left behind the great Nile, of which the Arab still says that he who once drinks of its waters will be sure to return to drink again. In the desert the new-born nation found that the first need was water. Similarly the new-born man's first need is the

indwelling of the Spirit of life. John 3 should be followed immediately by John 4. For Israel God provided no other drink than water: for the believer to-day the Lord provides no other refreshment or satisfaction than the communion of His blessed Spirit. And as water proved sufficient for Israel in the desert, so is the fellowship of the Spirit for us.

Caleb bestowed on his daughter Achsah land facing south, that is, land exposed to the tropical midday sun. Such land without water were useless. But she knew her father's heart and that he would not mock her by a useless wedding dowry; so she asked and he gave her the upper and lower springs. The upper springs gathered the rain or mist on the heights, which flowed down to the lower springs on her parched land (Judges 1: 11–15). Which also is an allegory. For this world, where we are set by God our Father, is a dry and thirsty land to the life born from above. The new man in Christ finds nothing under the sun that can preserve him from the scorching, withering heat of temptation. But let him ask of his Father in heaven and He will give him in possession the Water of life, that River which rises in the upper world and flows via the altar (Ezek. 47: 1), the cross of Christ, down to this parched earth, even the Spirit of God sent forth from heaven. Then shall the desert rejoice and blossom as the rose.

As before noted, in John 7: 37, 38, this heavenly Fountain within the believer rises and overflows, making fruitful the barren land around. If all this rich experience veiled under these figures is not the present enjoyment of the reader, let him inquire of the Lord why this is so, and let him allow Him to put away what hinders and fulfil His purpose and promise.

In the next chapter (5) John records the discourse in which Jesus explained and emphasized a vital fact, only implied when He spoke to the woman, even His personal equality with the Father. The disciple born of the Spirit, and who is also indwelled by the Spirit and satisfied, will go on to know Jesus as the Son of God. Such an one will conquer the world with all its seductions or threats (I John 5: 5), and will be empowered in his spirit to hear and obey Christ's next recorded teachings known as the Sermon on the Mount, which is impossible without this prior enrichment and equipment, but with it becomes the joy and rejoicing of the heart.

Note. There are some who practise speaking *to* the Holy Spirit in worship and prayer. There not being in Scripture direction or example to warrant this they employ such a passage as Num. 21: 17: "Spring up, O well; sing ye unto it." This is a misunderstanding and misuse of the figure of speech. In the Bible the water, not the

well, is the figure of the Holy Spirit, as in John 7: 38, 39, "from within him shall flow rivers of living water. This spake He of the Spirit."

The Son, as the Giver of the Spirit, is the "well" that yields the "water," the Spirit. The song in Num. 21 is addressed to the well not to the water. The Lord's direction to the woman as to getting the living water was "thou wouldest have asked of *Him* [Messiah] and *He* would have given thee living water."

JESUS AT THE WELL

There were two worn and weary ones
  That met at Jacob's well;
Both could of earth the emptiness
  And toil and sorrow tell:
The one had sought in paths of sin
  Her happiness to gain,
And found, as all our hearts have found,
  She sought it there in vain.

But He who sat by Jacob's well
  Was weary-hearted too;
This earth He found a wilderness
  In which no rest He knew:
He toiled, He daily spent His strength,
  His loins were girded fast;
There were but twelve hours in the day,
  He'd labour to the last.

Hungry and thirsty, weary too,
  He sits on Jacob's well;
But the strong thirstings of His love
  To rescue souls from hell,
Made Him forget all but her need,
  All but His Father's will;
His meat, His drink, His one delight
  His mission to fulfil.

And still, O Lord, art Thou the same,
  Though seated on the throne,
As when on that eventful day
  Thy grace to her was shown:
Thyself the precious gift of God,
  Thou givest waters free,
And openest lips, like hers of old,
  To win fresh souls to Thee.

(J. G. Deck: abridged.)

CHAPTER V

THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT. THE TWO HOUSES

Matt. 7: 24–27; Luke 6: 46–49

JOHN made many disciples, Jesus made more (John 4: 1). A disciple was a person who avowed publicly his purpose to comply with the teaching of a certain teacher. Matt. 5 to 7 is the first record of teachings the Lord gave to His disciples. The Sermon on the Mount is definitely addressed to disciples (Matt. 5: 1, 2), though in the hearing of the crowds and at its close extending its lessons to them all. There is nothing in the discourse which does *not* apply to disciples and most of it applies to them only.

That the Sermon applies to Christians, and in this present age, can be demonstrated.

I. (*a*) It cannot apply to the small remnant of Jews of the time of Antichrist who will fear God, because they will not be disciples of Christ. They will not believe on Jesus as Messiah until they see Him in His glory (Zech. 12 and 13). The last statement of the Old Testament shows that they will be under the law of Moses (Mal. 4: 4–6), and therefore not in the liberty of Christ.

(*b*) Christ knew that these disciples to whom He then spoke would be the nucleus of the church, not representative of an unbelieving remnant in a far distant day.

(*c*) When the Gospel of Matthew was issued the terms "disciples" and "Christians" meant the same persons (Acts 11: 26).

II. All the social conditions regarded in the Sermon are now present, not Millennial. Mourning, strife, persecution, corruption, oppression, adultery, divorce, fasting, the Bridegroom absent, dogs and swine, mammon worship, anxiety, the way of life narrow, few finding it, false prophets, mere professors, men being free to obey the Lord or to disobey—all this is found in the present age, none of it will obtain in the Millennium.

III. The kingdom has not come, for

(*a*) We are to pray that it may do so.

(*b*) The reward of faithfulness is still reserved in heaven.

(*c*) Judgment on our life and work is yet future.

IV. The Spirit of truth should remind the apostles of what Christ had taught (John 14: 26), and they were to teach disciples of all nations "to observe *all* things *whatsoever*" Christ had com-

manded them (Matt. 28: 20). This they did, as can be shown in great detail by tracing in the Epistles the very numerous quotations from or allusions to this Sermon, including those by Paul.

V. The Beatitudes are a full-length portrait of Christ Himself drawn by His own hand, and all disciples are called to become like Him (I Pet. 2: 21–23; etc.). Men of the type shown in the Beatitudes practise the precepts by nature, the new nature: others cannot do so at all.

VI. The counsels and precepts are peculiarly suitable and helpful to Christians in this age, as in the matters of oaths, anxiety, loving one's enemies, and the like. The guide and the road are obviously intended for each other.

The Sermon contains much instruction by pictures, and they are dual pictures.

(1) Believers are salt and light, both of which do their work by *antagonizing* the surrounding conditions (5: 13–15).

(2) The public synagogue, the secret chamber. Life before men, the heart before God (6: 1–18).

(3) Moth and rust; corruption inward and outward (6: 19, 20).

(4) Treasure and thief. Lay up treasure where it is safe (6: 19–21).

(5) Birds and lilies. Freedom from anxiety (6: 26–30).

(6) The mote and the beam: misjudgment and hypocrisy (7: 1–5).

(7) Dogs and things sacred; swine and pearls: the need of spiritual discrimination (7: 6).

(8) The narrow gate and way: the broad gate and way. Life or destruction (7: 13, 14).

(9) Sheep and wolves: danger and how to meet it (7: 15).

(10) Fruit good and bad. Deceivers exposed (7: 15–20). Here John's figure is adopted of the bad tree cut down and burnt (ver. 19).

This last picture of judgment leads to the final double picture of

THE TWO HOUSES

> Every one therefore who heareth these words of Mine, and doeth them, shall be likened unto a wise man, who built his house upon the rock; 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 the rock. And every one that heareth these words of Mine, and doeth them not, shall be likened unto a foolish man, who built his house upon the sand: and the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and smote upon that house; and it fell: and great was the fall thereof (7: 24–27).

In Matt. 13: 44–52 there are four pictures which are not specifically called parables, yet in ver. 53 are included in this general term. These four are introduced by the expression "the kingdom of the heavens *is like unto*." In Matt. 7: 24, 26 the parallel expression is used "Every one . . . shall *be likened unto*," which shows that a comparison may be a parable without this term being used.

The common gospel application of this parable to the final salvation or damnation of a sinner hides its true meaning and blunts its main lesson. The use may be legitimate, but the speaker should first make clear that it is by way of *application* and is not the primary intention of the passage.

For the Lord said nothing as to the fate of the builders. He did not even intimate that either was in the house at the time of the tempest, and certainly He did not say that the one was preserved and the other killed. This is imported without warrant. It is not for man to insert into the picture details which the Divine Artist left out. If he does this he will spoil the picture.

The lesson is this: That every man, disciple or otherwise, is spending his life—his time, strength, means, in building a life-structure, a character, an exhibition of himself; and this product of his energy will be severely tested, as a building by a tempest. If it stand the test the builder will have permanent advantage from his life-work; if it collapse, he will find that he had lived and toiled in vain.

The hearers, knowing their Old Testament, would be aware that the judgment of God had been pictured as a tempest demolishing a building: Isa. 28: 17; Ezek. 13: 10–16. In the latter prophecy it was *specified* that the builders should be destroyed by the fall of their wall, which adds point to the avoidance by Christ of this particular.

That the parable applies to real followers of Christ is shown by the application of the same essential figure to the Corinthian believers (I Cor. 3: 10–15). Paul had laid the only foundation upon which a well-built life can be erected, namely Christ Jesus. Nothing can impair the foundation; but a Christian may build thereupon a structure of indestructible materials—gold, silver, and stones vast, solid, and costly; or he may build of flimsy things—wood, hay, stubble. The coming day of the Lord will test severely the quality of the materials and the work, for that day will act as a fire. This figure also was well known to readers of the Old Testament: Isa. 10: 16–18; 29: 6; 30: 30; etc.

The picture may well have been taken from the great stone or marble temples. It may be seen at the vast Buddhist pagoda at Rangoon, the Shwe Dagōn. On the great rock area stands

the mighty gold-covered dome; around it are small wooden shrines, or the flimsy booths erected by pilgrims. A fire would sweep away the latter but leave the former undamaged.

That the lesson applies to the regenerate, but does not involve the eternal ruin of the builder, is clear from the apostle's statement concerning one who builds badly, that "if any man's work shall be burned he shall suffer loss: but he himself shall be saved; yet so as through fire."

When an aged atheist who had been converted was congratulated upon the salvation of his soul, he gave the discerning and searching reply, "Yes, my soul is saved, but my life is lost." He could not recover one hour of his eighty years and use it for God: all his time, strength, influence, and means were lost, lost irretrievably, though himself, the soul, the man, the sinner was saved by the blood of Christ.

It was this teaching that Christ so heavily emphasized and repeated to His disciples—that anyone might gain the whole world and lose his *life* (Matt. 10: 37–39; 16: 24–27; Mark 8: 34–38; Luke 9: 23–26. That *psuche* must in these connexions have its sense of "life," not of "soul" (= personality), is clear from the fact that no one is able to exchange his personality for something else: but he *can* barter away his *life*—time, influence, possessions, and lose it for ever. Such an one will enter eternity saved but penniless, with nothing to show for his life on earth.

The determining factor as to which it shall be is the attitude taken to the teachings of Christ. They who obey His words, beginning with His opening commandments in Matt. 5 to 7, will build securely; they who obey not His words will toil in vain. It is clear that the Lord in His day must approve actions that He Himself commanded; equally it is clear that nothing else will abide His tests. This involves the solemn condemnation of building into gospel service or church life, as much as into personal affairs, what the Lord has *not* sanctioned. It will be destroyed at His coming, and only the outcome of positive obedience to His known will can survive. It suffices to condemn an action that it is *not* commanded and has *not* had place in the heart of God (Jer. 7: 31).

Therefore let the Christian face seriously Christ's early teaching, the Sermon on the Mount, and His final instruction on the night of His betrayal, as well as all His commandments which lie between.

The dispensational theory that the first three Gospels are "Jewish," not directly for Christians, is very injurious to discipleship, and is plainly contrary to the direction of the Lord quoted, that disciples are to be taught to observe "all things

whatsoever" He had commanded the apostles (Matt. 28: 19, 20). The theory is calculated to induce in disciples a laxity which will expose them to the disaster of their life being in vain, their "house" being destroyed.

The demands of Christ upon His disciples, as given in the Sermon on the Mount, are exacting. Upon this George Müller, in 1850, remarked that some will ask how a Christian can pass through such a world as this? He replied that John 7: 17, gave the answer: "If any man willeth to do His will"; for said he, "WHOEVER *is* willing *to act out* these commandments (Matt. 5: 39–44) LITERALLY, will, I believe, be led with me to see that to take them literally is the will of God" (*Narrative*, part iv, 65, 66). Building on this principle George Müller did not labour in vain or spend his strength for naught and vanity.

CHAPTER VI

THE NEW AGE

Matt. 9: 14–17; Mark 2: 18–22; Luke 5: 33–39

1. The Bridegroom.

In Chapter II it has been noted that John the Baptist looked on Jesus as the Divine and heavenly Bridegroom foretold in the Old Testament. This position and dignity Jesus now tacitly accepts by speaking of Himself as the Bridegroom.

He was asked why His disciples were not practising the established rite of fasting. The followers of the Pharisees were doing so, and, more important, those of John His forerunner: why were His disciples omitting this religious observance?

We of this Christian age must note that our Lord by no means disparaged fasting. Not long before, He had assumed that His disciples would fast, and had told them in what spirit and manner they must do so in order for their abstinence to be acceptable with their Father in heaven (Matt. 6: 16–18). It is clear that the practice was known among the early Christians (Acts 13: 2, 3; 14: 23). In view of the first passage cited, concerning the going forth of two evangelists, it would be more scriptural and effectual if workers going abroad with the gospel were commended to the Lord with fasting rather than with a tea-meeting.

Nevertheless the Lord would make it clear that fasting as a ceremony, a rite, a merely religious and outward form, was out of keeping with the era of the kingdom of God He had announced. That form of fasting belonged to the old age now passing away, not to the new age already set in. It was of law, not of grace; of legal works, not of faith; as an outward obligation it was of the spirit of bondage, not of the liberty of sons.

Even according to Rabbinic law the marriage week was to be one of unmixed festivity, during which the persons concerned were released from various restrictions. The presence of the bridegroom forbade gloom. This the Lord applied to Himself and His immediate followers. He was the Bridegroom and it was unreasonable to expect His friends to be heavy and solemn, to fast in the legal spirit and form (see Edersheim, *Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah*, i. 662–664).

But, He intimated, His presence would presently be withdrawn and then His followers would fast; not, however, as a matter of

legality and ceremony but because of natural and overwhelming grief at His absence. It would be as if a bridegroom should mysteriously disappear and the joyous festivities be clouded and ended.

What says the reader's heart? Is the felt presence of the Lord his real joy? or does he feel pretty content without it? What says the worshipper's heart? Is he busy and pleased with a fair, external religious service? or is all worship empty and barren unless the Lord in the midst is a reality to his spirit?

In passing we must note how, at this early stage of His ministry, the Lord was already foretelling His removal from His followers. Therefore He was not at the same time telling men that His nuptials with Israel could be solemnized at once if they were willing.

2. *The Garment.* The situation created by the preaching of the good tidings of the kingdom was this—that something essentially new was introduced, something to which law and prophets had indeed pointed forward (Rom. 3: 21; Acts 26: 22, 23), but which could not be merged into the old system of legality and ceremonialism now decayed and ready to vanish (Heb. 8: 13). The old threadbare garment could not carry a patch from the new and heavy cloth, and the attempt to join them would ruin both.

Here is the history of Christendom in one small picture. The Corrupter of the church has from the beginning beguiled men to make this vain and ruinous attempt, and has kept them busy at the hopeless task. The chief organized Church systems are a patchwork of law and gospel, of ceremony and doctrine, of error and truth. And the result?—the new loses its strength and beauty and the old goes from bad to worse, so that what passes in such systems for Christianity is a torn, distorted caricature, a worn-out legalism, which can never cover the nakedness of the soul; it is but tattered rags, useless to even a beggar, utterly unfit and unseemly in the presence of God, the ALL-holy.

This was hard teaching for the Jewish legalists of Christ's day; it is equally hard for the "Christian" legalists of to-day. But it is stark, naked, invincible fact, and is the basis of apostolic doctrine as elaborated in, for example, *Romans*, *Galatians*, and *Hebrews*.

3. *The Wine and Wineskins.* In Scripture wine pictures the gladness which makes the spirit vigorous (Judges 9: 13; Ps. 104: 15; Eccles. 10: 19). Godly joy of spirit imparts strength (Neh. 8: 10).

The spirit, vigour, and gladness of the new age under the new covenant are an ecstasy the quality of which transcends the old nature, the old covenant, and the old ceremonies. "My joy," said the Lord, "may be in you, and your joy may be made full" (John 15: 11). His was a joy that maintained Him when reviled and rejected (Matt. 11: 25; Luke 10: 21). His greatly tried servant Paul could say that he "was sorrowful, yet always rejoicing" (II Cor. 6: 10), and Peter describes fellow-believers who were "put to grief in manifold trials," as nevertheless rejoicing "greatly with joy unspeakable and glorified" (I Pet. 1: 6–9).

Such heavenly joy and vigour cannot be generated by legality and ceremonial. It is a supernatural condition imparted to the spirit of man by direct action of the Spirit of God. And this His gracious activity is ever along the line of directing the believer to Christ as the Man of heaven and in heaven. This emancipates the heart from bondage to a system which, though originally ordered by God, is of the earth, for the earth, and operates only on earth. Abraham had known this experience before the Mosaic system was introduced: "Your father Abraham rejoiced to see my day; and he saw it, and was glad" (John 8: 56). This was occupation of heart with Christ, prior to Moses. Into this secret and its joy the Spirit leads the believer under the covenant of God with Abraham (Gal. 3: 13, 14, 29).

If the Christian who has known this heavenly liberty and gladness return to legality and externalism, even though it be copied from that of the Mosaic economy, he will presently give a display of the Lord's prediction in this passage. The worn-out system will break to pieces and he himself will lose his joy and strength.

The Reformation gave a large and solemn display of this. The Reformers abandoned the system of law for that of grace; for they repudiated works for faith as the condition of acceptance with God. For a time they were filled with joy in their new liberty and were strong to bear, to contend, to serve. But presently, in Protestant lands, they bowed the neck to the bondage of State control in religion. Then they advised their political rulers to deal with Baptists according to law, and to suppress them by violence, because they would not bow to civil authority in the things of God and accommodate themselves to the revived legalism. Thus the Reformers abandoned grace for law, liberty for bondage, worship by the Spirit for a modified ceremonial.

And the result was that the revived system of law broke down as a means of furthering the gospel, the joy that had made the movement triumphant was lost, and the Reformation stagnated, having a name to live, yet being dead.

Nothing is so useless as a withered wineskin, or a decrepit system, or a legally-minded Christian. Such lapse and ruin was the peril of the churches in Galatia and of the Christians addressed in the *Hebrews*. It is a perennial danger, as acute to-day as ever.

4. *The Old Wine.* Luke, guided by the Spirit, learned and recorded the words with which the Lord had closed this instruction, "No one having drunk old wine desireth new; for he saith, The old is good."

This commendation of the old seems to be a contradiction of the instruction just given, that the old must give place to the new. But our Lord was no mere theorist, oblivious to facts. He acknowledges that the old system was in itself good. He had not come to destroy the law and the prophets, but to bring in the better things to which they had pointed (Matt. 5: 17, 18; comp. Rom. 7: 12; I Tim. 1: 8). And He knew that honest hearts had derived benefit from the old system, would declare it to be good, and might only slowly recognize that the highest and perfect had now come. "The better often is the foe that keeps us from the best." To such hearers He taught no more than they were able to bear. He could wait three years from His interview with Nicodemus until he had found grace to espouse the Lord openly. This spirit of grace and forbearance is displayed and applied in Romans 14 and 15. The kingdom of God is ruled by love; neither its King, nor its officers who have His spirit, will break a bruised reed or quench a dimly burning flax. Its golden principle is: "We that are strong ought [are under obligation] to bear the infirmities of the weak, and not to please ourselves" (Rom. 15: 1).

CHAPTER VII

THE CRISIS

Matt. 11 and 12; Luke 10: 13–24; 11: 14–26

THE ministry of John the Baptist was in the energy of the Spirit of God. The impact upon the whole people was immediate and profound: "all men reasoned in their hearts concerning John whether haply he were the Messiah" (Luke 3: 15).

The ministry of the Lord Jesus was also in the power of the Spirit and it widened and intensified the impression made by John. John wrought no signs; Jesus confirmed His claims and teaching by many, yet were they but subordinate to His teaching.

In the forty-five places in the Gospels where English Versions give the word "Master" the legitimate translation to-day is "Teacher." An example is John 3: 2. It would be foolish to make Nicodemus say to Christ, "We know that thou art a *master* come from God." Yet in ver. 10 the A.V. makes Christ say to Nicodemus "Art thou a *master* of Israel?" The R.V. rightly has, "Art thou the teacher of Israel?" This was his function as a rabbi. In the ten places where the word comes in Acts and the Epistles, the A.V. rightly gives "teacher," and in over ninety places the corresponding verb is always rendered by "teach."

If "Teacher" had been used regularly the chief office of Christ would have been better appreciated. It was lack of Divine knowledge from which men suffered (Hos. 4: 6; Luke 19: 42; Eph. 4: 18). This knowledge the Lord imparted.

It is by the teaching of the truth that God is pleased to save (Matt. 28: 19, 20; I Cor. 1: 21). It was a notable spectacle to see the whole countryside flocking to hear John preach. It was stirring and significant to see thousands of men and women staying for days and nights on the hillsides to hear Jesus teach concerning the kingdom of God. And how inexhaustible was the theme that could be so enlarged.

It was by his preaching friars that Wycliffe began to stir England from its darkness and death. It was by preaching that God wrought through the Reformation, and later in the Methodist movement in England. It is *such* preaching that is the urgent need to-day. All kinds of specious and often carnal devices are employed to attract the people, but these do not

bring men to Christ and salvation, but rather detract from the message. If it please God in mercy again to anoint preachers with the Spirit and with power nothing else will be needed, nor can anything else meet the need.

There are godly people who claim to have had a revival of the miraculous gifts. If there is a genuine exercise of them granted by the Spirit of God this should be matter for thanksgiving. But it is noticeable that the *preaching* of these friends is not more blessed than that of some who make no claim to these gifts, and very few God-gifted *teachers* are among them.

The preaching of John, of the Lord, and of His messengers had reached and stirred the whole land. Leaders and people had been compelled to face the claims of Christ. His teaching was with authority and challenged conscience and will. This had continued for perhaps a year and a half from the time that John stepped forth as herald of the King. All had been able to grasp the bearing of the preaching. It demanded abandonment of sin; it required more, even a dethroning of self as the object of life; it called men to fix their attention on the things of God and to pay supreme regard to the future instead of the present. Christ talked often of carrying a cross. All knew what that meant. Their stern Roman tyrants had compelled all too many each to carry his cross to the execution ground, there to die on that cross.

As the real implications of this message came home to men the tide turned away from the Teacher, popularity waned, the crowds thinned, and resentment arose, fanned fiercely by the religious leaders. There came a full and fearful demonstration that miraculous signs and vast philanthropy do not of themselves change the human heart, not even of the religious (John 12: 37). Christ had endorsed and enforced the teaching of the prophets that not merely new works were required, but a new man to do the new works. Men must be born again. The masses, dulled and contented by the opiate of external ceremonies, were not ready for so drastic an experience, involving such far-reaching changes in daily life. They invented fearful and malicious calumnies against these exacting teachers: John was demon-driven; Jesus luxurious and licentious.

The situation thus reached Christ pictured in the parable of the *Children at Play in the Market-place.*

The one party piped merrily, the others were listless and did not dance to the music. The former changed their tune and wailed as for the dead, but the others did not beat their breasts in mock mourning.

This is a fearful state to reach, that the man should become unresponsive, even resentful, so that reasons are invented for rejecting the King and the kingdom of heaven. Thus it was with Israel at that time, and the ingratitude was most conspicuous in the region which had been most blessed by the presence and kindness of the Lord.

The visitor to the Lake of Galilee to-day will look in vain for Bethsaida, Chorazin, and the town of Capernaum. But the city of Tiberias is there, with some of the shore fortifications of Christ's time. The former towns He upbraided, and denounced against them the judgment of their sins. They are gone. But the Lord is not said to have visited Tiberias, nor to have reproached it for direct rejection of Himself; and it remains until this day.

The bitterness of being rejected could not diminish the trust and joy of the Son in the Father, and He gave thanks that matters were moving as they were. It was the Father's good pleasure, in which the Son rejoiced.

Nor could ingratitude lessen the grace of His spirit, so that at that same time He invited the burdened to come to Him and find rest to the soul. But His keen enemies, the Pharisees, dogged and opposed Him, and took counsel to destroy Him. This intensified malice He met by withdrawing from them, still as He went dispensing mighty blessings, even to causing a demon-paralysed man, who was blind and dumb, to see and hear.

The crowds were amazed, and again the question was forced upon their minds whether Jesus was indeed the Son of David, the King of Israel, the expected Messiah. This was the crucial point. If the crowds should so believe the hold of the Pharisees over them would end. To avert this, these blind leaders of the blind went further than the suggestion that John had a demon. Deliberately they declared that Christ was empowered by the very Prince of the demons himself. Thus they attributed the work of the Spirit of God to the Devil.

Nor was the present occasion the first when His opponents made this blasphemous suggestion (Matt. 9: 34; Mark 3: 22). Nor was it the last occasion. Later it sprang readily to the lips of the common people: "Thou hast a demon" (John 7: 20); "thou art a Samaritan, and hast a demon"; "now we know that thou hast a demon" (John 8: 48, 52). "Many of them said, He hath a demon" (John 10: 20). The crowd followed their leaders, and thus, while some refused the thought, the many adopted it, and the general national situation ripened for judgment.

Alas, they did not see that it was the Prince of the demons

himself who had instilled into their minds this evil thought about Christ, and thereby they themselves passed in sevenfold degree under his blinding, hardening power. Of this fearful prospect the Lord faithfully warned them, saying:

> The unclean spirit when he is gone out of the man, passeth through waterless places, seeking rest; and finding none, he saith, I will turn back unto my house whence I came out. And when he is come, he findeth it swept and garnished. Then goeth he, and taketh to himself seven other spirits more evil than himself; and they enter in and dwell there; and the last state of that man becometh worse than the first. Even so shall it be also unto this evil generation. Luke 11: 24–26; Matt. 12: 43–45.

The deliberate perversion of heart shown by the Pharisees in attributing to the Evil Spirit the work of the Holy Spirit, brought from the Lord the most solemn statements that ever passed His lips of grace and truth. They are given three times as follows:

> He that is not with Me is against Me, and he that gathereth not with Me scattereth. Therefore I say unto you, Every sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven unto men; but the blasphemy against the Spirit shall not be forgiven. And whosoever shall speak a word against the Son of man, it shall be forgiven him; but whosoever shall speak against the Holy Spirit, it shall not be forgiven him, neither in this age nor in that which is to come. Matt. 12: 30–32.
>
> Verily I say unto you, All their sins shall be forgiven unto the sons of men, and their blasphemies wherewith soever they shall blaspheme: but whosoever shall blaspheme against the Holy Spirit hath never forgiveness, but is guilty of eternal sin: because they said, He hath an unclean spirit. Mark 3: 28–30.
>
> And every one who shall speak a word against the Son of man, it shall be forgiven him: but unto him who blasphemeth against the Holy Spirit it shall not be forgiven. Luke 12. 10.

Here is the fulness of grace. All blasphemies can be forgiven, even that directed against the Son, so virtuous is His atoning death, the shedding of His precious blood. But here is the limit of grace. Blasphemy against the Holy Spirit is unforgivable; to this the atonement cannot apply. The terms are plain and emphatic: "the blasphemy against the Spirit shall not be forgiven . . . it shall not be forgiven him . . . hath never forgiveness . . . it shall not be forgiven."

The sentence is made yet more specific as to time: "it shall not be forgiven him, neither in this age, nor in that which is to come." The "never" is thus divided into two periods. Scripture speaks of many ages of the past, and says of the present period of world

history that "upon us the ends of the ages are come" (I Cor. 10: 11). The Lord has himself explained this plural "ends" by His later words: "The sons of *this* age marry . . . but they that are accounted worthy to attain to *that* age, etc." (Luke 20: 34, 35). "This" age and "that" age comprise this present period of grace followed by the Millennial age of glory. Together they form the double ending of all preceding ages.

Now forgiveness is obtainable in both these periods, but that coming age of the kingdom closes with the final assize of the universe before the eternal ages set in (Rev. 20: 11–15). At that last session of the Divine judgment destiny is declared. If, therefore, forgiveness is not obtained by then it will never be available, of which the words before us of the Judge are conclusive proof.

This is confirmed by His definition of this blasphemy, that the blasphemer is "guilty of eternal sin." The punishment is eternal because the sin is eternal. It cannot in this instance be objected that a sin in time is visited with a punishment which is eternal, for this sin itself is eternal, unending. And this reveals the reason why the guilty party can never be forgiven: he never ceases from the sin. The attitude of heart which caused him to utter the blasphemy is beyond change and repentance, and therefore the sin remains beyond forgiveness.

The basic reason why one who thus affronts the Spirit can never afterward reach repentance and renewal of mind is that the Spirit of truth alone can produce such a change of heart. He alone can convict of sin, and the blasphemer resists the Spirit to the point when even He can no more influence him.

Heb. 10: 26–31 has not this particular sin in view, but rather apostasy by one who is regenerate and is judicially "in Christ." But that passage indicates a spiritual activity by God which can apply to an unbeliever also and may issue for him in eternal consequences from which one seen judicially in Christ is secured by redemption.

This passage follows the following line. Historically God gave to Israel the law, which if a man keeps he shall live. Israel as a people refused to obey that holy law. In the fulness of the seasons God then sent to them His Son. Him they rejected and slew. Yet God had still one reserve measure of grace. He sent His Spirit to convict and recover men. Many responded in repentance and faith, but the vast majority of Israel hardened their hearts against the Spirit and sealed their national doom, for they had thus exhausted the Divine resources of mercy. There was nothing more possible to the grace of God and justice took its course.

This process ended in national doom because the individuals involved followed individually that course of resistance to God. It can be, and has been, followed by persons not of Israel. Dr. A. T. Pierson told of a judge in the United States who for long years sat regularly under his ministry, but was impervious to all appeals, public and private. He died in that obdurate state and then his Christian widow told Dr. Pierson his history. Twenty years before he had been deeply convicted of sin and had resolved to become a Christian. But he was in charge of a Bill in the Legislative Assembly of his State and he acknowledged that as a follower of Christ he could not promote that Bill. But his political position and future depended upon his success in getting that Bill passed, and he earnestly avowed his intention to follow Christ as soon as he had secured his public position. He got the Bill through, but from that hour he never again had the slightest concern as to the salvation of his soul. Thus, without any expressed blasphemy, he had reached the same state of determined resistance to the Spirit which carried him beyond repentance.

The subtlety of evil spirits has plunged into despair many sincere hearts by the misapplication of the Lord's words to sins and states to which they do not apply. As long as the conscience is awake and the heart sorrows over sin, as long as the man fears the wrath of God and longs for forgiveness, it is clear that he has *not* so sinned against the Spirit as to be beyond repentance and pardon. For had he *so* sinned these convictions and fears and longings for peace would have ceased. Let such distressed souls take to heart the Saviour's plain and comforting assurance that "every [other] sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven," even though they "shall speak a word against the Son of man"; yea, says the Lord, "Verily I say unto you, *all* their sins shall be forgiven unto the sons of men, and their blasphemies wherewith soever they shall blaspheme," so long as they do not advance to such persistent and invincible opposition to the Holy Spirit as is here in view. To each angel and man God has granted real freedom of decision in his own affairs. In grace He seeks, yea strives, by His Spirit, so to influence man's mind that he shall turn away from evil and be saved by faith in Christ. But the Lord had to say to men of His time, "I would . . . and ye would not," and they had their own way to their own destruction (Matt. 23: 37).

In this way, and at this stage of the Lord's ministry, Israel, leaders and masses, reached the solemn and decisive crisis in their relations with the Son of God. They took their way and

He went His way, departing further from each other by necessity of the case.

In love and pity He would still help and heal and teach, but a new general situation had set in which compelled a change in His attitude and action as the Teacher sent from God.

CHAPTER VIII

THE TEACHER, HIS OUTLOOK AND YOKE

Matt. 11: 25–30

He who would understand His teaching must understand the Teacher, His emotions, outlook, and objects. This the Evangelists enable us to do, always presuming that, by His Spirit, our hearts have sympathy with His heart. For the Evangelists were not mere chroniclers recording facts, but, by the infilling and inworking of His own Spirit, they understood *Him*, and their records include, at appropriate points in the narrative, words of His own, or comments of theirs, which open to view His inner life and reveal Himself.

Thus they tell us that at the time of the crisis just considered, "at that season Jesus rejoiced in the Holy Spirit, and answered and said, I thank Thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that Thou didst hide these things from the wise and understanding, and didst reveal them unto babes: yea, Father, for so it was well pleasing in Thy sight" (Matt. 11: 25, 26; Luke 10: 21).

This reveals that in the bitter hour of ingratitude and rejection Jesus turned to the Almighty Lord and talked to Him as Father. It was a strength and solace that His Father was pleased that such untoward circumstances should confront His Son. The outlook was unpromising: the wise and influential were opposing Him fiercely; His cause had only babes to support it. But it was the will of His Father, and the Son was grateful.

He is acting and speaking in the full consciousness of His own deity. He is possessor and controller of the universe, though poor to the extreme. He is comprehended by His Father only, and He alone comprehends the Father. Therefore in person and knowledge He is Divine.

His highest and deepest desire is to initiate others into His knowledge of the Father. They alone gain this knowledge to whom the Son is willing to impart it. His will, therefore, is sovereign.

Two important things are thus made evident. That Christ was not anticipating general acceptance by man, but was ready to reveal God to such as would welcome the knowledge of Him as Father. This last is the full and essential privilege of Christianity. It was therefore upon this ground the Lord was already

thinking, speaking, and acting. Not in the least was He contemplating the maintenance of the Jewish economy, the "old garment," but was introducing to His followers the new era, the heavenly, in which they would be no more children but sons, with the spirit of sonship in their hearts.

The Lord had already shown this when speaking on the Mount: "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called *sons* of God. . . . Ye shall be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect . . . if ye forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you . . . your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things" (Matt. 5: 9, 48; 6: 14, 15, 32; comp. Gal. 3: 23–26).

All are invited to share His rest of heart: but only those can find that rest who share His yoke. The heart of Christ was at rest though His load was heavy. This rest was found by accepting meekly the will of His Father as perfect. The lowly in heart will accept that same will as being "good and well-pleasing and perfect" (Rom. 12: 2), and will enjoy the rest of heart that Jesus knew. One who heard Christ's invitation said later, "Lord, show us *the Father* and it sufficeth us" (John 14: 8).

The Yoke

This picture of a man under a yoke is full of instruction.

1. Jeremiah 27 tells that the prophet was to send bands and bars to the surrounding peoples with the Divine notification that Jehovah had exercised His sovereign right as Creator and Lord of all to put all nations under the rule of Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, and that He required them "to put their neck *under the yoke*" of that monarch (vers. 8, 11, 12). If they refused they would be destroyed, but they were promised rest by accepting that yoke, each people in its own land (ver. 11).

In like manner God has set all the universe under His Son as its Lord. Such as refuse His rule shall perish; such as accept His light and easy yoke find rest in His kingdom of righteousness and peace by the Holy Spirit, who animates that Kingdom (Rom. 14: 17).

2. A yoke may be very heavy and burdensome. It was so with the taxes and forced labour that Solomon exacted (I Kings 14). Not so does the true Solomon overload His people. Outwardly Paul's long life of service to Christ seemed to men to be overwhelmingly hard; yet he himself described it as but a "light" affliction and very transitory (II Cor. 4: 17). He used the same word as Jesus used, as much as to say that he had proved

true the Lord's word "My burden is light" (Matt. 11: 30).[1] John's life seemed equally severe and hard, but he confirmed Paul by saying that the Lord's commands are not grievous (I John 5: 3).

3. Again, a yoke is an instrument that compels two to work together, that so they may perform labour that neither could do alone. We are called to be co-workers with God; and, as stated above, to work with the Lord under His yoke of serving and pleasing the Father is to find life relieved of strain on the spirit. But for this to be so, self-made plans and self-devised tasks must be abandoned. Many earnest workers wear out and pass away in the prime of life. Is this because they accept far more work than the Master they serve places upon them?

Only beasts of similar size and nature were to be yoked. The ox and the ass cannot pull together, being disproportionate in size, strength, and temperament (Deut. 22: 10). The need for this regulation was real. In Egypt a camel and an ass are often seen yoked at field work, which is cruel. There is equal need for the injunction to the Christian that he shall not be unequally yoked with an unbeliever in Christ. The worldling *cannot* walk and work with Christ; therefore the Christian when yoked to the non-Christian, *must* go the way of the latter and cease to walk and work with the Lord. This is true even if the unbeliever be an amiable moral person, with high natural ideals and tastes.

In consequence, the heart of the Christian so yoked loses the restfulness afforded by Christ's yoke, and must endure the fret and strain of the uneasy yoke and the heavy burden of the unbeliever. Whereas they who throw off the unequal yoke, and accept Christ's yoke, know the rest and bliss of the accompanying promise of God, "I will receive you, and will be a Father to you, and ye shall be to me sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty" (II Cor. 6: 14–7: 1).

To encourage heavy-laden men to adopt His proposal and accept His yoke the perfect Servant then drew aside the veil of His inner man and showed us a spirit that was meek and was delighted to do the will of Another, a heart that was lowly and condescended to persons and circumstances and service that were lowly, a heart that was full of love and therefore longed to bring others into its own blessedness.

It was in this gracious frame of mind that Jesus faced rejection

[1] These are the only places where the word *elaphros* comes in the New Testament, but it is found in the LXX at Ex. 18: 26; Job 7: 6; 9: 25; 24: 18; Ezek. 1: 7 only. Its cognate *elaphria* is found in N.T. only at II Cor. 1: 17.

by the many and acceptance by the few, and steadfastly set His face to go to Jerusalem and complete by His death the then present will of His Father.

This course He well knew was indispensable to the establishing of the kingdom of grace and glory on a righteous and eternal basis. It was the path in which He became the Perfecter of faith (Heb. 12: 2), by giving in the sufferings of death the perfect display of faith. Forsaken by God He declared "but Thou art holy" (Ps. 22: 3). To all outward appearance he had laboured in vain and spent His strength for naught and vanity, but by faith He was sure that His recompense was with His God and would be granted to Himself in due season (Isa. 49: 4).

It was One with this state of heart, with this outlook, expectation, and purpose, who continued to teach the people, but who, because of the hardness of the majority, henceforth largely veiled His teaching in parables. Only such as, by the Spirit, have the same lowliness of heart, with the same outlook, expectation, and purpose, can perceive the meaning and accept the lessons of His parables.

If it be supposed that the gospel in this age is to convert the world, we are supposing that which Christ never expected, nor His apostles. If we expect that from among the masses the Lord will in this age gather out a minority for Himself, we are entertaining His expectation and furthering His present purpose. Acts 15: 14–18 shows that the apostles so viewed the present age and the present work of God on earth.

CHAPTER IX

THE REASON FOR PARABLES

Matt. 13

THE acute and trained eye of the artist observes more than the ordinary person perceives, so that the latter often discerns in a picture or portrait features he would not himself have noticed in the original. So also does pictorial or parabolic language often reveal more truth than a plain statement would do, and set it forth in a more vivid and striking form which arrests the mind,

On the other hand, one of dull mind or blurred vision may see nothing arresting in the most beautiful picture, whether painted by the brush or in words; for which reason the lesson the artist meant to exhibit or the teaching conveyed in the parable may remain concealed from such an one.

Of necessity this will be especially the case with one who may indulge a prejudice against the artist or his style, or against a teacher and his doctrine. If such a prejudice be deliberate and pronounced it may effectually disable a hearer from perceiving the meaning of the lesson, especially if conveyed in parabolic form. None is so blind as he who *won't* see.

Thus when Ezekiel spoke of the wrath of God against Israel as a fire that should utterly consume the forest of the Negev (the south country), because God veiled the warning under the figure of a forest fire, they said of the prophet, "Is he not a speaker of parables?" (Ezek. 20: 45–49). And they paid no heed to the warning.

In the moral realm this opposition may be pushed so far and become so determined that a teacher may see it useless to press his doctrine upon the opposer, and may henceforth state it in so veiled a form that the opponent, being self-blinded, may be unable to benefit by it; whereas the honest-hearted hearer may be illuminated by the selfsame instruction.

This is an instance of the Divine government of men. Pharaoh himself hardened his heart, deliberately and persistently, until he *could* not bow to the will of God; whereupon God judicially confirmed that hardness and the wilful rebel met the doom he had invoked and compelled (Ex. chs. 3–14).

It will again be thus at the close of this age of gospel light: "because they received not the love of the truth that they might

be saved . . . for this cause *God sendeth* them a working of error, that they should believe the lie; in order that (*hina*) they all might be judged who believed not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness," that is, especially in the unrighteous rejection of God and His Son which the Lawless One will promote and require (II Thess. 2: 10–12).

This principle of government has been already exhibited in the case of Israel. They having long and wilfully rejected God's message through the prophets, at last Isaiah received the commission to

> Go, and tell this people, Hear ye indeed, but understand not; and see ye indeed, but perceive not. Make the heart of this people fat, and make their ears heavy, and shut their eyes; lest they see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and turn again, and be healed (Isa. 6: 9, 10).

By the time in the ministry of Christ to which Matt. 12 and 13 brings us the leaders and the people as a whole had hardened their hearts against Him and His message. At this stage His form of public instruction became principally parabolic; and, in reply to the inquiry of His disciples why this was so, He quoted the words of God to Isaiah just given. The moral hardness and blindness of the people had become again as in Isaiah's day and the righteous and judicial dealing of God could not but correspond.

The way the Lord changed the form of the statement is impressive. To Isaiah it was said, "Make the heart of this people fat . . . and shut their eyes; lest they see with their eyes." This Christ adapted to the then present fact: "this people's heart is [already] waxed gross, and their ears are [already] dull of hearing, and their eyes they have [themselves] closed; Lest haply they should perceive, etc.," and "*Therefore* speak I unto them in parables" (Matt. 13: 10–15).

Luke's version of the words, formed upon the report of them which his inquiries had given to him, shows how definitely those who had heard Christ understood Him in the above sense, for he gives the statement thus:

> Unto you it is given to know the mysteries of the kingdom of God: but to the rest in parables; that [*hina* in order that, to the end that] seeing they may not see, and hearing they may not understand" (Luke 8: 10).

This moral process in man, and its corresponding moral and judicial principle in God, abide; for which reason the state of

heart of the reader of Christ's parables will determine whether or not he can understand and benefit by them. As God said again by Isaiah (66: 2): "to this man will I look, even to him that is poor and of a contrite spirit, and that trembleth at My word"; and as Christ said: "If any man willeth to do [intends to do *thelē*] God's will, he shall know of [understand] the teaching" (John 7: 17).

Therefore to His few faithful disciples the Lord said privately, "Unto you it is given to know . . . but to them it is not given"; and the reason for this pregnant distinction is added: "For whosoever hath, to him shall be given: but whosoever hath not, from him shall be taken away even that which he hath" (Matt. 13: 11, 12; Mark 4: 25; Luke 8: 18). Luke's additional words give the key to this: "Take heed therefore *how* ye hear." The disciples listened with a mind eager to understand and ready to believe and to obey: the rest heard with either listlessness, or curiosity, or resolute opposition. To the former more knowledge would be granted; the latter would be deprived of what knowledge they seemed to have. This solemn position will be illustrated by Christ in the later parables of the pounds and talents (Luke 19: 11–27; Matt. 25: 14–30).

The principle being moral in nature is of perpetual application. In what frame of mind is my reader considering the passages before us? If in that of the crowd, the reading may result in loss; only if he be really a *disciple* will he profit.

The Lord's reply to the inquiry of the disciples indicated a further point of crucial importance. As before observed, from the beginning of His ministry He had been introducing His hearers to new elements of a new era of the kingdom of God. Now he mentions the "mysteries" of the kingdom. The word does not mean something "mysterious," and therefore abstruse, difficult to grasp, but simply something that had not been before revealed. When made known the matter may be easy to understand. This aspect of the parables, as revealing things hitherto kept in reserve, Matthew emphasized by saying that Christ's present teaching was a fulfilment of a prophetic word of a thousand years earlier:

> I will open my mouth in parables:
> I will utter things hidden from the foundation of the world (Ps. 78: 2).

According to the Hebrew text of the psalm Asaph had in mind to "utter dark sayings of old" which had been passed on by the fathers, but not understood. This is the character of a

"mystery," something hinted formerly, but only obscurely: now the time had come for disciples to learn the hidden meaning. Precisely so Paul wrote of his "understanding in the mystery of Christ; which in other generations was not made known unto the sons of men, as it hath now been revealed unto His holy apostles and prophets in the Spirit." It had been made known but not "as now," that is, obscurely, not clearly. Formerly it was suggested, now it is revealed. And the essential point of this "mystery of Christ" which Paul lifts into relief is that "the Gentiles are fellow-heirs, and fellow-members of the body, and fellow-partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel," that is, with the Jews (Eph. 3: 3–6).

This inclusion of the Gentiles, equally with the descendants of Abraham, was contained in the promise to that man of faith that in him all the families of the earth should be blessed (Gen. 12: 3). Instances of the Divine purpose had occurred at intervals, as in Rebekah, Rahab, and Ruth being incorporated into the people of God, and in the direction that an alien when circumcised should be as one "born in the land," an Israelite. But the time for the general fulfilment of this purpose was not made known of old, nor the steps and stages thereto.

In these parables the Lord points to this extension of the ways of God by explaining that the area of His operations as the Sower would be worldwide: "the field is the world" (Matt. 13: 38). This was in contrast to His former direction to the Twelve, when He had sent them to preach, that they were not to go to the Gentiles or the Samaritans, but to the lost sheep of the house of Israel (Matt. 10: 5, 6). For the method of God is "to the Jew first," but "also to the Greek" (Rom. 2: 10; Acts 13: 46).

This is an example of that feature of the New Testament finely worked out by Bernard in *The Progress of Doctrine in the New Testament*, that each doctrine taught by the apostles is rooted in a germinal statement by the Lord Jesus. This is true of Paul as of the others. The fact is an absolute bar to the theory that the Gospels are "Jewish," the Epistles "Christian." They must be construed together as seed and fruit, suggestion and expansion, commencement and completion.

In the Gospels we learn what "Jesus *began* to do and to teach" until His ascension to heaven (Acts 1: 1). In the Acts and the rest of the New Testament we learn what He *continued* to do and to teach from the Ascension and onwards. It is all one account of the continuous doing and teaching of one Person, from His baptism to the close of the apostolic days. His own anointing with the Spirit at Jordan, and the anointing of His disciples with the Spirit at Pentecost, assured one continuing plan and operation

to go forward until the close of this age, and the then more extensive pouring out of the Spirit, first upon Israel (Ezek. 36: 27), and then upon all flesh at the beginning of the age to come (Joel 2: 28). The Scripture is silent as to any withdrawal of the Spirit at the close of this age. It knows only of an ever-extending outpouring until all men are endued.

CHAPTER X

PARABLES OF THE MYSTERIES OF THE KINGDOM

Matt. 13; Mark 4; Luke 8: 4–15

It signifies much that at this juncture Jesus addresses the Father as "Lord of heaven and earth" (Matt. 11: 25).[1] The Son was in this world to reassert the sovereign rights of God. Those rights had been denied, by angels in heaven, by angels and men on earth. Christ maintained those rights, in the first place by doing as man the whole will of God. Then as Teacher He called others to repent of their sin in not having lived as loyal subjects of the Lord of heaven and earth, and He taught them that, through His coming and atoning death, sin could be forgiven and they themselves receive from the God they had defied the free gift of a share in His eternal life, the life that is the animating energy of His eternal kingdom (John 3: 14–16; 6: 40, 51–58; 10: 10–18, 27, 28; 12: 32; Matt. 26: 28).

The holy angels act by the impulse of a divine principle and energy, the doing of the will of God (Ps. 103: 20); and when in due time this will shall prevail on earth as it does in heaven then will God's kingdom have come fully to this earth.

In the meanwhile, during the present age, those who thus repent and are born of God are "rescued out of the sphere of authority of darkness, and are translated into the kingdom of the Son of God's love" (Col. 1: 13). Thus they are rescued from the Evil One (Matt. 6: 13), who keeps his subjects in the dark about all things divine and eternal, and they are become subjects in the kingdom of light, where God imparts knowledge of the great realities of heaven and earth, of time and eternity.

This aspect of matters Christ will open up later by explaining that He is the light; and now, at the crisis and juncture reached, He will diffuse light by outlining the phases through which the kingdom of God and heaven must pass in its development on earth on to its coming establishment on earth in power and visible glory.

It is to be observed that the theme is the kingdom, not the church, even though the parables cover the age during which the

[1] The title Lord is frequently applied to the Father. By Christ (Matt. 4: 7, 10; 9: 38; 11: 25; Luke 4: 18, 19); by men (Acts 4: 26; 17: 24; II Cor. 6: 18; I Tim. 1: 14); by heavenly beings (Rev. 4: 8, 11; 11: 15, 17; 15: 3, 4; 16: 7; 19: 6; 21: 22).

church is being called out. The church is a "palace-temple" for the dwelling of God (Eph. 2: 20–22), a "city" to be the capital of His kingdom, a "bride" to be the wife of the Lamb (Rev. 21: 9, 10); but a palace or a city or a queen is not the whole kingdom, but only a small part of it, even though the most honourable part. It is the widest present aspect of the kingdom on earth that is set forth here; phases that will accompany the demand of the gospel that men shall render to God the honour due to Him as the Sovereign, the Lord of heaven and earth. The various responses to that message are depicted. The vast masses of mankind who would never hear the message are not part of the picture, not having come under the influence of the kingdom of God; but wherever the message comes the effects will be as now indicated. Those hearers who bow to the authority of the King become members of His kingdom though as yet it is not a visible community or State on earth.

It is necessary to observe three general features of the parables by which this instruction is given.

First, the comparison of the kingdom of heaven is not to any one or other of the details of the picture drawn but to the whole picture. It is not the sower, or the seed, or the soil separately that forms the comparison, but all in combination. The kingdom of heaven is not likened to the leaven, or the woman, or the meal separately but to the combined action of the three.

Second, that the first parable is given by the Lord as a picture of His own activity as a Teacher, so that the series commences at the time of Christ. But the final parable is of the judgment that will close this era at "the consummation of the age" (Matt. 13: 49). Evidently therefore the parables cover the whole age.

Third, that once any given phase has set in it will persist until the age closes, so that at the consummation the kingdom of God will present all the phases of all the parables. Thus the tares continue in the field until that consummation, when "the Son of man shall send forth His angels" for judgment or salvation (Matt. 13: 40, 41).

The First Parable: The Sower

Matt. 13: 3–9, 18–23; Mark 4: 2–20; Luke 8: 4–8

In the first place the kingdom will be as when a sower goes forth to sow.

1. *The Sower* (Matt. 13: 37) is the Son of man. The particular aspect of the kingdom of God here in view commenced with His public ministry. John had prepared the way for the work which

Jesus carried forward. But the work did not end with the departure of Christ from the earth. By the agency of His Spirit He has ever since carried it on through His servants in whom He acts by His Spirit. What He did and taught when here in the flesh was a beginning only (Acts 1: 1); and when His followers went forth and preached He was still with them (Matt. 28: 20), working with them and confirming the word (Mark 16: 20); and thus it could be said to Gentiles who had never heard the Lord that "He came and preached peace to you that were far off" (Eph. 2: 17).

Be the preacher never so active he will labour in vain unless he can say with Paul "Christ speaketh in me" (II Cor. 13: 3); for that which Christ said is true of necessity in the kingdom of God, "apart from Me ye can do nothing" (John 15: 5). Therefore must we, by the obedience of love, abide in heart fellowship with Him, or we shall labour to no eternal purpose, even should we seem to influence thousands. In all times and all places the Son of man is the true Sower.

2. *The Sowing.* The field is the heart of man, so the seed is to be cast everywhere: "Go ye, therefore, and make disciples [from among] all nations" (Matt. 28: 19).

Our work is the sowing of seed: the imparting of knowledge, that is, the facts concerning God, His Son, His kingdom, so instilling truth into the mind of man. Only such means as secure this end are legitimate or suitable. "The grace of God hath appeared . . . *instructing* us" (Titus 2: 11, 12). The overseer of a church must be "apt to teach" (I Tim. 3: 2). If I do not get some item of divine knowledge into the mind of the other I have done nothing worth while. But the planting of the tiniest seed of truth may result in eternal fruit. Paul regarded his whole ministry as a sowing of spiritual things (I Cor. 9: 11). The wise preacher will himself ponder his message so as to understand it, otherwise he will not help the hearer to understand it, and he will seek for acceptable suitable words by which to make the message clear (Eccles. 12: 9, 10).

3. *The Seed* is the word of God (Luke 8: 11), the message about the kingdom (Matt. 13: 19). All too many preachers limit themselves to that part of the message which announces the forgiveness of sins and the new birth. Others get little further than the inculcating of moral duties. But John preached the kingdom, so did Jesus, so did Paul. For Paul, to "testify the grace of God" was equivalent to "preaching the kingdom" (Acts 20: 24, 25). Luke summarizes the apostle's ministry of

two years in Rome as "preaching the kingdom of God and teaching the things concerning the Lord Jesus Christ" (Acts 28: 31). His theme was the kingdom of God and the position therein of the Lord Jesus Christ. This is the same as preaching that "Jesus Christ is LORD," that is, the appointed King over God's entire kingdom (Phil. 2: 11; Rom. 10: 9). Only by this whole message can such impact be made on men's hearts as Paul made, and such thorough change of life be effected.

As far as worldly wisdom is mixed with this divine message the latter is nullified. Paul was well educated, but in a city of culture such as Corinth he determined to seem to be an *ignoramus* (the Latin equivalent of the Greek word he used, *agnostic*), as if acquainted with only one subject, Jesus Christ, and Him in the aspect most calculated to offend the refined, namely, as crucified, which meant as one executed as a criminal. But he knew that his message was good seed, which, sown in hearts by the Spirit of truth, could bring forth a new life in even the most sinful of men (I Cor. 6: 9–11).

Peter knew that believers have been "begotten again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, through the word of God, which liveth and abideth" (I Pet. 1: 22–25). The statement that the word of God is seed is not so much figurative as literal. We speak justly of "seed thoughts." Perhaps most can remember when some foul remark proved to be evil seed that duly brought forth in our heart a bitter crop of vile ideas, pictures, and ways. "Take heed *what* ye hear" (Mark 4: 24).

Equally so, good words are good seed, and God's words preeminently so, for they are full of life, and abiding life. Natural seeds may decay and lose vitality and their power to grow. Human words may become inert. No moral reformation in sinners, no radically new life in the spirit, is effected by quoting Shakespeare or Goethe, unless it be statements of truth that such may have learned from Scripture; but the word of God is inherently living, has perpetual vital energy to grow. It is not only that it *was* inspired by the Holy Spirit, but that it *is* so inspired, and, under proper conditions, will produce Divine life in the hearer, as it is continually doing. Many of us are eternally indebted to God that our parents sowed in our minds this imperishable seed from our earliest years. Such sowing may be done by the simplest individual privately, as well as by the noblest preacher in public.

4. *The Soil.* The message will meet with four kinds of hearers: the impervious, the shallow, the choked, and the fruitful soil.

(1) *The Impervious.* The sower of the word finds hearts that seem beyond impression, impenetrable. The path that skirts or crosses the field is trodden hard by the coming and going of passers-by. The ceaseless contacts and affairs of daily life tend to render the heart insensible to things unseen, and it is unaffected by the truths of the gospel.

Also the deceitfulness of sin indulged hardens the soul (Heb. 3: 13), so that it becomes unbelieving and disobedient and the word becomes unprofitable. The Christian is warned against this subtle danger, for this state is possible to the redeemed, such being addressed as "brethren" in Heb. 3: 1–4, 12, the passage cited. These imperil thus their prospects in the kingdom of God (I Cor. 6: 7–11; Gal. 5: 19–21; Eph. 5: 3–6). While the preacher meets such hearers among the unregenerate, the teacher has to sorrow over such among the regenerate. The former, if they so continue, will have no place in God's kingdom: the latter will be in the kingdom through their new birth, but will forfeit the inheritance of the first-born sons.

In such an impervious state of heart the word heard lies only on the surface of the mind. It is not pondered by the intellect nor are the emotions stirred. Through sheer inattention the meaning of the message is not grasped. Even Christians can remain ignorant in things divine. It is a law of our mind that what is not understood is readily forgotten, but in things spiritual there is an agency to accelerate and assure this; "When any one heareth . . . and understandeth not, then cometh the Evil One, and snatcheth away that which was sown in the heart" (Matt. 13: 19). The Devil is not anxious to remove from our minds secular knowledge. Rather does he foster over-occupation with things earthly; they can be thorns to choke the word; but he is eager and watchful to remove immediately every remembrance of things heavenly.

Satan personally is not omnipresent and does not act in more than one place at a time; but he has countless hosts of spirit servants who co-operate in his fell efforts. So the Lord says "then cometh Satan." The usage is as when one says "Wellington won Waterloo," meaning, he and the thousands of soldiers he commanded.

This is the Divine explanation of the utter indifference of sinners or believers to truth heard. No more impression has been made by the word than is made by seed on hard-trodden ground.

It is to be noted that "the birds of the heaven" represent wicked spirits. These devoured the seed. This illustrates that not every detail of a parable is to be pressed to a fixed meaning.

An evil spirit does not swallow and destroy the word of God itself; but he can remove it from the mind of the hearer. Here arises the vast importance that the preacher, having himself first understood the message, shall present it so lucidly that the hearer may understand it. Of C. G. Finney one said: "He does not preach; he explains what other people preach"; and his ministry was most fruitful.

(2) The second class of hearer is the *shallow*. These have not yet become hardened and unconcerned. They recognise the value of religion and they hear the word gladly. Their sentiments are stirred, their emotions excited; they promptly profess belief and acceptance. But this is merely superficial. Just beneath the surface their nature is as a shelf of rock, harder even than the trodden path. No roots can penetrate, no moisture can be held. Such growth as the seed can make must needs be upward. Such influence as the message can exert is seen quickly, but there is no grip of the truth upon the judgment, the affections, or the will. The dew of the Spirit is not held, the water of life does not sink in; and the first breath of the hot sun of persecution withers the early promise, and the grass and its flower perish.

The vital energy of truth produced some impression, but could not sink and root and work deeply enough for the impression to survive. It is to be feared that the "forcing" methods of much modern evangelizing have but fostered this surface and shallow work in large numbers who have soon lapsed. There has been too much desire that the results should spring up "straightway"; quick results that can be counted and tabulated.

(3) *The Thorny Ground.* The eldest son of a money-loving head of a great business was converted when a young man. I remember him. He had soon to choose between pleasing his Lord or his father. Thus the thorns were in the soil when the seed was sown and germinated; the cares of this age and the deceitfulness of riches were already at hand. He fell in with his father's wishes, devoted himself fully to business, rose to be the head of the concern, and when well on in life had to acknowledge that he had neglected things heavenly. He was about to retire and he expressed his intention to be more diligent in matters spiritual. But God is not to be mocked. The man retired and died suddenly in only a few months. He left £90,000 and a spiritually wasted life. The thorns had choked the word and it was unfruitful.

It can be equally so with the poor. Care of mind can be induced by having too much or not enough of earthly goods. In either case the heart can be like land choked with weeds. Observe

the nature of our Lord's comparison: things not wrong in themselves can be thorns. As they say in Devon, some soil grows only "vierns and vuzz," ferns and furze. Of such land God says solemnly that "its end is to be burned" (Heb. 6: 8).

A Christian was on the box-seat of an old-time horse bus. He asked the driver if he loved God. "Oh, I ain't got no time for those things, mister." "Are you married?" "Yes." "I'm very sorry for your wife." "Why, what's the matter wi' 'er?" "I'm sorry you have no time to love her." "Why, I loves her every yard I drives."

Thus was shown the hollowness of the excuse, but also the reality and strength of the "thorns"; the mind crowded with so many matters that there is no time for God.

Let the Christian also take warning: it was one whom the Lord loved and who truly loved Him that was "cumbered about with much serving . . . anxious and troubled about many things," and this as part of her supposed service to Christ Himself and to His friends (Luke 10: 40, 41). In such believers thorns may choke the good seed, and the life, over-busy with service, be unfruitful. It will certainly be this unless adequate time be taken to withdraw from outward activity and "sit at His feet and hear His word."

In the first case pictured, the wayside, the seed found no lodgment and no life developed. In the second case there were signs of life, but this was from the energy of the seed alone, and it did not secure the co-operation of the soil by becoming rooted. In the third instance there was real growth, but this did not develop fully. Luke's account displays this feature: "They bring no fruit *unto perfection*" (Luke 8: 14). This warrants, indeed demands, that the warning be applied to those in whom the new birth is a fact, but growth is hindered and the newly-born man does not grow on unto maturity and usefulness.

(4) *The Good Soil* is described as "an honest and good heart" (Luke 8: 15). The former word means fair to look at, as a farmer may say, "That's a nice field." "Good" refers to the essential qualities of the soil which make it rich and productive.

Inasmuch as all men are equally dead in sin what causes the difference in some hearers of the word? How do they come to be responsive and productive? The Teacher did not explain this, but took the fact for granted. Yet His hearers knew well, what did not need to be mentioned, that the farmer does not cast the seed until the ground has been prepared by the plough and the rain. Many a hard heart has been broken to pieces by trouble or sorrow, and then softened by the kindness of God, so as thus to be made ready for the message of life.

A thorough worldling was plunged into bereavement and bitter sorrow, of which he said to me that "it taught me what an insect I am, and that the world can give a man nothing when he needs it most." Brought thus to an end of himself and of men, convicted of nothingness and sinfulness, he became good soil.

Such ground has distinct characteristics which the Lord specified. (i) The word is "heard" with attention. (ii) It is "understood": the mind thinks it over and so receives illumination by the ever-watchful, ever-gracious Spirit of truth. (iii) It "accepts" the message: embraces it as true, reliable, trustworthy. (iv) It "holds it fast", being determined not to hear in vain. It relaxes its grasp upon the things of time and sense, and grips tenaciously the things of the kingdom that are heavenly and eternal. (v) Therefore it brings forth fruit with steadfastness.

(5) *The Fruit* is described in Galatians 5: 22, 23: "The fruit of the spirit [the new nature begotten by the new birth] is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, meekness, self-control." These features characterize the kingdom of heaven, as it is written, "the kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness and peace and joy in [the energy of] the Holy Spirit" (Rom. 14: 17). Upon this the Lord will enlarge when He gives the parable of the vine (John 15). This fruit is what He seeks in His people and is disappointed when He does not find it, which is the lesson of the barren fig tree (Luke 13: 6–9). The steadfast in heart will study so to live as to be able to say "Let my Beloved come into His garden and eat His precious fruits" (Song of Songs 4: 16), ever acknowledging that His word is true, "From Me is thy fruit found" (Hos. 14: 8).

The first type of hearer, the utterly unresponsive, is illustrated by the Pharisees and lawyers as a whole. With the exception of such as Nicodemus they totally "rejected for themselves the counsel of God" (Luke 7: 30).

The shallow hearers remind of those who for a time espoused Christ but when His teaching became deep and exacting they "went back and walked no more with Him" (John 6: 66).

The ground choked with thorns is seen in the young ruler who had heard enough to desire to learn more as to how to obtain eternal life, but for whom the Lord's demands were too severe. He went away, sorrowful it is true; but he went away, "for he was one who had great possessions" (Matt. 19: 22).

The good and fruitful ground represented fishermen of Galilee, harlots and rogues, with a very few of the upper classes, such as Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea, and all others who turned from sin and brought forth with patience the fruits of righteousness.

Later, in the days of the apostles, the rulers still proved impervious; the believers addressed in *Hebrews* had received the word with joy, but were in danger of withering under persecution: Demas was choked by love of this present age (II Tim. 4: 10); while the Thessalonians endured persecutions and afflictions with patience.

Of the still future period, the end of this age, the *Revelation* speaks of the hardened who, even under the fierce judgment of God, blaspheme His name (16: 9, 11); of shallow Christians in Sardis who had a name to live but were dead (3: 1); of Laodiceans choked with riches (3: 17); but also of such as walked in holiness (3: 4), kept the word of Christ's patience (3: 10), and endured tribulation and poverty (2: 9).

Thus these four conditions have been found all through this age and will exist to its end. The Lord of the harvest is to be praised that, though so much soil is unfruitful, and so much labour unproductive, yet there is much good soil, and that in all the world the word of God is bearing fruit and increasing (Col. 1: 6). "Wherefore, my beloved brethren, be ye steadfast, unmovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not vain in the Lord" (I Cor. 15: 58). The Sower will gather His harvest, and it will be larger than the firstfruits now gleaned.

The Second Parable: THE TARES; and the Third Parable

Matt. 13: 24–30, 36–43; Mark 4: 26–29

The second lesson as to the kingdom of God is drawn from the same sphere as the former, from agriculture, but the details differ and are the significant matters.

1. *The Field.* In that former parable the soil was the heart of the individual hearer, in this the "field is the world." Not, as in many places, the whole of mankind regarded as an organized system of life, with Satan as its Prince and organizer, but the world as meaning the earth, as in Ps. 24: 1: "The earth is Jehovah's, and the fulness thereof; the world and they that dwell therein." Here the "world" is distinguished from its inhabitants, and is the same as the "earth." Thus in the parable also, the seed sown in the field being men, the field is the earth on which they dwell.

This field is a proper possession of God, part of His universal estate or kingdom, for as the psalm quoted adds, "He hath founded and established it." The Son of man is "the man that sowed" His field, as in the parable. The subject of both parables is an activity of God in the affairs of His kingdom.

Since this owner had servants it is a fair presumption that actually they sowed the field for him. Certainly God uses His servants in this work, because the "sons of the kingdom" become such by the work of the former parable, the sowing of the word of God in the hearts of men, and this is done by His servants. But even so it is realistic and healthful for these servants to recognize the Lord as the proper Sower: "Sir, didst Thou not sow good seed in Thy field?", not, "Didst not Thou give us good seed to sow?" That was fact as to the former parable; but now it is a matter of placing *persons* in God's kingdom and this is distinctly His own work.

2. *The Seed.* In the first parable the seed was the word, the message, concerning the kingdom; here those who accept the message become themselves seed from which further fruit shall grow. In order to spread the message the Lord scatters His people over the earth as He pleases. Happy is the believer who is ready for this to be his experience, ready to be placed here, then to be moved there, to have life arranged and rearranged by God for the purpose of His kingdom. Then the seeming disturbances of affairs are seen as the ordering of God and the sting and strain of them is gone.

For His own great purposes the Lord thus overrules even the wrath of man, making it to serve His own ends and praise. Saul of Tarsus, blaspheming and murderous, causes a scattering abroad of the flourishing church at Jerusalem, with the happy result that "they went about preaching the word" and Samaria, Phoenicia, Cyprus, and Syria are reached and blessed, to the glory of God in some extension of His kingdom and authority on earth (Acts 8). The child of God is to regard himself firstly as seed, to be sown when and where the Lord of the harvest pleases. His proper function on earth is to be a "son of the kingdom," to stand for the divine right of the King of Heaven to the loyalty and obedience of all men, himself displaying this loyalty.

3. *The Darnel.* The main lesson of the parable is that there was found among the wheat a weed; and not merely a foreign plant but a noxious one, capable indeed of hindering the growth of the wheat, but also harmful if ground with the corn and eaten.

The chief characteristic of darnel is that until the ear stage is reached it is indistinguishable from wheat, so that not until fruit appears is its nature detected. This also represents persons, and to these Christ gives the fearful title "sons of the evil one." They are related spiritually to the Devil as intimately as the sons of the kingdom are to God. "Such men are false apostles, deceitful workers, fashioning themselves into apostles of Christ. And no marvel; for even Satan fashioneth himself into an angel of light.

It is no great thing therefore if his ministers also fashion themselves as ministers of righteousness; whose end shall be according to their works" (II Cor. 11: 13–15).

It is a fact well recognized in the pagan world that some men give themselves up so thoroughly to the service of sin and their god that they do literally receive into their spirit an infusion of the spirit of that god. These have not only the sinful nature and tendencies common to all Adam's children, but they become demonized, with diabolical subtlety, spirit-energy, and wickedness.

It is to securing this accession of spirit-energy that the mystery rites of initiation are directed. This obtains alike in the world of degraded savages and that of cultured paganism. It is possible that the climax of the initiatory ceremonies of the ancient Mysteries was a sight of Satan and becoming possessed by him. To this day the Brahmin of India, having passed through initiation, is styled the "twice born." Such of the sons of the kingdom who, as faithful messengers of Christ, have had close contact with them have felt that they are indeed sons of the Evil One. It has been my own experience. Such are to be met also among Moslems, apostate Jews, and also various other cults falsely known as Christian. Such sons of the Evil One were to be found among even those Jews who were inwardly convinced of the truth of Christ's teaching. He had to tell them plainly that they were of their father, the Devil, the proof being that in their hearts they were ready to murder Him, the Sent of God (John 8: 37–44).

In this parable the Lord warned that Satan would introduce such as these into any sphere where He placed sons of the kingdom, and that their characteristic would be that outwardly they would be so like the latter that for some time they could not be distinguished.

This had been so in measure in the history of Israel. That people was designed and called to be the realm on earth where the Most High God was owned; it was to be His kingdom: "if ye will obey My voice . . . ye shall be unto Me a kingdom of priests" (Ex. 19: 5, 6). They were to be the sphere where His authority was owned, and through whom as priests He could reach out in blessing to the rebellious peoples around. But Moses had to warn them that false prophets would arise (Deut. 13: 1–5), and the history shows that these became a chief agency in corrupting Israel, in destroying the intended testimony to the true God, and in the national overthrow.

In due time Christ had now commenced a new testimony designed to re-establish the witness to the true God (comp.

I Thess. 1: 9: "ye turned unto God from idols to serve a living and true God"), and to extend His kingdom among all nations; and He intimates at once that the same destructive measure had been commenced by His Enemy, the Devil. He said: "The kingdom of heaven had already become like" (*hōmoiōthe*, aor. pass). He had before warned His followers to "beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly are ravening wolves" (Matt. 7: 15). For years Judas passed as a faithful apostle and could not be distinguished by human observation, not even by his fellow-apostles (John 13: 28, 29). But at last Satan put it into his heart to betray his Teacher and then entered into him personally to see that the deed was done (John 13: 2, 27).

Instructed thus by the Lord His first servants went forth expecting that this feature would mark the progress of the kingdom of God: "I know that after my departing grievous wolves shall enter in among you, not sparing the flock; and from among your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them" (Acts 20: 29, 30). But naturally these did not present themselves at the door of the fold howling like the wolf for its prey, or they would have found the door barred; they came in sheep's clothing, as Christ had said. And those among the very elders themselves who had led the sheep astray must for long have seemed to be true pastors or they would not have been acknowledged as elders.

Later Paul warns Timothy against Hymenæus and Philetus as "men who concerning the truth have missed the mark, saying that resurrection is past already, and overthrow the faith of some" (II Tim. 2: 17, 18); and he proceeds to assure him that grievous times will come, one feature of which will be that such men will withstand the truth "even as Jannes and Jambres withstood Moses . . . men corrupted in mind, reprobate concerning the faith" (II Tim. 3: 8).

Peter was equally emphatic in warning against such hypocritical professors: "But there arose false prophets also amongst the people [Israel], as among you also there shall be false teachers, who shall privily bring in destructive heresies [sects that lead to perdition], denying even the Master [Despot] that bought them, bringing upon themselves swift destruction" (II Pet. 2: 1): not speedy destruction, for they may be tolerated by God so as to test the faithful (comp. Deut. 13: 3; I Cor. 11: 19); but a destruction that falls swiftly and is overwhelming.

John also warned the children of God that "many false prophets are gone out into the world," that many antichrists had arisen, forerunners of the Antichrist that cometh; and that

the test of these is that they deny the Father and the Son and that Jesus is the Messiah come in flesh: that is (1) they assert that God is not Father and Son, and (2) that therefore the Son of God did not assume true human nature, and therefore (3) He did not die as the propitiation for the sins of the world. And (4) they decline to accept the apostolic testimony as true (I John 2: 18–23; 4: 1–6).

Jude wrote to the same effect. He exhorted the called of God to contend earnestly for the faith deposited with the saints on trust, "for there are certain men crept in privily . . . ungodly men, turning the grace of God into lasciviousness and denying our only Despot and Lord, Jesus Christ" (vers. 3, 4).

From His place in heaven, yet as also in the midst of the churches, the risen Lord repeated His warnings given when here. In Pergamum, Satan's throne residence at that time, there were in the church "some who held the teaching of Balaam, who taught Balak to cast a stumblingblock before the children of Israel, to eat things sacrificed to idols and to commit fornication." In Thyatira there sat the woman who was the counterpart of that wicked woman Jezebel in Israel. She called herself a prophetess, and was so specious and insistent that she taught and seduced Christ's servants, leading them to commit fornication and to have communion with idols (Rev. 2: 14, 20).

And as the mighty drama of the End Times of this age unfolds in the *Revelation*, the time is reached when the False Prophet deceives all men into worshipping the Antichrist (ch. 13). At the close of his career, from the Dragon, the Beast (Antichrist), and the False Prophet demonic spirits go forth to complete the deception of those who had rejected the truth, so that they shall madly hurl themselves upon Jehovah's buckler and be destroyed by the Word of God at His descent to this earth (16: 13, 14; 19: 11–21).

Then shall the kingdom of darkness be suppressed on earth and the kingdom of God triumph.

The features of the sons of the Evil One, as given in these few apostolic statements, are to be noted.

(1) *Their twofold object.* The injury of the flock: the winning to themselves a following. They are wolfish and selfish. The word "grievous" which Paul employs was used by the Lord in connexion with the wolves of His day, the scribes and the Pharisees (Matt. 23: 4). They bound on men's shoulders burdens grievous to be borne. Souls were weighted with human regulations, to their deep inward injury, by being kept from the liberty of the spirit Godward which Christ came to assure.

And by attaching disciples to themselves they caused sects and schisms among the people of God, so that the flock was divided and scattered.

All priest-ridden systems, including those called Christian, show these features. The way of life is turned to a way of death. The free grace brought in Christ to the guilty, is banished by a scheme of rules burdensome and hurtful.

(2) Others of these false teachers tamper with the truth of resurrection and overthrow the faith of some. I Cor. 15 shows that by resurrection Paul meant the resurrection of the body, and that without *such* resurrection there is no Christian faith and no salvation. Matthew understood the word to refer to the body: "Many bodies of the saints that had fallen asleep were raised" (Matt. 27: 52, 53). Those false teachers Paul named said "resurrection is past already." As no resurrection of saints in their bodies had taken place since Christ was raised this must presumably have meant what some now call a "spiritual" resurrection, that is, a transfer of the spirit being of man to some better state and place. But, according to Paul, no such resurrection is known, and those not raised in body have no salvation. And if resurrection had already taken place, whatever its nature, those not raised, being still alive, could not expect resurrection or salvation. Thus was the true faith and hope of the gospel overthrown.

As this was the case with the assertion in question regarding the resurrection of believers, how much more antiChristian it is to deny that the body of Christ ever rose. Thus does a living preacher, a professed minister of Christ, write:

> "The physical body of Jesus was subjected to a process of speedy dematerialization or evanescence . . . I do not believe that the physical particles of Christ's body ever came out of the tomb"; there was "an evanescence, perhaps the speeding up of those processes which dispose of the physical matter of our own bodies."

Obviously this involves the notion of a merely "spiritual" resurrection, which is what spiritists and theosophists allege. But this is no resurrection at all, according to the Word of God. For in that case the Holy One of God *did* see corruption, and more speedily than the rest of men. Of necessity this involves a denial of the bodily ascension of the Lord, and so the same writer adds: "the very idea seems crude and absurd."[1]

This fatal error is necessarily involved in the basic falsity of Christian Science also, that matter is not real; for what does not

[1] Leslie D. Weatherhead, *His Life and Ours*, 303, 307, 326, 327.

exist cannot be raised from the dead and be glorified at the right hand of God.

(3) The deceivers in view in the passages of Scripture quoted deny, tacitly or avowedly, the true nature of God. They deny the Father and the Son, that is, that these relationships exist between these two Persons in the one Godhead.

Swedenborg denied this distinction of Persons and this relationship in God, and therefore that the Son was sent by the Father and became man.[1]

Russellism ("Jehovah's Witnesses") denies the eternal Sonship, asserting that before He became man Jesus was of only angelic rank.

Christadelphianism denies the eternal existence of the Son of God: "there must therefore have been a time when the Father existed but the Son did not" (*Who is the God of the Bible?* p. 3).

(4) A person who has not a child is not a father. Hence to deny that God has a Son is to deny that He is a Father. It is the folly and confusion of unitarian thought that God is styled Father though not having an only-begotten Son, of His own eternal nature.

They come perilously near to this error—little as they may suspect it—who question if this relationship of Son to Father existed in the Godhead before Christ's incarnation. For in that case there has come by the incarnation an *essential* change in the Godhead, whereas in His essence God is not susceptible of change.

(5) But in the denial of the true deity of the Son of God, and regarding Him as only a superior and exalted angel or man, there is of necessity the denial that Jesus Christ is "our only Despot and Lord," as Peter and Jude describe Him. The absolute sovereignty of the Son of God is set aside by all teaching that limits His person to something less than deity or that exalts humanity in general to His level. Such teaching is essentially pagan, not Christian. As Paul showed to a group of former pagans, then Christians, there are gods many and lords many in heathendom, but for Christians there is "one Lord, Jesus Christ," and He is the Creator "through Whom are all things" (I Cor. 8: 5, 6).

(6) This degradation of the Son of God involves a setting aside of His atoning, redeeming death. For one aspect of that death was that He "bought" us, and so doubled His proprietary right as Creator by the right of redemption. These rights these errorists refuse to acknowledge, thus maintaining their rebellion against the Father Who conferred them on the Son by "giving

[1] *The True Christian Religion*, 43, 142 (33).

all things into His hand" (John 3: 35; 13: 3). This last is not a mere assertion of His follower John, for the latter had heard the Son Himself declare that "all things have been delivered unto Me by My Father" (Matt. 11: 27).

(7) The conflict between the teachers of these false views and the writers of the New Testament is so complete and irreconcilable that the former are compelled to reject the latter as being merely recorders of their own impressions and opinions. Naturally they refuse to admit such a claim as that made by Paul, that "the things which I write unto you are the commandment of the Lord" (I Cor. 14: 37). They therefore involve themselves in the sharp and terrible condemnation of John, when writing concerning the spirit of antichrist already in the world: "We are of God: he that knoweth God heareth us; he who is not of God heareth us not. By this we know the spirit of truth and the spirit of error" (I John 4: 1–6).

(8) The Lord emphasized the conscious deceitfulness of such men: sheep's clothing donned by the ravenous wolf (Matt. 7: 15). They creep in privily and privily introduce their destructive doctrines, say Jude and Peter. The Jesuits may profess to be what they will if thereby the interests of their order and Church can be promoted. Modernists who deny everything Christian can be ministers and Professors of Divinity, taking salaries from evangelical sources though denying all evangelical doctrine. They may get their positions by false pretences, and then hold on to them, so as to continue to ravage the flock of God. They employ terms and phrases which for centuries have had a recognized and settled meaning, but they use them dishonestly and subtly to instil false ideas. Thus they first undermine and then overthrow the faith of many.

It is the same subtlety with which J. H. Newman sought in Tract XC to show that an avowedly Reformed document, the Book of Common Prayer, could be read in a thoroughly Romish sense.

Often brilliant in scholarship, pleasant in manners, suave of speech, they are darnel that seems like wheat. And usually they have done their deadly work before it can be recognized by the many.

In the early Christian centuries the Gnostics fulfilled all these conditions. Outwardly they appeared to be vanquished by the orthodox Christians and their sects died out. Actually their errors had taken deep root and have persisted and revived ever since. In the same way Swedenborg faded from view. His "New Church" is to-day quite insignificant. But his false teachings have permeated widely. I asked an avowed Unitarian

what place of worship in the town she attended, there being no Unitarian church. She replied that the latter fact did not matter much because their views had become widely held in the churches and were taught in many pulpits. This was by ministers holding professedly one or other orthodox creed, and I knew it to be true.

The fruit has been abundant and rank. At the beginning of this century R. J. Campbell was pouring forth his miscalled New Theology. It was not new. He confessed later that its essence was drawn from the ancient Greek philosophers and that they had derived it from the still older Hindu sages. In 1903, while he was still preaching at Brighton, I spent some weeks there. An assistant in a large business house there told me of the ungodly lives of fellow-assistants, and that when she had reproved and warned them the answer was, "Don't talk to us about hell: Mr. Campbell says there is no such place." Yet the preacher whose influence bore such bad fruit could on occasion preach such seemingly orthodox doctrine that a truly godly evangelical minister I knew thought him a prophet come from God. Thus is darnel like wheat. Mr. Campbell renounced his heathen philosophy and joined the Church of England. He publicly stated that during all the time he had been teaching his former views he had not been satisfied with them, because in his heart he had been "seeking an altar," that is, a religion that included sacrifice for sin. What did this mean but that he had never been honest and with a good conscience while spreading so forcibly his false philosophy? Two other prominent Nonconformist ministers, the Baptist Dr. John Clifford and the Congregationalist Dr. R. F. Horton, had openly supported Mr. Campbell in his pernicious ministry.

(9) The religious phenomenon now in view is stupendous. In all periods, and in all countries, whenever God has planted sons of His kingdom, before long there have been commingled with them these sons of the Evil One, not at first to be distinguished. The feature is universal and unceasing, evidencing design and skill, as did the work of the sower of darnel. The only possible explanation is that given by Christ: "the enemy that sowed them is the Devil" (Matt. 13: 39). The continuance of the sowing the long centuries through demands a sower who neither dies nor sleeps.

As the Sower of the good seed was a person, the Son of man, so is the sower of the darnel a person, the Devil. Yet one of the wiles of his "sons" is to deny personality to their spiritual father.

His object has been to hinder the sons of the kingdom from

bearing fruit unto God. The Gnostics aimed at a compound of religions and philosophies; Christianity was to be included, but only so that it could be corrupted; for when salt combines with corruption it loses its saltness and is the most worthless of all substances, not being useful on even a dunghill (Matt. 5: 13; Mark 9: 50; Luke 14: 34, 35).

Fifty years ago Dr. Timothy Richards of China proposed that the best elements should be taken from the religions of China and from Christianity, the poorer elements of all religions being dropped, and from this melting pot there was to come forth a religion which all could accept, and thus thousands of Chinese could be gained, instead of ones and twos. The Communists to-day know better the true essential nature of the Christian faith and that it cannot be fused with any non-Christian philosophy or religion.

Parliaments of Religion and World Councils of Churches aim at similar fusion, or confusion, and serve the same destructive ends. On the Indian Ocean I conversed with a Hindu pundit on his way to such a Parliament at Chicago. His hatred of pure Christian truth was as virulent as that of Nietzsche and his spirit was that of a veritable son of the Devil.

Of late years the English-speaking world has had a spate of private translations of the Bible by modernistic scholars, Moffat and the American Revised Standard Version being the two best known and, in our judgment, most injurious. Why have these many anti-fundamentalist men thought it worth while to deluge the church with these books? A probable subtle effect is to instil the feeling that the Scriptures are most indefinite as to both the original text and the meaning. Why did one of these men think proper to write of Peter's "barbarous Greek"? Whether a modern Englishman knows Greek better than a man who lived with that language around him may be questioned; in any case the remark could not but suggest that Peter was not a spokesman of the Spirit of God.

Behind all such activity, whether recognized by men or not, the Lord exposes the activity of the Devil, setting his agents among the godly for the injury of the latter and to rob, as far as possible, the "Householder," the Owner of the field, of something of His desired harvest. And this fell work he does by night ("while men slept," which is not in itself a matter of reproach, nor did the householder blame his servants); that is, Satan acts invisibly and stealthily, which calls for the greater watchfulness in saints.

(10) *The Situation is Unchangeable.* The main stress of the

parable is that no attempt to eradicate the darnel can succeed or is to be attempted. In nature the roots of the two plants so intertwine that to pull up the one would drag up the other. This does not mean that a local group of believers may not withdraw from fellowship with a known teacher of doctrines that cause sects; for a man that makes factions is to be refused fellowship (Titus 3: 10), and from such as maintain a form of godliness but deny its power, the son of the kingdom is to turn away (II Tim. 3: 5).

But while such local and individual action is to be taken against a known individual there is to be no general attempt to eradicate the darnel, nor would it succeed. "Let both grow together until the harvest" at the consummation of the age (Matt. 13: 30, 39).

At this point the utmost attention is demanded. Until the time of harvest shall have come the good and the bad will stand on earth side by side, and in the harvest alone will they be separated. This is our Lord's direct refutation of the wholly false notion that the sons of the kingdom will go on multiplying until they only are found on earth and then the Lord will enter into His kingdom. To uphold that idea the parable of the tares must be wholly rejected for it cannot be accommodated thereto.

> "*Let both grow together until the harvest.*" Pregnant words, which tell us that evil is not, as so many dream, gradually to wane and disappear before good, the world to find itself in the Church, but each to unfold itself more fully, out of its own root, after its own kind: till at last they stand face to face, each in its highest manifestation, in the persons of Christ and of Antichrist; on the one hand, an incarnate God, on the other, the man in whom the fulness of all Satanic power will dwell bodily. Both are to grow "until the harvest," till they are ripe, one for destruction, and the other for full salvation" (Trench, *Parables*, 99).

The parable also forbids the notion of some good men that the Christian sphere at its commencement was everywhere marked by pristine beauty and unity, which by gradual decay fell into ruin. The Enemy did not so long delay his attack. Already among the apostolic twelve he used Peter to put a stumbling-block before Christ (Matt. 16: 23), and later he found in Judas his traitorous agent. In only the second Christian church Simon Magus appeared (Acts 8: 18–24). Paul had scarcely left Corinth when faction-makers arose (I Cor. 3). It was not long before "false brethren . . . came in privily . . . that they might bring us into bondage" (Gal. 2: 4). The darnel was sown from the very beginning of the preaching by the Son of Man. The

dispensational theory that the church lost its first glory as a society and fell into ruins is therefore without foundation.

4. *The Harvest.* (1) *Its Time.* There is a definite season for harvest: "in the season (*kairos*) of harvest" (Matt. 13: 30). For harvest is the completion of a process, the climax of growth.

The Third Parable: Spontaneous Growth

Mark 4: 26–29

Mark inserts here a cognate parable not included by Matthew. It reads:

> And He said, So is the kingdom of God, as if a man should cast seed upon the earth; and should sleep and rise night and day, and the seed should spring up and grow, he knoweth not how. The earth beareth fruit of herself; first the blade, then the ear, then the full corn in the ear. But when the fruit is ripe, straightway he sendeth forth the sickle, because the harvest is come.

This exhibits:

(*a*) That the affairs of the kingdom of God go on though man perceiveth it not. This is because the Son of man and His Enemy uninterruptedly continue their activities, even as the forces of nature go on automatically: "the earth beareth fruit spontaneously," automatically (*automatē*).

(*b*) Growth is a process and takes time: blade, ear, and full grain.

(*c*) Harvest is determined by ripeness, not by calendar or clock: "when the fruit permits, straightway he sends forth the sickle, because the harvest has come" ("permits" points to a definite season and action; *paradoi* aor. subj.).

Thus God's judgments are at proper seasons, which, though in His foreknowledge known and controlled by Him, are not determined by the calendar as are human assizes, but by the moral consideration of ripeness of character and ways. "The iniquity of the Amorite is not yet full" (Gen. 15: 16), and therefore full judgment on them was delayed for 400 years. This gave opportunity for repentance in humble hearts (II Pet. 3: 9).

Returning to Matthew and the Second Parable, the season of harvest is the *Consummation of the Age* (Matt. 13: 39, 40, 49). The disciples took up this expression on Olivet and asked the Lord, "What shall be the sign of Thy parousia and consummation of the age?" (Matt. 24: 3). This question drew from Christ

that further prophetic discourse. He used the term once again in the heartening assurance to His witnesses, "Lo, I am with you all the days until the consummation of the age."[1]

The term is part of the larger conception of the ages of time. The finite mind is of limited power and cannot grasp the fact of infinite duration. This is as true of angels as of men, though they being of greater power than man may be able to conceive of greater stretches of time than we can grasp as yet. Therefore as soon as finite beings were created time began, that is, eternity was divided into successive periods such as the finite mind can conceive. It follows from this that time can never cease, because the created mind can never become infinite and able to conceive of eternity. Rev. 10: 6 says "There shall be *delay* no longer" (R.V.).

These ages were of course foreseen by God with all the changes they would involve in the principles and developments of His ways with creation. A few passages are of first importance.

i. I Tim. 1: 17. God is "the King of the ages." Sin has brought fearful havoc in the course and working of these vast periods. How far back time began, or how many and extended ages preceded Adam we do not know. Those pre-Adamic periods can have been long enough for the immense eras that geologists imagine. But sin and its dire results are not triumphant and uncontrolled: they are under the sovereign mastery of the King of the ages.

ii. Hebrews 1: 2 informs us that the creative activity of God was effected through the agency of the Son: "through Whom also He [the Father] made the ages." This included the material structure of the universe, its living beings, and the course of the ages. So that the Son is the actual Ruler of all that has developed or will develop during the ages, and is therefore the Judge at all its judicial crises.

iii. Heb. 9: 26 is the one further passage where the term before us is found. It tells us that "now, once, at the consummation of the ages hath He [the Son of God] been manifested to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself." This perfected work can never be repeated.

Calvary is the central point to which all preceding ages led and from which all succeeding ages flow. It conditioned the ways of God prior and subsequent, making it right that grace should be available and recovery from sin possible. The fact that the Lamb of God had been thus foreknown from before

[1] *Telos* is simply an end, conclusion. According to Trench *sunteleia* is a point of conjunction between the end of one age and the commencement of another age (*Parables* 103, note 2.) But I do not find support for this. The term seems to point to various matters coming to an end *together*.

the foundation of the world (I Pet. 1: 19, 20) would seem to have made possible forgiveness of sin in all ages which preceded His cross, and therefore forgiveness of the sin of angels and of such beings as probably existed on earth in ages prior to Adam. For in Christ God reconciled to Himself the *cosmos* (II Cor. 5: 19), and Christ's precious blood avails to cleanse the heavenly things (Heb. 9: 23). Whether any such beings availed themselves of the clemency of God we are not told. We do know that it was on the ground of what Christ would suffer that the sins of men before He came were forgiven (Rom. 3: 25).

iv. Eph. 3: 10, 11 shows that there is a divine "purpose of the ages." This repels the false notion that, though there is a Creator, yet He put the universe in the grip of fixed laws, Himself retired into the background and never interferes with the outworking of those laws. On the contrary, He has a purpose running through all the ages and He ceaselessly overrules all events to the fulfilment of that purpose.

The particular part of that purpose in view in Eph. 3: 10, 11 has to do with that society of redeemed persons being gathered in this age, known as the church of God. When that company shall have been completed one factor in the course of this present age will have been perfected, which will contribute to the consummation of the age.

The Harvest at that consummation covers two operations as it affects the wheat and the darnel.

A. *The Wheat Harvest.*

The Lord put this age in contrast to the next age, and showed that the means by which the godly dead will attain to that age is resurrection (Luke 20: 34, 35). Now that first resurrection will be brought about by Himself descending from the throne of God to proximity to this earth (I Thess. 4: 15–17). That event will synchronize with the consummation of this age, even as He said in the explanation of this parable of the tares, "the Son of man shall send forth His angels" (Matt. 13: 41). This will be His harvest-home of the godly and the harvest of judgment for the wicked.

He will say later on Olivet: "They shall see the Son of man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. And He shall send forth His angels, with a great sound of a trumpet, and they shall gather together His chosen from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other" (Matt. 24: 30, 31). The same event is pictured in Rev. 14: 14–16, under the same figure. An angel with a mighty voice calls to the One sitting on the cloud, "Send forth Thy sickle [angels] and reap: for the

hour to reap is come; for the harvest of the earth is dried up," and therefore is ready for the garner. Similarly, in the parable of the tares, the Householder said to the reapers, "gather the wheat into My barn."

This service of holy angels will assure that no mistake is made in distinguishing between wheat and darnel, and it will guarantee that no resistance by the wicked shall thwart justice. It was angels who destroyed Sodom, first putting righteous Lot into safety and then burning up the wicked (Gen. 19). It was a band of "angels of evil" who plagued the Egyptians but spared the Israelites (Ps. 78: 49). Angels supervised the judgment of Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar, again delivering the godly and destroying the wicked (Ezek. 9). They are executioners of the holy wrath of God as well as protectors of His people, which dual work they will perform at the coming consummation of the age. They will convey the godly into the safety of the heavenly garner in the clouds, and will cast the godless into the furnace of fire.

This harvest is not the judgment before the great white throne after the millennial kingdom and prior to the new heavens and earth. That final assize of the universe is to be held at a point of time where earth and heaven flee away, and it includes all the dead who had not been raised in the first resurrection (Rev. 20: 11–15). This judgment of tares is of persons living on earth at the consummation of this age, not at the close of the following millennial age.

It will be well to observe here that all the parables of Christ concerning the end of this age regard persons living at the time when He returns and do not teach concerning the dead. Of course, the principles of justice are the same for both classes, but the details vary greatly. Confusion and mistake have arisen from attempting to apply the parables to the dead.

B. *The Darnel Harvest.*

This takes place in two stages: (*a*) the gathering of the weeds into bundles, and (*b*) the later casting of them into the fire.

The former operation is illustrated in Rev. 16: 14, 16: "spirits of demons go forth unto the kings of the whole inhabited earth to *gather them together* unto the war of the great day of God, the Almighty . . . and they *gathered them together* into the place which is called in Hebrew Har-Magedon." But into the very midst of this gathering of the armies of the Beast the Lord interposes the announcement, "Behold, I come as a thief." This therefore is the moment of the gathering of the wheat into the barn, for His coming as thief is applied to His own in Matt. 24: 42–44; Luke 12: 39; II Pet. 3: 10–12; I Thess. 5: 2; Rev. 3: 3.

It is not that the darnel is burned up immediately it is gathered together. The coming as a thief takes place during that process of gathering. Matt. 13: 30 coincides with this, for it reads: "Gather up first the tares and bind them in bundles *with a view to* burning them" (*pros to katakausai auta*). The picture used makes this clear. The whole field being ripe, wheat and darnel alike, it is easy to distinguish them, and no harm will now come to the wheat by separating them. But when the weeds have been all segregated and separately bound, no farmer would think of setting fire to them so long as the wheat was at hand on the field. The latter would be removed to safety and afterward the darnel would be burned.

This is important as showing the point in the consummation of the age when the wheat is removed to the heavenly garner: it is just before the destruction of the Lord's enemies, while these are assembling to the final battle at Har-Magedon. This is further shown in Rev. 14: 14–20: for after the Son of man has gathered His harvest to the clouds (vers. 14–16) then follows the vintage of the earth and it being crushed in the winepress of the great wrath of God (vers. 18–20; ch. 19: 15; comp. Isa. 63: 1–6).

The Furnace of Fire. How fearful is the prospect of these sons of the Evil One! They share the doom of their father the Devil.

> The setting forth of the terrible doom of ungodly men under the image of the burning with fire of thorns, briers, weeds, offal, chaff, barren branches, dead trees is frequent in Scripture; thus see II Sam. 23: 6, 7; Matt. 3: 10–12; 7: 19; Isa. 66: 24; etc., etc. But dare we speak of it as an image merely? The fire reappears in the interpretation of the parable; the angels "*shall cast them*," those, namely, "*which do iniquity*," "*into a furnace of fire.*" Fearful words indeed: and the image, if it be an image, at all events borrowed from the most dreadful and painful form of death in use among men. Something we read of it in Scripture. . . . Whatever the "*furnace of fire*" may mean here, or "the lake of fire" (Rev. 19: 20; 20: 10), "the fire that is not quenched" (Mark 9: 48), "the everlasting fire" (Matt. 25: 41; comp. Luke 16: 24; Mal. 4: 1), elsewhere, this at all events is certain; that they point to some doom so intolerable that the Son of God came down from heaven and tasted all the bitterness of death, that He might deliver us from ever knowing the secrets of anguish, which, unless God be mocking men with empty threats, are shut up in these terrible words: "*There shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth*" (comp. Matt. 22: 13; Luke 13: 28). (Trench, *Parables*, 104, 105.)

The Reward of the Righteous.

How ravishing is the prospect of the sons of the kingdom!

They share the glory of their Father: "Then shall the righteous shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father" (Matt. 13: 43). God had called them through the gospel unto "the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ," yea, "into *His own* kingdom and glory," that is, into the heavenly portion of the kingdom. They, on their part, had responded to the call and were suffering persecution at the hands of God's Enemy (II Thess. 2: 14; I Thess. 2: 12–14; II Thess. 1: 3–12). Or as Peter wrote to persecuted saints: "The God of all grace called you unto His eternal glory in Christ. . . . Wherefore, brethren, give the more diligence to make your calling and election sure" (I Pet. 5: 10; II Pet. 1: 1–11).

These sons of the kingdom have seen the Sun of righteousness in His glory and have become glorious (I John 3: 2). Thus had it been promised five centuries before, and Christ repeated the promise. Speaking of that same period, the consummation of the age, which should bring a resurrection unto eternal life, the angel had said to Daniel that "they that are wise shall shine as the brightness of the firmament, and they that turn many to righteousness as the stars for ever and ever" (Dan. 12: 1–3).

It must be stressed that "righteous" here means those who have practised righteousness. To be sure they had first had judicial righteousness in Christ put to their account, but in these passages practical righteousness is meant. The sons of the Evil One wrought unrighteousness, the sons of the kingdom wrought righteousness, and suffered somewhat for doing so. They received fulfilment of two Scriptures, samples of many: "through many tribulations we must enter into the kingdom of God": "if we endure, we shall also reign with Him" (Acts 14: 22; II Tim. 2: 12).

This parable is the basis of much later teaching, to the right understanding of which it is a key.

Parable Four: The Mustard Seed

Matt. 13: 31, 32; Mark 4: 30–32; Luke 13: 18, 19

The kingdom of heaven is like unto a grain of mustard seed, which a man took and sowed in his field: which indeed is less than all seeds: but when it is grown, it is greater then than the herbs, and becometh a tree, so that the birds of the heaven come and lodge in the branches thereof.

Mark adds the descriptive clause "and putteth out great branches." Matthew describes the soil as "field," Mark as

"earth," Luke as "his garden." This illustrates the features that differences in detail need not be pressed to yield different specific meanings; and also that differences may not be contradictions; for any soil is earth, and a garden may be a corner of a field. But "field" in Matthew accords with the preceding parable, "the field is the world." The lesson is a further phase which the kingdom of heaven will display on earth.

On another occasion the Lord compared faith to a grain of mustard seed (Matt. 17: 20). The expression was in proverbial use, meaning anything extremely small.

Some learned expositors regard this parable as supporting the opinion that, though the church which Christ was founding was in its beginning small and insignificant, yet it had in it Divine energy of growth, and would develop until all mankind had been gathered into salvation under its shadow, as birds shelter in a tree. As warrant for this last detail they cite Dan. 4: 12 and Ezek. 31: 6. Thus Alford treats the parable as revealing

> the *inherent self-developing power* of the kingdom of heaven as a seed containing in itself the principle of expansion;

and he regards this as pointing to

> the penetrating of the *whole mass of humanity*, by degrees, by the influence of the Spirit of God, so strikingly illustrated in the earlier ages by the dropping of heathen customs and worship: in modern times more gradually and secretly advancing, but still to be plainly seen in the various abandonments of criminal and unholy practices (as *e.g.* in our own time of slavery and duelling and the increasing abhorrence of war among Christian men), and without doubt in the end to be universally manifested.

That was the deceptive surface as seen by an eminent and sanguine Christian of the nineteenth century; but this twentieth century, with cruel blow on blow, has shattered the baseless fabric of the dream, and has shown that human nature, incited by wicked spirits, has not changed and can speedily revert from "civilization" to the vilest and cruellest days and ways of heathendom. Moreover, the proportion of non-Christians to Christians on earth is far vaster to-day than ever; and in those very Western areas where, a century ago, the gospel seemed to be widening its public influence, there has been a shocking recrudescence of war, violence, vice, and crime, perhaps surpassing in extent the worst periods of the ancient world. Any prospect of the kingdom of heaven reaching universal triumph by the slow and peaceful progress suggested above has been relegated to a future so remote that it is wholly negligible and wholly improbable, not to say wholly unscriptural.

The learned Dean mentions some general influences of the gospel in the first centuries and then passes to recent days; but naturally the thousand intervening years of the Dark Ages yielded him no ground for his view and hope; and now, after a brief period in which God caused the message to spread over the earth, He has permitted the present deluge of Satanic activity and is allowing His work to be greatly restricted over half the world and its population. This compels the question whether it was ever His design that His kingdom should conquer the earth in this age and by present means, or whether He must not have a quite different programme. In this case the meaning of this parable must be quite different from that given above and to be found in many other devout writers.

The theory advanced shows that the writers equate the kingdom of God with the church of God. When we reach Matthew 16 where the church of God is first mentioned in the New Testament, it will be shown that the two conceptions are quite distinct, as was indicated above at the beginning of this chapter. The parables depicted phases which would arise in the movement to assert the kingly rights of God. Truly it is the members of the church who assert those rights and effect that movement; but a chief lesson of the parables is the activities of the Enemy to counteract that movement, and to do so by corrupting its inner spirit and outer form.

It is true that in warm climes the tiny mustard seed sometimes grows to the size of a fig tree into which a man may climb and in which birds may roost. But that is exceptional; normally its growth is that of a herb, and to become a tree is abnormal. The picture therefore intimates that the outward condition of those who nominally stand for God may become abnormal.

The Lord showed what was His intention by describing His followers as "a little flock" to whom His Father purposed to give the kingdom. The latter clause shows that the condition of being a "little flock" is to persist until the time when disciples shall receive the kingdom; for had they by that time become something vast the kingdom would not in that case be given to a "little flock" (Luke 12: 32).

This smallness of the flock is implied in them being "sheep *in the midst* of wolves" (Matt. 10: 16): the flock small, the pack so large as to *surround* them. During the first three centuries after Christ this condition continued: Christians were few comparatively, heathen were many. But the Enemy early designed to change this situation, to the advantage of his kingdom. He

commenced this manœuvre early in the second century, by inducing Christians to elevate a single elder to be the "bishop" of each little local group of believers. Then he advanced by inducing these "bishops" to meet in districts for mutual counsel as to the churches of the district, which became the rudiment of a diocese. This led on to general Councils, and presently to the exalting of one bishop (of Rome, the capital of the Empire) to be the Primate over the now Confederate Church.

This universal organized Church supplanted the separate unaffiliated local churches which alone the apostles formed without inter-church organization. And in the fourth century this Church Constantine made the official Church of the Empire, and tens of thousands of unregenerate pagans were "baptized" into "Christians." This meant that what still styled itself the kingdom of God had ceased to be a lowly herb and had expanded into a tree. The "little flock" was still to be found in the relatively few who followed the teaching and ways of the Lord and His apostles, and the State Church, still nominally Christian, became the howling wolves to tear and kill them.

This dread process has been seen again and again. Practically every Protestant denomination has gone through the same development. Beginning as a few persecuted witnesses to some God's truth or practice, these also have developed into Corporations of size, intolerant of dissidents.

The process can be watched among certain Christians where one might least expect and can most regret it, the "Plymouth Brethren." They began as small and independent groups of believers, zealous only to obey the Word of God and further His rights among men. But the first of these small groups in England, at Plymouth, allowed itself to become a very large community, in which fact the Enemy found his first great opportunity to corrupt and divide.

At the same period (the thirties of the last century) another such small group commenced at Bethesda Chapel, Bristol, only seven believers meeting at the table of the Lord, purposing to follow His Word in all things. They also unwisely grew to be a very large community, and there the Enemy found his second opportunity to attack and divide.

The human agent in these divisions was an exceptionally able, devoted, and learned disciple. The one party that followed his lead (Exclusive Brethren) accepted his rejection of the New Testament feature of independent churches and regarded all their assemblies all over the world as one community as regards order and discipline. Again the Enemy saw his advantage and has divided and divided them again and again.

The other churches, which refused the ruling principle in question, and remained separate companies, thereby avoided general divisions, became mighty in evangelism, and saw the Lord of the harvest thrust forth hundreds and hundreds of His servants to preach in many distant countries; and He greatly blessed their labours.

But the present generation has seen the same skilful and untiring Enemy take advantage of this vast and blessed service to weld the greater number of these workers into a Missionary Organization, with its Central Office, Magazine, List of some 1,100 workers, its central fund, and its huge annual meetings in London. This has brought diminished unction and deterioration. And now it is the few who study to adhere in all things to New Testament ways, while the leaders in this centralizing movement have openly accepted the principle of Expediency as their guide.

How greatly to the purpose is the prayer of the early Moravians, "From the unhappy desire of becoming great, good Lord deliver us."

The same disastrous tendency can be traced in detail. Great cathedrals, fine churches, large halls, vast congregations, extensive schools and hospitals; correspondingly large funds—all done on a noble scale, and all tending away from the condition of the lowly herb to that of the great tree. And the promoters will all avow that their one design is to do things worthily of God and to strengthen His kingdom, not perhaps seeing that there develops in their own heart the spirit of the great Emperor who said, "Is not this great Babylon which I have built?" (Dan. 4: 30).

Let each of us examine his own heart. How sadly often it has been seen that a poor and spiritual brother having been prospered in business, or having by diligence advanced in learning, or having otherwise become great in outward condition, has become dwarfed spiritually when important outwardly, a Diotrephes who loves to have the pre-eminence and to lord it over God's heritage. The history is repeated, "When he was strong, his heart was lifted up, so that he did corruptly" (II Chron. 26: 16). "From the unhappy desire of becoming great, good Lord deliver *me*!"; for as certainly as a man, a church, a community becomes great the birds of the heaven will make themselves at home in its branches.

The Birds of the Heaven.

Ezek. 31: 6 and Dan. 4: 12 offer no moral parallel to the supposed meaning of our parable by which it is made to picture the

conversion of all nations through the peaceful preaching of the gospel. For the kings of Assyria and Babylon were barbarous conquerors ruling ruthlessly conquered nations, whereas the kingdom of God is marked by righteousness, peace and joy. And these conquered peoples pictured as birds dwelling in trees did not submit gladly to the situation, as it is suggested they will yet do in the kingdom of God.

But in truth the Lord had only just before explained clearly what He now meant by birds of the heaven. For in the parable of the sower it was these who snatched away the seed of the word, and Christ declared that they represented the Evil One, and of course his demon servants. It is the spirits of darkness who can enjoy and utilize the great organizations and great individuals which pass as Christian, but are abnormal growths alien to the kingdom of heaven. For that kingdom is composed of little children and no others can enter it or become great in it (Matt. 18: 1–6; 19: 14; Mark 10: 13–15; Luke 18: 15–17).

> There is a kingdom into which none enter but children, in which the children play with infinite forces, where the child's little finger becomes stronger than the giant world; a wide kingdom, where the world exists only by sufferance; to which the world's laws and developments are for ever subjected; in which the world lies like a foolish wilful dream in the solid truth of the day. (W. Fleming Stevenson, *Praying and Working*, 1863.)

Nor is there any other sufficient explanation of the pride, self-sufficiency, luxury, and cruelty that have so constantly developed in great societies and great individuals except that they have been infected with the spirit of the Evil One, through those spirit agents who promote, enter, and inspire that which is outwardly great. It was by a nominal Christian king and his ecclesiastical minions that the saintly Samuel Rutherford was summoned to appear (1661), that they might judicially murder him as they had already slain other leaders of his godly type.

> But he was already on his death-bed, and on hearing of it, calmly remarked that he had got another summons before a superior Judge and judiciary, and sent the message, "I behove to answer my first summons, and ere your day arrive, I will be where few kings and great folk come." (Bonar, *Letters of Samuel Rutherford*, Biographical Sketch.)

Once again: "From the unhappy desire of becoming great, good Lord deliver us."

Parable Five: The Leaven and the Meal

Matt. 13: 33; Luke 13: 20, 21

1. *Leaven.*

It has been justly observed that the tree of the preceding parable represents growth outward and visible, but that leaven works in secret: It was *hidden* in the meal. Those who regard the visible growth as representing the final triumph of the gospel over all mankind, naturally see in the leaven affecting the whole mass of meal another indication of that triumph, only viewed as the quiet inward influence of the truth changing mankind.

In support of this some say that leaven is not invariably a symbol of evil and cite the two loaves at Pentecost, which were waved before Jehovah, yet were baken with leaven (Lev. 23: 15–17). But *why* did these contain leaven? Passover having been fulfilled at Golgotha, this next feast, fifty days later, must point to Pentecost. That was the day when believers in Christ, being anointed with the Holy Spirit, became witnesses to Christ (John 15: 26, 27), pictured by two, the number of witness (Deut. 19: 15; John 8: 17; etc.). But because in them, as still in the flesh, there was sin in principle, the two loaves, which prefigured them as witnesses, were mixed with leaven (see Kellog, *Leviticus*, "Expositors' Bible," 460, 461; *Notes on Leviticus* by C.H.M., 315).

The same principle explains the presence of leaven in some of the wheaten cakes of the peace offering (Lev. 7: 13). The leavened cakes were associated with the thanksgiving of the offerer. Now thanksgiving, even though inspired by a godly spirit, is a product of the heart of the worshipper, and sin being still an element in him, his praise is sullied, which was typified by the leaven. That is a deep and searching word which speaks of "the *iniquity* of the *holy* things the children of Israel shall hallow in all their *holy* gifts" (Ex. 28: 38). It has been said justly that the types are as rigid as mathematics.

But if it be admitted that Scripture elsewhere than in the parable always uses leaven as a symbol of evil, it is still argued that this is not by necessity, but that it can rightly be regarded in this parable as a symbol of a good influence. It is truly said that the same object may picture either good or evil, as when a lion is now a symbol of Satan, now of God, now of the Son of God (I Pet. 5: 8; Hos. 5: 14; Rev. 5: 5). Similarly, it is urged, the action of leaven in meal, which can be hurtful, can also be helpful, as when bread is thereby made more wholesome.

Incidentally, I beg to question this last assertion. In the course of travel I have eaten not a little unleavened native bread, and I am pretty sure that it is more sustaining than leavened bread. But this apart, it is to be remembered that, in order that leavened bread may be eaten, the normal action of the leaven must be arrested by great heat, apart from which the dough would be duly and wholly corrupted.

Now this process of arrestment the Lord did not introduce into the parable, and it is not allowable for us to put into a picture a feature the Artist left out and which is not of necessity implied, and then to make the meaning depend on that inserted feature. As He drew the picture the leaven continued to work until the whole lump of dough was leavened, it was not that the action of the leaven was stopped and the dough baked for bread.

In those cases where one figure is used in opposite senses it will be found that no doubt can arise as to whether the sense is good or evil. In the present instance the parable in no wise makes clear that leaven has an opposite typical meaning to that which it has in all other places in the Word of God, and so it is to be understood as used here in harmony with its otherwise invariable use as symbolizing an evil influence.

The nature of that influence can be learned easily from Scripture.

1. Leaven is something inharmonious with redemption from sin, indeed so utterly contrary thereto that its mere presence in the house during the seven days of the great redemption festival of Passover was punishable with death (Ex. 12: 19). Moreover, no sacrifice offered upon the altar of atonement was to have contact with it (Ex. 34: 25; Lev. 2: 11). On the contrary the cakes that were to contain leaven, in the two instances above-mentioned, had to be accompanied by atoning sacrifices, but were not themselves to be burned on the altar. Hence the charge of Amos that the Israelites were burning leavened sacrifices (Amos 4: 5; where "offer" should read as R.V. margin "offer by burning").

2. The Lord specified the teachings of the Pharisees, the Sadducees, and Herod as being leaven (Matt. 16: 5–12; Mark 8: 15; Luke 12: 1).

(i) *The Pharisees.* Christ particularized the leaven of the Pharisees as being hypocrisy. This answers to leaven in that it works secretly and insidiously, depraving the heart. By it the whole life is corrupted and is vitiated before God. Christ's usage of the term hypocrisy is most searching and instructive.

(*a*) the hypocrite loves the external, the present, and the praise

of men; to be reckoned pious; to gain which status and esteem he will mask himself in false guise. Matt. 6: 2, 5–18.

(*b*) The hypocrite is keen to notice any tiny defect in another (the mote in his eye), and is conceited enough to think he can put him right; but he ignores his own serious errors (the beam). Matt. 7: 5; Luke 6: 42.

(*c*) The hypocrite can understand the natural but not the spiritual: the changes of the weather he can discern, to the providential orderings of God he is blind. Luke 12: 56.

(*d*) The hypocrite is religious enough, but his religion is external and is governed by the traditions of men, though these make void the Word of God. Therefore, though they honour God with their lips, and maintain the forms of worship, it is all in vain, for their heart is far from Him. Therefore the defilements which work as leaven in the heart break forth in life. Matt. 15: 1–20; Mark 7: 1–23.

(*e*) The hypocrite will demean himself so deeply as to feign to be righteous that he may, if possible, entangle and trip up the truly righteous. Matt. 22: 15–22; Mark 12: 13–17; Luke 20: 19–26.

(*f*) Matt. 23. The hypocrite's hostility to the kingdom of God is such that

i. (ver. 13) He will not enter therein himself, nor submit to be ruled by God and His Word, but rather to the utmost of his power he will prevent others from entering.

ii. (ver. 15) He is eager and energetic to gain followers to his party, and lends his whole influence to making them more satanic than even himself. Satan is the chief Hypocrite of the universe, and these, filled with his deceit, do his fell work.

iii. (vers. 23, 24) The hypocrite scrupulously insists upon obedience to the minor matters of the law, but despises its inner spirit and weightier demands: he strains out the gnat and gulps down the camel.

iv. (ver. 25) He insists that external practice ought to be as clean as the outside of a polished vessel. Granted this, then the secret practice of the hypocrite may be one of extortion and other signs of a life without moral restraint.

v. (ver. 27) Thus he is like a whitened sepulchre—outwardly adorned, inwardly corrupt and loathsome.

vi. (ver. 29) They profess to repudiate the crimes of their forbears, but show themselves in reality to be their true sons by completing their iniquities, and thus they display their true nature to be that of the Devil, as "serpents" and an "offspring of vipers." Thus did the Lord repronounce their condemnation by John and

warn them that they were assuring their own doom in the fires of Gehenna.[1]

This is the detail picture of leaven as given by the Utterer of our parable. We shall illustrate it when treating of the Woman who hid it in the meal. It is enough now to observe that the spring out of which this polluted and polluting stream rose was the afore-mentioned insubordinate attitude to the will of God declared in His Word. While sitting on Moses' seat they made void his law.

(ii) *The Sadducees.* Though this second dominant party in Jewry was in general conflict with the Pharisees, its teaching was equally "leaven." They denied the existence of angels or other spirit beings, as well as any resurrection of the dead (Acts 23: 8). This was virtual atheism, since God is a spirit. Consequently, though they formally admitted His right to be worshipped, they disallowed any real foreordination by Him and magnified the will of man as the only determining factor, thus virtually and practically eliminating God. They were the then "humanists." Their denial of a resurrection wholly set aside future punishments and rewards and left the present as the sole affair for man's attention. They were the Jewish materialists of their day.

(iii) *Herod.* Matt. 14: 1–12; Mark 6: 14–29; Luke 3: 18–20; 9: 7–9; 23: 7–12. Every man has influence, every king special influence. There was that about Herod Antipas which caused the Lord Jesus to compare him to leaven. His own disciples were in danger of being infected by this leaven and needed to be warned against it. This leaven Christ distinguished from that of the Pharisees: "Take heed, beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and the leaven of Herod" (Mark 8: 14, 15).

We need not go to Josephus to learn of the influence of Herod. The few notices in the Gospels will indicate the nature of his leaven.

(*a*) He was licentious: he had induced the wife of his own brother to marry him.

[1] Of the Pharisees as a class older scholars held the severe view that is the apparent force of the Gospel narratives. See *e.g.* Edersheim, *Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah.* Some more recent scholars considerably modify this opinion. See H. L. Ellison, *Jesus and the Pharisees* (The Victoria Institute). We are not required to regard them as sinners above all that dwelt in Jerusalem; indeed, as regards their evil teaching and influence, the Lord classed that of the Sadducees and Herodians as equally leaven. But this groups all as equally *bad.* Certainly the Gospels paint them all in dark colours. Yet doubtless there were individual exceptions, and their moral state may have varied at different periods. For the main purpose of this present study the chief point is not the general condition of the three sects, but rather the character and effect of leaven, their doctrines. Of this there is no Scriptural mitigation.

(*b*) He was revengeful and vindictive. John the Baptist had faithfully reproved him for this immorality, and he had first imprisoned and later murdered him, though he recognized him as being righteous and holy.

(*c*) He was crafty and therefore deceitful. This the Lord indicated by calling him a fox (Luke 13: 31–33). Herod had heard of Jesus, and would like to have seen one so famous work a miracle (Luke 23: 8). But this Rabbi was popular with Herod's own subjects and might be dangerous. They had once intended to make him a king (John 6: 15). He would fain have killed Jesus, but perhaps he did not want to incur the public odium of murdering another prophet. Yet he let it be known that he was planning this crime, possibly thinking that the dangerous Teacher and Leader would quietly save him trouble by withdrawing beyond his borders. Those equal hypocrites, the Pharisees, served his purpose by advising Jesus to disappear lest Herod should carry out his threat.

(*d*) Like other vile, unprincipled, unscrupulous men Herod was superstitious. The foul murder of John rankled in his memory and he jumped to the conclusion that Jesus must be John resuscitated. Conscience made him a coward.

The influence of such a sovereign could not but leaven his court and kingdom, aggravating the general debasement. There was a substantial party who supported him—the Herodians, and these were infected with his craftiness and joined the Pharisees in a base attempt to entrap Christ and embroil Him with the Roman governor to His undoing (Matt. 22: 16).

Thus leaven stands in the Gospels for
that of the Pharisees—hypocritical formalism,
that of the Sadducees—rationalistic materialism,
that of Herod—debasing sensualism.

All this appears afresh in the figurative use of leaven by the apostle Paul. It is he who affirms that Christians "ought to remember the words of the Lord Jesus" (Acts 20: 35). If, then, the Lord had, in the parable before us, used leaven as a type of good, Paul does not seem to have remembered this. He is the only other New Testament writer who uses the figure and in each place it pictures evil.

Gal. 5: 9. It is fairly clear that he knew of this parable for he almost reproduces Christ's phrase "until it was all (wholly, *holon*) leavened," saying, "a little leaven leaveneth the whole (*holon*) lump." The leaven which had been put into the minds of these Galatian believers was that of the Pharisees, even a formal keeping of the law as to circumcision being made needful unto salvation.

This was a thorough perversion of the true doctrine of justification by grace through faith, on the ground of the blood of Christ. If allowed to work, this leaven of error would corrupt the whole body of Christian and saving truth. This is equally the case with such doctrines as that baptism, or the keeping of the seventh day sabbath, or any other work is necessary to salvation.

I Cor. 5: 6–8. Here again Paul warns believers against the pervasive influence of evil, repeating that "a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump." At Corinth it was particularly the leaven of Herod: sensuality was among them by an unholy marital alliance, as in the case of Herod: and the rest were tolerating it, with the danger that all of them might succumb to passion and lust.

But not only "wickedness," the passions of the body, were in question, there was also at work "malice," a readiness, on the one hand, to defraud another, and, on the other hand, a readiness for the defrauded to seek vengeance at the hand of the law (ch. 6). This hard spirit also could presently infect them all, and mercy and love fail. Biting and devouring one another, Christians can consume one another. It was the spirit of Herod and the Herodians, ready to slay the obnoxious Teacher of truth and holiness.

Then also among the Corinthians there was the leaven of the Sadducees, the denial of resurrection, the doctrine of annihilation (ch. 15). The apostle laboured to show that this was a complete denial of the Christian faith, destructive at once of salvation and holiness. He urged that "evil communications corrupt good manners," an instance of leaven at work, and that the practical effect of the teaching was concentration on the present life and its bodily indulgences: "let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die."

In this place also Paul's statement corresponds remarkably with that which Christ said to the Sadducees upon this same subject of resurrection, namely, that "God is not the God of the dead, but of the living" (Luke 20: 38). In both contexts "die" and "dead" are used in the sense of the sceptics being answered, that is, non-existence. Not even God can be the God of what does not exist. These are the only places where the word death is allowed this meaning, and in these only for the meaning to be expressly repudiated.

The facts as to the symbolic meaning of leaven are:

I. That the Old Testament usage is uniformly of evil.

II. This parable seems to be the first occasion when the Lord spoke of leaven. On each later occasion He used it unmistakably as a symbol of evil. Even if they had no other guidance, how

could the apostles have understood that first use otherwise than in the light of the uniform earlier and later usage?

III. That His inspired and commissioned apostle, the chief teacher of Christian doctrine, used leaven only as a symbol of evil.

IV. That if upon that first occasion the Lord meant leaven to typify a holy influence by which all mankind would ultimately be renewed, leading up to His own return and reign, then He flatly contradicted His own outlook, and His teaching given at the same time. For it is not to be denied that the parable of the darnel pictures this evil plant as continuing in the field alongside of the good plant, the wheat, right up to the consummation of the age, and only to be removed by the agency of the angels whom He, at His parousia, will send forth as reapers. And it is equally beyond denial that the parable of the drag-net gives exactly the same picture of the close of this age—good and bad fish in the net together, only to be separated by the angels.

As it is impossible that the Son of God should have contradicted Himself, leaven must represent an insidious influence that should enter the kingdom of heaven and work corruption.

It is only the preconceived and unwarranted notion that the gospel is at last to save the world at large in this age that calls for the unfounded and contradictory view that the mustard tree and the leaven represent a normal and good process. By this view these parables are forced into irreconcilable conflict with the teaching of the whole Word of God upon both the symbolic use of leaven and of the character and condition of the end of the present age.

2. *The Meal.*

Leaven therefore represents evil teachings which produce corrupt practice: "Then understood they that He bade them . . . beware . . . of the teaching of the Pharisees and Sadducees" (Matt. 16: 12).

What, then, is the meal in which the leaven works? It must be something congruous in its nature to leaven. Leaven will not affect iron or stone, their nature being incongruous to it. The leaven used in fermenting bread is yeast, which is a plant, and therefore acts upon wheat which is also the product of a plant. It follows that "meal" points to something congruous to "leaven," and the latter being "teaching" the former must be "teaching." Therefore the meaning is false doctrine corrupting sound doctrine, error spoiling truth.

But the meal the woman took was the staple food of the house-

hold, its staff of life. Thus Sarah made cakes from three measures of meal for the guests who had come to Abraham.[1]

What, then, is the staff of life in the realm of the spirit? Let Jeremiah answer. Of the finding of the book of the law he says: "Thy words were found, and I did eat them; and Thy words were unto me a joy and the rejoicing of my heart" (Jer. 15: 16; II Chron. 34: 14–16). Let the Lord Jesus answer by His words: "I am the bread of life . . . he that eateth Me he also shall live because of Me," and "the words that I have spoken unto you and spirit and are life" (John 6: 48, 57, 63).

Therefore "meal" typifies God's word written and God's word Personal, which two are one, the Person, the Living Word, being the subject and energy of the written Word. Therefore "leaven" is such error as negatives the truth and influence of the written word of God concerning the Son of God: which indeed includes all subordinate truths, for Christ could say, "I am the truth" (John 14: 6), and it was all one to say "the Spirit of truth shall guide you into all the truth" or to say "He shall take of Mine and declare it unto you" (John 16: 13, 14).

This, then, is the true meal, the true staff of life, Christ revealed and appropriated in Scripture; and "man doth not live by [material] bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God" (Matt. 4: 4); for, as we saw when considering the new birth unto eternal life, the words of God are both living and life-giving.

Of course, all earthly illustrations fail in some point or degree. This lies in the imperfectness of things earthly. Here enters the importance of taking statements strictly, and also limiting the illustration to the exact point illustrated. It is not that truth, like meal, can in itself be corrupted. This is not what is said, but that, in the outward development of the kingdom of God in this age, one phase will be a corruption produced by error being subtly mixed with truth, false doctrine combined with true doctrine, issuing in perversion of mind and corruption of practice.

This enforces the principle of interpretation that the whole picture is what represents the kingdom of heaven, not its features separately. The kingdom of God is not itself like leaven, nor like soured dough, but a phase of its development is represented by the action of leaven upon dough.

3. *The Woman.*

The outworking of this forecast can be traced in the arising

[1] With this instance in mind no fanciful meaning need be sought for the measures being three in number. Apparently it was the quantity normally used and would be the natural amount to mention.

of that depraved clerical system which has debased before men the honourable name of Christian. For in the typology of Scripture a "woman" represents a system, either political or religious, or both in combination.

(1) The peoples of Israel and Judah, under the name of their respective capitals, Jerusalem and Samaria, are spoken of as two sisters (Ezek. 16), and their unfaithfulness to their God is represented as adultery.

(2) In the *Revelation* the heavenly company, formed of some of the redeemed from the earth, is portrayed as a woman (ch. 12), and later is shown as the Bride, the wife of the Lamb (ch. 21).

(3) In the same book there is a woman corrupting the church in Thyatira to whom is given the name "Jezebel." Her full-length portrait is drawn in ch. 17 as the Harlot Church whose origin, character, and doom are connected with the city Babylon.

This "Jezebel" is the "woman" who, more than all others, inserted the leaven into the meal. She is older and larger than the Roman Catholic Church, though this is her present chief realm.

The ancient Jezebel, wife of Ahab and queen of Israel, had been the vile, cruel corrupter of Israel, by instructing them, through her prophets, in the false doctrines and vile practices of the worship of Baal (I Kings 16 to 22). Her successor in the smaller sphere of the church at Thyatira was doing the same work by the same methods—she was calling herself a prophetess, that is, a divinely commissioned teacher, was spreading false teaching, and was leading the way in corrupt practice.

The old Jezebel was a typical, concentrated example of the paganism that originated in Babylon after the Flood and rapidly corrupted men's minds with false philosophies, perverting the truth which men then knew as to God and creation, heaven and earth, time and eternity (Rom. 1: 18–32).

That Babylon and its system of life had been itself pictured as a "woman" (Jer. 50: 42; 51: 2, 3, 7; etc.), even as the New Testament pictures its successor, or perhaps it should be described more accurately as its continuator. For the great Confederated Church that in the early centuries posed as Christian was in all essential respects the same system of religion and politics that had before been avowedly pagan.

The inserting of error into the true apostolic doctrine and practice was done with truly satanic subtlety, and sometimes by men in the system who, one would believe, had as individuals no perception of what they were doing. For example:

(1) In the local churches as left by the apostles the rulership was exercised by a plurality of elders in each assembly (Acts 14:

23; 20: 17; Phil. 1: 1; I Cor. 16: 15, 16; I Thess. 5: 12–14; I Tim. 5: 17; I Pet. 5: 1). But the last of the apostles had been but recently taken when, early in the second century, the martyr bishop of Antioch, Ignatius, commenced the exalting and lauding of one bishop in each church as the honourable representative of Christ in that church. In due time the leaven worked widely until churches everywhere were dominated by a single elder in each.

(2) As the apostles left the churches each was an administrative unit, depending directly upon the Head in heaven, acting by His Spirit on earth. There was no visible union of the churches. The bond between believers was spiritual only, that of a common faith and a mutual love.

In that same second century these single bishops in each church began to meet for consultation of the affairs in their particular districts. At first their consultations resulted only in recommendations, and each bishop and church acted on these only when they saw good. But in due time recommendations stiffened into rulings, and local churches which did not submit could be excommunicated, as were the Donatists in North Africa in the fourth century.

(3) By this time all the churches that assented to these developments had been federated into the State Church, and then the false doctrine was spread that outside of that Church there was no salvation. This corrupted the truth that no person becomes a member of God's church until he has first experienced the new birth and so is already saved, and it led to salvation being made to depend on baptism, by which one "joined the Church."

(4) In apostolic days it was persons already professing faith unto salvation who alone were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. The second century saw the entrance of the unscriptural practice of baptizing infants, to which was soon added the deceit that by this baptism first children, and later adults, became regenerate and members of the church. By consequence it followed later that clerics who administered baptism taught that without baptism children died in sin and were lost for ever. By this cruel chain this false baptism was riveted upon the generality of professors, to the exaltation of the clerics.

This leaven spread throughout the whole Confederate Church, and it still works its fatal corruption in various systems that broke from the Church of Rome at the Reformation. Probably more professing Christians have died in their sins by accepting this one lie of regeneration by baptism than from any other error.

(5) In the first days the Supper of the Lord was simply a feast of remembrance. The eating and drinking set forth that inward

participation of Christ by faith which makes Him our spiritual life. This was perverted by the leaven that the elements used in the Supper are themselves the transmitting medium of the spiritual grace. This led on to the utterly false assertion that the consecrating priest effects the transubstantiation of the physical elements into the actual body and blood of the Lord, and to the additional falsehood that only by partaking of these consecrated elements can Christ be appropriated and salvation be maintained.

(6) But who has adequate power to effect this wondrous change of the bread into the veritable body of the glorified Lord? This involved the attribution to the consecrating cleric of a priestly office conferred by his consecration by the bishop, and it further involves the falsity of his being a sacrificing priest, an official wholly unknown to the New Testament.

And how does a bishop acquire right and power to endow a priest with these miraculous powers of regenerating a sinner by baptism and then of turning bread into Christ and feeding the partaker unto eternal life? The answer is offered in the figment of the Chief Bishop, the Pope of Rome, having derived his authority to consecrate by succession from Peter the apostle.

(7) And all this mixture of error with truth involves the denial of the sufficiency and finality of the atoning death of the Son of God to secure salvation for him who truly repents and believes. And it mixes works and sacraments with faith as the means of appropriation by the believer of the grace of God, and thus vitiates both faith and grace (Rom. 4).

Thus from the small grain of leaven, the elevating of one elder above the rest of the brethren, there developed the vast hierarchical system of the Papacy, with its corruption in doctrine and its depraved practice: and what passed as the kingdom of God on earth was actually a system in which Babylonian Jezebel had seated herself in the church and seduced even servants of the Lord to commit fornication, and eat things sacrificed to idols. For the "saints" whose images were set up for veneration were too often but pagan idols with new names.

In most of the great church histories an effect of the leaven is shown in this feature, that the doings and doctrines of this Jezebel, the Confederated Church, are narrated as being the history of the church of God. As I wrote long years ago regarding this great Woman in her final development as the Harlot of Rev. 17:

> Let us not mistake the situation that will thus arise. This

gigantic conglomeration of sects is Christless in all but name: it does not by any right or means really represent the church of the living God of which the rejected Son of God is at once Founder and Foundation. In obscure spots the lowly herb still flourishes, though amidst storms; the little flock still waits on the Great Shepherd: the house of God has not been razed; the gates of Hades have not prevailed.

The true outlook on the history of this true church is set forth admirably in E. H. Broadbent's *The Pilgrim Church* (Pickering & Inglis, Ltd.). He shows that all the centuries through the true pilgrim church has been those who broke away from the Woman and took the Word of God as their rule, instead of tradition, and therefore were persecuted by Jezebel.

The inquiring reader can pursue the subject of the growth and character of the Confederated Church in Bryce, *The Holy Roman Empire*; Charles Reade, *the Cloister and the Hearth*, ch. LXXIV; Hatch, *The Organisation of the Early Christian Churches*; Hislop, *The Two Babylons*; Pember, *The Church, the Churches, and the Mysteries*, and *Mystery Babylon the Great and the Mysteries and Catholicism*.

Before leaving this parable we will consider a few more instances of the hiding of leaven in the meal by this Woman.

(8) *The Godhead*. The Catholic creed avows the orthodox doctrine of the trinity of Persons in the one God. In practice, however, the glorification of Mary makes her the chief object of devotion. In the first period of the Confederated Church the East and the West sections were one body. The Coptic Church of Egypt is a branch of the Eastern section. In its liturgy there is a passage in which Mary actually stands between the Father and the Son as an object of invocation. Thus was idolatrous error interwoven with the truth.

(9) *Atonement*. The Church avows that the sacrificial death of Christ is indispensable to our salvation; but this is vitiated by the doctrine that this salvation is obtained through the sacraments, and these require the priest for effectual administration. Liberty of direct access to God through Christ is thus set aside.

(10) The Catholic creed admits the Divine origin of the Old and New Testaments, but this is corrupted by the recognition of the Apocrypha also. Moreover, before the official Catholic creed admits the Holy Scriptures it requires the avowal of a steadfast assent to and acceptance of alleged apostolic traditions. And to the acknowledgment of the Scriptures the promise is appended not to interpret them save according to the unanimous consent of the Church Fathers. As these in fact are not unani-

mous on doctrine no interpretation of Scripture by the individual Catholic is possible. Thus does leaven vitiate the meal. Tradition is made the more important, and the Word of God is made of none effect.

(11) *Purgatory.* In my commentary on *Hebrews* it is shown (ch. 13) that Scripture warns that an unsanctified believer is liable to the parental chastisement of God after death, with a view to his being fitted for the Millennial kingdom. To this salutary teaching the Catholic Church adds the fundamental error that this purification is necessary to final salvation, whereas the blessed truth is that *this* is dependent solely upon the atoning death of Christ relied upon by faith.

To false doctrine on this matter the Church then appends the further falsity that its priests can help the sufferer through and out of purgatory by their masses, thus greatly strengthening the grip of the priests on their dupes and their money.

(12) *The Assumption of Mary.* On p. 187 of the commentary on *Hebrews* mentioned it is said:

> It is worth deep and full inquiry whether it be not the case that the whole system of Roman theology, and each dogma separately, has some element of truth at its heart, truth perverted and corrupted, but there. It is to be doubted whether any one of those dogmas is undiluted error. That Church has been pre-eminently the woman that has hid the leaven of error in the meal of truth; but the meal is there.
>
> If this is so, it is to be expected that in even their doctrine of purgatory there is an element of truth.

Here is a theme worthy of some competent evangelical theologian and historian.

A reviewer remarked upon the paragraph just quoted that "there is true insight here, but the statement goes too far: what element of truth lies at the heart (for example) of the latest Dogma, that of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary?"

The answer affords a useful illustration of the feature here discussed.

The history of this dogma begins with an early legend that almost immediately after the death of Mary Christ appeared, with His angels, and caused her soul to be reunited with her body and she was carried to heaven.

The legend appeared in the third or fourth century and was attributed to Gnostic or Collyridian heretics. The latter worshipped the Virgin Mary as a goddess and offered to her cakes as a sacrifice. The book that preserved this story was for a while rejected by the Church and was officially condemned as

heretical by a *Decretum* attributed to Pope Gelasius A.D. 494. By a series of forgeries in the names of John the Apostle, Melito, Athanasius, Jerome, and Augustine, and further by the adoption of the Gnostic legend by some accredited teachers, writers, and liturgies, it became accepted by the Church in centuries 6, 7, and 9 (see Smith's *Dict. of Christian Antiquities*, ii, 1142, 1143). But it remained only a "pious tradition" [which nevertheless ought to be accepted] down to A.D. 1950, when it was exalted to being a Dogma which the faithful are bound to believe at peril of the soul.

Here is a clear denial of the Dogma of Papal Infallibility, for what was condemned as heretical in 494 was affirmed as Divine truth in 1950.

Thus the lowly Mary, the mother of Jesus, *and of His brothers and sisters* (Mark 3: 31; 6: 3; John 2: 3–5; Gal. 1: 19), was metamorphosed into the Perpetual Virgin and impiously exalted to be the Queen of Heaven with the blasphemies which are attached to her, as in the instance cited above where she is placed between the Father and the Son in adoration, and as when she is set forth as the tender-hearted Intercessor, who pleads for sinners at the hands of her harsh and unwilling Son.

Thus the pagan Queen of Heaven, as owned at first by the heretical Collyridians, was adopted by the Confederate Church at large when it had become paganized as the Church of the Empire.

The reader may think the reviewer justified in questioning whether there can be any element of truth in this blasphemy. Yet going back to the original form of the legend, its essence is this: That immediately after Mary's death, by a descent of the Lord from heaven with His angels, her body was re-quickened by reunion with her soul, brought from Paradise, and she was then translated to the heavens. Now *this is precisely what is to occur to Mary* at the descent of the Lord from heaven with the angels of His power, and to all other believers accounted worthy to attain to that coming age and the resurrection from amongst the dead (I Thess. 4: 16, 17; I Cor. 15: 50 ff.; Luke 20: 35).

The error mingled with the truth was that the event had already taken place in the case of Mary, and this paved the way for the disastrous corruptions mentioned.

If the apostles had taught the early church that all believers go to heaven at death this would of necessity have applied to Mary and there would have been neither need nor room for inventing a special legend so as to get her there. The fact of the legend about her in particular shows that the apostles had not so taught.

(13) *The Place of Dead Saints.* Let it now be much observed that, according to the legend, Mary's soul did not at death go to heaven above, but was carried by angelic agency to Paradise. This shows that down to that time (cent. 4) it was held that believers at death went where Lazarus went at his death, and by the same angelic agency; "he was carried by the angels into Abraham's bosom" (Luke 16: 22). This was the current description of Paradise, the sphere of the pious dead, and it was thither that the Lord and the penitent thief went at death (Luke 23: 43; Eph. 4: 9). I find not a word of Scripture to suggest that the godly dead have ever gone to any other place, yet the unfounded idea is general that Christ at His resurrection took from Paradise all believers, removed them to heaven, and that consequently ever since then believers have gone to heaven at death.

Upon this the learned Bishop Pearson, in his monumental treatise on *The Creed*, writes on Article V as follows:

> This hath been in the later ages of the church the vulgar opinion of most men . . . But even this opinion, as general as it hath been, hath neither that consent of antiquity, nor such certainty as it pretendeth. . . . The most ancient of all the fathers, whose writings are extant, were so far from believing that the end of Christ's descent into hell was to translate the saints of old into heaven, that they thought them not to be in heaven yet, nor ever to be removed from that place in which they were before Christ's death, until the general resurrection. . . . Indeed, I think there were very few (if any) for above five hundred years after Christ, who did so believe Christ delivered the saints out of hell, as to leave all the damned there; and therefore this opinion cannot be grounded upon the prime antiquity, when so many of the ancients believed not they were removed at all, and so few acknowledged that they were removed alone. . . . But there is no certainty that the patriarchs and the prophets are now in another place and a better condition than they were before our blessed Saviour died; there is no intimation of any such alteration of their state delivered in the scriptures; there is no such place with any probability pretended to prove any actual accession of happiness and glory already past.[1]

This opinion that believers at death go to heaven and glory is worse in its nature than the doctrine of the Assumption of Mary. That doctrine did at least include the resurrection of the body as prerequisite to ascent to heaven; this other opinion dispenses with resurrection as a preliminary to translation to the presence

[1] Griffith Thomas' discussion in *The Principles of Theology* (66–72) I feel to be inadequate and faulty. It is to be remembered that Pearson uses "hell" in its older sense of hades, the place of the dead, not in its present commen sense of final punishment, the lake of fire.

of God. In this particular the one was scriptural, the other is unscriptural; and in scope and influence the latter is the larger error, for the one applied to Mary alone, the other affects myriads of believers.

Its practical effect is to make resurrection unnecessary, for the saint has already reached the goal and the highest state possible, the glory of God.[1] In essence this is much the same as the error of Hymenaeus and Philetus, that "resurrection is past already," and its moral effect is similar, even to diminish faith as regards a living expectation of resurrection at the coming of the Lord, even in those who sincerely aver belief in the last doctrine.

Now that which lessens in the Christian the keen desire for the coming of the Lord is injurious. It works alongside of the error that the church is to convert the world in this age, which error gained ground at the same time that the hope of the Lord's return ceased to be generally held by Christians.

(14) *The Sovereignty of the Saints.* Scripture teaches that it is the purpose of God that Christ shall be King over all the earth (Ps. 2; Dan. 7: 13, 14; Matt. 25: 31; etc.). Included in that purpose is the plan that those who will form the church of the firstborn ones, those who conquered in the present wars of the Lord, shall share the sovereignty and glory of Christ (Matt. 19: 28; Luke 22: 28–30; I Cor. 6: 2, 3; Rev. 2: 25–28; 3: 21; etc.).

This high prospect the Confederated Church accepted; but when that Church was adopted and honoured by the State, and the expectation of the return of Christ faded away, error was added to this truth also. The truth was retained; but even as the translation of Mary was brought forward into this age, and no longer deferred to the first resurrection at the coming of the Lord, so was the temporal rule of the saints brought forward and it was taught that the Church ought to rule the world now. It matters nothing that Paul had reproved the believers at Corinth for "reigning," as if this were the period for the saints to do so (I Cor. 4: 8). The City of God must be built here and now, without the personal presence of the King.

Out of this perverse and ill-timed application of the truth grew the rank and poisonous weed of Papal Supremacy. The Pope claimed to be king of kings, lord over all rulers and peoples, and to have authority to depose sovereigns and absolve a king's subjects from their due allegiance to him. As Viceregent for Christ it was his to live in more than royal splendour and luxury.

[1] I understand that William Tyndale urged this argument against the Catholic, Sir T. More, who asserted that Christians go to heaven at death (*Reply to Sir T. More*, Ch. VIII, 118).

This corrupt and civilly corrupting leaven, this evil political theory, is still held firmly by that Church, and is yet to be realized when the Harlot Church shall for a short time sit on and direct the Scarlet-coloured political Beast, the kingdom of Antichrist (Rev. 17).

Annually, in mock imitation of the blessed Lord having washed the feet of the apostles, the Pope washes the feet of twelve beggars. But, as Bengel said, it would show more true humility were he to wash the feet of *one king*.

The blessed hope of the return of the Lord was a vital part of apostolic doctrine. Whatever diminishes it in the heart of the believer is of the nature of leaven, a corrupting of truth by an admixture of error. Here each who abhors the Woman has to fear and watch lest he help her to spread leaven. The Roman Church is not the only agency that has done this work of the Evil One.

These instances of the work of the Woman and the leaven against the truth will suffice. The serious lesson of the parable is that this process having early commenced in the sphere of the kingdom of heaven will continue to work until the consummation of the age, so that the coming Lord has Himself raised the question whether "when the Son of man cometh shall He find the faith on the earth?" (Luke 18: 8).

Parable Six: The Hidden Treasure

Matt. 13: 44

Confusion of the church with the kingdom has greatly darkened the exposition of this parable.

To some the church is the treasure, Christ the Man who found it and who gave His all to acquire it, by buying the world in which it lay hidden.

But the church of God was chosen before the world was founded and Christ was the One in association with Whom that choice was made (Eph. 1: 4). How, then, could the Son of God be ignorant of its existence and happen upon it casually while busy in this world about other things? The church already existed in His and the Father's joint counsels, and the Son knew that to Himself the Father had given its members (John 17: 6).

Others suggest that the church is the treasure hidden in the mass of mankind, and that the inquiring soul learns of this church and its privileges, desires them, and surrenders all he has to gain

a share in the church. But is the society known as the church so completely hidden that one knows nothing of its existence till he happens on it accidentally?

Another says that the truth of God is the treasure, that it is greatly hidden by its association with errors as held by various sects, as the treasure was hidden in the field, but that when a person makes the discovery of truth he buys the whole field to get the treasure; that is, at whatever necessary cost he accepts the sect entire, with its opinions and ways, because there he has found the treasure. But sectarianism is no manifestation of the kingdom of heaven of which the parable speaks.

Leaving these incongruous notions we notice that this short parable presents these features:

1. The kingdom of heaven is a treasure.
2. It is a hidden treasure.
3. It is a treasure that may be found unexpectedly.
4. It affords great joy to the finder.
5. It will cost him all that he has to acquire it.

The kingdom of God and heaven is that realm of existence in which the authority of God is owned and the holiness and happiness of heaven are enjoyed. This can be the inward experience of the believer now; it will become the general condition of life in the age to come. Inasmuch as the kingdom is said to be already like this treasure it must be the present aspect that is primarily in view. Yet the present is a foretaste of the future.

The features above indicated are seen in the case of Abraham, our spiritual father. He lived in an earthly kingdom of splendour and power, but the kingdom of God with its reality and glory was hidden from him. Unexpectedly by him the God of glory revealed Himself to Abram and made overtures to him to enter His kingdom (Acts 7: 1–3). Shown in advance the day of Christ, Abram rejoiced and was glad. But to enter that blessed kingdom, and gain possession of what was offered and promised, he had to sacrifice all, including country, kindred, and even his immediate relatives.

The same features are seen in Moses. He had princely rank in the greatest kingdom of his day. He was powerful, highly educated, wealthy; but of the kingdom of heaven he knew nothing. He knew that the race to which he belonged by birth had a different god to those of Egypt (Acts 7: 25), but neither he nor they knew so much as His name (Ex. 3: 13). But quite unexpectedly, while he was about his usual work as a desert shepherd, God appeared to him, and appointed him to service in His divine kingdom. Like Abraham he too was shown the

coming triumph of the kingdom of God and Christ (Heb. 11: 25, 26), and in the joy of that recompense of reward he forsook all to follow the heavenly light.

It was thus with the eleven apostles. They knew in their heads more than Abram or Moses had known when called of God, but of the kingdom of heaven as a present reality they were ignorant. But the Prophet from Nazareth passed their way; John the Baptist drew their attention to Him; they heard Him teach as to the kingdom; in an ecstasy of joy one of them goes to find his friend to announce the wondrous news, "We have found Him of whom Moses in the law, and the prophets, wrote" (John 1: 45). Later one of them told the price they had paid: "Lo, we have left all and followed Thee" (Matt. 19: 27).

It was the same with Saul of Tarsus. Well born, well educated, a man of means and leisure, he lived for the world of Jewry, outside the kingdom of heaven, carrying out his own thoughts, not the will of God (Acts 26: 9). But suddenly, on the open road to Damascus, the Lord of the Kingdom shone upon him, captivated him, apprehended him as a willing prisoner (Phil. 3: 12), and appointed him to high and dangerous service in His heavenly kingdom. In the joy and power thus received he too "suffered the loss of all things" and thought nothing of the sacrifice (Phil. 3: 8).

A Catholic monk, his spirit burdened with a sense of sin, knew naught of the freedom of the kingdom of God and Christ. But the unexpected happened in that a monastic superior recommended him to read and believe the Bible. Ere long he passed out of the kingdom of darkness into the kingdom of the Son of God. The joy and vigour of Martin Luther shook Europe; but it cost him all that he had before esteemed.

The dark ages saw countless fulfilments of this parable of the kingdom of God, especially during the dreary stretches when the Woman could make herself drunk with the blood of the saints (Rev. 17: 6), and treat the reading of God's Word as a capital crime. It must needs be so again when she will again control the civil power, as that chapter foretells, and when "darkness shall cover the earth and gross darkness the peoples" (Isa. 60: 2).

That behind this accidental finding of the treasure there lies an activity of the Divine grace and guidance is blessedly true, but this potent factor is not introduced into the parable, because the Teacher wished to emphasize the human and outward aspect of the kingdom.

It is to be observed that the Lord does *not* say that this parable shows the terms upon which a sinner may find pardon and peace.

That priceless boon *may* be reached by the process and at the cost indicated; yet many have gained peace with God without it. Children reared in Christian homes are often instances of finding life without such drastic and costly experiences. The Lord is talking of the kingdom of heaven and of one phase it will display in this age. Now to know the power of that kingdom, to be a thorough disciple of its King, the cost is always as here indicated and nothing less. Justification and eternal life are unconditional gifts of grace (Rom. 3: 24; 6: 23), but discipleship, with all its high privileges and noble prospects, is costly. No one can be a disciple of Christ who does not give Him the absolute preference over the dearest relatives, as Abraham did. None can follow Christ who does not bear his own cross, for Jesus bore His. The cross is the rugged instrument of death to self: "*I* have been crucified with Christ" (Gal. 2: 20). No one can be Christ's disciple who does not renounce the title to all that he possesseth, for Christ renounced all that He possessed to do the will of God on earth (II Cor. 8: 9; Phil. 2: 5–8).

Thus the application of this parable goes beyond the first finding of salvation. Many who have gained assurance of pardon halt there, and suffer arrested spiritual development. It is frequently so with children converted early. The kingdom of heaven, as the true sphere of interest and activity, may not be seen for years. It is a *hidden* treasure. At length a passage of Scripture suddenly illuminates the mind and challenges devotion; or a book or an address suddenly arrests attention and calls for full dedication to Christ and His interests; or some consecrated and rich spiritual life, met unexpectedly, creates a hunger for a similar experience. It has occurred often that the price to be paid is all that has been held dear—maybe a friend, a home, a position and prospects, a fortune.

In a theological college there was a student of great grace, unction, and heavenly influence. The Principal conversed with him and said: "I would give all I have to get what you have"; to which the reply was: "Then you may have it, sir, for *that is just what it cost me.*"

Did not the psalmist point to the essential idea the Lord presents in the parable when he wrote: "I rejoice at Thy word as one that findeth great spoil"? (Ps. 119: 162).

Parable Seven: The Pearl of Great Price

Matt. 13: 45, 46

The meaning of this parable, as of the last, has been hidden for

many by the bringing in of the church. It is suggested that the merchant is Christ, the pearl the church, and the price paid the precious blood.

But the merchant was seeking for as many fine pearls as possible. Are there, then, many churches of God, of which one is the choicest? The New Testament speaks of only one church. It is a poor picture of the Son of God that He went wandering about the world looking for churches, and only by much inquiry found the best church.

Others have suggested that it is the seeking sinner who finds the church. But there is no such thing as finding the church of God as one complete and perfect entity like a fine pearl. It is only being slowly gathered together, one by one, person after person, and will be a complete and glorious object only at the first resurrection.

The parable pictures:

1. A merchant.
2. He is seeking pearls.
3. He finds one unique pearl of exceptional value.
4. He parts with everything and secures it.

A main lesson here, as of the last parable, is the cost of acquirement; but there are differences and these are the more significant matters.

In that parable the finder did not know the treasure existed and learned of it unexpectedly. In this, the merchant knows that there are goodly pearls and he searches for them. It is while so engaged that the special pearl comes before him, to his joy and enrichment.

The erroneous views mentioned are excluded by the fact that the parable does not say that the kingdom of heaven is like a *pearl*, let alone that the church is like a pearl; it says that the kingdom of heaven is like a *merchant*.

Nicodemus was a student of religious knowledge, and one of long-standing and rich acquirement or he could not have reached the position and reputation of a public Teacher or have been called to the Chief Council of the nation (John 3: 10; 7: 50). Prosecuting his inquiries he visits the new Rabbi that had arisen and finds in Him the all-inclusive truth.

It is said that the Jews of old set small worth on pearls, in comparison with Gentiles.[1] If this is so, it may suggest that this phase of the kingdom would have larger fulfilment among Gentiles. At any rate, many honest Gentiles have exhibited the features of the parable.

[1] The pearl that Cleopatra of Egypt dissolved and drank at the banquet with Mark Antony was valued at £80,000.

Justin Martyr, in the second century, "tells how he travelled through the whole circle of Greek philosophy, seeking everywhere for that which would satisfy the deepest needs of his soul, and ever seeking in vain, till he found it at length in the gospel of Christ" (Trench, 126).

Augustine (cent. 4) wandered far for satisfaction, and found it not till he could say: "Thou awakest us to delight in Thy praise; for Thou madest us *for* Thyself, and our heart is disquieted till it resteth *in* Thee" (*Confessions*, p. 1).

John Bunyan spent years in anxious search for peace, and found it at length in Christ crucified and glorified, as revealed in Holy Scripture.

Tersteegen wrote:

> I searched for truth, I found but doubt;
> I wandered far abroad:
> I hail the truth already found
> Within the heart of God.

In the heathen world benighted souls are met who go from shrine to shrine, from land to land, seeking truth and a purer life than they know. They make painful pilgrimages, pay much money, do hard tasks, read much philosophy, in hope of finding truth and peace. Sometimes they happen in this life on the treasure by seeming accident, as by a Gospel being put into the hand on a street. Sometimes, however, in answer to their earnest inquiry, they are directed to some servant of Christ, and the pearl of saving knowledge is acquired.

We shall perhaps go beyond the strict scope of the parable if we ask as to the many such who sought but in this life did not find. But the subject is of deep interest and importance. Ancient heathen records reveal such seekers. Are they not in view in Rom. 2: 1–16? This passage deals with man as man: "O man, whosoever thou art"; and it guarantees that "God will render to every man according to his works: to them that by patience in well-doing seek for glory and honour and incorruption, eternal life . . . in the day when God shall judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ, according to my gospel."

It is not said that they found but only that they sought something glorious, honourable, and incorruptible; and in unison with the Lord's words that "he that seeketh findeth" (Matt. 7: 8; Luke 11: 10) the assurance is given that these seekers shall receive eternal life.

That these in view do not receive it in this life is suggested by the statement that both those who obey not the truth and those who seek it shall each receive his recompense at the same time,

namely, in the day of general judgment when the godless will be judged, that is, at the great white throne (Rev. 20: 11–15).

Of course the basis of this grant of eternal life is the redemptive work of the cross; but the warrant for granting it to these who did not in this life know of that work is that they honestly sought for incorruptibility, being dissatisfied with their corruptness. And what they sought the God of mercy and of justice will see that they find, even as the seeker for pearls found the one pearl of great price. *God* read the secret, hidden longing of the heart after truth and holiness: *He* knew that eternal life had been provided by Christ for all honest seekers, though they may not have heard this good news on earth: how, then, could He refuse it and so discredit the work that provided it? A judge may see ground in law for dismissing a prisoner though he had committed the evil deed, and though he was ignorant of the law known to the judge. Truly it is good news that God judges the secrets of all hearts, as Paul says.

The bearing of this on the parable is that such as these will enter the kingdom, and by the only process that avails, even the new birth that confers eternal life. By faith in Christ they will know a fulfilment of John 3, as does every regenerate person. But they will never form part of that limited company of the regenerate known as the church of God, for that company will have been completed and glorified at least a thousand years before these enter the kingdom. Here is seen the necessity of distinguishing between the kingdom in general and the church in particular.

Thus some gain truth and life by seeming accident: "Gentiles who followed not after righteousness, attained to righteousness" (Rom. 9: 30); while others gain salvation through most diligent search; and in many cases both the one and the other must pay the fullest price to secure what is a free gift of grace. This is the paradox of Isa. 55: 1, addressed to mankind at large, and to Gentiles in particular (vers. 3–5):

> 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*.

It is a free gift, yet it costs all that a man hath. This is a part of the mysteries of the kingdom of the heavens.

Parable Eight: The Drag-Net

Matt. 13: 47–50

To hearts oppressed by inward disorder and helplessness, or

by outward chaos and hopelessness, or by both, it verily is good news that there is a kingdom where these dire conditions are unknown, a kingdom which ruleth over all and which shall know no end. Thus the message of the kingdom, when presented adequately, has a power to draw attention and response.

The message of God's love and mercy has a sweet attractiveness, but the message of the kingdom is presented in this parable as having compelling force; as a later parable puts it, hearers are "*constrained* to come in" (Luke 14: 23), even as the drag-net compels the fish caught in its meshes.

But this means that all kinds and qualities of fish are caught, those bad for food as well as those good. This is parallel to the darnel among the wheat; and just as it was not possible to distinguish the one from the other until harvest time, so neither can the fish be distinguished until the net is drawn out of deep water on to the shore.

This repeats the lesson that the bad will continue alongside of the good all through this age and be found together at its close; for here the Lord again says distinctly that the separation will take place at the "consummation of the age" (40, 49).

There is seen here an illustration of the wrong of introducing details not given. The scene employed, if fully worked out, would require that the fishermen handling the net would be the persons who sorted the fish, and so it has been taken (*e.g.* Darby, *Synopsis*, iii, 99). But this is not specified, and it contradicts the parable of the darnel, for the *servants* were forbidden to attempt to separate it from the wheat, the bad from the good. Moreover, when the hour for the separating arrives the human servants of the Lord will have been already removed from the earth by rapture.

That the separation is deferred to the point of time indicated, the consummation of the age and the coming of the Son of man, implies what has been before noted, that the Lord's parables of judgment at His return deal with persons then found alive on earth, not with the dead; for judgment of those not accounted worthy to share the first resurrection is deferred to the close of the Millennial age and takes place before the great white throne. That the principles of the Divine judgment are the same for all persons does not alter the fact that the times and sessions of the court of God vary.

"The angels shall come forth." As yet they pass to and fro from earth to heaven, engaged in their God-appointed service of mercy or of justice, but only when a Jacob or a Gehazi is granted an open eye are they perceived. At the hour of consummation they will not only come, as now, but come *forth* into

open activity. These activities have been mentioned above under the parable of the darnel, as well as the fearful judgment the wicked must endure.

If the awful prospect were as vivid to us as it was to the Lord surely we would more urgently warn the wicked to turn from the error of his way. And surely such ministry of the truth is needed *within* the circle of the kingdom, as well as in circles not before reached, for thus the "bad" may be changed into the "good," the darnel into wheat, the wolves into sheep. This is another of the mysteries of the kingdom, even the new birth unto eternal life; and the goodness and the longsuffering of God with this evil age are directed unto this blessed end (Rom. 2: 4; II Pet. 3: 9).

Parable Nine: The Instructed Scribe

Matt. 13: 51, 52

"Have ye understood all these things?" The question implies that the Teacher expected that His pupils would have comprehended the parables, and their answer affirms that they had done so. This should both rebuke and encourage us; for those hearers had not yet received the Spirit of truth as the indwelling Illuminator, the Guide unto all truth, yet they understood; therefore we ought to be able to understand these parables.

He who cannot do so should inquire why he is further back in spiritual intelligence than were those disciples at that earlier period before Pentecost. Is it that he has *not* received the Indwelling Guide? If so, let him do so by definite acceptance of the promise concerning His indwelling and instruction.

Or is it that he has not given the earlier teachings of the Lord, as recorded in the Gospels, that serious attention which the apostles had given? These are the indispensable avenues of approach to the parables. The dispensational theory that the Gospels are "Jewish" in character has caused disastrous neglect of the teachings the Lord gave, with consequent misunderstanding of the Epistles the apostles wrote, for these are founded upon what they had learned from the Lord, afterward elaborated by His Spirit. Many who know well the letter of the Epistles know little of the Gospels, which is one reason why to them the *Revelation* also is a puzzle, for this is the completion of the prophecies of the Old Testament and the Gospels.

That the apostles had grasped at least the most dominant message of the parables is clear from their whole later ministry, spoken and written. They did not expect that more than a minority of their hearers would accept their message. Thus on

the very day when they had been endued with power to witness, and might have supposed that all men would respond under the conviction and persuasion of the Spirit, Peter's appeal was only, "*Save yourselves from* this crooked generation" (Acts 2: 40). Years later James explained the work of God through them as being that "He visited the Gentiles to *take out* a people for His name," and that not until the Lord should return would Israel be re-established or the residue of men seek the Lord (Acts 15: 14–18).

Paul was not surprised that the words of the prophets should be fulfilled and Israelites "despise, and wonder, and perish," and "judge themselves unworthy of eternal life." When they did so he turned to the Gentiles, which also he viewed as a fulfilment of prophecy (Acts 13: 40–47; 28: 24–28). And that of the Gentiles only some would be faithful he made clear by warning them that they could be cut out of the olive tree of grace, as Israel had been (Rom. 11: 19–22). See Ch. XLI. Further, he repeated most express Spirit-given warnings that the later times of this age, the "last days," so far from seeing the gospel triumph universally, would witness apostasy in the church, and grievous wickedness and opposition to the truth (I Tim. 4: 1; II Tim. 3: 1–9).

Peter emphasized this by saying that "in the last days mockers shall come" (II Pet. 3: 3). John describes this whole age, in comparison with the vast stretch of preceding ages, as "a last hour," and says, "Ye have heard that Antichrist cometh." His spirit was already in the world and many precursors had arisen in preparation for his personal advent (I John 2: 18; 4: 3). Of his coming Christians had heard from Paul also, and that he would only be put down by the personal appearing of Christ in glory (II Thess. 2: 3–12). This parousia of Antichrist and his destruction by Christ John was used to expound and depict in the *Revelation* (chs. 13 and 19).

Jude summarizes and emphasizes the foregoing expectation, as being the consensus of apostolic teaching, by writing, "But ye, beloved, remember ye the words which have been spoken before by the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ: how that they said to you, In the last time there shall be mockers, walking after their own ungodly lusts" (vers. 17, 18).

It was in this sense that the apostles had understood the essential message of the parables, and it is not possible rightly to understand their message unless the parables are understood in the sense which they grasped and repeated.

The statement before us implies these points:

1. *In the kingdom of heaven there will be scribes.* The scribe was one who, beyond the majority of people, could read and write fluently. Probably most Jewish boys of that time could read, but only few became proficient and could write and read easily. So he who could do this, and who gave himself diligently to learning, acquired a superior status and influence in society.

In His kingdom the Lord Jesus was and is the chief Scribe who, out of the Divine treasure of wisdom and knowledge, brought forth the truths which the Father entrusted to Him.

But He speaks of "every scribe," pointing to His purpose to raise up in His kingdom other men of superior heavenly learning. Every believer is indeed intended to have power of spiritual perception and so of increasing in the knowledge of God (Col. 1: 9; II Pet. 3: 18; I John 2: 20). Nevertheless, and to further this end, the Lord granted to some special revelations and special gifts to impart truth (Eph. 3: 2–5; 4: 11–13; etc.). It is foretold that such will arise at the very close of this age: Dan. 11: 33; 12: 3.

Nor were such scribes restricted to the apostolic band: they were found in every assembly of believers, raised up and qualified by the Lord Himself (I Cor. 16: 15, 16; I Thess. 5: 12, 13). These elders were to be "apt to teach," they were to "labour in the word and teaching" (I Tim. 3: 2; 5: 17). Such as do so are to be esteemed exceeding highly, to be accounted worthy of double honour, and to be obeyed by the rest of the church.

Thus scribes are a perpetual need of the people of God and a perpetual gift to them; and woe to the kingdom in any place or period when they are not found or not respected.

2. *The Scribe's Treasure.* On account of their position and authority the scribe is here compared to a householder (lit. a house-despot). For in the Divine ideal, and largely in actual fact in the Orient, the head of the house was just that, the *head* of the house, with real and acknowledged authority. And he kept under his own control his possessions, his treasured store.

To the chief Scribe, the Lord Jesus, the Father, as the inalienable Proprietor of all things, had committed all things (John 3: 35; 13: 3), and the Son could say to the Father, "all things that are Thine are Mine" (John 17: 10). It was the "good pleasure of the Father that in the Son all the fulness should dwell" (Col. 1: 19). It was out of this illimitable store that the Lord Jesus, when on earth, supplied His disciples, and still supplies them that learn of Him.

The means by which this continual supply is maintained differs from that initial supply to the disciples in the days of His flesh. Then He taught them by word of mouth; and when

leaving them He promised that the Spirit of truth should come to them and should (1) bring to their remembrance all that He had said unto them; (2) should guide them into all the truth; (3) should declare unto them the future; (4) should show unto them further matters concerning the Father and Himself (John 14: 26; 16: 13–15).

This would constitute their "treasure," and out of this they were to impart Divine knowledge to others. Thus they would become "disciples unto the kingdom of heaven," and in their turn would thus make other disciples; and these they were to teach to observe all things whatsoever the Lord had commanded themselves (Matt. 28: 19, 20).

All this wealth of promise was fulfilled to that first band of disciples, including Paul. Speaking of the "mystery" fully unfolded to him Paul said that it had been granted to him "to complete [Darby] the word of God, even the mystery," formerly hidden (Col. 1: 25). Thus the mysteries of the kingdom were fully revealed. As to the promise of the unveiling of the things to come, this found its fulfilment in the apocalyptic visions granted to John, for these carry forward the unfolding into the eternal kingdom of the new heavens and the new earth. Paul had summarized the essential feature of the future in the sentence that "God shall be all in all" (I Cor. 15: 28): John expanded the steps and stages of that consummation.

The unfolding of as much of the mind and purposes of God as He designs now to give having been thus completed, no subsequent revelation has been required or is possible. The permanent record of it, through all its stages, was secured by the providence of God in preserving to later generations the written records of what prophets and apostles had taught. Therefore this record, in the Old Testament, the Gospels, the Acts, the Epistles, and the Revelation, has ever since been the available, and only available, treasure house out of which instructed scribes can draw what they can display and impart. Every such scribe comes under the Lord's description "householder," house-despot, one who knows what treasures he controls, where to find them, and how to exhibit them to advantage.

The scribe to the kingdom must therefore emulate those scribes of the former age in this at least, that he meditates in God's Word day and night, so as to be conversant with all its contents. And he must also seek wisdom to open it out skilfully, harmoniously, attractively, impressively, and thus impart the truth to others to their enrichment, to the extension and establishment of the kingdom, and so to the glory of the King.

It is he who both does and teaches what the Lord commanded

who shall be great in His kingdom (Matt. 5: 19). He must be himself a good man, have good treasure stored in his heart, and must bring it forth (Luke 6: 45). And so a senior scribe unto the kingdom exhorted a younger scribe in these pregnant words:

> These things command and teach. Let no man despise thy youth; but be thou an ensample to them that believe, in word, in manner of life, in love, in faith, in purity. Till I come, give heed to reading, to exhortation, to teaching. Neglect not the gift that is in thee, which was given thee by prophecy, with the laying on of the hands of the presbytery. Be diligent in these things, give thyself wholly to them; that thy progress may be manifest unto all. Take heed to thyself, and to thy teaching. Continue in these things; for in doing this thou shalt save both thyself and them that hear thee (I Tim. 4: 11–16).

3. *Treasures New and Old.* The Lord and the apostles never neglected the truths that had long been revealed. They based their teachings and claims on the Old Testament. "Think not that I came to destroy the law and the prophets: I came not to destroy but to fulfil" (Matt. 5: 17). And Paul declared of his ministry that he was saying "nothing but what Moses and the prophets did say should come" (Acts 26: 22).

Yet they constantly threw new light on old scriptures, and also they brought out of the purposes of God new material which they built upon what had been before laid down. This the instructed scribe will continue to do. The completed Word of God, the Bible, is inexhaustible. The centuries through scribes unto the kingdom have brought into prominence truths found in the Book but formerly overlooked or overlaid with the rubble of human tradition. Then, alas, godly men have formed systems of truth thus brought to light, which systems were but partial, and they have presently closed their eyes against everything not comprised in their imperfect creeds and formularies.

John Robinson, the Puritan, in century seventeen, could not sufficiently deplore that the Reformed Churches had come to a full stop in religion, for neither Lutherans nor Calvinists would go a step beyond what those great men had taught, though he was persuaded that "the Lord had yet more light and truth to break forth from His Holy Word."[1]

Blessed are the scribes who are brave and skilful to bring forth the new, and blessed are those hearers who have minds open to

[1] Similarly, in general, the followers of J. N. Darby will allow no variation from his prophetic scheme, nor will those of B. W. Newton readily go beyond his views. So for nearly a century these schools of thought have remained stationary on that subject.

accept the new, so long always as it is brought forth out of our only store of things Divine, the Word, the Holy Scriptures. Nor let it be overlooked that the Lord put the new before the old as that which the instructed scribe brings forth.

General Remarks on the Parables of Matthew 13

1. The moral sphere on earth which will arise from the impact upon men of the kingdom of God and heaven will develop these aspects:

(1) The message concerning God's rights and purposes will be spread among men as seed is sown in a field. There will be a four-fold result.

(*a*) Some seed will be fruitless, because Satan will at once remove it from the mind of the hearer.

(*b*) Some seed will produce quick but only transitory effects.

(*c*) Some seed will at first promise due results, but these will be choked off by worldly concerns and cares.

(*d*) A portion of the seed sown will grow to maturity and fruitfulness.

(2) To counteract this fourth result the Evil One will craftily intermingle his "sons" among the godly, to the possible injury of the latter.

(3) There is a persistent, Divinely-implanted energy ceaselessly at work to secure fruit unto God. Neither man nor Satan can ultimately frustrate this, for His word shall prosper in the thing unto which He has sent it (Isa. 55: 10, 11). Therefore, while the servants of the King should be faithful and zealous, they should not be anxious, for their labour cannot be in vain, being wrought in the power of the Lord (I Cor. 15: 58).

(4) The sons of the Evil One will contrive that the outward form of the kingdom shall not remain as was the Divine plan, a lowly institution, but shall be changed into a great corporation, a visible and comfortable sphere of operations for wicked spirits.

(5) By means of false teachings this outward society shall be stealthily and thoroughly corrupted from the simplicity and purity that is toward Christ.

(6) This corruption and confusion shall be so vast that men will scarce be aware that a Divine message and wealth are to be had. Only by seeming accident will it come to their knowledge and possession.

(7) Yet in times and places there will be earnest seekers for truth and purity, and these shall find the pearl.

(8) This mixed and confused condition shall continue until it reaches its aforeseen consummation. Then the Son of man will

bring it to an end, by the agency of the angels of His power, and will establish on earth His kingdom in visible glory.

(9) For the maintenance and furtherance of His true interests, that is, for the deliverance of the Satan-enslaved and benighted, and for the strengthening of His own followers, the Lord will call and qualify instructed and faithful teachers of His truth on to the close of the age.

The passages cited above from *Daniel* (p. 119), point particularly to a godly remnant among Israel at the end of this age, God-fearing though not up till then disciples of Jesus. This feature shows again that the kingdom of God is a wider sphere than the church of God. The judgment scene shown in Matt. 25: 31–46, teaches the same lesson, for the sheep of that parable will be some who will inherit the kingdom though they had not themselves thought of the Son of man as the object of their service (vers. 37–40).

2. The scope of the parables is this whole age. For the first parable views the personal activity of the Son of man when He was here, the Sower of the word, and the last extends to His personal intervention at His second advent. The various aspects shown will be ever arising here and there all through the age.

There is no clear indication that these aspects would arise consecutively, each picturing a further and following period during the age. This idea is negatived by the facts that as early as the second parable the end of the age is depicted, not only in the last parable, and that the features mentioned in all the parables did actually develop from the beginning of the age. Birds of the air were active from the start, darnel appeared without delay, abnormal growth, false teachings, the treasure being hidden from some and sought by others, the net holding bad as well as good, the presence of instructed teachers—these conditions all arose at the beginning and have continued ever since in various areas and degrees.

3. The series of eight parables as given in Matthew 13 is divided circumstantially into two groups of four each. The first four were addressed to the crowds in public, the second four to the disciples only and in private. Mark 4: 34 states that it was "privately to His disciples that He expounded all things." This suggests that, though Matthew narrates the interpretation of the first two parables in the course of his report of the first four parables, it was actually given in private to the disciples.

It is somewhat conjectural to assign a reason for the one group being spoken to all and the other group to the few. Yet it is fact that the crowds were mainly persons who had no faith but

rather were blinded by unbelief, while the disciples were blessed with faith and understanding. And yet it is to be borne in mind that the first four were but some of the parables addressed to all (Mark 4: 33), and we cannot say whether all those unrecorded parables were of the same character as those on record.

Yet there is indicated some closer connexion between the last three in Matthew than between the first four. The latter are simply connected by the word "another," each being merely additional; but the three are more closely linked by "again," that is, they in some sense supplement one another. It is a subtle feature more to be felt than defined.

It is wise not to be positive in assigning a reason for the division into public and private.

4. Some features of parabolic teaching may be noted:

(1) The same figure may have different applications. Soil is found in five parables. In parable one, the Sower, it means the heart of the individual. In two, three, and four, darnel, spontaneous growth, and mustard tree, it points to the earth as the dwelling-place of men. In parable five, the Treasure, no specific meaning is suggested or needed.

(2) Different figures may have the same meaning. Sons of the kingdom and good fish are one, as are darnel and bad fish. Garner for wheat and vessels for fish have one meaning. The corrupters are "darnel" when viewed individually, but corporately are a "woman." This variation carries two lessons:

(*a*) each figure contributes its own sense and completes the rest;

(*b*) that diverse figures are used, such as "garner" and "vessels," bespeaks caution in defining the reality.

CHAPTER XI

THE LIVING BREAD

John 6

It was remarked in Ch. VII that the cities which the Lord cursed are gone. Of these Capernaum seems to have been the chief in size, privilege, and guilt. In April, 1928, when the writer was there, only one relic of it was to be seen, the ruins of the fine synagogue. It had been a handsome edifice, and there is little doubt that it was the synagogue given by the Roman centurion (Luke 7: 4, 5), for on the lintel over the front entrance the Roman eagles were carved. The stone lay on the site to be seen. It must have been some powerful motive that caused religious Jews to consent to the emblem of the hated heathen tyrants being on their place of worship.

Sitting quietly there one seemed to hear the Son of God talking to the now enthralled, now murmuring throng, saying "I am the bread of life . . . I am the living bread which came down out of heaven: if any man eat of this bread he shall live for ever: yea, and the bread which I will give is My flesh, for the life of the world."

The teaching Christ had already pressed upon men had shown that entering and living in the kingdom of heaven is, in one aspect, a serious business. The Sermon on the Mount had been given in that same district. Its claim to absolute and literal obedience to the severe demands made called for strenuous, whole-hearted effort and conflict. Who could be equal to such a life? who strong enough for such incessant battling against the world, the flesh, and the Devil?

The assuring answer is, "I am the bread of life," the food by which men live in My kingdom and service! "As the living Father sent Me, and I live because of the Father [by reason of what the Father is to Me]; so he that eateth Me, he also shall live because of Me [by reason of what I will be to him]."

Here the Lord revealed the secret of His own perfect life and of the life of the true disciple. All true life flows from the living Father, through the Living One, the Son (Rev. 1: 18), by the Spirit of life, into the believer.

1. *The Son lived because of the Father.* He had already made the solemn and categorical statement, "Verily, verily I say unto you, the Son can do nothing of Himself, but [only] what He seeth

the Father doing: for what things soever He doeth, these the Son also doeth in like manner" (John 5: 19).

"The Son is not able to do anything from Himself," that is, by His own initiative or resources. It is the Son who declares this, nor is there any marvel in this Divine impotence. There are things God cannot do. He cannot lie (Heb. 6: 18), or deny Himself, by not fulfilling His word, whether of grace or justice (II Tim. 2: 13). The reason is that He cannot act contrary to His own nature, and therefore also no one of the Persons of the Trinity can act independently of the Others, for that would be schism in the Godhead. Then God would cease to be the triune Being that He is, which is impossible.

This essential and invariable co-activity of the Godhead is eternal. It did not begin when the Son became man. In the initial work of creating it was the Father who made the worlds, but He made them by the agency of the Son (Heb. 1: 2), and the Son acted by the Spirit (Job 26: 13; 33: 4; Ps. 104: 30).

Thus the Father is the Fountain of all existence, imparting to the Son infinite wisdom, energy, and authority to be the actual Creator, Sustainer, and Ruler of all things. And the Son says, "I can of Myself do nothing" (John 5: 30). But as the Son is competent to receive and to exercise the fulness of the Father, He cannot be of less than infinite capacity with the Father, and must be equal with God.

Yet there cannot be more than one infinity, for the infinite is all-inclusive; therefore God is one God, Father, Son, and Spirit. The Son cannot be less than God, for He can do in like manner to the Father whatsoever the Father doeth. And inasmuch as this equality and activity of the Deity was exercised in the original creating of the universe it must be the pre-creation condition of the Godhead and be itself eternal.

It is significant, and should be guidance to all preachers, that the Son of God stated these highest and profoundest truths, and their implications, to the unregenerate crowds that thronged to Him (as in John 5). Therefore they are truths that all men need to know. So much of our preaching and teaching is poverty-stricken, and reminds of Spurgeon's story of the farm labourer who at supper said to the farmer's wife, "I say, missus, I wish you'd let that 'ere chicken run through this broth once more." It is small wonder if believers shrink from the claims of discipleship if they are not fed richly on the Bread of life, the mighty truths as to the Person of the Son of God.

2. The Son knew the Father perfectly and in His career on earth He drew from the Father by faith the wisdom, knowledge, vigour, guidance and all other qualities needed for doing per-

fectly the will of the Father. It is Himself who so declares. The very judgments of His mind on persons and affairs were righteous because He did not form an independent judgment but only upon what He heard from God (John 5: 30; 8: 16). His teachings were a repetition of what the Father taught Him (John 8: 26, 28), and this extended to the very words in which He taught things (John 17: 8). He attributed to the Father all His works also, as resulting from the indwelling of the Father. Thus His inner life and its outward effects arose because the Father abode in Him and He in the Father (John 14: 10).

The human life of the Son of God was therefore a continuance on earth of the oneness and communion, the dependence and obedience, which existed in His eternal relations with the Father. In result, He could say, "He that hath seen Me hath seen the Father" (John 14: 9).

It was not that in earthly humiliation He ceased to draw upon personal resources of His own as the Son of God. It is of the very nature of the union of the Godhead that the Son never had personal resources of His own apart from the Father: "all things that are Mine are Thine, and Thine are Mine" (John 17: 10). It was upon the resources that are His in unrestricted oneness with the Father that He drew, by trusting the Father, praying to the Father, and doing the will of the Father. And this relationship persists now that He has resumed His place with the Father in glory. Of the blessed Spirit of God Christ could say, "If I go away *I* will send Him unto you." But this was in conjunction with the Father, for He had before said, "I will make request of the Father, and *He* shall give you another Comforter" (John 16: 7; 14: 16). And again: "the Holy Spirit whom *the Father will send* in My name," and yet, "the Comforter, whom *I* will send unto you *from the Father*" (John 14: 26; 15: 26). When this promise had just been fulfilled, Peter, now illuminated, conjoined these Divine activities by explaining the event thus: "Being therefore by the right hand of God exalted, and having *received of the Father* the promise of the Holy Spirit, He [the Son] hath poured forth this which ye see and hear" (Acts 2: 33).

3. In John 6 the Lord further declares that the believer may enjoy a similar relationship with Himself to that which He has with the Father, and with like effects: "He that eateth My flesh and drinketh My blood abideth in Me, and I in Him . . . so he that eateth Me he also shall live because of Me" (vers. 56, 57). This is the supreme privilege and possibility of faith. But it is enjoyed subject to the same condition as that which exists in the relation of the Son to the Father, even that the Son must be the believer's *only* life and *sole* source and resource.

Man's natural life depends upon the eating of suitable food. The benefit of food will be reduced if unsuitable articles are taken with it, especially if poison be mixed with it. It has been noted in Ch. IV that when Israel entered the path of faith their first need was water, which God supplied all the journey through. Their next need was food, which was met by the daily supply of manna. Water and manna were *all* that God supplied for the whole desert journey, and on these they throve.

There were occasions when they longed for the varied diet of Egypt; but while cucumbers, leeks, onions, and garlic can tickle the palate they afford no stamina for the toils of the desert. Disgruntled, they protested "our soul is dried away; there is nothing at all: we have nought save this manna to look to . . . give us flesh that we may eat" (Num. 11: 5, 6, 13). Upon this sad and solemn event the Divine comment is "He gave them their request, but sent leanness into their soul" (Ps. 106: 15).

The leanness was inevitable. They were sufficiently enlightened to know that manna and water for the body were material counterparts of spiritual food and drink that renewed their inner man: "they did all eat the same *spiritual* food, and did all drink the same *spiritual* drink" (I Cor. 10: 3, 4). Therefore in despising the symbol they forfeited the reality, and starved the spirit to please the flesh. It is fearfully common history, and we also are warned "not to lust after evil things, as they also lusted" (I Cor. 10: 6). Yet the viands they craved were not essentially evil, but it was evil to demand what was not the present will of God. Christ and the Spirit are the only sustenance and refreshment the saint needs, and he who feeds upon the flesh and blood of the Son of man lives the life that is life indeed.

4. What, then, is the reality of the figure of eating and drinking His flesh and blood? The question is urgent, for the Lord has said most solemnly that "Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of man and drink His blood ye have not life in yourselves" (ver. 53). Man has no inherent natural life; his fellow-man may deprive him of it by a knife or a bullet. Much less, then, has he spiritual life in himself: this he never has had, for it is not conferred by our natural birth.

The Roman Catholic Church insists on a literal material sense. The physical flesh of the Lord must be eaten, and so that this may be possible they propound the lie that the priest converts the bread and wine of the Lord's Supper into the veritable body and blood of Christ, eating which the partaker receives eternal life. This dogma of the Mass the Prayer Book (Art. 31) justly calls a "blasphemous fable and dangerous deceit."

Luther denied so much of the doctrine of transubstantiation

which asserts that the bread and wine, after consecration by the priest, cease to be such, save in appearance, and become materially the body and blood of Christ. He held that the elements remain bread and wine; but he taught that the body of Christ glorified is universally present, therefore it is in the bread and wine, and therefore is eaten and drunk by the communicant. This is known as consubstantiation, the actual body of Christ being in the elements, both being there co-substantial. But on the ground given, the universality of the body of Christ, it should be equally true that a child eats of Christ when he eats a blackberry from the hedge.

It is observable how ideas tend to reappear where they might be least expected. The principal section of Exclusive Brethren have developed this train of thought: That when His people meet to break bread the Lord is not at first present, but that after a brother has prayed and has distributed the bread and the cup the Lord becomes personally present in some sense in which He was not there prior to that act. All this leads towards the status and acts of the consecrating priest of the sacerdotal systems and his power to assure the presence of the Lord in the sacrament. It were but a short step further to the notion of the bodily presence of Christ and thus to eating His veritable flesh and blood.

This shows the need of watchfulness against subtle error and of a clear understanding of Scripture. So far is the presence of the Lord among His people from being dependent upon the *Supper*, that the promise of His presence stands in immediate relation to two or three meeting in His name *to pray* (Matt. 18: 19, 20).

The Lord safeguarded His statement against this material notion. His hearers at the time took His words in a material sense, saying, "How can this man give us His flesh to eat?" (ver. 52). The Lord rebuked this misconception by saying "the flesh profiteth nothing" (ver. 63). No other flesh had been mentioned except His own body, which He would offer for the life of the world (ver. 51). So that this remark meant, If you *could* eat My flesh in the material sense you adopt, such eating would profit nothing! The truth of this has been demonstrated by the millions upon millions who, as their priests have taught them, have eaten Christ's flesh in the sacrament, without being in the least profited, spiritually or morally.

Moreover, it is clear that the Lord's teaching applied to His hearers that day in the synagogue: "My Father giveth to *you* (*humin*) the true bread out of heaven" (ver. 32). Yet it is very

certain that the partaking of Christ by those persons did not depend upon the Supper not yet instituted.

On the other hand, it is the fact that the Supper teaches the same truth that the Lord taught that day. In this lies its very real profit. He taught it then by the figurative language concerning eating bread: in the Supper He teaches it by the symbolic act of eating bread. If *remembrance* of the Lord's death had been the only purpose of the ordinance this could have been gained simply by the breaking of the bread and pouring out of the wine. But we are also to *eat* and *drink*, thus not only *remembering* Him and His death, but *appropriating* Him in such wise as to assimilate and incorporate Him each into himself, that He may become our personal life and vigour, as does our daily food. In bread the Creator has stored energy. This energy is liberated by digestion and becomes the working force of the eater. Similarly the Father has placed all life and power in the Son, and he that eateth Christ by faith lives because of what He becomes to the spirit of the partaker.

Later the Lord opened up this theme more fully by the parable of the vine and its branches, which will be considered in its place. It is enough here to observe what He taught as to the actual method by which He is now to be appropriated by the believer. He said: "It is the spirit that giveth life" (ver. 63). The word "to give life" comes twice in John 5: 21, then in this place, and in eight other places.[1]

In every place it is the thought of *resurrection* life, a life which follows and annuls death. This can be brought about only by a spiritual energy. Adam's body was prepared but was lifeless until "the Lord God breathed into his nostrils the breath [spirit] of life; and man became a *living* soul" (Gen. 2: 7). What, then, is the higher counterpart to this in the raising of the sinner from the spiritual death through sin into the spiritual eternal life? Christ's answer is distinct: "it is the spirit that giveth life: *the words* that I have spoken unto you *are* spirit, and *are* life" (ver. 63). The inherent divine vitality of God's words has been noted in Ch. X, p. 66, *The Seed*. In that honest and good heart which receives the Lord's words in faith that they are true, and with the intention to obey them, the new life is begotten. And that new life is Christ, for His words and Himself are inseparable. The soul that feeds on the words of Christ feeds upon Christ, and learns in blessed experience that He is indeed the Bread of God that imparteth eternal life.

[1] John 5: 21 *bis*; 6: 63; Rom. 4: 17; 8: 11; I Cor. 15: 22, 36, 45; II Cor. 3: 6; Gal. 3: 21; I Pet. 3: 18. In I Tim. 6: 13 instead of *zōopoieō* read *zōogoneō*.

As regards the Roman interpretation of John 6: 53, it is interesting to note what has been said in earlier days by men whose names are much honoured in Roman tradition. Augustine, writing on the literal and spiritual interpretation of Scripture, says: "If the words contain a precept either forbidding what is flagitious and criminal, or enjoining what is useful and benevolent, we must understand them literally. But if the contrary, they are to be understood figuratively. Thus, when our Lord says, 'Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of man and drink His blood ye have no life in you,' He seems to enjoin what is criminal and flagitious. It is a figure, bidding us communicate in our Lord's passion, and secretly and profitably store up in our memories that for our sakes He was crucified and pierced" (*On Christian Doctrine*, iii, 16). Similarly Bernard of Clairvaux says on John 6: 54: "That is to say, He who reflects on My death, and after My example mortifies his members which are on earth, has eternal life—that is to say, 'If you suffer with Me, you shall also reign with Me'" (*On Loving God*, iv, 11). (F. F. Bruce.)

As to the water of life we have seen that the soul must drink and drink again, and confine its drinking to the heavenly elixir. It is so as to the Bread of life; the believer must eat continually of Christ communicated in His words, nor spoil his appetite by the poisoned viands of the kingdom of darkness. The life which began by believing words of God must be nourished continually upon "the words of the faith and of the good teaching," even "the healthful words, the words of our Lord Jesus Christ" (I Tim. 4: 6; 6: 3). And among these words are those which call us to eat and to drink of the symbols of His person and sacrifice offered in His supper.

Neglect of this habitual meditation upon God's words is necessarily, inescapably followed by spiritual anæmia. A fine Christian I knew went to the house of a Christian leader to fetch his children from an evening party. He said that he found a number of foolish young people, dressed in foolish clothes, eating foolish food, and engaged in foolish conversation. This was as truly foolish as it is sadly common.

The strength of God's great angels is related to their absorption of His words (Ps. 103: 20):

> Bless Jehovah, ye angels of His:
> Ye mighty in strength, that fulfil His word,
> Hearkening unto the voice of His word.

The strength of spirit of the Christian is consequent upon feeding continually upon God's words (I John 2: 14):

I have written unto you, young men, because ye are strong, and the word of God abideth in you, and ye have overcome the Evil One.

To all eternity it shall be thus: Christ, the Son of God, the Living One, shall be the life of all the living, received by means of His words of power.

Christ is our life, our life for daily life;
Christ is our life to face the fiercest strife;
Christ is our life, and He is life indeed;
Christ, e'en the living Christ, for every need.

Were it not so we ne'er should win our way
Through earth's tempestuous night to heaven's day;
Long ere the goal were reached our faith would fail,
Ne'er should these eyes the land of promise hail.

But Christ this weary way before us trod,
Upward to Zion's hill, the throne of God:
We through the wilderness His track pursue,
Urging our heavenward way, His throne in view.

. . . .

Why as we feast upon the food of God
Will thought unbid retrace the way we trod?
This Bread that feeds us through eternal years
We ate on earth, oft moistened with our tears.

Why as we drink the wine that cheers the heart
Do visions of the thirsty desert start?
This blood-red wine of heaven, so rich, so rare,
Is strangely like the living water there.

. . . .

Yes, He Who satisfies the Father's love,
He is the joy of all the hosts above:
Christ is our strength through all the vale of tears,
And Christ our life through heaven's unclouded years.[1]

It is important to observe the effects in His hearers of this teaching, so instructive, so searching. The people begin by *inquiring* what they must do to work the works which God requires (ver. 28). They are told that faith in His Messenger is the work God demands. So faith is work. They reply by a *challenge* as to Christ's credentials as the Sent One of God (ver. 30), which shows that the many and mighty works they had already seen had not reached conscience and heart, not even the miraculous feeding them of only the day before. They make a

[1] From the writer's poem "Christ is our Life." *The King and other Verses*, 16.

request for the bread of life now offered, but upon the Lord declaring that He Himself was the bread come down from heaven, they *murmur* against Him. Upon the truth being further explained and enforced they *strive* with one another (ver. 52). Upon His still further declaring the truth even many of His followers murmur and *forsake* Him.

Such is the sifting force of truth, and by such minds what is in reality a rich and strengthening truth is felt to be a "hard saying" and unendurable.

By recording the words of the Lord, Scripture puts to each reader His question to the Twelve, "Would ye also go away?" Discipleship must be wholly free, the follower being drawn and bound by love of truth and of Him who is the Truth. Those of old who left their native land at the call of God "would have had opportunity to return" (Heb. 11: 15). Had they done so they would have had no place in God's roll of honour nor have gained the high prospects offered at the end of the life of faith. Those disciples who forsook Christ at the time in question are unknown in His records, whereas those who stuck to Him to the end gained eternal renown and reward. Happy are they who feel that there simply is no one else to whom to turn, being assured that Christ is the Holy One of God, and that His words impart eternal life.

Yet even the faithful ones the Lord further searches by the piercing word "one of you is a devil!" (ver. 70). O Thou Searcher of hearts, am *I* as one of the eleven or as the twelfth?

CHAPTER XII

THE CHURCH

Matt. 16: 13–28; 18: 15–20

It had been plainly foretold by the prophets that there would come a period when God would no more have mercy upon His people Israel, but would declare them to be not His people. Their names would be Lo-ruhama and Lo-ammi. In connexion with this repudiation others should obtain mercy who had not before done so, and so they who were not His people should become His (Hos. 1 and 2). This could only mean that Gentiles would be brought into favour, for, when Israel should be displaced, there were none others to come into the question.

The fact of the setting aside of Israel in favour of Gentiles is explained fully by Paul (Rom. 9 to 11). He felt it important that Gentile believers should understand this element in the plans of God and should know that the situation thus created would be only temporary, for in due season Israel should be restored to its former place in the olive tree of promise. See Ch. XLI.

Seeing that this cutting off of Israel as a people had been distinctly foretold, and must assuredly take place, it is the more easily seen that the Lord never could have offered to that people that He would forthwith establish them in the glory of the kingdom if they would receive Him, for that would have made void the Word of God as to their being set aside for a time. The Scripture would have been broken.

The general rejection of the Lord by leaders and masses precipitated the crisis which the prophets had foretold, and now He would begin to enlighten the apostles as to the fulfilling of the related promise of the creating of that new people for God. He will build His church, that is, He will form a new company that He will call into association with Himself as the Rejected One by men, but accepted and exalted by God. These would be mainly Gentiles (Acts 1: 8; 13: 46–48; 15: 14–18; Rom. 9 to 11), but a distinctive feature of this company would be that Jews and Gentiles would be merged into this one new man in Christ Jesus (Eph. 2: 11–21).

This development would be in accordance with the original purpose and promise that through Abraham the whole human race should be blessed. The particular stage of this fulfilment would prove to be that a portion of Abraham's spiritual descend-

ants should qualify for the inheritance that was promised to him in the world above, the heavens. He had embraced that higher and nobler prospect, and had shaped his course on earth accordingly; these should follow him in this, and like him live as aliens and pilgrims on earth (see *Galatians* and *Hebrews*).

That a company of mankind should be translated from man's proper region of the universe, the earth, to live in that upper world of glory, must needs create a new situation in the heavenly world, and involve many new and striking elements. It was part of the reason why the Son of God should become man, and in His humanity should return to His proper realm with God, that there should be a Man to be the Head of this exalted and glorified section of mankind. Conversely, it is part of the reason for their being thus specially graced and glorified, that the Man in the glory should not as man be isolated and solitary there, but should have, as His heart's delight and to His honour, associates from the race whose nature He has for ever assumed. See Ch. XLII, The Bride.

The carrying out of this portion of the counsel of the Father involved the superhuman work of redeeming mankind from the sin and condemnation in which they otherwise irretrievably lay; else the justice of God would have frustrated His grace and their glory by demanding their damnation.

In the outworking of this Divine scheme it was further unavoidable that the Son should be despised and rejected by men, and initially by Israel; for thus Israel's fall became the opportunity for the message of mercy to reach out to the Gentiles. This in turn involves that those who accept the call to association with the Son of God in His present heavenly life and its prospects, must of necessity join themselves to Him as the One despised and rejected and must accept such treatment themselves.

The final recompense which the grace of God proposes for thus sharing Christ's lot as rejected is the sharing His glory and kingdom at His return to establish it; for we become "joint-heirs with Christ, if so be that we suffer with Him, that we may be also glorified with Him. . . . For if we died with Him, we shall also live with Him; if we endure, we shall also reign with Him" (Rom. 8: 17; II Tim. 2: 11, 12).

Living *with* Him, is something additional to having life *in* Him. All the saved have the latter by the new birth; but not all the saved will live for ever in His immediate presence. There is to be a new earth, not only a new heaven, and saved Israelites and saved nations will people it.

It is this calling and choice of the God of all grace to share His

own eternal glory that we must give the more diligence to make sure (I Pet. 5: 10; II Pet. 1: 10, 11). It is this vast prospect that lies behind the instruction which the rejected Christ gave to His followers in connexion with His purpose to build His church.

For thus espousing Christ, and for proving faithful to Him amidst the blandishment or the antagonism of the world, the first necessity is some just apprehension of Who He is, the Son of God. Therefore the Lord here raised this question: "Who do men say that the Son of Man is?"

It is illuminating to note the impression He had made upon men. They compared Him to John the Baptist, Elijah, or Jeremiah. These were men of massive mould, strong, faithful characters, men upon whom God could count under severe tests. Jesus did not impress men as a weakling, soft and pliable, though to the fallen and the sorrowful He was tenderness itself.

This estimate was true but wholly inadequate. The apostles had discerned far more than this. John afterwards explained that a result of their close intimacy with Jesus had been that they had recognized that in this real Man they were watching a manifestation on earth of something eternal, divine. In that true human life there was exhibited the eternal life of God, displayed in a man on earth (I John 1: 1, 2).

Peter now expressed this same conviction in the arresting confession, "Thou art the Messiah, the Son of the living God." It was not that these enlightened eyes had pierced through the humanity and discovered the deity, but rather that they saw the Godhead shining upon them in the humanity.

It is the God-wrought apprehension of this mighty fact that alone enables us weak mortals to espouse Christ and His cause in the face of the sternest opposition by Satan and his servants; for "who is he that overcometh the world, but he that believeth that Jesus is the Son of God?" (I John 5: 5). The new life begotten in the believer has as its essential nature an irreconcilable and victorious antagonism to the world, for Satan is the inspiring, guiding, energizing force in the world system (Eph. 2: 1–3; II Cor. 4: 3, 4), and the Divine nature stands in uncompromising resistance thereto.

But it is the principle of faith that brings man into that hostility to the world, faith that discerns that Jesus is the Son of God. Nor is it enough to admit this as a doctrine of the Bible; this stage may be reached by "flesh and blood" having influenced one, that is, by the clear, cogent instruction of the mind by a fellow-man; it is vital that the Spirit of truth shall so *reveal* Christ as that the same overmastering conviction is wrought as in the

case of the apostles, and the heart is bowed, captivated, enslaved to the Son of God, through a revelation granted by the Father. Such a believer has thus come under the immediate influence of the whole Godhead, Father, Son, and Spirit, which empowers the man to confess Jesus as the Son of God and supports him in the ensuing conflict.

This clear confession by Peter and the other disciples led the Lord now to instruct them as to His own forthcoming sufferings and that each who purposed to go after Him must be prepared himself to suffer.

Such an one must first deny self its former place as the guiding principle of life. It is native to fallen man to consider each item or event as it affects his self. But the creature ought to be living to please God, to regard Him alone as to be served and pleased. From this slavery to self into the liberty to serve God the soul is brought when it enthrones Jesus the Son of God as its object.

To effect this radical change of attitude to self, the disciple must take up his cross. The cross was the instrument on which a man was put to death. Jesus would presently carry the cross on which He would literally die. His follower is to accept the *death* of self: now we cease to serve one who has died. "I have been crucified with Christ" is the personal application of the general truth concerning believers that "our old man was crucified with Him" (Gal. 2: 20; Rom. 6: 6). Self being reckoned dead, room is made for Another to be the object of devotion: "to me to live is Christ" (Phil. 1: 21). Then the believer finds heart of grace to follow Him along the road He trod.

Let each who professes to be a follower of the Lord Jesus examine his heart and life. Jesus did not seek riches or honour or pleasure for Himself. He took exactly the opposite course, by impoverishing Himself that others might benefit, by despising shame, by not pleasing Himself. Therefore He is entitled to say to others that the one who takes care of time and opportunities, that is, his life, to serve himself, is throwing away his life, and at last shall find he had wasted and lost it. Yes, though he should gain the whole world, and yet forfeit his life by having lived in vain, it would be to no advantage at last. The years I am to live, the powers I am to employ, the possessions I am to control, that is, my allotted life on earth, are something which I cannot exchange for something nobler once I have frittered them away in serving self. Therefore one who was noble, rich, cultured, influential in the affairs of this world, but who lived for self until eighty years of age, had then to own sadly that, though his soul was saved through such belated faith, his life was lost.

Not one hour of those long years could be recovered and spent for God instead of self.

A farmer who should hold his seed corn instead of sowing it would lose it; but he who loses present possession by scattering it over the fields is enriched at harvest. The harvest is the consummation of this age, when the Son of man, now rejected and absent, shall come in His glory and shall render unto every man according to his doing.

This ennobling yet searching truth was the setting in which the Lord placed the announcement that He was about to build His church. A place in this privileged fellowship is free to every believer; but when the Son of Man comes in His glory to share that glory with His followers, it will be granted to those only who have shared His cross and rejection, by literally walking in His steps. Such shall walk with Him in white because they kept their garments white on earth; such shall sit with Him in His throne because, by His strength gained daily by fellowship with Him, they conquered the world even as He conquered it (Rev. 3: 4, 21). His holy bride must, by heavenly grace, make her own trousseau for the marriage day: "she hath made herself ready . . . the fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints" (Rev. 19: 6–9). See Ch. XLII, The Bride.

In connexion with this His church Christ on this occasion used four pictures: a building, a rock, gates, and keys.

1. *The Building.* It is "a holy temple . . . for a habitation of God in the Spirit" (Eph. 2: 20–22; I Cor. 3: 16; 6: 19, 20; I Pet. 2: 4–8). This temple is formed of "living stones," a striking figure, not known in nature. But we know that electricity can electrify iron. Similarly, by the new birth and the indwelling Spirit, the life of God suffuses the believer, so that his former death gives place to life. It is such living persons alone that Christ incorporates into His church. They have responded to His call and become part of His *ecclesia*, His called out company.

Note i. They are called *out*; they forsake the world entire, or its separate national or other subsections, and "go *forth* unto Him" (Heb. 13: 13).

Note ii. They do not obtain the Divine life by "joining the church": life has been begotten in them by faith in Christ, and it is as stones already living with spiritual life that Christ builds them into this company of the saved. Salvation by "joining the church" is a putting the cart before the horse, a fatal perversion.

Conversely, should one, by Divine command, be put out of the church (I Cor. 5: 13), though he thereupon ceases to be a stone in the building, he does not thereby lose the eternal life, for this was granted to him as an individual before he was incorporated into the church, even as it was given to men of faith in the ages preceding this era of the church, and will be given to believers in the age after this building shall have been completed and glorified.

Note iii. It is the Lord alone who builds this building: "the Lord added to them day by day those that were saved" (Acts 2: 47). Men have built organizations, denominational, national, or even, as is alleged, universal (Catholic), and have miscalled these "churches"; but the church which Christ is building has no universal or national or inter-church exhibition. It is visible only in the individuals who manifest the Spirit of Christ indwelling and ruling them, and in any local company of such individuals in each place where they live.

2. *The Rock.* To be secure a building must have a secure foundation. Christ had before commended the builders who dug down to the rock. He here said: "Upon this rock I will build My church." The Roman Church asserts that Peter is this rock. Their sole reason for this is to give to Peter an unique, indispensable place in the church, so that the Popes, as Peter's alleged successors in office, may inherit this indispensable place and unique authority.

Some deny this claim on account of the grammar of the passage in Greek: "thou art a stone (*petros*), and upon this rock (*petra*) I will build My church." They say that the pronoun "this" being in the feminine form cannot refer back to "*petros*," which is a masculine noun in Greek: but it does agree in gender with the immediately following noun *petra*, which is feminine, and with which it is directly connected.

The claim is to be rejected on the ground that impetuous, failing Peter would have been a weak foundation for an eternal and magnificent superstructure. Even after his restoration and having been greatly used by the Lord, Peter failed disastrously and stood condemned for dissimulation and falsifying the very gospel of salvation.

But Peter himself denies the claim made for him by stating plainly, in the passage cited, that Christ, not himself, is that Living Stone upon which the other living stones are built up (I Pet 2: 4, 5). He is both the foundation stone, the corner stone that secures the structure, and the head stone that completes it and is exalted by it.

Therefore the Lord meant that His church would be built upon the mighty truth that Peter had just confessed, even that He in person was the Messiah, the Son of the living God. This eternal fact is indeed a rock, an unshakeable foundation for an eternal structure.

Implicit in this is the acknowledgment that Jesus of Nazareth is Jehovah, the God of Israel. Every Jew knew that the Rock is one of the great titles of God given in the Old Testament. See Deut. 32: 4, 15, 18, 30, 31; II Sam. 22: 2, 3, 32; and very often in the Psalms. No devout Israelite would have applied this august title to a *mere* man, Peter or any other.

It follows that each who has been illuminated by the Father so as intelligently to perceive who Jesus is, and who has been strengthened by the Spirit to confess Him seriously before men, being prepared to accept the rejection and opposition that is to be expected, is on the Rock, is of the church. He may be ignorant about many other matters, he may be as failing as was Peter on the occasion when he denied his Lord or when later he dissembled; but Christ has received him and therefore the people of Christ should receive him, even as it is commanded: "wherefore receive ye one another, as Christ also received you, to the glory of God" (Rom. 15: 7).

3. *The Gates of Hades.* The exact Hebrew equivalent of this expression is used by Hezekiah when death was imminent and he said, "In the noontide of my days I shall go into the gates of Sheol", *Sheol* being *Hades* in Greek (Isa. 38: 10). Ps. 16: 10 reads: "Thou wilt not leave my soul to Sheol." In Acts 2: 27 this is rendered in Greek: "Thou wilt not leave my soul unto Hades." The force is even stronger: Thou wilt not abandon me to the grasp (or control) of Hades (*egkataleipo* . . . eis).

Long before Hezekiah, as far back as the days of Job, men had thought of the world of the dead: Job 38: 17; Ps. 9: 13; 107: 18. Now gates shut out, but they also shut in. A man walked into the grounds of a mansion. The son of the house asked the stranger sharply, Do you see that wall? Why is it there? The other coolly replied, *To keep people in!*

In the days of Job, and not so far from his district, there was current in Mesopotamia a story of one of the goddesses of heaven which shows what was in the minds of men upon this subject. This goddess was curious to see that lower world of the dead, so she presented herself at the first of the gates of Hades. At each of the seven gates they took from her one of the insignia of deity, so she entered that gloomy region like an ordinary mortal. Having gone around she desired the angel Governor of Sheol to

allow her to return to heaven. But he refused, saying that he admitted all who went down to his territory, but he allowed no one to leave. But the Queen of heaven heard of her sorry plight, and interceded with the supreme god, who sent down the messenger of the gods to order her release. At each of the gates the insignia taken was returned, she rose from the dead and returned to heaven, and so the gates of Hades no more prevailed against her.

Surely this is an instance of how the men of those earliest times after the Flood retained in mind the essence of truth originally known. What is this story but a picture of death and resurrection? We take Christ's words to be an assurance that though the members of His church go in turn down to that world of the dead those gates shall not for ever hold them; for God shall order their release, and the Son of God shall effect this at His coming again. Therefore as the Living One He reassured the heart of His servant John, who lay before Him as dead, by saying, "Fear not . . . I have the keys of death and of Hades" (Rev. 1: 17, 18). Now keys open doors as well as shut them.

4. *Keys.* To Peter the Lord said: "I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven; and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven." It is the common notion that Peter used these keys at Pentecost, to bring Jews into the kingdom, and in Caesarea to bring in Gentiles. But the Lord's words do not appear to foretell such gospel activities. The "and" connects the first clause, as to the keys, with the next clause concerning binding and loosing, which surely shows that these latter activities are the consequence here in view of holding the keys.

The Roman Church regards these words of Christ as giving to Peter, and to his alleged ecclesiastical successors the Popes, and through them to all the priests of that Church, who derive authority from the Pope, the power to confine souls in purgatory or to loose them therefrom. This has been a means of vast financial profit to the Church, by the payments of the faithful for masses by the priest to shorten the period in torment and liberate the soul therefrom. But to teach this the Lord ought to have said to Peter, I will give unto thee the keys of *Hades*. But, as we have just seen, *these* keys He retains in His own hands. To Peter it was the keys of the *kingdom of heaven* that were given.

There is no real difficulty in this matter if it be observed that in ch. 18: 15–20, where the subject of the church is resumed, this same power to bind and loose was extended to any local church.

Also, on the day of His resurrection the Lord repeated essentially the same authority to all the disciples gathered together that evening, saying: "Receive ye the Holy Spirit: whose soever sins ye forgive, they are forgiven unto them; whose soever sins ye retain, they are retained" (John 20: 22, 23). This was therefore no special prerogative of Peter, but was shared equally by other disciples, and by local churches.

The Corinthian letters show this in an actual case. Of the incestuous brother in that church Paul wrote that, as if he were present in body, he had passed sentence upon this evil-liver, acting in this in fellowship with that local church: "to deliver such an one unto Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that the spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus" (1 Cor. 5: 3–5). And he commands that local church to act upon this sentence and put that offender away from among themselves (ver. 13).

Thus his sin was bound upon this man by the solemn act of the apostle and the church of which he was a member. It is implied that he would not give heed to Paul or the church—the case supposed in Matt. 18: 17: "if he refuse to hear the church also, let him be unto thee as the Gentile and the tax-gatherer"; that is, let him be treated as no longer in the church, but in the outside world. In this instance the act of excommunication would take effect in the heavenly world, would be ratified there, by the sinning Christian being deprived of life by Satan. Heaven would thus endorse the judicial decision passed on earth.

It is evidently an intensely solemn thing to be put out of the church in such manner as the Lord warrants and confirms. Death under such judgment pursues the believer until "the day of the Lord Jesus." This shatters the complacent notions that death necessarily translates a believer to heaven and bliss and glory. By no means. Such a death as this is no "gain" to a Christian such as Ananias, Sapphira, or this brother in Corinth.

But certain vital elements are to be noted.

(1) That the local church is presumed to have the presence of the Lord when they gather in His Name (Matt. 18: 20).

(2) That they reach agreement, an united judgment: "if two of you shall agree" (ver. 19). This agreement is not brought about by carnal feelings or natural reasoning: it is (as the word is) a symphony, a musical accord brought about in their spirits by the Master musician bringing them all into harmony with His mind, by the action of His Spirit on their minds.

This leads to prayer unto the Father of spirits; and because they have thus gained the knowledge of His will in the matter in hand, and because the Son in their midst endorses their appeal, it is of course ratified in heaven and granted by God; for "if

we ask anything according to His will He heareth us; and if we know that He heareth us whatsoever we ask we know that we have the petitions which we have asked of Him" (I John 5: 14–17).

This certainty of God's endorsement of such prayer is followed at once by instruction as to (*a*) sin that *must* be visited by death, as to which God will not move us to pray for the pardon of the brother and the sparing of his life, and (*b*) sin concerning which such prayer is permissible and effectual. Upon this subject James also gives instruction (ch. 5: 19, 20).

(3) This teaching is quite plain in Scripture though generally ignored or misapplied. But it is to be specially noted that this chastisement of a sinning child of God, though so severe, does not affect his final salvation. Indeed, it is rather directed to assure the "salvation of his spirit in the day of the Lord Jesus."

Ps. 94: 12, 13 reads: "Blessed is the man whom Thou chastenest, O Jah, And teachest out of Thy law; That Thou mayest give him rest from the days of adversity, Until the pit be digged for the wicked." This is confirmed and extended in I Cor. 11. Because of their sins as Christians many in that church were weak in body, or positively ill, and not a few had died prematurely (ver. 30). Then the apostle adds: "But if we discerned ourselves [if we passed judgment upon ourselves] we should not be judged. But when we are judged, we are chastened of the Lord, in order that we may not be condemned with [at the same time as] the world" (31, 32).

The principle is that one who has already received chastisement deserved will not have to endure it further, in the day that the Lord Jesus will execute judgment upon the world. The present age is the very time when judgment begins at the house of God (I Pet. 4: 17).

This truth entirely excludes the doctrine that the regenerate may, on account of misconduct, be deprived of salvation. The heaviest discipline the Father may inflict, even to untimely death, operates in the case of His child to the exact reverse, even to salvation in the day of the Lord Jesus.

But keys can also open a door and release a prisoner. The second letter to Corinth shows this (ch. 2: 5-11; 7: 12). Evidently the brother put under discipline repented and sorrowed, and the apostle forgave and directed the church to forgive and to receive him back in love. Thus was he first "bound" and then "loosed."

What authority, dignity, and solemnity is thus conferred upon a local assembly of Christians and their actions. They are set

in direct association with the heavenly world, so as to effect on earth what is resolved in heaven, and while acting in the power of this association what they do is ratified by the authorities above. But this demands that they be in a lowly, obedient, dependent state of heart, ever waiting upon God for the guidance of His indwelling Spirit. Therefore when conferring these powers upon the disciples the Lord prefaced the conferment with the words "Receive ye the Holy Spirit," for apart from His present aid and control men cannot rightly exercise such high authority.

For lack of this endowment a church may take action by natural judgment and fleshly energy, with complete failure to recover one excommunicated. But when such discipline is of God the effect is that the believer is thrust out of the one sphere on earth where God is present to-day into the outside world of which Satan is the prince, where darkness of soul prevails. This is calculated to shock, soften, and humble, and to cause the backslider to long again for the realm of light and peace and joy he had lost.

It is a wondrous privilege to be in the church of God: it is disastrous and dangerous to forsake it or to be put out of it by command of the Head of God's house. In Abraham's day his household was the one spot in the whole region which had the presence and protection of the Most High God. When Hagar fled thence, because of harsh and unjust treatment, she fled into the perils of the desert, perils from destitution and marauding ruffians. Therefore the angelic direction was "Return . . . submit" (Gen. 16: 9). To endure wrong in the house of God is far, far better than the loneliness, privation, and danger that must be met in the world; therefore said the apostle to believers who were being wronged and going out into the world seeking redress: "Why not rather take wrong? why not rather be defrauded?" (I Cor. 6: 7).

The Lord is still building His church. It is our duty and privilege to be of those who serve the heavenly Solomon in this vast enterprise; but not in the spirit of those bondmen whose forced labour was yielded reluctantly, but in the joyful, willing spirit of God's own people who rejoiced the heart of David by giving joyously to the work.

CHAPTER XIII

LESSONS FROM THE LITTLE CHILD

Matt. 18: 1–14; 19: 13, 14; Mark 9: 33–37; 10: 13–16;
Luke 9: 46–48; 18: 15–17

I

SWEET and instructive is the picture of Jesus, the Son of God, with infants in His arms. He loved them, they trusted Him.

Odious is the sight of His disciples being each jealous and contentious for the pre-eminence. Diotrephes is one of the most detestable of characters (III John 9–11).

Desire to be great in the kingdom of the heavens is not in itself vicious; rather is it a laudable ambition: but it is evil and disastrous to indulge it in a carnal, selfish spirit; and to seek to rise by such means as men of the world employ is to assure humiliation.

Matthew gives the particular that it was "in that hour" the disciples proposed their question as to who is the greatest in the kingdom. The hour in question (ch. 17: 24–27) was that in which the tax-collectors had demanded of Peter to know whether his Rabbi did or did not pay the temple tax. Christ had explained to Peter that Himself as Son of the King, and those who in Him were sons of God, were technically free from taxes, even as it is with the royal family in an earthly kingdom; but that it would not be acting in love to assert this to men who could not possibly see the justice of it and would only be stumbled and hindered in their approach to Christ. Love dictated that the sons of the kingdom should forgo their right of exemption and pay what actually they were not liable to pay. Thus did the King of the kingdom of heaven humble Himself so as not to injure others by asserting His rights, and at the same time to teach Peter and the others of the group likewise to humble themselves: "that take and give to them for Me and thee."

But the lesson of lowliness was lost at that time. In that very hour the disciples raise the matter of greatness. "Who then is greater in the kingdom of heaven?" Here the comparative equals the superlative. Understand, "who then is greater [than the rest]," and so the greatest.

The Lord's pictorial and literal answer is that the little child is

the greatest in His kingdom, which fact He enforces with the utmost solemnity and urgency. Few believers ever ponder His words, though prefaced with the weighty "Verily, verily I say unto you, except ye turn, and become as little children, ye shall in no wise enter into the kingdom of heaven." Yet these were believers upon Him as the Son of God, as Peter had plainly confessed (16: 16); therefore they had been born of God and were already in the kingdom (John 1: 12, 13). It cannot then be of this initial entrance that the Lord here spoke, but rather of that future entrance when the kingdom shall be set up in glory.

The believer ruled by the spirit of a child does even now enjoy and influence the kingdom of God in a manner not known by the Christian of a different spirit; for true are the words of Fleming Stevenson that "there is a kingdom into which none enter but children, in which the children play with infinite forces, where the child's little finger becomes stronger than the giant world. . . . Gossner had been brought into that kingdom; these questions were nothing to him—it was enough that he could kneel down and pray" (*Praying and Working*, 318).

This is a blessed anticipation of the kingdom of glory yet to be, but it is not the proper force of the expression "enter the kingdom." Matthew records that on this occasion the Lord put beside this expression the further term "enter into life," and as this is in contrast to being "cast into Gehenna" it must point, like the latter, to something that is beyond this present life on earth. This same conjunction is unmistakable in Mark 9: 47, where "entering into life" is equivalent to "entering into the kingdom of God," and again both are in contrast to being "cast into Gehenna."

The first occurrence of the expression is in Matt. 7: 21, where the next verse places the entrance forward "in that day," the day of the coming of the Lord for judgment. See also Matt. 19: 16–24, where again "entering into life" and "entering the kingdom" are parallel. See further Mark 10: 13–15, 17–30, this last verse showing that the life in view is the eternal life regarded as the recompense "in the coming age" for loss for Christ in this age. This instruction is repeated in Luke 18: 17–30.

By this repetition in three Gospels the Spirit impresses upon us that this truth is of deep importance. It forms the basis for Paul's confirmation of it in his earnest exhortation to young converts to continue in the faith and that it is "through many tribulations that we must enter into the kingdom of God" (Acts 14: 22). These converts were already in the kingdom as to present experience, so that the kingdom in question, to be

reached through a course of earthly troubles, must be the future kingdom of glory at the coming of the Lord.

The only other occurrences of the term I have noticed are Matt. 23: 13 and its parallel Luke 11: 52, where the present participle "entering" carries a present force, the first entrance into the kingdom by faith and the new birth.

The warning as to not entering the kingdom reminds of that earlier warning addressed to those same disciples on the same topic of greatness in the kingdom (Matt. 5: 17–20). The law of God is inviolable and must be accomplished. Therefore to break even the least commandment, and thus encourage others to do likewise, is to assure for oneself insignificance in that kingdom where the will of God prevails; whereas to do, and to teach others to do, even the least command is the path by which to rise to greatness.

But as if this were not enough, the Lord adds the piercing statement: "For I say unto you [= there is no doubt whatever about it], that except your righteousness shall exceed that of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no wise enter into the kingdom of heaven." Now as regards imputed, justifying righteousness, that is reckoned equally to every believer and as to it there is no question of the righteousness of one exceeding that of another. The defect in the Pharisees was that they taught righteousness but did not practise it. Matt. 23: 1–4. To exceed such righteousness, therefore, meant to do as well as to teach, and upon this, states the Lord, entrance into the kingdom when manifested, will depend. To be justified, and so delivered from damnation, is expressly independent of works. To say otherwise is to deny Scripture and falsify the gospel as expressive of the grace of God (Rom. 3: 28; 10: 4, 5; etc.). But to deny that works of righteousness are indispensable to entrance into the millennial kingdom is likewise to deny Scripture and falsify the gospel as regards the kingdom.

As in ch. 18: 4, the Lord emphasizes humility as the state of heart that secures greatness in His kingdom, so does He re-emphasize this in ch. 23: 11, 12, saying "Whosoever shall exalt himself shall be humbled, and whosoever shall humble himself shall be exalted." Therefore the greatest is he who makes himself the servant.

How sadly slow are our poor hearts to learn this so oft-repeated lesson. A little later, while with the Lord at the table where there had just been instituted the holy Supper which sets forth the Son of God in His deepest humility, the disciples were still disputing as to who was the greatest among them (Luke 22:

24–30). Alas, that we also can sit at that Table in that same unholy, contemptible spirit. Again the Lord pressed on them that the greater should act as the younger should act, with deference to his seniors; that the chief should serve, even as He, their Teacher and Lord, was among them as the servant, and had just washed their feet.

Not long before this the sons of Zebedee had preferred their selfish request to be granted the first places in the coming kingdom (Matt. 20: 20–23). Christ had replied that it was through drinking the cup of deepest suffering, and being baptized in a cruel death, that even Himself, the Sovereign of that kingdom, must reach His throne, and that they must take the same road. Moreover, He added, that He could not grant honours in His kingdom except to those to whom His Father allotted them and that the path to greatness lay in making oneself a *servant* (*diakonos*), and the way to become the first of all in His kingdom was to be everybody's *slave* (*doulos*).

For those Scriptures must be fulfilled which speak of the establishment of His coming kingdom, such as Isa. 2: 12: "For there shall be a day of Jehovah of hosts upon all that is proud and haughty, and upon all that is lifted up; and it shall be brought low": and again, "For, behold, the day cometh, it burneth as a furnace; and all the proud, and all that work wickedness, shall be stubble, and the day that cometh shall burn them up, saith Jehovah of hosts, that it shall leave them neither root nor branch" (Mal. 4: 1).

Let not the believer in this age presume that he can be proud of heart and work any wickedness and yet escape such warnings, for he is solemnly reminded, on the very ground that he is expecting to receive a kingdom, that "*our* God is a consuming fire" (Heb. 12: 28, 29).

It is in the light of these solemn considerations that our Lord exhorts disciples to turn from pride, ambition, self-seeking and self-sufficiency, and seek the spirit of the little child, one who can be humble and lowly, trustful and obedient. For this is an inexorable law of the kingdom of God to which God Himself is obedient; for though Lord of heaven and earth, out of His fulness He is for ever serving all His creatures; and the Son of God in the very day of His taking the kingdom will again gird Himself as a slave and come forth and serve the faithful of His servants, as He did that wondrous night of old (Luke 12: 35–37).

But what sort of persons will He thus honour? Not the careless and worldly, not the proud and haughty, not the covetous, the self-indulgent, or those who seek anxiously after the good

things of earth; but those who seek earnestly the kingdom of God; who invest treasure in advance in that kingdom by giving, not by getting and keeping; whose hearts are therefore where their treasure is, and who consequently are ever on the alert for the return of their absent Lord: "Blessed are those slaves, whom the Lord when He cometh shall find watching: verily I say unto you, that He shall gird Himself, and make them recline at table [as honoured guests], and shall come and serve *them*," not others unlike them.

It was to the very men to whom He had lately opened up the special theme of His heavenly church that the Lord in love opened up these further exhortations to renounce pride and self-seeking and to get them the heart of a little child. Whoever, with opened eyes, will study their instructions and exhortations to their fellow-Christians, will see that in due time they accepted the lesson for themselves and urged it upon their converts and fellow-Christians (I Pet. 5: 1–6; Rom. 12 and 14; etc.).

As mentioned before, the Divine direction to Hagar was to return to her lowly place of a slave and submit to the mistress who had been harsh to her. She needed no other sphere in which to cultivate the priceless ornament of a lowly spirit; and if she did thus act what a different servant must Sarah have found her.

In like manner no Christian needs any sphere other than present circumstances in which to dethrone pride and cultivate the spirit of a little child. The epistles are addressed to believers as husbands, wives, children; as masters and servants; as friends; as people in business; as subjects to rulers; as sufferers. All these ordinary relations and conditions offer the best opportunities to be slaves at heart.

Ephesians regards us as already seated with Christ in the heavens, and exhorts us to show this by lowliness, meekness, long-suffering, forbearance in love, and diligence in promoting unity (4: 1–3). To this end (chs. 5 and 6) wives are to be subject to the husbands; husbands to love their wives and serve their highest interests; children are to be obedient to parents; fathers to serve the true interests of their children; servants are to obey masters, and masters and servants are to regard their dealings with each other as opportunity for serving the Lord. Subjects are to obey rulers, and rulers are to act as servants for the public good. Thus submission is the key-note in every walk in life, especially in these common and perpetual relationships.

The trivial round, the common task,
Would furnish all we ought to ask;

Room to deny ourselves, a road
To bring us, daily, nearer God.

Peter writes to precisely the same effect. "Be subject" to rulers (I Pet. 2: 13–17); "servants be in subjection" (2: 18); "wives be in subjection" (3: 1); "ye younger, be subject unto the elder. Yea, all of you gird yourselves with humility to serve one another" (5: 5), where "gird" gives the picture of the slave putting on the apron to serve others, as the Lord girded on the towel to wash the feet of His servants.

This vital instruction John Newton expressed in the accurate and adequate lines:

As a little child relies
On a care beyond his own;
Knows he's neither great nor wise,
Fears to stir a step alone;
Thus with Thee would I abide
As my Father, Guard, and Guide.

II

The child in the Saviour's arms teaches the further lesson of the actual status of the little children in the kingdom of God, which lesson Christ Himself stated distinctly in plain words.

(1) The reason why little children were to be encouraged to go to the Lord was that "to such belongeth the kingdom of heaven and God." Three evangelists record these words (Matt. 19: 14; Mark 10: 14; Luke 18: 16). The statement is unqualified and unequivocal. The kingdom belongs to the little children, and in such manner that adults must become children in spirit or they cannot enter.

(2) Little children are so definitely and intimately associated with the Lord that whoso receives one such in Christ's name receives Him, in precisely the same sense that he who receives the Son receives the Father Who sent Him. The three evangelists record these words also: (Matt. 18: 5; Mark 9: 37; Luke 9: 48).

(3) Such deep, divine concern has God for little children that special angels are charged with their care and these have unrestricted access to Him in their interest (Matt. 18: 10).

(4) As a shepherd values each one of his sheep, and labours to find and to save one if lost, so there is earnest care in the presence of the Father in heaven that not one little child shall perish. How this salvation is effected will be considered shortly.

What open violence is done to these plain declarations of the Son of God by the horrid and pain-giving dogma that little children go to hell unless they have been baptized. The chain of false reasoning is this: There is no salvation out of the church; entrance into the church is by baptism; therefore for infants as much as for adults there is no salvation without baptism.

This shows the deep importance of seeing clearly, what was shown in the last preceding chapter, that it is only those already saved and regenerate by faith in Christ whom the Lord adds to *His church.*

It is certain that the little children of whom Christ immediately spoke, and whom He took into His arms and blessed, had not been baptized, yet such exalted things as are given under (1) to (4) above were true of them.

But are not all children born in sin? How then are they in the kingdom of God and owners of its privileges? The answer lies in the universal efficacy of the redeeming death of Christ. They who deny this cannot admit that any but elect children can be saved. But the Lord gives no hint of this restriction. His statements are unqualified, being made of little children as such. Scripture asserts definitely that Christ is the propitiation for our sins, that is, those who already believe in Him, "and not for ours only but also for the whole world" (I John 2: 2). The insertion of the words "the whole world *of the elect*" is a wholly unwarranted gloss, and is expressly excluded by the later statement in the same epistle, "We know that we are of God, and the whole world lieth in the evil one" (5: 19). Here again the "we" refers to those already born of God, and "the whole world" is the rest of the human race, and it is impossible to limit the term "the whole world" to the elect, since the fact is that all mankind are in the evil one and he works in them (see Eph. 2: 1–3 for the same contrast between believers and the rest of our race).

Inasmuch therefore as the redemptive death of Christ applies to all mankind, it cannot but free from the blight of inherited sin such as have not attained to moral consciousness so as themselves to have sinned, such as little children and imbeciles from childhood. As baptism is, according to Scripture, an act of faith and obedience it cannot be required of those who cannot believe and obey.

III

A further very solemn pronouncement by the Lord the more demands our attention that it is mostly neglected. He said

"but [in contrast to the reception of a child in His name] whoso shall cause one of these little ones that believe on me to stumble, it is profitable for him that a great millstone should be hanged about his neck, and that he should be sunk in the depth of the sea" (Matt. 18: 6). This warning was repeated later (Luke 17: 2; Mark 9: 42).

The "whoso" was addressed to the apostles and included them and all believers, as much as unregenerate persons. Yet how thoughtlessly do even Christians so act as to stumble youthful believers. I knew a quite small boy whose godly grandfather asked if he did not wish to go to heaven. The child answered with a prompt and decided, NO! Shocked by such childish depravity, the aged saint inquired why he did not wish to go there. With a well-known hymn in mind the little fellow answered "The *stern disciples* are there!"

The Lord's words show that little children may reach faith in Him. How often it happens that such are stumbled by the carnal example of Christian parents or friends. It occurs when in their own homes they learn from their elders to smoke, to take intoxicants, to play cards, to be angry, selfish, self-indulgent, and so on.

Oh, that adult believers, including preachers of the Word, as were these apostles, would take deeply to heart our Lord's terrible warning that an untimely violent death were better than the punishment for stumbling a young believer. And must not something more dreadful than such a death be after death? This is discussed in my commentary on *Hebrews*, upon Ch. x. 29, p. 180, on the "sorer punishment" than death by stoning.

IV

In giving these instructions and warnings the Lord in no wise reverted from the theme of the church to deal with the kingdom. The church is part of the kingdom, even as a queen is part of the kingdom. She is indeed the most exalted personage in the kingdom after the king, yet she remains one of his subjects. By virtue of his position she is exempt from a hundred petty regulations and liabilities, but she is not exempt from the moral laws of the realm. Rather ought she to be a shining example by her observance of these.

It has been before remarked that God is Himself the chief example of the humility that serves, for He continually supports and supplies all His creation. The Son of God in like manner humbled Himself to be the servant of God and man. The Spirit of God graciously devotes Himself to the highest welfare of the

saints, even their progress in holiness. The holy angels show the same lowliness of mind in that they diligently serve the interests of us who are lower than they in rank and glory (II Pet. 2: 11).

Thus the law of humility rules in heaven and must therefore rule in the highest of the heavenly orders, the church of God. The wife of the Lamb must be of the same spirit as her Divine Lord. Each member of the church glorified will be able to say, "I am meek, and lowly of heart, and have found rest to my soul by bearing my Lord's yoke of serving willingly both God and man." A haughty, ambitious queen were an ill-match for a gracious, humble-hearted king, and no one who allows that spirit now will be qualified to reign with the Lord of glory. "Except ye turn and become as little children, ye shall in no wise enter into the kingdom of heaven."

CHAPTER XIV

THE UNMERCIFUL SLAVE

Matt. 18: 21–35

I

THE moral duties upon which Christ enlarged had been concentrated in the Beatitudes with which He opened His public ministry (Matt. 5). Poverty of spirit, meekness, hunger and thirst, mark the little child. But the believer is at the same time an adult. Mourning over sin and its effects, being merciful when injured, purity of heart, influence for peace, joy when persecuted, are qualities of more mature years. Both types of virtue co-exist, however.

Hudson Taylor well said that, whereas in nature our progress is from the cradle to the grave, in grace it is from the grave to the cradle. For spiritual development starts with the death and burial of the old man at the cross and grave of Christ (Rom. 6), and advances thence to becoming more and more a *child* of God. Yet at the same time, faith which begins at that new birth is to expand by the full growth of the manly virtues mentioned by Peter in his second epistle, ch. 1: 1–12, the crown of which is unrestricted love.

Thus on the occasion before us the Lord first emphasizes the necessity of humility like that of the little child, and then very solemnly, almost sternly, presses the necessity of love displaying its nature in mercy.

He had spoken of an injured disciple seeking to gain the repentance and restoration of a brother-disciple who had wronged him. Such an attempt at reconciliation will be made only by one whose heart is humble, tender, mourning the sin committed, and longing for harmony and peace. In short, he will be in the good of the Beatitudes.

Peter has not yet come as far in grace. Which of us has done so? Peter thinks that there must surely be some limit to this duty of forgiving a wrongdoer. The rabbis had laid down that an offender must be forgiven three times. If he offended further the injured party could resort to law and press for redress. The purpose of the parable is to cancel for Christians the view of the rabbis and to constrain the follower of Christ to an entirely unlimited readiness to forgive.

Of course, it is implied that, according to verse 15, I have in love remonstrated with my brother and sought to gain him. It is further understood that, though I must on my side be always ready to forgive, actual forgiveness can only be rightly extended when the offender repents; but if he does this even seven times in one day he is to be forgiven seven times. And I am to take heed to myself lest his sin cause hardness and failure in me. It is all too easy to be so justly occupied with my brother's sin against me that I fall myself into the sin of being unmerciful to him. In the light of such a situation no wonder that the apostles said, "Lord, increase our faith" (Luke 17: 1–5).

II

The parable has been misapplied in two ways. First, it has been taken as a picture of an unregenerate person and the dealings of God which issue in eternal ruin.

Second, it has been rightly taken as treating of the child of God, but wrongly that he may lose his salvation and go into eternal damnation.

In both cases the error is made of importing eternity into the parable.

The Lord begins with a note of time present. [Because of this (*dia touto*) present duty of unlimited mercy] "Therefore the kingdom of heaven became [*hōmiothē*, aor. pass., with the arising of this new duty on its subjects] like unto a man, a king." The picture is wholly oriental, using events quite frequent in the ancient east.

(1) The persons in question belong to the personal attendants upon the king. They are his slaves, his personal property. Later the Lord definitely distinguished between the household slaves of a king and the wider circle of his subjects (Luke 19: "his own slaves" (*doulous heautou*) and "his citizens" (*politai autou*) vers. 13, 14). In this parable it is the former alone that are introduced.

(2) Who these are, and their status toward God and one another, is plainly shown by the Lord's brief application of the parable (ver. 35): "So shall also My Father, the heavenly, do unto you, if each of you forgives not his brother from your hearts." The parable teaches an action of God as Father with those who are brothers in His family.

This double relationship of King and slave, Father and child, is the fact in every regenerate person. He is a slave of God (Titus 1: 1; Jas. 1: 1; I Pet. 2: 16, where *doulos* is used, as in Matt. 18), though he is also a child of God by the new birth. The

parable therefore pictures a condition shown by the epistles as continuing in this Christian period. It is not to disciples as "Jewish" or as under law that the Lord spoke. He deals here not with men as rebels, or merely as subjects, but with those who are of God's family and household in this dual capacity of child and slave.

Peter conjoins these same thoughts in the first chapter of his first epistle. He writes to such as have been begotten again and are heirs of glory and honour at the revelation of Jesus Christ (vers. 3–9). Exhorting us to obedience and holiness, because our God is holy, he adds, "if ye call on Him as Father" remember that "without respect of persons He judgeth according to each man's work." This is an exact summary of the parable, which Peter had heard. The king judged the servant according to his work, the Father deals with each of His children on that same equitable principle. Nor can He show partiality to a wrongdoer, even though he be His child. It were bad indeed for a kingdom did the sovereign allow his children to do evil deeds for which he would send other subjects to prison.

III

The slave in the parable was presumably an officer of high rank, controlling the royal revenue. Eastern potentates were often fabulously rich, often also some slave stepped high into favour, and could, if so minded, "borrow" vast sums from the revenues that passed through his hands. It was a general practice. In this matter Daniel, chief minister of Darius, was incorruptible. His subordinate officers found it disagreeable to be under a chief who would not allow them to get rich at the king's expense, but who fulfilled the primary purpose of his and their appointment that "the king should have no damage" (Dan. 6: 2–5); so they plotted his downfall.

The practice continued to recent times. It is on record that the ministers of the Dowager Empress of China, fifty years ago, were often indebted to her in just such sums as the parable gives, some millions of pounds.

This illustrates both the immense opportunities and privileges of the servants of God and their correspondingly great responsibilities and obligations to Him. The fact is that each of us is so deeply indebted to His favour that we never can discharge the liability; should one have done (what no one can do) even all that is required of him, he were still but an unprofitable slave (*doulos*), for he would have done no more than his bare duty

(Luke 17: 5–10). This teaching follows in Luke upon the duty to forgive without limit.

But in the parable the slave has by no means done all his duty but is heavily in arrears. Still employing the facts of the times, the Lord describes the punishment as being that he was to be sold, with his family and property, and payment to be made. It was not that the king cared much for getting the money—he was so rich that a minute later he released the debt. But it was necessary to make such a delinquent a deterrent to others who might abuse their trust to rob the treasury. Public policy required this step.

Let the Christian ponder this. God has to control not only His family, but His kingdom, the universe of earth and heaven. His character as the righteous Lord entirely forbids that He shall tolerate wrongdoing by His children. His ways are watched by angels as well as men, and these include His enemies. He cannot warrant a charge against Himself that He is partial and unfair in judgment. His family are amenable to His laws.

IV

And His Word shows that God is ceaselessly taking account of His people's ways. Job was discussed before His heavenly court. David was a man after God's heart, but He robbed God of double service morally due to Him, the chastity of a woman and the life of one of his subjects, her husband; and though God, in that instance, remitted the capital penalty to which David had rendered himself liable the king had to suffer very severely to the end of his days. He had given great occasion to the enemies of the Lord to blaspheme; and his offences being public, public policy demanded public vindication of the laws of God (II Sam. 11, *et. seq.*). Nadab and Abihu had just been consecrated priests unto Jehovah; but on the very day of their anointing they publicly violated one of the fundamental laws of their office and paid the penalty of death in God's house (Lev. 10). Achan was one of the redeemed people, but paid the full penalty of misappropriation of property devoted to Jehovah, the King of Israel (Josh. 7). Consider also Pelatiah, Ezek. 11: 1, 2, 13.

The Old Testament is full of such examples of the holy severity of God to His people. And the New Testament continues the record of His just dealings in the present dispensation. Ananias and his wife robbed God and lied about it, and like Nadab and his brother, fell dead in the house of God (Acts 5); the dispensations of law and of grace being alike signalized by

one act of judgment on God's people at their commencement. Children of God in Corinth were visited with sickness and death because of abuses at the Table of the Lord, and one of them especially would have died at the hands of Satan but that he quickly repented (I Cor. 11: 30 and 5: 5).

If by modern relaxed sentiment it be thought hard that the delinquent's wife and children should be sold with himself, this does not alter facts or the judgments of God. The family is God's social unit. A godly head brings Divine blessing on his household; it is unavoidable that they suffer if he be wicked.

How then does this agree with God's pronouncement in Ezek. 18 that the son is not to suffer for his father's sins? It is there made clear that the son shall not suffer unless he consent to the sins of his father. In such case they become his own sins and he suffers for them. This is assumed in the Biblical instances. Job presumed that his sons and daughters might have sinned against God in their revelries. If so, it was for their own renouncing God in their hearts that they died, though the occasion was made the testing and chastening of their father. Achan's family could not but have known of their father's theft, for he buried the stolen property in their common tent. David's family whose judgments are recorded (Amnon, Absalom, and others) were themselves wicked, and paid the penalty, though this was used as part of the punishment of David. The family of the unjust slave could not but have known by what means he was so rich, for such doings in the East are notorious and scarcely veiled. They all shared the affluence thus acquired and were all involved in the consequences when the crash came.

How careful, for his family's sake, should the head of a house be to walk uprightly; and how careful should they be to repudiate his offences; and refuse, as far as possible, to benefit by the proceeds of unrighteousness.

V

It were highly profitable that Christians should perceive the ways in which as God's servants we can rob Him. Everything we have, without the smallest exception, is His grant. But all is granted on loan for use in His business. Wesley finely said that God is, and must remain, the inalienable proprietor of everything that He has created. It is a right of which He cannot divest Himself. By consequence, each of us is only a steward, not an owner, and "it is required in stewards that a man be found faithful" (I Cor. 4: 1, 2).

The root sin of the slave in view was that he served self at his lord's expense. Let each of us search and see how far he is guilty of this.

Why am I in business, or a profession? It was said of one prosperous man that William Reynolds' business was to serve Jesus Christ, and that he packed pork to pay the expenses. Can this be said of me?

Why am I rearing a family? To what end am I training them? A believer left the down-town assembly where he had been saved and united with a respectable denominational church in the better-class district to which he removed. The ostensible reason given was that the former was too far from his new house; the real reason he gave to a friend was that, if he continued with the former assembly, he would not be able to marry his daughters well. Thus hypocrisy and lying sprang out of worldly ambition. God blew upon it in merciful judgment. He presently failed badly in business.

Of all that we control *time* is the most valuable item, for some portion of it must be expended upon everything we do. Gladstone said well to students: "Let me commend to you thrift of time. It will repay you with a usury beyond your utmost expectations." A Yankee said to a negro, "I've no time for anything." The other offered the sage comment: "I suppose you have all the time there is!" Let the believer estimate how many minutes per day he wastes on matters not to the glory of God. The idle chit-chat when Christians are together; the profitless reading; evening hours misspent; the aimless activities—put these together and ponder how much of God's gift of time is misused and He robbed of revenue.

Add to these items, the misspent money, used upon mere luxuries, liquor, tobacco, worldly literature, needlessly fine dwellings, mere ostentation in clothing. In Britain, its Colonies, and the United States many millions of pounds are diverted annually from the treasury of the King of glory and handed to His enemies in the form of subscriptions to Masters' Federations, Trade Unions, and other worldly societies.

These items alone may cause shock and distress as indicating what colossal debts the servants of the Lord can incur. Oh, to heed carefully and ceaselessly Peter's words: "The time past may suffice to have wrought the desire of the Gentiles, and to have walked," as they walked; much rather should we "no longer live the rest of our time in the flesh to the cravings of men, but to the will of God" (I Pet. 4: 3, 2). Only so shall we be found blameless whenever He calls us to account.

The Lord said that the king would make a *reckoning* with his

servants. The word is *logon*: it is used in Heb. 4: 13: "all things are naked and laid open to the eyes of Him with Whom we have to *reckon*." How much do we reckon upon this? or how far do we perhaps resent the idea and cozen our souls with the non-Scriptural term "sovereign grace"?

VI

The dismal prospect suddenly facing the unfaithful slave was that of being sold into slavery to some other master than his royal owner. There are believers enough in this very state. They have lost the freedom of spirit enjoyed at conversion. They are no longer at liberty to approach God with boldness; indeed access to Him is denied. They call but He does not answer, for their backsliding destroys them (Prov. 1: 28, 32). They are captive again to their old sins, and are no more able to enjoy that righteousness, peace, and joy which the Holy Spirit imparts, for they have quenched Him. They feel unable to rise, to shake off the shackles, or even to desire to regain the freedom of spirit. Satan has captured them, and fettered their inner man. And, alas, alas, children of God sometimes die thus enslaved.

The lesson to be taken to heart, then, is as follows: This slave may quite possibly not have taken seriously his wrong conduct. Almost everyone in his position so acted. Thus can the child of God to-day equally beguile himself by arguing that everybody does what he is doing. But the king suddenly called the man to account. The crucial moment for the Christian is when suddenly his conscience challenges and accuses him. At that moment his Lord demands a reckoning. Let him not burke the issue and sear his conscience.

But let him rather do as the slave did, fall upon his face in shame and distress; let him give glory to the Lord as righteous in all His ways, and cast himself unreservedly upon His mercy. Then shall he most certainly find that his heavenly King is easily moved to compassion, that in mercy He delights, and most gladly, graciously, and completely remits the debt. So free was the pardon grace pronounced on the culprit that there was no word depriving him of his post. For ought that was said by the king he might have continued in his privileged office. Thus was repentant Peter restored to service.

VII

But now came the test and downfall. Grace did not produce grace, mercy did not beget mercy, forgiveness did not make him

forgiving. He accepted mercy but demanded justice. Dealt with in grace he enforced law. Treated tenderly he acted harshly. And it was over a sum so paltry as compared with his own vast debt, merely a few pounds—such is the heaviest liability of my brother to me as contrasted with mine to God.

This also is known among children of God. At Corinth brethren in Christ were defrauding one another, and the wronged were going to law to enforce redress (I Cor. 6: 1–11). They had been justified and sanctified in Christ, and therefore were children of God; they had washed themselves, but were now again defiling themselves. The apostle warned them that such conduct would involve forfeiting *inheritance* in the kingdom of God. To "inherit a kingdom" means to be of royal, sovereign dignity in it, as Paul had just said (vers. 2, 3) that "the saints shall judge," be *judges* of men and even angels, holding the highest posts and honours. This is far more than to be in a kingdom as an ordinary subject.

What hardness of heart had benumbed a Christian who said to me of the brethren "I don't care if I never see them again." What spirit of violence had seized a Christian, and a teacher, when upon leaving the employ of a brother in Christ, he at once set to work to cut into his business and draw away his customers for his own profit.

Against this spirit and conduct the Lord most solemnly warned His followers. "Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy" (Matt. 5: 7). "Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. . . . For if ye forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses" (Matt. 6: 12–15). "And whensoever ye stand praying, forgive, if ye have ought against any one; that your Father also who is in heaven may forgive you your trespasses" (Mark 11: 25).

These warnings were given to men who called on God as Father and whom Christ regarded as true children of God for He said "*Your* Father; *your* heavenly Father." To try to avoid this is to deal deceitfully with the words of Christ and with one's soul. These statements the Spirit of truth caused Christian teachers to put on record for Christians well after the Christian age was fully introduced. Whatever solemn prospects the teachings of Christ picture must be accepted by the child of the Father, without emasculating them for the sake of dispensational theories or theological problems.

Yet the area of application must again be strictly observed. These teachings were not addressed to the unjustified and

unregenerate. To these the condition applies only so far that, so long as he cherishes a malicious spirit he cannot receive the justifying sentence of the Holy Judge, because such a spirit is sin and while one persists in this or any other sin he cannot of course be forgiven.

But the solemn fact is that one may have been brought to the experience of justification through the blood of Christ, and have been born into the family of God, and yet thereafter act in the malign power of the carnal nature. It is against this that the precepts and the parable are directed. The possibility of carnality in us the children of God is plainly shown in Scripture and is all too plainly seen in fact. We *can* act like the forgiven but unforgiving man of the parable and if we do so we incur his penalty. If this were not so conscience would protest that it ought to be so.

VIII

The action of the fellow-slaves is noteworthy.

(*a*) They were deeply pained. It is a sorry state when a Christian can see wrongdoing without pain of heart.

(*b*) But they did not simply chat about it among themselves and there leave it. Nor did they talk about it to persons outside the household circle, and enlarge the scandal.

(*c*) Nor did they attempt themselves to prevent the wrong or to restrain their violent fellow-slave. But they set the right example, they jointly told their Lord what had taken place and waited for His action.

If He had directed them to act in the matter they would have had authority and duty to do so. There are matters in which the church is ordered to act (Matt. 18: 17; I Cor. 5: 12, 13). But this offence was so flagrant, so utterly contrary to the king's own nature and practice, that He took it in hand Himself. This is unutterably solemn, for, as Christians are warned, when the Lord Himself judges His people, "it is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God" (Heb. 10: 30, 31).

All Scripture testifies to this:

Gen. 18. The Lord did not deal with Sodom on report only, nor leave the judgment to angel watchers. He Himself came down to investigate and act, and Sodom and Gomorrah perished in flaming fire from heaven.

Lev. 20: 4, 5. Dealing with idolatry by His people, Jehovah said that, if they failed in their duty to stone the offender, "I will set My face against that man and against his family" and cut them off.

I Sam. 3. When the high priest Eli failed God announced that He would Himself deal with the matter in judgment and the priest and his family should die and forfeit their office. No expiation would be accepted.

II Sam. 12: 11, 12. When David sinned so shamefully, the Divine message was: "Behold, *I* will raise up evil against thee out of thine house. . . . *I* will do this thing."

II Sam. 24: 10–14. When David had sinned greatly in numbering the people God gave him the choice of three penalties, one being that pestilence would be inflicted and controlled by God Himself. David, who knew by experience the compassion of God, chose this judgment, saying: "Let us now fall into the hand of Jehovah; for His mercies are great; and let me not fall into the hand of man." It was a wise choice, but, as *Hebrews* says, it proved a fearful thing to fall into His hand, for seventy thousand of the people died in three days.

Thus in the parable also. His lord summoned the hard-hearted slave to his presence and

(*a*) addressed him by the severe term "Thou wicked slave," thou bad and worthless man (*poneros*). The term is very just. He was bad inasmuch as his spirit was so contrary to the kind and generous spirit of his lord; he was worthless inasmuch as he was no credit to his master but rather a cause of reproach as a member of the household. This reproach the king must wipe away by condign punishment, that all may know his estimate of such conduct. God must maintain the honour of His great name (Ezek. 36: 22).

This term "wicked" the Lord will apply again to a household slave of an absent lord (Luke 19: 22). It is important to observe its application to one whose debt had been remitted, who was one of the Lord's own household, a child in the family of the heavenly Father. Such an one can act wickedly, as this man did by his heartless treatment of his brother, treatment warranted maybe by the existing law of man but condemned by heavenly grace.

(*b*) The ground of condemnation was that the man had acted contrary to the spirit and example of his lord: "shouldest not thou have had mercy on thy fellow-servant, even as I had mercy on thee?" "Thou besoughtest . . . I forgave": "be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving each other, even as God also in Christ forgave you" (Eph. 4: 32). The world's standards and principles are not those for the servant of God: what God may at present tolerate in them He condemns in His children. For these His own spirit and ways are the only permitted standard. Disciples must act like their Lord or stand condemned before Him.

(*c*) "And his lord was wroth." What else could he be with conduct so contrary to himself? God *must* be indignant with what is opposed to His nature and therefore to holiness and mercy, and in His children as much as in His enemies. Sin does not become amiable because the sinner is a Christian, eternally justified in Christ: rather in such it is the more detestable and culpable, for the regenerate *can* cease from sin, whereas the unregenerate cannot do so. "You only have I known of all the families of the earth: *therefore* I will visit upon you *all* your iniquities" (Amos 3: 2).

(1) By enforcing the law against his neighbour this man put himself under law. This is the principle of Gal. 5: 4: "Ye are brought to naught from Christ, ye who would be justified by the law; ye are fallen away from grace," or "ye are fallen out of the sphere where grace operates" (*EXepesate*). You cannot enjoy grace while you act by law.

This principle prevails in the realm of Christian conduct, not only in the matter of standing by justification. James (2: 1–13) wrote to his "brethren," yea, his "beloved brethren," to those who are called to walk by the royal law of love, royal because it is the law that the King Himself obeys. These he reminds that they are to be judged; therefore let them walk carefully; and the test will be whether they have walked by the law of liberty. Christ set them free; He lifted them out of the bondage of sin and legalism into a life of heavenly liberty, the liberty of love: are they walking by love? If so, love will show itself in mercy to all, even those who may be in my debt by wrongdoing. To enforce this James assures us that "judgment is without mercy to him that hath showed no mercy; mercy glorieth against judgment."

The parable illustrates this. The king judged the debtor and sentenced him to be sold and the debt paid. But mercy moved him and caused him to override the sentence and annul it and the debt. Thus mercy gloried against judgment.

But a new situation had arisen by the forgiven debtor proving so terribly unmerciful. Now unmercifulness is a more serious offence against God than is debt. An unmerciful heart has boundless capacity for the worst of evils; it proves itself selfish, and can be hard, cruel, vindictive, murderous. In days gone by, even in England till a century ago, the prisons were pestilential and to consign a debtor there was often to kill him. Thus the king had now to deal with a monstrous vice, far more mischievous in a kingdom than a debt could be, and he dealt with it according to its heinousness, and judgment was without mercy to him that had showed no mercy.

(2) The penalty now imposed upon the unmerciful slave was, firstly, the revoking of the former pardon and the consequent exaction of the debt: "till he should pay all that was due" (ver. 34).

Theology finds in this a major problem. To avoid it it has been said that it was not the forgiven debt that now came in question, but other debts. Yet the parable says nothing about other debts. Others take the revocation as implying that a justified man may be finally lost, losing salvation entirely. This makes justification contingent, not absolute, dependent upon sanctification.

There are principles of God's ways, in both judgment and mercy, little considered, perhaps seldom recognized. Israel, as a people, are the chosen people of God, called in the call of their father Abraham, beloved for his sake. Of having thus chosen and called them as a people God will never repent, in Him there is no change of mind (Rom. 11: 29). This, then, is their permanent indefectible *standing* as a nation, they are the people of God.

When the whole people rebelled at Kadesh Barnea God threatened to disinherit that generation and start afresh with Moses and his descendants (Num. 14: 11, 12). But granting the request of Moses, He said: "I have pardoned according to thy word" (ver. 20); but heavy penalties had to be faced, though immediate destruction was averted. This clemency was renewed to Israel many times as the centuries passed. Again and again God forgave their rebellion and ingratitude and renewed His mercies to them as a people.

Yet notice the word "all" in the passage quoted from Amos 3: 2: "I will visit upon you *all* your iniquities," and compare it with the later words of Christ to the Israel of His day (Matt. 23: 34–36):

> Therefore, behold, I send unto you prophets, and wise men, and scribes: some of them shall ye kill and crucify; and some of them shall ye scourge in your synagogues, and persecute from city to city: That upon you may come all the righteous blood shed on the earth, from the blood of Abel the righteous unto the blood of Zachariah son of Barachiah, whom ye slew between the sanctuary and the altar. Verily I say unto you, All these things shall come upon this generation.

Here also the word "all" is significant: "that upon you may come *all* the righteous blood shed on the earth," from the days of Abel and onward, "Verily . . . *all* these things shall come on this generation." That is to say, Because the nation persisted

in sin the former pardons would not operate to avert the exaction of the full penalty for *all* past ungodliness. Exactly so the king ordered that the culprit should be made to pay "*all* that was due."

Yet it is to be fully recognized that, in spite of the full and fearful fulfilment to Israel of that dread sentence, a fulfilment still in progress and the completion of which will bring such trouble as the history of mankind has not yet seen (Matt. 24: 21); in spite of all this, Israel as a nation retains its *standing* as the chosen people of God, which will be fully displayed in the millennial era and the eternal earth. In the same way the parable offers no hint that the "wicked" servant was cast out of the king's household.

The unregenerate stand outside of God's circle and kingdom, exposed to eternal destruction. They stand in their sins. Upon repentance and faith in Christ the sinner is justified freely by God's grace (Rom. 3: 24). "Justified freely," that is, unconditionally, as *dōrean* means; and thereby and thereupon "being justified by faith . . . we *have had* our *access* by faith into this grace [this state of favour] wherein we *stand*" (Rom. 5: 1, 2).

The man's standing is thus completely changed: he is now within the circle upon which the favour of God rests, he has been translated out of the kingdom of darkness into that of God's beloved Son (Col. 1: 13); has passed out of the realm where death rules into the realm where life, eternal life, animates all (John 5: 24). He is now a child of the Father, a household slave of God. And because change of standing is effected solely on the ground of "the redemption that is in Christ Jesus" (Rom. 3: 24), and because the efficacy of that redemption can never diminish, therefore the *standing* of the justified is equally indefectible, eternal, and his place by new birth in the family circle of God is assured for ever, for this last also is an unconditional gift, for the "*free* gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Rom. 6: 23).

But within this new sphere of the kingdom of God the laws of that kingdom operate with undeviating regularity; the rule of the King is directed by them, and the household of the King are amenable to them. It is to those who are called and able to walk by the Spirit that it is solemnly said: "Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap. For he that soweth unto his own flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption: but he that soweth unto the Spirit shall of the Spirit reap eternal life" (Gal. 6: 7, 8). If the Christian farmer sows his seed in damp, foul soil he will find it rot, just as certainly as if he were an unbeliever; whereas sown in good ground he may expect a harvest. Just as surely will he reap cor-

ruption if he lives to gratify his fleshly nature, but will reap development of life eternal if he uses time, influence, means in fulfilling the desires of the new, spiritual, heavenly nature.

The parable is taken from the relationship of lord and household slave. Christian household slaves were exhorted "with good will to do service, as unto the Lord, and not unto men; knowing that whatsoever good thing each one doeth, the same shall he receive again from the Lord"; and their lords were bidden to act similarly toward their slaves, "knowing that both their Lord and yours is in heaven, and there is no respect of persons with Him" (Eph. 6: 5–9).

IX

This situation is part of one of the major topics of the Bible, one which awaits adequate treatment, that is, the temporal judgments of God, or the present administration of the universe on to the epoch of the Great White Throne, followed by eternal issues. One of the most essential features of this temporal administration is that it is *temporal*, and it is never to be inferred that a punishment inflicted thereunder *must* have *eternal* consequences. It does not follow of necessity that all who were destroyed by the Flood, or perished in the wilderness, or were cut off in their sins are lost eternally. The common inference to the contrary is not warranted by Scripture. Destiny will be declared at the Great White Throne. It is not for us to assume the prerogative of the Divine Judge and pronounce a verdict in advance.

Yet it has been the general practice, as much of learned expositors as of others, to bring eternity into passages which do not refer to it, of which their dealings with this parable are an instance.

Yet the parable itself forbids this.

(1) The slave was to be delivered to the tormentors "till he should pay all that was due." Apply this to eternity and the implication will be that a sinner may perchance escape at last by virtue of his own torments discharging his liability to God. But we do not find this allowed by Scripture; that is not God's way of salvation.

This picture the Lord had used before (Matt. 5: 25, 26). Judges sat in the market-place and suitors came before them. There were no documents to be lodged or other formalities. It was precisely a court of summary jurisdiction. To any who were at variance with another Christ gave the ever-wise counsel

to settle the matter out of court lest haply the judge decides against you, hands you to his officer, who thrusts you into prison as a debtor: "Verily I say unto you, Thou shalt by no means come out thence, till thou hast paid the last farthing." This counsel was given in the first year of the Lord's ministry. Luke records that it was repeated in the last year (12: 57–59).

Here again the application of the passage to eternity will raise the false idea that a sinner may at last find release by his own efforts. But regarded as a temporal judgment it represents the exact and frequent experience of offenders, both Christians and others.

(2) The idea of "tormentors" compelling payment does not apply to eternity. It is grotesque to picture the Devil and his angels as tormenting lost men in the lake of fire. They are themselves the chief criminals and the most tormented (Rev. 20: 10). Demons can torture men now on earth, but as to the future they know that torments await them: "Art Thou come hither to torment us before the time?" (Matt. 8: 29).

(3) In Scripture sickness is spoken of as tormenting a man (I Sam. 6: 3 LXX; Matt. 4: 24; 8: 6). Adverse circumstances torment men, as waves buffeting rowers (Matt. 14: 24). Lot tormented his righteous soul over godless men (II Pet. 2: 8), a penalty for choosing to live among them. The two prophets at the End time will torment the apostates in Jerusalem (Rev. 11: 10); and demons will torment the godless at that time (Rev. 9: 5). All of these agencies may be employed by God to chasten His children when their ways provoke Him to chasten them for their profit.

Satan employed fire, tempest, and marauding raiders to chasten Job, God using this unto His servant's searching, humbling, purifying, and exalting. Satan would have taken the life of the incestuous brother at Corinth (I Cor. 5: 5), but the discipline would have ended in the day of Jesus Christ, if not sooner. Hymenæus and Alexander had shipwrecked their faith, and Satan was to deal with them; but it does not say unto their eternal damnation, but that "they might be taught not to blaspheme," a good end not likely to result in one of Satan's people, but possible in a backslider (I Tim. 1: 20).

The intensely solemn thing is that when the Lord is compelled to deliver to these tormentors one of His household the painful process will extend until the offence has been purged by the punishment, until "every transgression and disobedience has received its just recompense of reward" (Heb. 2: 2, 3). This rule operated against the people of God under the old Covenant. Under the new dispensation we are here warned that its action

will result in still more serious consequences to us if we are negligent and wilful. See also Heb. 10: 29: "Of how much sorer punishment, think ye, shall he be judged worthy," who acts against the fuller light and richer experience of grace now displayed.

This exposition of the parable (*a*) dismisses the question of eternal punishment; (*b*) preserves inviolate the justified standing of a believer and his relation to God as his Father in Christ; (*c*) limits the area of the teaching to the household and family of God; and (*d*) agrees with all Scripture in requiring us to contemplate both the goodness and severity of God, displayed as really in His own family circle as to the world of the unregenerate beyond.

"As many as *I love*, I reprove and *chasten*: be zealous therefore, and repent" (Rev. 3: 19).

And, "to this man will I look, saith Jehovah, even to him that is poor and of a contrite spirit and that *trembleth at My word*" (Isa. 66: 2).

CHAPTER XV

THE LIGHT

John 8

THE narrative given in the Gospels has reached the last year of our Lord's public ministry. The general rejection will shortly culminate in His murder. At this time, as Luke 9: 51 tells us, "the days were being fulfilled that He should be received up" and "He stedfastly set His face to go to Jerusalem."

The picture of the "set face" is noteworthy. It represents firm resolve, immovable determination. Jacob, the pilgrim, set his face homeward (Gen. 31: 21). The backsliders of Judah set their faces to go down to Egypt (Jer. 42: 15). In contrast Daniel the man of prayer set his face Godward in supplication (Dan. 9: 3). The prophet set his face to listen attentively to God (Dan. 10: 15) or when he spoke to man (Num. 24: 1). Soldiers set their faces to reach their objective (II Kings 12: 17; Dan. 11: 17); and thus Cromwell's men used to say of him, "He has on his battle-face."

The prophet had put these words into the mouth of God's chosen Servant, the Messiah: "The Lord Jehovah will help me; therefore have I not been confounded: therefore have I set my face like a flint, and I know that I shall not be ashamed." In this confidence He should give His back to the smiters and His cheeks to them that plucked off the hair, and hide not His face from shame and spitting (Isa. 50: 6, 7).

It was to this dread experience that Jesus now set His face; but the Spirit of God, when echoing through Luke the words of Isaiah, shows how the Son of God, in full knowledge and full assurance, looked beyond the cross to the glory; the goal of the journey and the issue of the battle was the ascension, "that He should be received up."

It was in similar confidence that Paul faced his execution, despising the shame of being treated as a criminal (II Tim. 4: 6–8), and Peter also (II Pet. 1: 11–14).

John narrates what took place on Christ's arrival in Jerusalem (7: 2–10; 10: 42). It was at this time that the Lord gave the rich promise of the one who believes on Him becoming a bountiful distributor of the water of life (7: 37–39). At this we glanced in

Ch. IV. Bread and water are indispensable to life. Light is equally so. Christ had offered Himself as the food of the heavenly world and His Spirit as its water of life. Now He makes the stupendous claim "I am the light of the world" (8: 12). What the sun is to the earth, this am I to mankind, the heavenly source of knowledge and comfort and health.

Without the light of the sun death would at once reign on this planet. To the same effect Jesus said, and it is still true, "except ye believe that I am He ye shall die in your sins" (8: 24). His claim was to be the I AM, the self-existing Jehovah Who had given this to Moses as His name (Ex. 3: 13, 14), the One Whose existence preceded Abraham (John 8: 58). And not only so in the past. It is not "I *was* before Abraham," but "I *Am*," I exist, without past or future, in one continuous present.

To discern this fact is to have light on the person of Jesus Christ, God manifest in human nature; and yet more, it is to receive light upon the real nature of God; for in the Son the Father is revealed, and made known to faith, the Father Who sent the Son. This is the supreme revelation which Christ made. Upon this highest of all themes He is the only light of the world, the Father cannot be discovered save when the Son is pleased to reveal Him (Matt. 11: 27).

He who does not know the Father in the Son is in the dark as to the invisible, ultimate, eternal realities. By consequence, he does not know how rightly and savingly to order his present life, for he cannot adjust and direct it to fit into that invisible, eternal realm. He is out of harmony with its order, and doomed to be crushed by its overwhelming might, when at last all that is contrary to it must be suppressed.

But, said the Lord, "I am the light of the world: he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life." That eternal life, which was revealed in Christ, is the light of men (John 1: 4); when, by the new birth, it has been infused into the dead spirit of man the darkness of the man upon all divine and eternal affairs begins suddenly to pass away; for the good news as to Christ gives illumination as to the glory of Christ and of God (II Cor. 4: 3–6). It is as when an electric light is switched on in a dark room, which is instantly illuminated. I have seen persons in middle life learn more truth in fifteen minutes after conversion than they had gained in forty or fifty years.

Perhaps the highest earlier promise on this matter was given 700 years before Christ came in Isaiah's words: "Who is among you that feareth Jehovah, that obeyeth the voice of His servant? he that [even though he] walketh in darkness, and hath no light,

let him trust in the name of Jehovah, and rely upon his God" (Isa. 50: 10). Sage counsel, indeed. The name Jehovah carries the truth of His eternal faithfulness, His utter dependability; let the perplexed man, who has no light upon the path and problems of life, rely upon his God. It is in this condition that many pass their days. Yet the Light now shines, and He promises to such as literally follow His steps that they shall "not walk in darkness," but shall have the light by which to live.

Thus does the new era surpass the old and Christ transcend Moses as the Guide of man. But the condition must be observed or the promise cannot be fulfilled. The Lord did not say that one who came only as far as to have faith on Him as Redeemer should not walk in darkness, but the one who, starting at this point, presses forward after Him along the path He took in this world of sin and opposition. The Light is not stationary; it moves forward: he who lags behind, or turns to another path, or falls asleep, must needs lose the light.

And the path that He took, and which we must follow, is that "He stedfastly set His face to go to Jerusalem" to fulfil the whole will of the Father. For Him that path meant physical death; it has meant the same for thousands of His followers; it will mean this for many more. And when this may not be the case, yet for each and all who mean to follow Him in reality, the path leads to that moral association with Him in death which He pictured as "taking up his own cross" daily and following Him in unreserved denial of self and unreserved devotion to the will of God. For this death to self leads to resurrection of the spirit into His world of heavenly life and the undimmed light which shines from His face.

I have seen the face of Jesus,
  Tell me not of ought beside;
I have heard the voice of Jesus,
  All my soul is satisfied.

CHAPTER XVI

THE DOOR, THE FOLD, THE SHEPHERD, THE SHEEP

John 9 and 10

His claim to be the Illuminator of man the Lord confirmed by giving sight to one who never had seen. "Since the world began it was never heard that anyone opened the eyes of a man born blind" (John 9: 32). By this assertion the healed man showed that a ray of light had entered his heart as to Jesus, even that He was sent by God: "If this man were not from God, he could do nothing" (33). That was the very point that Christ's enemies, the Pharisees, were determined not to concede, and the man's confession cost him dearly: "They cast him out"; not merely from their then assembly—but they excommunicated him (vers. 22, 34), deprived him of his standing as an Israelite, with the severe consequences entailed. He would no more be permitted to worship with his people, nor would social intercourse be available among the orthodox.

This arbitrary action of the rulers became known and Jesus heard of it and made it His business to find him. Incidentally this shows that the Lord did not exercise omniscience or He would not have needed to gain information by report or to have sought for the man. The latter had been openly rejected for His sake. This threw him into fellowship with Jesus as despised and rejected, so the Lord found him and drew him to Himself.

His first act was to show further that He is the Light by granting the man more light as to Himself. He taught him that He was not only a man sent from God but was also the Son of God. This light also the man accepted, which he showed by worshipping Christ. Thus did he place himself upon the Rock upon which the Lord would build His church, and became a member of that circle which had gathered unto Jesus as the Son of God. As one later expressed it, he had gone forth unto Jesus outside the camp bearing His reproach (Heb. 13: 13).

This situation caused the Lord to utter openly the solemn explanation of it: "For judgment came I into the world, that they that see not may see; and they that see may become blind" (39). The man had been blind, not only physically, but in the deeper spiritual fact that he had never heard Christ's claim to be the Son of God, for on being asked if he believed on Him he asked "Who is He?" But the Pharisees had heard that claim,

and took the position that they saw it to be false. Thus they said "We see"; and on them would be fulfilled the Scripture, "shut their eyes; lest they see with their eyes . . . and be healed," as the blind man had been healed (Isa. 6: 10).

Perceiving the bearing of all this the Pharisees demanded if Christ meant that they were the blind, to which came the searching dictum, "If ye were blind," that is, as to who Jesus was, as the man through ignorance had been blind on the point, "ye would have no sin," that is, no sin of rejecting the light: "but now ye say, We see: your sin remaineth": you are deliberately binding on yourselves the sin of rejecting Me (vers. 40, 41).

I. The Fold and The Thieves

The chapter division here is a hindrance: the Lord immediately gives the parable found in ch. 10, and commences with the solemn and impressive formula "Verily, verily"—listen to something infallibly certain and urgent!

There is a fold for sheep. In ancient times, from Babel and onward, God "suffered all the nations to walk in their own ways" (Acts 14: 16), and they turned every one to his own way and were as sheep going astray with no shepherd. But shortly God formed a fold, by separating from other nations the seed of Abraham, His friend, surrounding them with His law as a fence, and giving them Moses as a shepherd. Into that fold there was a door, the rite of circumcision (Gen. 17: 9–14), and through that door Gentiles also might enter and find shelter and food (Ex. 12: 43–49).

Ch. 10, ver. 1. From time to time God raised up shepherds over His flock, such as David; but too often false shepherds seized office and fed themselves, not the flock (Ezek. 34). Upon these God pronounced fearful woes. There were such in the time of Christ, men like these Pharisees and scribes, who had usurped the place of Moses (Matt. 23: 2), but not for the good of the flock but for their own enrichment and aggrandizement. These Christ denounced, as Ezekiel had their predecessors, and they in return opposed and persecuted Him. These had got into power by some other way than the door of being appointed by God, and were both thieves and robbers, for they not only robbed the people but did so with violence, even as they had just treated the healed man.[1]

[1] For the two terms together, but used of different persons, see the Epistle of Jeremy (57): "Neither from thieves, nor from robbers, shall in any wise be saved gods of wood, even overlaid with silver or overlaid with gold." It was among robbers, not merely thieves, that the man fell going down to Jericho (Luke 10: 30). But the Lord applies both terms to the same person. These Pharisees were not merely thieves, but violent thieves. They were the successors of those mentioned by Hosea (7: 1–3): "the thief entereth in, and the troop of robbers spoileth without." Here also the two terms are associated.

ver. 2. God had long since foretold that, in contrast to these false shepherds, He would raise up one who "should feed his flock like a shepherd, he will gather the lambs in his arm, and carry them in his bosom, and will gently lead those that have young" (Isa. 40: 11). In this He should perfectly fulfil the ideal illustrated by Jacob (Gen. 33: 13). In that same passage Isaiah had described one who should prepare the way for that Coming One, the true Shepherd (vers. 3, 4); and when John the Baptist was challenged by the false shepherds to state who he was he cited this prophecy and declared himself to be that Voice, the forerunner of Messiah. John indeed did open a door for Christ, not only into the public life of Israel, the fold, but into the hearts of the humble and repentant minority of the people. Into that fold Jesus entered by birth and circumcision, but John introduced Him to the people as the Lamb of God. It was no part of John's message to encourage his hearers to remain in the Jewish fold. On the contrary, as was shown in Ch. II, John's work was to point men to a new order, the kingdom of God and heaven (Matt. 11: 12; Luke 16: 16).

ver. 3. When the Lord thus openly entered into the fold of Israel all the people heard His voice, for He toured the whole land, taught in the temple and the local synagogues, and on the hill-sides instructed thousands at a time for days at a time. But while all heard, not all heeded. In the eastern fold several flocks could shelter at night. When in the morning a shepherd entered by the door and called, all the sheep would hear his voice but not all would know his voice and respond, but only his own sheep. Thus in Israel only a minority recognized the voice of God's promised Shepherd. These He here calls "His own" sheep, whose names He knows and whom He leads out.

The last expression is to be much observed. Christ did not come to keep men in the Jewish fold and to care for them there, but to call them out of it and take them elsewhere. The healed man was an example: "they cast him out . . . Jesus found him."

ver. 4. Those who thus turn from any earthly fold at the call of Jesus need not only bread and water and light, but also guidance. No sheep will find its way safely. Horses, dogs, cats, elephants can do so, but a sheep can only go astray. Its safety is secured by following the shepherd. When he has brought forth out of the fold all His own then our Good Shepherd goes in front of them. Here lies the emphasis in the Greek, "*before them* He goes," and they follow because they know His voice.

This recognition of the voice of the Shepherd is the prime essential for the sheep. Then, as now, many voices called to the sheep. There were, there are, Pharisaic formalists, Sadducean materialists, Herodian sensualists. The rabbis were divided into great schools, with conflicting opinions, as philosophers and theologians are to-day. The sheep will be confused, seduced, misled unless it can distinguish these clamouring voices from the voice of the Good Shepherd. An under-shepherd through whom He spoke very distinctly wrote: "We are of God: he that knoweth God heareth us; he who is not of God heareth us not. By this we know the spirit of truth, and the spirit of error" (I John 4: 6).

Happy is that sheep who at once detects the voice of the stranger and flees from him. Sorrowful and full of danger it is that so many of Christ's sheep sit under preachers, or read certain books, and do not perceive that the voice that speaks is that of the stranger, not the Shepherd, or that the statements made are the alluring cry of the thief enticing the sheep into his clutches. And what shall the sheep do when suddenly it recognizes that the voice is that of an enemy? The Lord tells us what sheep always do—they "flee from him": Christ's sheep should leave in haste that congregation where the stranger's voice is heard; or turn at once from the book that teaches error.

These Pharisees, having already brought upon themselves the judgment that their eyes should be closed, could not perceive the meaning of this parable. So in a gracious attempt even yet to enlighten them the Lord offers its explanation, again prefacing this with the note of certainty, Verily, verily. To make the truth clear He varies the figure. Before there was a fold and a door, into which He entered. Now He drops the thought of Himself entering a door and says that He Himself is the door, and pictures the sheep as entering by Him, securing assured safety, going in and out, and finding pasture.

Now into what spiritual area did the sheep enter by faith in Christ? Clearly not into the fold of Israel, for they were already in it by birth and circumcision. Christ was not the door into that fold. Rather He called His own sheep out thence and went before them elsewhere. Neither did they pass out of Israel into the church, for this new society was not yet formed. It was therefore into the kingdom of God that He was the door of access. In that realm they passed under the authority of God's Shepherd, and by following and obeying Him they were assured of safety, protection, guidance, and provision.

In this wide realm of life there is no fold, for even when formed

the church did not become a fold but a flock, as the Lord added (ver. 16): "Other sheep I have who are not of this [Jewish] fold; them also I must lead, and they shall hear My voice; and they shall become one flock [under] one Shepherd." This foretold the extension of the gospel call to the Gentiles and their union with believing Israelites in one new company (Eph. 2: 11–21).

How assured were the vision and work of Christ! He knew that, as with Israel, so with the other nations, there were among them those who were His by the donation of the Father, and that, when He spoke to them in the gospel message, they would recognize His voice and rise up and follow Him as Leader, as Shepherd. So to His messenger in a great and wicked heathen town He could say: "Be not afraid . . . I have much people in this city" (Acts 18: 9, 10), and He could and would secure the personal safety of His under-shepherd until these His sheep had been led to Him and by Him. And still there are those like Cornelius and Lydia whose hearts He opens to attend to His call (Acts 16: 14); who, being disposed towards eternal life, believe (Acts 13: 48);[1] whose honest and good heart is as the good soil of the parable of the Sower (Luke 8: 15).

ver. 8. The statement "all that came before Me were thieves and robbers" cannot be taken universally. Moses and David were not thieves and robbers, but true shepherds. The sentence preceding and that following refer to the door into the fold and thus limit the meaning to the idea that all who claimed to be the means of entrance into the fold were thieves and robbers. Other words of the Lord indicate His meaning here. The lawyers had taken away the key of knowledge, not entering themselves or allowing others to do so (Luke 11: 52), and the scribes and Pharisees helped in this evil (Matt. 23: 13). Now to hold the key means to grant or forbid access by the door, which is the equivalent figure to being the door of access. These classes of leaders, therefore, were the thieves and robbers, and later the spiritual havoc they wrought was strongly illustrated in the dread doings of their disciple and colleague, Saul of Tarsus, a Pharisee of Pharisees. Ever since there have been leaders in religion of their spirit doing their work of destroying souls. The true sheep do not heed such now, even as the Simeons, Annas, and such as Zechariah and John the Baptist did not answer to their call or grant their claims, but at once knew the Good Shepherd when they heard His Voice.

[1] So Alford, Bengel, Bloomfield, Wordsworth, Rotherham, Speaker's Commentary, and others. This disposition was certainly the work of the Spirit of God, but *tasso* here does not assert *foreordination.*

II. The Door

ver. 9. In contrast to those thieves Jesus was the door of salvation; first from the fold of Judaism, now a place of rabbinical, ceremonial captivity, of bondage and burdens, with starvation of soul for the sheep. Such as turned to Him found access to the kingdom where salvation, in its fullest sense, present and eternal, is assured. And firstly, deliverance from the tyranny of legalism. The Shepherd had before cried aloud, "Come unto Me and I will give you rest . . . ye shall find rest unto your souls," rest from the vexatious burdens laid upon you by the scribes and Pharisees (Matt. 11: 28–30; 23: 4).

What a suitable word is this for the many to-day who seek God and rest and are told by their leaders *to do* this or that, to give, to pray, to fast, and the like—works of law, often not even of God's law but of man's regulations.

But further. The sheep thus liberated by the Shepherd shall "go in and go out," that is, shall have freedom, not imprisonment. It has been suggested (Godet *in loco*) that this whole parable intimates three parts of the day. The morning, when, after the night, the Shepherd leads his own sheep out of the fold; the day-time, during which the sheep go here and there under the oversight of the Shepherd; the evening, when the wolves come forth to destroy, and the Shepherd gathers together the sheep into safety.

All these experiences are known by the flock of Christ: at the moment He stresses the happy freedom which is the portion of His people. "For freedom did Christ set us free" (Gal. 5: 1).

It was the dawn of morning when first we heard the voice of our Shepherd, and were saved from further going astray like sheep and turned unto Him as the Shepherd and Overseer of our souls (I Pet. 2: 25). It is day while we go about daily affairs as guided and ruled by His Spirit. It is evening when times come that clouds fall and wolves howl: then does the sheep prove the protecting power of the Shepherd and says: "Thy rod and Thy staff they comfort me" (Ps. 23: 4). David learned to be a shepherd by being a sheep. Thus are all under-shepherds trained by the Chief Shepherd. They who learn to follow learn to lead, and only as they themselves follow the Great Shepherd can they lead others after Him.

One characteristic by which to determine whether one is really following Christ is that the soul "finds pasture." He leads the heart to "lie down" in "green pastures" and "beside waters of rest." To lie down, not to be restless, agitated, fretful: to good

provender, so that hunger is unknown: to waters which flow softly, not to rushing, angry torrents of excitement and danger (as are known in some religious meetings). So the Shepherd had before said: "I am the bread of life: he that cometh to Me shall not hunger, and he that believeth on Me shall never thirst" (John 6: 35).

Therefore, if His sheep is restless, hungry, faint, it must have missed the steps of the Shepherd, and should bleat until the Good Shepherd restores the soul and guides it again into paths of righteousness. It is when something is done that is not right that the sheep misses the right path and goes astray; but repentance assures restoration, and this the Shepherd will effect "for His own name's sake," because the good name of the Shepherd is involved in the state of his sheep (Ps. 23: 3).

III. The Good Shepherd

vers. 16–18. The Lord now drops the figure of the door and enlarges upon that of the shepherd. This title had been adopted by psalmists and prophets and applied to Jehovah Himself in His dealings with His people. To Him as such the trustful of His people had cried for help: "Give ear, O Shepherd of Israel, Thou that leadest Joseph like a flock"; and that this shepherd was God is shown by the annexed sentence, "Thou that sittest between the cherubim, shine forth" (Ps. 80: 1–3). On Him the humble had relied and in Him had rejoiced: "Jehovah is my Shepherd; I shall not want" (Ps. 23: 1). In times of desolation and dispersion, He had been the hope of the godly: "He that scattereth Israel will gather him, and keep him, as a shepherd doth his flock"; and the ground of this expectation was redemption: "For Jehovah hath ransomed Jacob, and redeemed him from the hand of him that was stronger than he" (Jer. 31: 10, 11).

When therefore Christ asserted "I am the good shepherd: the good shepherd layeth down his life for the sheep" (ver. 11), He quite simply claimed to be the fulfiller of such scriptures as those quoted and therefore to be the God of Israel. The Jews rightly so understood Him: "For a good work we stone thee not, but for blasphemy; and because that thou, being a man, makest thyself God" (ver. 33).

Thus the good, great, and chief Shepherd was among them, but they were not of His sheep and did not recognize Him. Nor was it the fit season for that promised general gathering of scattered Israel: all He could then do was to "gather together into one the children of God that were scattered abroad" (John 11:

52), who were to be in this age the people who should bear His name (Acts 15: 14). This picture thus harmonizes with the teaching already studied in the parables of Matt. 13, as to the work the Lord is doing in this age, worldwide restoration being deferred to the next age, to which it properly belongs in the Divine programme.

This Good Shepherd stands and shines in contrast to three other classes—the thief, the hireling, the wolf (vers. 10, 12).

(1) The thief has only one object, that "he may steal, and kill, and destroy" the sheep. He is therefore a peculiar kind of thief. A common thief is content to steal a sheep, perhaps to sell it, perhaps to kill and eat it. This thief is fired by a wanton lust to destroy. Satan is the first and worst of such thieves, and it is by his cruel spirit they are all consumed. Of the Pharisees the Lord said: "Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye compass sea and land to make one proselyte; and when he is become so, ye make him twofold more a son of Gehenna than yourselves. . . . Ye serpents, ye offspring of vipers, how shall ye escape the judgment of Gehenna" (Matt. 23: 15, 33). These false shepherds and their proselytes, thieves and stolen sheep, will alike reach destruction.

It is a fearful scene: Satan, demons, and demon-driven men of religion bent on destroying all they can. Let this be remembered by some to-day who attempt to whitewash as a class the Pharisees of our Lord's time—He knew them better than modern students. Let this be pondered by such thieves and hypocritical teachers of religion as abound to-day. And let the true sheep cleave to their true Shepherd.

An elderly lady, an earnest Christian worker, protested to me against some books that sought to expose the wiles of the Devil. She thought it unnecessary and hurtful to be occupied with Satan and his works: it was enough for the Christian to be occupied with Christ. A few days later she asked for counsel and prayer because she had lost the joy of salvation and was no longer assured of eternal life. But, I said, you have been a believer for, I suppose, fifty years, and you know the statements of Scripture that the believer on the Son of God has eternal life. Yes, she knew them well, but somehow they no longer satisfied her. I asked her to say who it was that first led man to doubt the word of God. She replied that, of course, it was Satan in Eden. Yes, I answered, and the great thief has beguiled you like a General seeks to mislead his opponent into thinking that he has left the area and need not be considered; whereupon he makes a secret attack upon the unwary. Satan led you to

think you have no need to consider him, and, having put you off your guard, has, thief-like, stolen your faith and peace and joy in the Lord.

It is blessedly true that the thief cannot snatch the true sheep out of the hand of the great Shepherd and destroy it, but he *can* steal the trust and happiness of that sheep, if it ceases to heed the voice of the Shepherd, by doubting or disobeying His words.

(2) There are hirelings as well as thieves. These do not intend themselves to destroy the sheep; they are not bloodthirsty; but they love self more than the sheep, they are busy in the flock of the Lord for the sake of salary, or social position, or love of rule. Should their stipend fall off, or should a job be offered with a better salary, or especially should some direct attack of the Devil threaten to give trouble in the flock and endanger their comfort and ease, they find it convenient to move elsewhere, they flee from peril and leave the flock to face the enemy alone. It is the same spirit of self-love that prompts any believer to leave a church because it has grown cold or has strife among the sheep.

(3) Yet worse dangers beset the flock. There are wolves. Wolves are among the most savage of wild beasts. Their craving for blood is insatiable. In the days of the Russian revolution a peasant was converted to God at an evangelical meeting. He confessed that a lust for human blood had burned in him and he had killed at least two hundred persons for the sheer love of killing. This spirit vented itself in those days in many attacks upon Jews and Christians, with ruthless slaughter. It has often been thus in the past centuries; it will be known again before this age ends. Let those called to the service of the flock of Christ inquire each of his own heart whether his love to the Lord and His sheep will stand the strain of faithful service at such a time.

In heavenly contrast to thief, hireling, or wolf stands the Good Shepherd. His becoming man was to serve many wondrous ends for God, for the heavens, for all nature, but as regards the sheep He had one determining object: "I came that they may have life, and may have it abundantly" (ver. 10).

To this end He drove off the thieves, though in the conflict they murdered Him. To this end He fought the Wolf and all his wolfish pack, though it meant that they rent and killed Him. To this end He stood His ground when the hireling fled, for they were His own sheep and He loved them and laid down His life for them.

When the blood of a victim must flow,
The Shepherd by pity was led

To stand between them and the foe,
And willingly died in their stead.

Thus did the Lord illustrate and emphasize that His voluntary, substitutionary death was the efficient cause of the salvation of men, even as that of the shepherd for the sheep.

Nor was it that He merely secured their lives. The good shepherd is by no means content that his sheep shall be merely kept alive, he desires that they shall do him credit by being fat and flourishing, that they shall have abundant life. To this end are green pastures, quiet clear waters, the anointing with oil, which subject the Lord will later illustrate by a different picture, that of the Vine and the branches (John 15).

The Shepherd stresses some further essential elements of His relations with His own sheep.

(1) vers. 14, 15. *Knowledge.* He knows them and they know Him *even as* the Father and the Son know each other. This cannot refer to that divine infinite comprehension which the Father and the Son each has of the other. It is not a question of the degree of knowledge but of its nature. The Father and the Son know each other by an instinctive, intuitive acquaintance of love through community of nature. It is not a knowledge gained by mental study or research. Even so the Shepherd and the sheep know, love, understand each other. His nature has been begotten in them, creating mutual affection and comprehension. A child does not have to go to school to learn to distinguish its father from other men; from infancy this knowledge has been in its breast. Thus does the lamb know its shepherd from other persons.

It is that type of knowledge revealed in the incident told of Dr. F. W. Baedeker. He had been with Russian peasants. He left for the railway station to go to another place where he was then expected. On the way he said to some who accompanied him that he would not go, so they returned. On arriving, a telegram asked him not to go to that other town because smallpox had broken out. Looking upward he said: "Father, I thank Thee that I understand Thee without telegrams."

(2) vers. 17, 18. The sacrifice He would make of Himself by dying for His sheep was an act of His own free will. Every substitutionary redeeming transaction must have this element or it would be immoral. It were obviously unjust for the law to compel one man to discharge the debt of another man. Such a deed must be voluntary; then it is moral and legal.

It was wicked men who brought the Redeemer to the situation

on the cross which would naturally have terminated in death, and for their deed and intention they are fully responsible. But in fact He did not die by that natural process; but when the work of atonement for sin was being wrought He completed it by dying of His own free will; He said: "Father, into Thy hands I commend My spirit: and having said this *He gave up the spirit.*"

The four historians draw definite attention to this as His own act (Matt. 27: 50; Mark 15: 37; Luke 23: 46; John 19: 30). The first three emphasize this by the fact that the Sufferer had so much strength left as to cry with a loud voice. Mark further stresses it by further telling of the effect produced upon the centurion in charge of the execution: "When the centurion saw that He *in this manner* (*houtos*) gave up the spirit he said, Truly this man was Son of God" (ver. 39). John adds the special and equally significant detail that having said, "It has been completed," the Lord of His own will lowered His head on to His breast and gave up the spirit (*klinas*). It was not that His head merely sank on to His breast as by weakness, but it was His own act.

The spirit is not the man, the person. The soul is the *ego.* No one can give up his personality to another. The spirit is that element of the human being which vivifies the material portion, the body, and renders it tenantable by man, the soul. Now no man has the right or the power thus to dismiss the spirit. It is God, the Giver, Who recalls it, whereupon the body dissolves and the soul is left unclothed. If a man determines to end his life he can only do it by attacking *the body:* he is not able to dismiss the spirit by an act of his will. And this violent deed is murder, self-murder. But the Lord here declares that He had received from the Father authority to close His own career by dismissing His spirit, and also the power to effect it. Thus His actual death was His own deed, and apart from His consent men could not even have brought Him to the point where He could die.

But further. It was no part of the counsel of the Father and the Son that the Redeemer should remain dead: indeed there would then have been no way of giving effect to His death as the redemption for sinners. The Father had at the same time given to the Son authority to resume life by resurrection. This also was His own act (vers. 17, 18): though because it was wrought by the Father's authority it is quite properly attributed to the Father: "Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father" (Rom. 6: 4): "the God of peace brought again from the dead the great Shepherd of the sheep" (Heb. 13: 20). Here again the Son of man was authorized and empowered to do what no other man can do: none can command the gates of Hades to

open and let him out from the world of the dead. In these two matters of death and resurrection, as in all things, the Son as man has the solitary pre-eminence. Upon this is grounded the power He had before claimed to raise all others from the dead; both the just and the unjust, and to judge them and determine their destiny (John 5: 26–29; Acts 17: 30, 31).

(3) ver. 18. In closing this parable the Lord revealed His own submission to His Father. These exceptional rights and powers He did not assert as His own, but accepted and exerted them in obedience to the Father: "This *commandment* received I from My Father."

And as the Father saw the Son of His love thus humbly obedient as a man on earth, and carrying this perfect obedience to the furthest possible extent, even to death, yea, the death of the cross, it kindled in the Divine breast an intensity of affection which the Son felt and mentions: "Therefore doth the Father *love* Me, because I lay down My life, that I may take it again."

But was not the love of the Father to the Son already divine and therefore infinite, and can the infinite know degrees? Presumably not as to extent, but apparently, Yes, as to expression. The total heat of the sun cannot be increased by man, but it can be caused to concentrate upon a small object and so in application be intensified.

We ought not, with Buddha, to conceive of the Divine Nature as static because infinite, as insusceptible to motion or emotion. There is, if it may be so expressed, a naturalness in the exercise of the attributes of God; and the sight of His Beloved thus obeying and suffering excited the affection of the Father to the Son, though that affection had ever been real and perfect.

If, therefore, man is to be in full harmony with the Father it must be by loving the Son. This love will show itself in obedience to the Son, even as by obedience He showed His love to the Father: "that the world may know that I love the Father, and as the Father gave Me commandment, even so I do. Arise, let us go hence," to Gethsemane and Calvary (John 14: 31).

Such love in us to the Son, manifested in obedience, will draw forth toward us a similar love by the Father; "for the Father Himself loveth you, because ye have loved Me" (John 16: 27). Thus will our heart, through the Son, be in fellowship with the Father concerning the Son. And again, we hear the Son address to us the matchless assurance that, "If a man love Me, he will keep My word: and My Father will love him, and we will come unto him and make our abode with Him" (John 14: 23). And of all the words of the Son to us none exceeds in

practical power this injunction: "This is My commandment, that ye love one another, even as I have loved you" (John 15: 12).

It was contemplation of the Son laying down His life that kindled the love of the Father: it will be by contemplation of that same great sacrifice that love to the Son will be kindled and maintained in our cold hearts. Let us then repair to Golgotha, and with the soldiers, though with far other feelings and effects, sit and watch Him there. Then shall we sing with deepest emotion and honest devotion what Dr. A. T. Pierson described as the richest hymn in the English language:

When I survey the wondrous Cross
On which the Prince of glory died,
My richest gain I count but loss,
And pour contempt on all my pride.

Forbid it, Lord, that I should boast,
Save in the death of Christ, my God:
All the vain things that charm me most,
I sacrifice them to His blood.

See, from His head, His hands, His feet,
Sorrow and love flow mingled down:
Did e'er such love and sorrow meet,
Or thorns compose so rich a crown?

Were the whole realm of nature mine,
That were an offering far too small:
Love so amazing, so divine,
Demands my soul, my life, my all. (*Watts*)

IV. The Sheep

vers. 25–30. Further pressed by His enemies the Lord plainly exposes their state and its cause. They do not believe His words, though so fully accredited by His character, life, and works; and the reason is that they have not the heart of the true sheep of His flock. They are thieves or hirelings or even wolves.

In contrast to such are His own sheep. He repeats their indispensable and most characteristic features. By these let each of us test his profession.

(1) They hear His voice as their Shepherd; not with the outward ear only, but with the glad, loving response of the obedient heart.

(2) The Shepherd knows them, each of them individually, by name (ver. 3). Ponder this; it is both comforting and searching.

I need not tell thee who I am;
My misery and want declare.
Thyself hast called me by my name;
Look on Thy hands and read it there. (*Wesley*)

On the other hand, "all things are naked and laid open before the eyes of Him with whom we have to reckon" (Heb. 4: 13). He knows the state of the blood, as well as of the wool on the back.

(3) They follow Him. Let no one take unction to his soul from the following assurance of eternal life unless he is an actual, matter-of-fact follower of Christ; walking in His steps when these go over stony and thorny paths as much as in green pastures; following His example when this may involve loss or reproach.

(4) But to each whose spirit has the co-witness of the Shepherd's spirit, that to hearken and follow is the real, consistent, determining bent of the heart, the Lord offers to faith the absolute unequivocal assurance that He gives unto such to share in the eternal life which is His own life; that therefore they shall never perish, because that life, now their life, cannot perish, being divine and eternal; and that, even as the life is intrinsically beyond decay, so is it eternally beyond danger, for neither thief nor wolf can snatch the sheep out of the Shepherd's hand. The shepherd could snatch the lamb from the mouth of the lion or bear (I Sam. 17: 35); the reverse can never be.

But more, much more. The eternal, almighty Father cooperates with the Son in the eternal security of the sheep. He also has in them a divine, personal concern. From among the masses of mankind He made of these a love-gift to His Son: He is "greater than all," absolutely supreme in the universe: it is unthinkable that even Satan himself, the first and chief thief and wolf and lion, can snatch them out of the Father's hand.

To this end the Father and the Son join hands: "I and My Father are one."

Let each of Christ's own sheep hide these unsurpassable words in his heart; then will he not sin against the Good Shepherd by harbouring a doubt about his eternal security.

Unbelievers have quibbled as to whether Christ's statement "I and My Father are One" constituted a claim to personal oneness with God, or meant no more than a psychological oneness of thought, feeling, and purpose. The Jews who heard had no such doubt. To them the words plainly meant that Christ, being a man, made Himself God (ver. 33). Obviously they were right. Such a simple, unguarded assertion could

mean nothing less. The Speaker was either a blasphemer or was God, one with the Father in the Deity. The comfort and confidence of the sheep arises strictly from this being the fact. No mere man *could* guarantee eternal security to his fellow-men; nor could an angel do this. It is possible to God alone. In trusting the Good Shepherd we have through Him set our faith and hope in *God* and we shall never be confounded (I Pet. 1: 21; 2: 6).

CHAPTER XVII

THE GOOD SAMARITAN

Luke 10: 25–37

It seemed good to the Spirit of truth that we should be indebted to Luke for much valuable information and precious instruction from this period of our Lord's life, the closing year.

A man learned in the law stands up among the hearers and puts to the Lord a test question: he "tempts" Him. The word used was employed by Christ to confute Satan: "Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God" (Matt. 4: 7; Luke 4: 12). Its only other place in the New Testament is I Cor. 10: 9: "neither let us tempt the Lord, as some of them tempted, and perished by the serpents." Here it signifies an evil action. The Lord used it to quote Deut. 6: 16: "Ye shall not tempt Jehovah your God, as ye tempted Him in Massah." Ex. 17: 7 records the occasion: "they tempted Jehovah, saying, Is Jehovah among us or not?" This also was an evil act.

The Hebrew word comes some thirty-six times in the Old Testament. Of these places twelve speak of man putting God to the test unbelievingly, which is always evil. But it is also used of God proving, testing man, as Abraham (Gen. 22: 1), and Israel (Ex. 20: 20). The occasion which is nearest to the case before us is where the queen of Sheba "came to prove Solomon with hard questions" (I Kings 10: 1; II Chron. 9: 1). As we might say, she intended to put Solomon through his paces, as a horse may be tested.

If this lawyer had recognized Jesus to be Jehovah incarnate, his approach would have been wicked and his attempt irreverent. But this cannot be assumed. Here was a Rabbi who was commanding general attention: he would put to him a searching test as to the law and the future of man.

ver. 25. "Teacher, what having done life eternal shall I inherit?" Here are three deeply important matters: (1) There is a life that is eternal; (2) It is an inheritance; (3) By what means can I qualify for this inheritance?"

(1) This influential Teacher spoke much about the eternal life. The subject was important in the highest degree. The students of the law thought that this life was to be found in the Scriptures (John 5: 39). The lawyer would probe the teaching of

the new Rabbi as to how man, frail, mortal, transient, could secure this inestimable boon.

(2) It being an inheritance it must belong to children in the family of God, since it is universal law that it is children who are heirs. Israel as a people were regarded as children of God (Isa. 43: 6; 64: 8; Jer. 3: 19; Hos. 1: 10; II Sam. 7: 14), so they could entertain the hope of inheriting the eternal life of God.

(3) But an instructed Jew knew that there is a painful possibility of forfeiting one's inheritance. Esau had done so (Gen. 27), and Reuben (Gen. 49: 3, 4; I Chron. 5: 1), and Shimri, a Levite, was made the firstborn, so that the actual firstborn had been passed over (I Chron. 26: 10). What if this contingency applied, not merely to priority in rank, but to the larger and far more vital matter of the *eternal* life? Such as Esau and Reuben lost their earthly inheritance by having done wicked works. What, then, must a man do of good works to secure the full inheritance, the life that is eternal? This Teacher is but a young man, and he has not been trained in the schools: can he throw light upon this problem, so urgent, so profound?

But the divinity schools of his time, like at least most of the divinity schools of our time, had failed to teach the inquirer the vital fact that no law could make the dead to live; "for if there had been a law given that could make alive, verily righteousness would have been of the law" (Gal. 3: 21). Moses indeed had written "that the man that doeth the righteousness which is of the law shall live thereby" (Rom. 10: 5; Lev. 18: 5). But the stubborn fact that all men had died showed conclusively that the law had not availed to preserve even this our earthly, created life: how much less could it secure to us the eternal life!

In any case, how could the utmost efforts of man be sufficient to acquire so priceless, so infinite a blessing as to share in the life of God, eternal life? Plainly it must be a free gift of God (Rom. 6: 23).

Like the majority to-day the lawyer was blind to these obvious considerations, though very conversant with the letter of the Word of God. Hence his question: "Having done what, shall I inherit eternal life?" He did not ask, "What shall I do?" This could imply no more than some single deed. His question was in the form of the aorist participle (*ti poiēsas*), implying a course of conduct brought finally to a successful consummation and viewed as one whole completed action. He was placing his hope upon a pious life brought to a consistent conclusion.

This is exactly the doctrine of all who hold that no one is sure of salvation until he shall have brought a godly course of life

to a satisfactory close. Having succeeded in that prolonged effort, say such teachers, you may hope for the mercy of God at last. This is to mix law with grace, and make it the ground of salvation, and so to make grace void, "for if the inheritance is of the law, it is no more of promise; but God hath granted it to Abraham by promise" (Gal. 3: 18), for "if they that are of the law are heirs, faith is made void, and the promise is made of none effect: for the law worketh wrath" (Rom. 4: 14, 15).

The theologians of that day, as so commonly of this day, refused to acknowledge the disability of human nature, corrupted and enervated by sin, to keep the law of God, and that, while the law in itself is holy and righteous and good, it is weak because of man's carnal nature, and not able to help man (Rom. 7: 12; 8: 3). It can only condemn him to endure its own penalties as a violator of its commands.

vers. 26–29. He that is wise to win souls starts with a man at whatever spiritual point he finds him, so the Lord takes the lawyer where he has shown he stands, looking to works of law as his basis and hope: "What is written in the law? How readest thou?"

The answer shows a just appreciation of the law of God. The lawyer quotes the same two major precepts of the law which Christ later declared to be those than which no command is greater and upon which, indeed, all the law and the prophets hang (Matt. 22: 34–40).

The inquirer saw that the whole law is involved in the word "love." This forbids that rigid contrast between law and gospel sometimes pressed as if the two were antagonistic. The most essential feature of both is the same. And love acts in two directions, first Godward, then manward. It is but one activity of the heart. He who loves God will love his brother also; if he does not do the latter he cannot be doing the former (I John 3: 10; 4: 19–21). And the measure of my love to my neighbour is to be that of my love to myself. This is possible. Even in the age of law it had been known: "Jonathan loved David as he loved his own soul" (I Sam. 20: 17).

Christ was but magnifying the law, and admitting the justness of Moses' dictum that the man who fulfilled its requirement should retain his life, when He said to the lawyer, "Thou hast answered right: this do, and thou shalt live." Here is one of those striking instances of how the Lord showed the law to be of richer meaning than was commonly perceived, or is generally perceived to-day. The life that was under discussion was eternal life, therefore the Lord's remark meant that the promise

given by Moses extended to gaining *eternal* life *if* a man fully kept God's perfect law, that is, loved with the whole heart both God and man (Gal. 5: 14; Rom. 13: 8–10).

The Lord's simple remark reached the man's conscience. He knew himself that he had *not* loved his neighbour as he loved himself. Had his desire to secure eternal life been a dominant passion he would have owned this failure and sought a remedy in the mercy of God. But he was not sincere enough for this. His inquiry was purely intellectual, so lawyer-like he commenced to prevaricate, his real instinct being to justify himself in spite of his sin in not living by God's standard.

"My neighbour" is a wide term. I cannot know or meet or help everybody; how then shall I know who is the neighbour I ought to love? It was the unworthy quibble of a self-loving soul, who did not *want* to meet his "neighbour," for he could not meet the requirement of God that he should bestow on that neighbour the same love as upon himself.

vers. 30–35. To answer and reprove the evasion, and in mercy to the quibbler to drive deeper the sword of conviction, the Lord used the incident of the man who fell among robbers and was rescued by the Samaritan.

Travellers who have gone from Jerusalem to Jericho by that old road, know how favourable to brigandage is the horrid wilderness of Judea. This hapless man was seized, stripped, and robbed, and his efforts at escape or resistance meant that fierce blows felled him, and the robbers decamped, leaving him, as Wycliffe translates the passage, "half alive," a not unreal description of many a Christian. But the Greek reads "half dead"; so much so that left to himself death must ensue.

The priest and the Levite would not attempt to help. It would take time, and they must hurry along lest they also be attacked. They did not know him; maybe he was an alien, or a Samaritan, or one unclean, and they might be ceremonially defiled by touching him. Their religious duty forbade such risk. Let him die, or let someone else help him.

And that "someone" was directed to him by the God of Israel and of all mankind, and he was a Samaritan. Between Jews and Samaritans there ruled a virulent hatred fully developed on both sides. They had no dealings with one another (John 4: 9). The sacred law of hospitality was violated by Samaritans if the traveller was going to Jerusalem, and, in return, Jews would heartily have blasted Samaritans by calling down fire from heaven (Luke 9: 51–55). But how different the spirit of the Jew named Jesus. The insult He forgave, the revenge He rebuked.

The Samaritan had a compassionate heart, went to the man, dressed his wound, lifted him on to his own beast, walked himself, brought him to an open public hostelry, cared for him through the night, and in the morning at his own expense engaged the attendance of the innkeeper and guaranteed any further cost should convalescence be slow. And all this love was shown to an alien, whom his own race had robbed or neglected, and whom the Samaritans' own people would have abhorred, or might even have readily killed outright. Indeed, what might they not say to himself if they learned he had thus relieved a Jew?

Thus did our Lord heartily stress that racial or religious antagonisms are contrary to the law of God "thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself," a law that many who even say they are His disciples openly violate in times of war, and many less openly disregard at all times. As its horrid developments show, nationalism is antichristian. It would have prevented the good deed of the Samaritan. The love of God is universal toward all His creatures without distinction.

vers. 36, 37. There could be but one answer to the Lord's question as to whether the priest, the Levite, or the Samaritan acted as neighbour to the wounded man. This the lawyer admitted. The Lord's application "Go thou and do likewise" is directed to each and all of us. The sons of the kingdom are expected to do likewise, and they are fully empowered for this if the love of God has been shed abroad in the heart by the Holy Spirit. "We love because He first loved us." Not only do we love Him (as A.V.), but we love our brother and neighbour also (I John 4: 19). "But whoso hath this world's goods, and beholdeth his brother in need, and shutteth up his compassion from him, how doth the love of God abide in him? Little children, let us not love in word, neither with the tongue, but in deed and in truth" (I John 3: 17, 18).

Spiritual application of this lovely picture is often attempted. It may be in small degree legitimate but it is precarious. It affords illustration of how the vital features of a picture or parable may be possible of application but the detail treatment be fanciful or inaccurate.

The injured man is used to picture the sinner leaving God to go to the place of the curse, Jericho. The robbers are Satan and his minions. The priest and the Levite are regarded as representing the law and its ceremonies, unwilling to help the sinner. This is not allowable. Individual ministers of religion can be careless as to the salvation of sinners, but the law of God in itself is otherwise characterized in the New Testament. It

was directed to the good of man and was ready to guide him to life.

Or Christ is regarded as the good Samaritan. As far as this man was animated by disinterested love he may be a general type of the Saviour of sinners, but detailed application is plainly impossible. Christ did not come from His native realm to this earth on some private business of His own and just happen by the way on sin-stricken sinners. On what beast of burden does Christ carry the sinner? What spiritually is the unroofed open lodging-place where all casual passers-by were welcome? Certainly not the church of God. Only those already healed are members therein. Who is the keeper of the hostel who took no care of the man at first, and was paid by the Samaritan for his later services? Certainly not the blessed Holy Spirit. What further payment will *He* receive from Christ on the latter's return journey?

These queries show how fanciful must often be any attempted interpretation of details. And in the attempt there is easily lost the solemn practical lesson drawn for Christian practice in daily contact with our fellow-men, "Go, thou, and do likewise." Such is only normal conduct in the kingdom of God.

This is not called a parable, and I regard it as a real incident. It could easily have been so. Robbers on that road were common. In a society where all goes on in public it would be matter for much general comment that a Samaritan had so befriended a Jew. The news would at once spread up and down that much-used road and travel far and wide.

CHAPTER XVIII

IMPORTUNATE PRAYER

The Friend at Midnight

Luke 11: 1–13

VERS. 1–4. "He was praying." He was a man of prayer. The Son cried often and long to His Father; sometimes a whole night was spent thus. If He needed to pray, how much more we. The disciples felt this, and asked Him to teach them to pray. John had taught this holy art to his disciples; they begged the Lord to instruct themselves.

So momentous, so indispensable is prayer that the Word of God is full of instruction upon it. It records a number of prayers which were acceptable to God; and by meditating upon these our prayers may become so. Those of Abraham, Moses, David, Solomon, and others are before us for our study and learning.

On this occasion the Lord responded by giving similar suggestions to those He had before given on the Mount (Matt. 6: 9–15). We shall not now study this example of prayer further than to note

(1) The brevity of each sentence: "God is in heaven [great, majestic] and thou upon earth [humble, insignificant], therefore let thy words be few" (Eccles. 5: 2). It is Solomon who thus advises. His prayer is one of the longest in the Bible, yet can be read in a few minutes. It is disrespectful to be tedious before the sovereign.

(2) The order of the petitions. First, God and His kingdom; afterward our affairs.

(3) Following the ancient authorities the R.V. varies the clauses much from those of Matt. 6. Some are shortened, some omitted. Had the Lord intended this to be a *form* of prayer, would He not on this second occasion have repeated it precisely as on the former occasion? That He did not do so emphasizes His opening words as in Matthew, "*After this manner* therefore pray ye," not, "use this phraseology regularly."

But that we may follow this petition we must keep it ever before us. Like the Ten Commandments, this pattern prayer should be memorized by disciples: then life can be governed by the one and prayer by the other.

vers. 5–10. Christ then went on to stress the need of perseverance in prayer.

An unexpected guest had come at night. He was "out of his way," as Christ put it. What a picture of the human race. Out of the right way, in the dark, hungry. Do those who are conscious of their state and need turn to you and me, disciples of Christ, as naturally as this traveller went to his friend's house? And if one of them comes have we heaven's food to set before him? or is our larder empty?

In one of his meetings Dr. R. A. Torrey saw a man deeply affected by the truth. He thought it happy that sitting next to the man was a Professor of theology, head of a college. To him he went and whispered that the man beside him was much moved; would he lead him to Christ? The Professor replied: "Torrey, I don't know how to do that!"

Thus earlier Chas. G. Finney had reproached the theological halls for sending out mostly preachers who were like one who should leave a nautical college knowing how to do everything except navigate a ship. It is the same to-day, perhaps more so.

And what of the generality of Christian people, that is, the really regenerate? Can they feed hungry souls? In 1892 A. T. Pierson wrote solemn words even more true to-day:

> No more alarming sign exists in the Church of to-day than this, that so small a part of our church-members ever convert a soul to God! With all our so-called refinement, education, culture, social influence, the Church to-day has but few who are at work for souls, and who will at last bring in armfuls of sheaves. (*The Divine Enterprise of Missions*, 119.)

If any reader is one of these ineffectives in the cause of God, and if he sincerely longs to be enriched so as to be blessed to hungry souls, let him act as did the man in our Lord's picture—let him turn to the God of heaven and ask for a full supply of the Bread of God, Christ ministered by the Spirit, and he can count upon a generous response.

First, such prayer is unselfish. The prayers of so many children of God are purely selfish. Their own daily needs are first and last, beginning and end, of their prayers. They are on much the level of the prayer put into the mouth of a little dog:

> A master who is good and kind,
> And understands a doggie's mind,
> A walkie, and a meal a day,
> Is all I ask for when I pray!

To be kindly treated by a considerate Lord, and one's own

little needs to be met, forms their whole desire. Such self-centredness is foreign to the love of God, which seeks ceaselessly for the true welfare of others. He cannot enrich such souls. Let them get busy in seeking the good of others and at once God will open to them His good treasure, for now they will use it worthily and to His intention.

Second. To be caught without food for a visitor were an insufferable reproach to the Oriental. By some means or other he must wipe it away: by hook or by crook he must supply the needs of his guest. So he resists the Easterner's dread of the dark and hastens to the house of his neighbour. To be sure he ought to have been ashamed of himself making such a to-do in the street at midnight, and disturbing his sleeping friend and his household. But it is the very point that Christ presses that he was *not* ashamed; that he would not take NO for an answer, but "because of his shamelessness" (*anaideia*) he prevailed over the reluctance of his friend and went home able to meet the need of his visitor.

vers. 9, 10. How much more, then, shall unselfish, unceasing appeal to God be answered, seeing that He is full of desire that His heavenly provision shall be made available to the sons of men. Therefore the Son of God added the assurance:

> And I say unto you [I, the unselfish Son of God, say to you the sons of God], Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you. For every one that asketh receiveth, and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened (vers. 9, 10).

If one says that he has asked, sought, and knocked without result, he should inquire of his own heart for the reason. It is plainly implied that our appeal is to be of the order of that of the man pictured, being unselfish, for the good of others, and persevering until the answer is given. No one who has fulfilled these necessary conditions has ever had to return to his famished guest empty-handed.

vers. 12, 13. To reinforce the lesson and encourage faith the Lord graciously added another comparison. No normal father would give his boy a stone, a serpent, a scorpion instead of the loaf, the fish, or the egg desired. Earthly parents partake of the corruption of our human nature, yet they know how to give good gifts to their children; how much more, then, shall the perfect Father give spiritual gifts (*pneuma hagion*, no articles) to those who ask Him.

Bread, fish, and eggs are articles to sustain life in vigour. They represent those spiritual supplies which invigorate the new

nature of the child of God, and they are to be had in abundance for the asking by those who purpose to use their renewed powers to the glory of God and the blessing of men. It is hypocrisy to append to our prayers the formula "for Christ's sake" unless we so live that Christ be magnified. If the Son of God is to get nothing by God answering our prayer our prayer will not be answered; for the honour of the Son is the ruling passion of the Father.

The chief business of God's kingdom on earth is the meeting of the needs of dying souls, to the glory of Christ, and their upbuilding for His service. This business is not much transacted by your organizers and advertisers, by the schemers and financiers. These may build fine religious skyscrapers greatly admired; but their structures collapse when time's tempests burst, or they go up in smoke in any fiery test, being made of wood, hay, and stubble.

The true kingdom is not ruled or furthered by such, but by men and women of prayer. These command the energy of the Almighty and they remove mountains that obstruct the way of the Lord to the hearts of men. Moreover they conduct His divine affairs at comparatively little expense; nor do they need to beg of men or their brethren, whether openly or covertly, since the prayer of faith is the key to God's riches in glory in Christ Jesus. They ask and they receive, for they wish only what God wills, and they find this can always be accomplished by waiting patiently for the Lord to work.

George Müller early resolved that he would not knock at man's door, asking for help, until he found his heavenly Father's door shut against him. This never happened, so he never asked of men, though his needs were vast for his vast service. In principle it is thus with all who know how really to pray.

Little regarded by men, or even their fellow-Christians, men and women of faith and prayer are renowned in heaven. It was while one such man of prayer was at prayer that it was said to him by heavenly beings, "O man greatly beloved . . . thou art greatly beloved" (Dan. 10: 19; 9: 23).

"Lord, teach *us* to pray." Will *you* thus pray sincerely, counting both the cost and the gain?

CHAPTER XIX

THE STRONG ONE DEFEATED

Luke 11: 21–23, 24–26; Matt. 12: 29

FOLLOWING the instruction on prayer last considered Luke introduces the vicious slander by the Pharisees that the Lord worked by the energy of the Devil. This has been studied in Ch. VII.

But there is one picture mentioned by Matthew (12: 29) and drawn more fully in Luke's narrative (11: 21–23): "When the strong one fully armed guardeth his own court, his goods are in peace: but when a stronger than he shall come upon him, and overcome him, he taketh from him his whole armour wherein he trusted, and divideth his spoils. He that is not with me is against me; and he that gathereth not with me scattereth."

This is one of the passages where the insertion of "man" blurs the picture. It was not a man who held the blind mute, but a demon. "The strong one" is Satan.

Here was a poor captive of the Devil, whose subordinate, a demon, had seized possession and inhibited his faculties of sight and speech. Jesus released him and sight and speech were freed. This our Lord explained by a picture of a fortified house, guarded by its owner, fully armed, who prevents access and so holds his goods in peace. The body and soul of the demon-held man was the house; Satan the owner, the strong one; lying and fear, the armour, the means by which he held or terrified his captives, his "goods."

We are told that when, in days past, a British frigate would bear down upon a slave ship, the cruel captors would deceive the slaves by telling them that the British, if they captured the ship, would inflict on them awful tortures. Thus did they persuade them to join in resisting their would-be liberators; and thus does Satan lie about God and His Son, and many are his miserable slaves who resist their would-be Saviour.

Here is also a chief reason why so many sinners pay no attention to the gospel. They may sit in an evangelistic meeting when the message is told clearly, when the trumpet calls loudly for surrender to their rightful Lord; but they are down in the dark dungeon of Satan's lies, so they pay no real attention, though seeming to listen to the address. Or if perchance awakened, so that Christ is a reality to the mind, they display the power

of the Enemy's lie by crying with the Gaderene demoniac: "I beseech Thee, torment me not" (Luke 8: 28).

The Lord teaches those who would release these captives of the Devil that this can only be effected by first overwhelming their Captor and stripping him of his panoply (the word here used). Only then can the Christian distribute Satan's goods, that is, free his captives from his grasp. It is vain to deal with the prisoner until the power of his Captor has been broken.

This demands that the soul-winner must have more spiritual vigour than the demon, or he cannot break his grip on the sinner. For lack of energy of spirit the attempt to save sinners so often fails.

To change the figure. The message of God is compared to a sledge-hammer which can break rock in pieces (Jer. 23: 29). But such a heavy tool cannot be used by a weakling. It requires a strong arm to deliver a shattering blow.

Few believers have adequate energy of spirit for such conflict and conquest. Many workers do not even recognize the situation of souls as here pictured by Christ. They deal, or attempt to deal, with the captives without first binding the Strong One who binds them. They blame their blindness and hardness instead of first releasing them from the external bondage.

But that mighty defeater of the Devil, Paul, said to his younger fellow-soldier: "Thou, therefore, my child, *be strengthened* in the grace that is in Christ Jesus" (II Tim. 2: 1); and when about to instruct as to the war with wicked spirits, and exhort the Christian to put on the *panoply* of God (the same word as above), he begins by saying, "be strong in the Lord, and in the strength of His might" (Eph. 6: 10). Only a powerful man could possibly wear the heavy armour of former times, let alone fight in it.

Here is the failure of too many active Christians. They give little or no time to that secret nourishing of the inner man which is gained only by appropriating Christ as the daily food, so that His strength becomes theirs. This was studied in our Ch. XI. They give little time to that waiting upon God in secret prayer which is vital to vigour of faith. And all too often it is their reckless activity in what they think Christian work that prevents soul nourishment and renewal of strength. A Youth for Christ worker, with frayed nerves and weary brain, told me that for six years he had preached every night without exception. He had not attended to the call of his Master, "Come apart and rest awhile."

Very notable are the words of William C. Burns, who in his day opened the windows of heaven and saw floods of spiritual blessing fall: "The great fundamental error, as far as I can see,

in the economy of the Christian life, which many, and alas! I for one, commit, is that of having too *few* and too *short* periods of solemn retirement with our gracious Father and His adorable Son, Jesus Christ."[1]

A young Egyptian man attended frequently meetings in Cairo and seemed truly desirous to be saved but declared that, though he sincerely wished to trust Christ, he simply was not able to do so. I asked if he had to do with spiritism. He replied, Yes, for his brother was a medium and he had attended his séances. I told him he was like a child whose upper arm was gripped by a strong man, so that the limb hung helpless and could not be used by the child. By going into Satan's sphere he had given to a demon opportunity to suspend his faculty of faith. Was he willing that the power of the demon should be broken? Most earnestly he protested a great longing for this. In the name of the Lord Jesus I then commanded the evil spirit to depart, and forthwith his victim was free and left the place rejoicing in Christ as his Redeemer and Deliverer.

ver. 23. To one and all, outsiders and disciples, the Lord then addressed the searching statement, "He that is not with Me is against Me; and he that gathereth not with Me scattereth." The Christian whose attitude is not positively and actively on Christ's side in this stern conflict with Satan, must inevitably be furthering Satan's cause against Christ. His influence is used to scatter souls from the Lord, if he be not active in gathering them to Him. There is no neutrality in this war,

vers. 24–26. The Divine Teacher concludes by a solemn warning. He states, what is known in demon-ridden lands, that unclean spirits are restless if disembodied. Expelled from a man, they begged permission to enter swine and in them rushed into the sea (Luke 8: 32, 33), for waterless places are obnoxious to them. This craving to be embodied implies that originally they were so, which has led to the suggestion that they may be disembodied beings of the pre-Adamic races on earth, slain in judgment for sin, but not yet banished from earth to the abyss, which they dread as their final misery (Luke 8: 31; Matt. 8: 29).

Thus free to roam the earth, they are watchful for opportunity to renew residence in a person or community formerly occupied. It matters not to them that there has been moral renovation since they were ejected, that the life is swept of gross sins and garnished with morality. If the heart and body be "empty," not occupied, filled, controlled by the Spirit of Christ, they will enter and abide

[1] Quoted from my pamphlet *Praying is Working* (p. 23). In this, and in my booklet *Prayer Focused and Fighting*, this theme is discussed more fully. The above quotation is from D. M. McIntyre's *Hidden Life of Prayer*, Pref. xiv.

and rule, and the reformed but not God-occupied man will soon be in a worse state than ever.

This warning had awful fulfilment in the generation of Jews that rejected Christ (Matt. 12: 45). Denying Him His rightful place they were soon more fatally mastered by the Devil unto their destruction. Let each of us take heed, even the Christian; for though the Deceiver and Captor cannot compass his final perdition, it is possible that as backslidden he may be dragged more deeply into sin and misery than in his former unregenerate days. I have seen such cases. A drunkard I knew was obviously saved, and lifted out of the slough and misery of his drunkard's life. After some years the Lord spoke to him about tobacco. This indulgence he doggedly refused to abandon, encouraged by the example of professing Christians, including the leader of an adult school he attended. I warned him that if he persisted in fighting the Spirit of the Lord he would forfeit His grace and strength, in which case he could soon be in the depths whence he had been raised. This, alas, came to pass.

"Wherefore, Let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall." This is the concluding warning of a powerful series of warnings based on Israel's disasters in ancient days. But this is followed by the assurance that there is no need to be defeated, for God is able to strengthen us to endure every temptation (I Cor. 10: 1–13). Nor is there any surer way of defeating the Devil, than to leave the defensive and assume the offensive. As the military maxim is, He who would win must attack! Let the Christian give himself ceaselessly to attacking the Strong One, with the object of releasing his captives to trust and serve God. He will find this the finest means to keep his own heart triumphant and radiant, and so shall he be an effective member of the fighting forces of the kingdom of God.

CHAPTER XX

THE RICH FOOL

Luke 12: 13–34

THUS it is a dread battle to which the disciple is called. The enemy is strong and fierce and can inflict dire distress, even unto a cruel death.

After further hard conflicts with the Pharisees and lawyers Christ saw thousands of the people thronging Him. He at once continued the war by warning His followers against the hypocrisy which, like leaven, permeated and corrupted the Pharisees.

A prominent use of the word hypocrisy was to describe an actor, who impersonates someone else. The actor hid his own personality, sentiments, and conduct by pretending to be another person. The Lord assured His hearers that at last such pretence and secrecy will fail. Everything covered shall be revealed, everything hid shall be made known. Words spoken in darkness and secrecy shall be proclaimed publicly. A fearsome prospect, which urges the disciple to be always sincere in act and speech. For there is no other way to be "void of offence" in that day of unsparing exposure, "the day of Christ" (Phil. 1: 10).

The Christian being thus transparent and luminous will assuredly be a mark for the most bitter attacks by all who love darkness, because their deeds are evil. Is not this a truly alarming outlook? It certainly is calculated to throw a paralysing dread over the spirit. Therefore to those He graciously describes as "My friends" the Lord added (Luke 12: 4, 5), "Be not afraid of them that kill the body, and after that have no more that they can do. But I will warn you whom ye shall fear: Fear Him, Who after He hath killed hath power to cast into Gehenna; yea, I say unto you, Fear Him."

Fear God Who can consign hypocrites to the torments of Gehenna! It is not said that Christ's friends may be cast there, but that a Being so glorious and powerful as can follow the soul into the world beyond death, and there deal with it so drastically, is the One to fear. He in whose heart the holy fear of God rules will soon fear no one else. Such an one will be at peace in the sweet assurance that that mighty God is concerned as to the sparrows, and how much more for His children, the friends of

His beloved Son. Indeed, the very hairs of their head are numbered.

While the throngs listened to this exalted teaching "one of the crowd said unto Him, Teacher, bid my brother divide the inheritance with me." Please constitute yourself a judge in Chancery and help the cause of righteousness!

On a former occasion the Pharisees had invited Jesus to act as judge in a criminal case concerning an offence liable to the capital penalty. He had so dealt with the prosecutors that they abandoned the proceedings and the case lapsed. This left Him free to act in mercy (John 7: 53–8: 11).

On the present occasion He again avoids the task proposed by pointing out that no constituted authority had appointed Him to be a judge or a divider of estates. Therefore, even if He undertook the part desired, His decision would not bind the brother or compel him to act.

Here is clear enough guidance for those who are careful to follow Christ's steps. It is not for them to be judges or administrators in secular disputes outside Christ's circle, the church (comp. I Cor. 6: 1–11). To be sure, if two men of the world ask a Christian to help them to compose their differences he may well act as a peacemaker (Matt. 5: 9); but here was an *ex parte* application, an appeal by *one* party to help *him* against the other, right or wrong. This the Lord refused to do, but on the contrary at once makes to all present a pungent application against

Covetousness.

ver. 15. "Take heed and keep yourselves from all covetousness, for a man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth."

The simple force of the word covet, as of the Greek word it translates *pleonexia*, is *the desire to have more*. It matters not whether it be for much more or little more. Nor is it less than covetous to desire what may be legally one's own but is unjustly withheld. This may have been the case with the man who at this time had applied to Christ for help. It is quite probable that his claim was right, or he would hardly have applied for help to this Rabbi whose demand for righteous practice was so uncompromising. But he wanted more than he had, which was covetousness.

It is against this longing that He Who had renounced the divine riches He had held now warns us all. We are to be on our guard against *all* covetousness, even the least degree of it and every

form of it. There is only one right and safe state of mind, even that given in the exhortation in Heb. 13: 5, 6:

> Let your turn of mind be free from the love of money;
> *content with such things as ye have.*

To desire more is to impugn the goodness, wisdom, and rightness of the ways of God in having ordered present conditions for my welfare. This was the snare by which Satan entangled Eve: God knows perfectly well that He might have made you happier than you are! Coveting this different condition she lapsed from confidence in her benevolent Creator and took her own way to disaster.

Thousands of Christians are in the same snare. Not being content with what God has allotted them they do not gain the benefit of the matchless accompanying promise:

> Himself hath said, I will in no wise fail thee,
> neither will I in any wise forsake thee,

and the sweet calm of being in the care of the Almighty is forfeited.

This all-covering guarantee was given to Israel in view of the coming battles with giant Devil-begotten enemies in the land of promise. It was at once repeated to Joshua as the future leader of the hosts of God (Deut. 31: 6–8). It was renewed to Solomon in view of the tremendous task of building the temple of Jehovah (I Chron. 28: 20). To us it means that in the present wars of the Lord against wicked spirits, and for the purpose of building the church, the house of God, God Himself is our entire sufficiency. If our whole life, in every department, be devoted to these purposes, then the promise holds good, and

> With good courage we say,
> The Lord is my helper;
> I will not fear;
> What shall man do unto me?

What indeed? Why, nothing other than the Almighty Father and Helper permits, for my good and His glory by my testimony.

It was to inculcate and strengthen this spirit of contentment and peace that our Lord went on to forbid His followers to lay up treasure on earth, but rather in heaven (vers. 33, 34). Yet too many who talk about being His followers persistently flout His directions by getting richer and richer, and some think to further His cause by creating trust funds the income of which

is to be spent in gospel work. But it is not the less a laying up treasure on earth, so causing the hearts of His servants to be on earth rather than in heaven.

To enforce this pungent warning against covetousness the present parable was spoken.

> And He spake a parable unto them saying, The ground of a certain rich man brought forth plentifully: and he reasoned within himself saying, What shall I do, because I have not where to bestow my fruits? And he said, This will I do: I will pull down my barns, and build greater; and there will I bestow all my corn and my goods. And I will say to my soul, Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years; take thine ease, eat, drink, and be merry. But God said unto him, Thou foolish one, this night is thy soul required of thee; and the things which thou hast prepared whose shall they be? So is he that layeth up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God.

This man is a sample of myriads, in that

(1) He abused God's goodness in permitting his ground to be specially fruitful. He did not consider *why* God had enriched him, or recall what the Giver had written as to the use of riches.

(2) On the contrary he "reasoned with himself," but did not take counsel of God. His life was self-ruled, as was that of Saul of Tarsus who said, "I verily thought with myself" (Acts 26: 9). So do Christians argue by human prudence, and plead that they ought to prepare for a rainy day, or lay up for their children, or for old age. And they urge that God means them to make the most of His bounties, and so on. Against all of which specious and misleading reasoning stands the plain command "Lay not up for yourselves treasure on earth," which as Wesley justly said, is a thing as plainly forbidden by Christ as is adultery or murder.

(3) So this poor rich man decided to enlarge his premises and to increase his reserves; one of the common sins and follies of our day.

(4) Then he confessed to himself what were the real objects that determined his conduct. Probably he did not own them to even his friends, but what he was really after was (*a*) security for many years to come, a confession that he was not trusting God for the future; and (*b*) a love of ease, in disregard of the will of God that, for his own good, he should toil (Gen. 3: 17–19); and (*c*) the desire to gratify the lusts of flesh by eating, drinking, and foolish mirth.

. . . .

But the God he had ignored suddenly burst in on this pleasant programme and broke it up. He

(1) described this prudent, calculating, shrewd, and prosperous man as one truly foolish. This competent, careful, intelligent person, as he no doubt thought himself to be, and as the world considered him to be (for "while he lived he blessed his soul, and men praise thee when thou doest well to thyself," Ps. 49: 18): this successful man of business, this prosperous estate owner, was in God's estimate *aphrōn*, a man without reason, showing "want of mental sanity and sobriety, a reckless and inconsiderate habit of mind" (*Hort*). In his calculations he had ignored two prominent factors of all human affairs (*a*) the possibility of an early and sudden death, and (*b*) that he would have to leave his wealth behind, for he brought nothing into the world and could take nothing out.

This being folly, as it certainly is, what a world of foolish people Adam's race is, a folly that persists in and is even fostered by many Christians.

The R.V. margin is to be studied: "Thou foolish one, this night do *they* require thy soul of thee"—"Soul" were better translated "life." The soul is the man, the *ego*. He cannot part company with himself; but his life is forfeit and must be surrendered on demand. But to whom? Surely to those angelic executioners of the sentences of the heavenly court of whom something has been written above. Angels conveyed Lazarus to paradise; angels cut short human life when so ordered by God.

Upon this parable the Lord gives His own searching comment: "So is he that layeth up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God" (ver. 21). Let each decide which principle rules his life.

vers. 22–30. What now is the preservative against this ruinous longing to get something more? It is to learn from the ravens that it is perfectly safe to trust God to feed His child, and from the lilies that He can clothe His family.

ver. 31. It is to recognize that man's true business is to advance the kingdom of God by acting righteously, whereupon the resources of that kingdom are automatically at his disposal for this purpose.

vers. 32, 33. It is to remember that the kingdom in its day of manifestation and glory, will be given to the few and feeble, the "little flock"; not to the great, the affluent, those who are like the wealthy man of the parable.

These strange people are the wise. They will always be happy

to dispose of possessions rather than to accumulate them. They will gladly give, rather than get and keep. They carry their wealth in purses that never wear out; they invest their money in heavenly securities, where alone it is safe. Their hearts are in heaven, and to heaven they shall arrive to enjoy their riches sent on before.

The Teacher often repeated His lessons. The disciples surely remembered that He had taught these principles and given these directions a year or so earlier when teaching on the mount (Matt. 5–7). This would deepen in their hearts the imperative duty of obedience. It revolutionizes a human heart to be convinced that "man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth" (ver. 15). It will revolutionize society when in a coming day it is believed. It is so plainly true, when a true idea is gained of what it really is *to live*. The rich may waste life; the poor may really live. The measure of one's possessions is not the determining factor. He who thinks otherwise is a fool.

CHAPTER XXI

THE PARABLE OF THE HOUSEHOLD SLAVES

Luke 12: 35–40

His rejection by Israel being manifest, the heart of the Lord went ever more forward to His departure, to the building of His church, and on to His ultimate return to establish the kingdom of God on earth. Therefore His thoughts were the more occupied with that minority of Israel and the nations given to Him by His Father as the nucleus of His coming kingdom. To these He had just said: "Fear not, little flock; for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom" (ver. 32).

vers. 29–32. His followers at any one time would be very few, His enemies very many. The former might therefore be anxious how they would fare in this hostile world. But they could confidently rely on the care of the Father, seeing what a noble future He had provided for them. It was theirs to seek in all things to serve the interests of that kingdom which should be their inheritance.

A special meaning attaches to the expression "*give you the kingdom.*"

Dan. 5: 31. Upon the overthrow of Belshazzar "Darius the Mede *received the kingdom*," that is, was made king by appointment of Cyrus the Persian.

Esther 4: 14. To the Queen, Mordecai said: "who knoweth whether thou art not *come to the kingdom* for such a time as this?"

Rev. 11: 15. "The kingdom of the world is *become the kingdom* of our Lord and His Christ."

All these phrases indicate receiving sovereignty in the kingdom, not being subjects in it. It is in view of this high dignity and responsibility that the Lord appended the instruction now to be pondered. The essential lesson is that this grant of royal position demands corresponding conduct in this age of the King's rejection. The grant is not guaranteed irrespective of fidelity and fitness. When the day of conferment shall come, at the return of the King, there will be a display of the holy severity of God, as well as of His matchless goodness.

The picture is again taken from the oriental household, the head being owner and lord of his dependants, they his slaves.

The lord is absent at a marriage feast; his bond-servants are to be ready to open instantly when he returns and knocks. This is the general picture and the specific lesson. Out of it various details arise, consideration of which must not be allowed to weaken the dominant lesson. Indeed, it is difficult to see a precise application for some details.

ver. 36. For example, Christ pictures Himself as like to a master *returning from* the marriage feast.[1] If this is to be applied to Him literally, His return to His "house" must be deferred till after the marriage supper mentioned in Rev. 19: 7, 19. This will demand that His "house" shall continue on earth after the rapture of the church to be the "wife of the Lamb." By consequence, the faithful stewards, whatever their reward, will not be part of the Bride. Yet the apostles were such stewards (I Cor. 4: 1), and they cannot be excluded from the heavenly company, for they are of the foundation of the new Jerusalem, which is a picture of the Bride (Rev. 21: 14, 9). Moreover, the promise to the faithful steward, "he will set him over all that he hath," points to that ruling office which is to be the dignity of the heavenly saints. Then also, it seems that this marriage feast is to be held on earth (see Matt. 22: 1–14; 25: 1–13; 26: 29; Luke 22: 18, 30), for guests are invited whose status is of the earth (Ps. 45: 12–17; Matt. 22: 11–13; 25: 10–12).

It therefore appears that no stress is to be laid here upon the expression "*return from* the marriage feast." It simply uses a well known circumstance to impress the duty of the servants to be ever ready to open to their Lord, always on the alert.

Then again, if this feast is to be deferred until the very close of this age and its conjunction with the age to come, it would form no basis for a call to watchfulness to any disciples prior to that final time, and could have had no application to those who first heard the parable or who have heard it since. But this is contrary to the parable itself, which raises the question of the Lord coming before or after midnight (the second or third watch) and calls for perpetual watchfulness (vers. 38, 40).

ver. 35. Of this attitude of heart, this watchfulness of spirit, the outward symbols are girded loins and burning lamps.

While active the Oriental gathers together his flowing robes and fastens them with the girdle. When relaxing or reclining he unlooses the girdle. Peter takes up the Lord's words and shows their meaning. When speaking of "the favour which is being brought unto us at the revelation of Jesus Christ," he

[1] "Marriage feast" is in the plural. It is so in the LXX at Esther 2: 18. Perhaps the English plural "nuptials" would be a good equivalent, meaning all the ceremonies and festivities viewed as one composite event.

adds, "wherefore girding up the loins of your mind, be sober" (I Pet. 1: 13). Our thoughts are prone to be discursive, wandering, flitting from flower to flower, from topic to topic, ready to trail in the dust of things worldly like ungirded robes. We are here exhorted to bring our minds under control and to concentrate on things heavenly, things to be revealed when the Lord comes.

To the same effect Paul wrote of "bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ" and that we should "set our minds on the things that are above where Christ is," in expectation of His being manifested (II Cor. 10: 5; Col. 3: 1–3).

Such control of the thoughts is possible. Gladstone said that when he shut his bedroom door he shut politics outside. It demands strenuous and unceasing effort; but the Holy Spirit affords His efficient aid to assure success.

Peter adds: "be sober." The Greek word meant to abstain from wine, and so to be in a fit state of mind to offer Divine worship. For wine excites and beclouds the mind, so that thoughts and tongue run riot from lack of control. It is probable that Nadab and Abihu were under its influence when they acted without regard to the regulations governing approach to God; for immediately after their trespass and death the command was given that a priest, when about his duties in the tent of meeting, was not to drink wine or strong drink. His mind was to be clear and alert to teach the people the distinctions required in the service of God (Lev. 10: 1–11).

Similarly, the Lord's bond-servants are to abstain from, not only wine, but all things that divert the mind from steady attention to the things of God and lessen the preparation of heart for the return of the absent Lord. Novels, pastimes, frivolities, business, family cares; oh, how many matters distract the mind and bring it into bondage to things present and visible. Things positively necessary should be held with a tight rein, and the rest be cut off completely.

"Burning lamps" tell that the period of the Master's absence is, for His servants, night. Night, when inevitable tendency to drowsiness must be steadfastly resisted. Its peril and penalty will be emphasized later in the parable of the Ten Virgins. No one drowsy or asleep is watching. The Devil offers various and pleasurable opiates which, when not deadly, induce lethargy. The skill with which they are compounded is seen in that they render the mind more acute to things earthly and present but dull to the heavenly and divine and future. In the fourth century the vast majority who named the name of Christ drank

them readily and fell asleep as to the coming of the absent Lord, though busier in trying to make the world pleasanter.

The general condition in view was well and painfully indicated in the seventeenth century by that Roman priest who said that there were three great trades of the world—the lawyers who ruled the world, the soldiers who defended the world, and the clergy who enjoyed the world (*Pepys*, Dec. 20, 1668).

The Christian adulteress asleep in the embrace of the world will not be watching for the coming of the outraged Husband (Jas. 4: 4, 5). But if the lamp be burning, not smouldering and smoking, the servant is awake, busy, and ready to open at his Lord's first knock.

ver. 37 contains what the great commentator Bengel regarded as the greatest promise in the Bible. "Blessed are those slaves whom the lord when he cometh shall find watching: verily I say unto you, that he shall gird himself, and make them recline at table and shall come and serve them." Just before He left His servants the Lord did this, as we shall see in John 13. In the day of His kingdom, at His own marriage feast, He will repeat this profound condescension. What precisely the reality will be we are not told, but so great is the value to His heart of the watchfulness and fidelity of His servants, and the affection of heart that longs to see Him, that He will most signally reward the faithful and expectant slave.

Truly the slave does no more than his duty by being ready for His Lord's return; even so he is but an unprofitable servant, not having done more than his duty (Luke 17: 10); but the Lord will in grace honour highly and uniquely his fidelity and affection. Let not the careless and worldly-minded believer indulge the vain conceit that such as he will be thus honoured by the Lord. If he wishes to share this dignity he must bestir himself betimes, shake off sloth, and prepare in all seriousness to meet his Lord.

But in this royal action there is surely more. By so acting at the outset of His reign the King will give a notable object lesson of the spirit that has always animated Him and will do so for ever, and which He will expect His personal retinue to display. Indeed, to all His subjects He will thus point the way to rise in the kingdom and reach honoured intimacy with Himself, their Sovereign, the way of humility and lowly service.

ver. 38. "And if he shall come in the second watch, and if in the third."

The indefinite "if" is notable and intentional. Christ did not say that He *might* come in one of those periods, but only *if* he should come. On a later occasion He stated that neither the day nor the hour of His return was known to even Himself,

but to the Father alone (Matt. 24: 36; Mark 13: 32). He could not therefore speak precisely upon this point and must needs leave His followers in a designed uncertainty. They were not to know whether it might be at evening (the first watch of the night), at midnight (the end of the second watch), at cock-crowing (during the third watch), or in the morning (the fourth watch reaching to the dawn) (Mark 13: 35).

Nor did He define when this "evening to morning" would begin and end. As remarked above, this whole period of His absence is a moral night to the heart that loves Him and longs for His return. Yet, in another sense, to them it is not night but day, our day of opportunity for service. Not yet has come to His followers "the night in which no man can work" (John 9: 4). Perhaps *this* night will be only that brief period when Antichrist will utterly suppress all testimony to God and His Son, when the disciple will not be able to work in the gospel, but only to suffer. It may be that it is that darkest of all periods which is covered by "even, midnight, cockcrowing, and morning."

This would harmonize with what else we are told concerning the present age of witness and its closing years. The Lord made it perfectly clear to His followers that He would be away for a long while, on a lengthy journey, and would return only "after a long time" (Luke 19: 12; Matt. 25: 19). It is of the period immediately before the end of this "long time" that He speaks in the passages considered.

vers. 39, 40; Matt. 24: 33, 34. The uncertainty as to the hour is now emphasized, and the consequent need of perpetual watchfulness. The statement has two features to be specially noted.

(1) The description "the master of the house" is elsewhere applied by the Lord to Himself (Luke 13: 25) and to God (Luke 14: 21; comp. Matt. 22: 1). Here it is applied to the servants of Christ. This shows that the same figure may be very differently employed, which forbids that a figure be given only one uniform meaning. The context and other scriptures must be considered.

(2) On a later occasion, speaking of His advent, the Lord said: "Wheresoever the carcase is, thither will the vultures be gathered together" (Luke 17: 37). It is urged that the "carcase" cannot mean Christ, or the "vultures" His people gathering to Him, because the figures are unsuitable and incongruous. Yet they are not more incongruous than that the Lord coming to take His own should be compared to a thief stealing what is not his own; nor that God should compare Himself to raging wild beasts, or the corrupting moth (Hos. 5: 12, 14; 13: 7, 8). See further in Ch. XXIX.

These various pictures display the essential feature that only the precise detail illustrated is to be regarded. Christ at His advent will be the centre of attraction to His waiting people as a carcase is to vultures. God will act severely in His judgments as a lion or a moth destroys. The coming of Christ will be as unannounced as that of a thief.

(i) Peter asked if this lesson from the thief was for themselves (the apostles) in particular or for all. The Lord had just before addressed His remarks to the "little flock" to whom their Father was purposing to give the kingdom. Now, in answer to Peter, He makes a specific, not exclusive, application to the rulers (stewards) of His "house" in His absence. It thus appears that the "house" and His "stewards" will continue on earth until the Lord shall come after the manner of a thief, that is, until at least the sixth Bowl of Rev. 16: 15.

(ii) I Thess. 5: 2. Paul has been instructing the saints that those who will be left alive on earth as far as to the parousia (presence) of the Lord will not be removed to the air prior to the dead; for the Lord, at His descent from the throne of the Father to the air, will take away together all who are to share in that mighty movement. He then adds that they had no need of further instruction as to the times and seasons of that event, "for yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so cometh as a thief in the night." Inasmuch as they were already enlightened upon this matter, and not in the darkness of the world about it, they need not be overtaken by that day as (to incorporate the figure used by Christ) a householder who did not know a thief was coming, or what hour he would come. God had not appointed them to meet His wrath in that day, but to obtain that salvation from its then outpouring of which the Lord Jesus had spoken: "He that endureth to the end [of the age], the same shall be saved," that is, from the wrath then to be outpoured (Matt. 24: 13). Similarly Paul presses the need of watchfulness, sobriety, readiness, if that salvation is to be realized. His whole reasoning implies the presence of Christians on earth down to the day of the Lord, but their salvation from its sudden onset if they are sober and watchful.

(iii) II Pet. 3: 10, 11. Peter heard that instruction by Christ, and he repeats that "the day of the Lord will come as a thief," and therefore believers, even such as had already "obtained a like precious faith with us in the righteousness of our God and Saviour, Jesus Christ" (II Pet. 1: 1), ought to give diligence that they "may be found [at that day] in peace, without spot, and blameless in His sight" (II Pet. 3: 14).

The heavy emphasis which the apostles put upon the *state* of the Christian does not agree with the teaching that our state has little to do with participation in the deliverance held forth as possible at that day.

(iv) Rev. 3: 3. That the apostles understood aright both the privilege of escape and the peril of forfeiting it is certain from the fact that, speaking from heaven as the ascended Lord, the One who is to come, Christ said (ver. 2) to the saints at Sardis, "Become (*genou*) watchful . . . If therefore thou shalt not watch, I will come as a thief, and thou shalt in no wise (*ou mē*) know what hour I will come upon thee (or, *over* thee, or, against thee, *epi se*)." This again emphasizes that the coming as a thief applies to the church of God, and forbids that the passage in Luke applies to pious Jews as such.

In the fact of things, saints living prior to the End Days, have not been in personal danger of the Lord coming as a thief. Hence the real direct application of the warning must be to those who will be on earth as the Day of the Lord nears. This is important as showing the weightiest meaning of the Letters to the Churches.

If it be pressed that there must have been some application to the persons to whom Christ spoke in the days of His flesh, and to those to whom the Letters were first sent, as well as to all succeeding generations of Christians, it should be considered whether the true implication be one usually little suspected. What if *dead* believers are required still to be alert, watchful, men of faith and godliness, living in that world unto God, as conditions precedent to sharing in the first resurrection, when the Lord will come suddenly upon His church? This would give continuous application of the words of God to believers, as well as continuity to the dealings of God with His children, and it would solve some hitherto obscure problems. More upon this theme is hinted in Scripture than is generally conceived. Unto God that world, dead to us, is a living world (Luke 20: 38), and He carries on the blessed work of perfecting His people "until the day of Jesus Christ" (Phil. 1: 6). It does not stop at the hour when they die to this world. Why should it? Why should the intervening years be a blank? The whole theme sorely needs investigation and exposition. In the Old Testament Sheol is mentioned 65 times, and Hades ten times in the New Testament. There must surely be here a great deal of information and instruction awaiting patient meditation and courageous explanation.

(v) Rev. 16: 15. The sum of the foregoing is that (*a*) the house of God and its government, the family of God and its

discipline, will continue on earth as far as to the Day of the Lord; (*b*) that, however, it is not appointed by God that Christians should experience its terrors, for He has graciously provided salvation from it by the method described in I Thess. 4: 13–18. But (*c*) it is only the watchful, prayerful, overcoming Christian who is guaranteed a share in *that* salvation. (*d*) Therefore the Lord, in great mercy, gives the faithful exhortations that are always connected with the theme of His coming as a thief. We are like unto night watchmen in the holy house of God. The Captain of that house gives no notice as to the hour when He will inspect the guard. The penalty of being caught asleep is to be stripped naked and be put to shame as an unfaithful guard. Hence the sentinel must keep awake through the whole of his watch in order that he may keep his garments.

Here it cannot be too plainly stated, or too heavily emphasized, that the believer's "garments" (plural) are NOT that righteousness of God which is reckoned to him upon faith in the Redeemer, which righteousness justifies him eternally from the *eternal* wrath due to sin. That righteousness *God* puts on the believer, that is, imputes it to him. I know not that that righteousness is ever described by the plural. But the believer's own "garments" are those habits, acts, and conduct which he *makes for himself*, by the grace of the Holy Spirit, and puts on himself, or, alas, puts off by backsliding of heart and ways. See Rom. 13: 11–14; Eph. 4: 20–24; 6: 11–18; Col. 3: 8–14.

That garment which can be "spotted by the flesh" (Jude 23), and must, by the care of the saint himself, be kept unspotted (Jas. 1: 27), obviously is not the righteousness of God in Christ, for this cannot be sullied. It is not *this* divine robe that saints may need to wash in the water of the word and whiten in the blood of the Lamb (Rev. 7: 14). It must be other garments than this of which the Lord said that some in Sardis "did not defile their garments," and that therefore "they shall walk about with Me in white; for they are worthy" (Rev. 3: 4). What are the flowing robes that the saint is to gather up above the filth of the paths of the world, and to fasten with his girdle of truth (I Pet. 1: 13)? The answer is found in Rev. 19: 7, 8: "The marriage of the Lamb is come, and His wife hath *made herself* ready. And it was given unto her that she should *array herself* in fine linen, bright and pure: for the fine linen is the *righteous acts* of the *saints*." See Ch. XLII.

If the coming of the Lord as a thief is to take place at any time prior to the point in the End Days reached in this verse (Rev. 16: 15) its mention here is beyond explanation; for the reminder would seem wholly irrelevant, the warning pointless, and the

blessing beyond attainment. There can be no danger from an event already past. If the thief has come and gone the peril is already over and the loss sustained.

The source of the picture is not in doubt. It is taken from the Temple at Jerusalem. Edersheim in *The Temple, its Ministry and Services as they were at the time of Jesus Christ*, c. VII, "At Night in the Temple" (p. 112), remarks on the minute and accurate allusions of John to the details of the Temple services and arrangements, especially in the *Revelation*. On our verse he says (p. 120): "During the night the 'Captain of the Temple' made his rounds. On his approach the guards had to rise and salute him in a particular manner. Any guard found asleep when on duty was beaten, or his garments were set on fire—a punishment, as we know, actually awarded. Hence the admonition to us who, as it were, are here on Temple guard, 'Blessed is he that watcheth and keepeth his garments.'"

Therefore if by watchlessness and carelessness or wilfulness, the guard be caught asleep on the dusty ground, he will be stripped, his defiled life will be burned up, and he stand there in shame before his Lord at His unexpected presence (I John 2: 28). This is the evident force of Paul's metaphor in I Cor. 3: 15, that the character and life-work formed of poor materials shall be burned up in the day of Christ, though the believer "himself shall be saved yet so as through fire."

The exact *modus operandi* by which this will be effected is veiled by the varied figures employed. Let obscurity deepen solemnity that we may avoid the reality.

"Be ye also ready: for in an hour that ye think not the Son of man cometh."[1]

[1] The section on the coming as a thief is rearranged from my *Revelation of Jesus Christ*, pp. 255–259.

CHAPTER XXII

THE STEWARDS OF THE HOUSE

Luke 12: 41–48

THIS is the first place in the New Testament where the term "steward" is found, and here and 16: 1–8 are the only places in the Gospels. It is found six times in the Epistles,[1] and its cognate "stewardship" five times.[2] The term illustrates the not infrequent feature of New Testament language, that if a word is used metaphorically an actual example is given to show its meaning. Rom. 16: 23 speaks of "Erastus the city treasurer" (steward); the man to whom was entrusted the collection and oversight of the city funds. And Gal. 4: 2 speaks of the senior slave on whom was conferred the responsible task of caring for the heir to the family title and estate until he should come of age.

Thus the stewards had both the control of property and the care of persons, the former for the benefit of the latter. Consider Eliezer, Abraham's head slave (Gen. 15: 2; 24: 2), and Joseph's position under Pharaoh (Gen. 41: 40). So in the picture drawn by the Lord the steward was entrusted with the control of the food that he might thereby feed the household.

Paul describes his office and service as that of "a servant of Christ and steward of God's secrets" (I Cor. 4: 1). The essence of the Lord's instructions and warnings is summarized in Paul's next statement that even in earthly relations it is required that every steward be found faithful. He adds the pertinent remark that a steward need not be concerned as to the judgment of his fellows, nor should rely upon his own opinion of himself, not even though his conscience be clear as to his conduct as a steward; for it is the judgment of the Lord alone that matters (vers. 2–4).

Peter inquired whether the parable of the household slaves, just spoken, applied to all or to themselves, the apostles, in particular. The answer of the Lord implied that, in addition to the common relation of all the household to Himself, its Head, there were special officers, with special privileges, duties, prospects, and

[1] Rom. 16: 23; I Cor. 4: 1, 2; Gal. 4: 2; Titus 1: 7; I Pet. 4: 10. A cognate is found only in Luke 16: 1.

[2] I Cor. 9: 17; Eph. 1: 10; 3: 2; Col. 1: 25; I Tim. 1: 4; translated in each place by "dispensation" except the first, where "stewardship" is used.

perils. In His house some would be set over the rest as administrators of the house during His absence. To these He would entrust the "food" the rest would need in order to be capable of the work allotted to each.

Therefore to his fellow-elders Peter gives the exhortation that they should "tend the flock of God" (I Pet. 5: 2). He was fulfilling and repeating the Lord's charge to himself: "establish thy brethren" (Luke 22: 32), "feed my lambs . . . tend My sheep . . . feed My sheep" (John 21: 15–17). This is the chief duty of the steward: the elder is to be "apt to teach." He is not to *sell* the food to the household, rendering his service for pay as a hireling; rather as Peter says in this passage, the oversight of the flock is to be rendered "not of constraint, but willingly . . . nor yet for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind."

This warning against the seducing effect of a craving for money has a striking illustration in ancient Babylonian history. Herodotus narrates that Nitocris, queen of that city, prepared her tomb above a gate of the city, and caused an inscription to be carved on it that, if any subsequent sovereign of Babylon should be in need of money, he was to open the tomb and take what he wished; but only if he should be in real need, for otherwise it were not a good act. The tomb remained long undisturbed, but Darius the Persian thought it a pity that treasure should be unused and had the tomb opened. He found, however, no money but only the corpse, together with a writing saying, "If thou hadst not been insatiable for money and sordid gain thou wouldst not have broken open the sepulchres of the dead" (Her. I, 187).

Peter uses the adverbial form of the strong word that the historian employed, *aischrokerdees*, filthy lucre, or sordid gain. Thus did he stigmatize the shameful practice of serving in the house of God for the sake of money. What proportion of clergy and ministers regard "the ministry" as a means of livelihood? How many would remain at their posts if there were no salary? How many change their sphere to increase their income? Paul uses the noun twice, once in relation to elders (Titus 1: 7), also to deacons (I Tim. 3: 8).

As rare as it is noble was the example of Dr. A. T. Pierson. At one time he was the minister of a wealthy church in America paying a salary of £2,000 a year and providing town and country houses. He said to his wife that this was no style in which to bring up children for the Lord. With her concurrence he went to a church giving only £500 a year, with no house. All their children developed into active servants of Christ. Later, he adopted a travelling ministry with no guaranteed income, which

was much owned of God to the advancement of His people. He was verily a "faithful and wise steward of the mysteries of God," deeply taught in His word, and skilled beyond most in setting it before the household of faith.

It is emphasized that the Lord Himself sets such stewards over His household (ver. 42). Neither Pope, Bishop, Synod, Conference, or local church can make such an appointment. Those who think to derive from the apostles authority to appoint should listen to an apostle when he disclaims for himself such authority. Paul said to the elders at Ephesus that it was *the Holy Spirit* Who had made them overseers of the flock, which the Lord had purchased and of which He was therefore the Owner (Acts 20: 28). In the light of this the appointment of elders by himself and Barnabas (Acts 14: 23) can mean no more than that they gave open recognition, and led the believers to do so, to the prior act of the Holy Spirit in having qualified these brethren and incited them to set themselves to minister to the saints (I Cor. 16: 15, 16). To such God-appointed stewards the household are to be subject, for by the act of the Lord of the house these are over the household and have His authority (I Thess. 5: 12, 13).

vers. 43, 44. "Blessed is that servant whom his Lord when He cometh shall find so doing. Of a truth I say unto you, that He will set him over all that He hath."

Here is an instance of the feature that the strict application of the Lord's parables is to the time when He shall come. Those will be days when it will be exceedingly dangerous to be a leader in a Christian community, and their reward shall be correspondingly noble: "He will set him over all that He hath." How Peter understood this is shown by his assurance to faithful elders that "when the chief Shepherd shall be manifested, ye shall receive the crown of glory that fadeth not away" (I Pet. 5: 4). Men contended for a crown that decayed, Paul for one that is incorruptible (I Cor. 9: 25).

The conception and illustration taken from the public games had been employed prior to the apostolic letters. The author of the Book of Wisdom had written (iv. 1, 2):

> Better is childlessness with virtue;
> For in the memory of virtue is immortality:
> Because it is recognized both before God and before men.
> When it is present men imitate it;
> And they long after it when it is departed:
> And throughout all time it marcheth [leading the procession] crowned in triumph,
> Victorious in the strife for the prizes that are undefiled.

The character of the reward in view will be opened further by the Lord in later statements to be considered in their order (Luke 19: 17–19): Matt. 25: 21–23). The present passage shows an enlargement of service as outcome of fidelity in limited service: first, control of the household food; then, control of all the Lord's property. In both there is rulership as the essential feature of the service. Truly "Faithful is the saying, If a man seeketh overseership he desireth a good work" (I Tim. 3: 1): only let him face the qualifications demanded, and the perils involved, not only the rewards.

The Person of the Servant

vers. 45–48. "But if that servant shall say in his heart"—What servant? The sentence in English admits of but one answer. The only person before-mentioned is the faithful and wise steward; there is no one else in view and so no one to whom the "that" can refer. The pronoun in Greek (*ekeinos*) is equally as emphatic or more so.

The plain meaning is that a good servant may degenerate and become a bad servant, to which, alas, facts sadly correspond. Demas was with Paul during his first imprisonment at Rome and was worthy to be mentioned in the same breath with the beloved Luke (Col. 4: 14); but by the time of the apostle's second imprisonment at Rome Demas had been seduced by the love of this present age and had forsaken Paul (II Tim. 4: 10). This matter is so vital to the right understanding of our Lord's teaching that the application here given must be fortified.

J. N. Darby was a Greek scholar of distinction. On this passage he wrote that

> So the wicked servant who ate and drank with the drunken, was "*that* servant," the same as the faithful one and Christ his Lord . . . He stands on the same ground as to his responsibility as the one made ruler of all his goods—is spoken of as the same servant. . . . God does not recognize *individuals* unconverted as such, save as to responsibility and judgment, as to which He does fully recognize them. But X is quite wrong when she says that God recognizes no third class.[1] He does recognize as the church (*Christ does*) what He spues out of His mouth in judgment. He does recognize as His servant him whom He cuts asunder and appoints a portion with the unbelievers [The better translation here is the R.V. "unfaithful"]. "Blessed is that servant, etc. But and if *that* servant say in his heart, etc.," and he is judged as such, and by much more terrible judgment because he has been in that place. All this I

[1] That is, that God acknowledged only two classes, converted and unconverted —G.H.L.

refer to, to show that a state of things, and *a relationship with God*, is positively contemplated and taught in scripture, and *on which judgment depends*, which is not founded on personal conversion: not merely responsibility, because of what they knew but which is called "church" but spued out of Christ's mouth, or "servant" yet has a portion with hypocrites and unbelievers [unfaithful], yet the Lord is "the Lord of that servant" . . . Scripture therefore, does speak of a third class; that is, of persons in relationship with God and responsibility according to that relationship and cut off, rejected, judged, but whom the Lord judges as "Lord of that servant," and individually even cut off from the olive tree into which it had been grafted. (*Letters of J.N.D.*, ii, 58, 331; iii, 465, 466.)

The point here established is that mankind are not only divided by God into two main classes, the unregenerate and the regenerate, but the latter in turn are divided into two classes, the faithful and the unfaithful; and that the last class are judged and punished on the very footing that they belong to the Lord and are unfaithful to Him. What that punishment will be will be considered later: the fact for the present is that the unfaithful servant is a believer and actually of the household of God.

It is evident that Darby allowed that the emphatic pronoun "that" identifies the evil slave with the faithful slave as being the same man. I had urged this in my treatise on the Revelation (p. 32). In an attack on this book in a magazine it was said that

> It is true that the word "that" usually has an antecedent, but this is not necessarily so. In Matt. 18: 7; 26: 24; Mark 14: 21, 25, the "that" refers to the subject defined afterwards, not previously.

But my critic had not observed that in the passages cited the pronoun "that" is part of the subject of the sentence, itself antecedent to what follows, and therefore it does not itself take an antecedent. This is not so in Luke 12: 45, now being considered, or in the parallel verse in Matt. 24: 48. In these the "that" demands an antecedent, and there is none except the only other person mentioned, the faithful steward. I have questioned several good Greek scholars as to this and each has agreed with the view expressed. Alford is very distinct on the point. A well-known tutor of Greek, Prof. F. F. Bruce, wrote to me as follows:

> I am sure that in these two passages (Matt. 24: 45 ff. and Luke 12: 45, 46) the idea is:
> The master leaves a servant in charge. If that servant be faithful,

he receives his reward. But if that servant be unfaithful (in which case he merits the description "that wicked servant") he is punished. Both possibilities are envisaged for the same servant.

Probably no serious student would question this view but for two considerations:

(*a*) That the severity of the penalties is supposed (but wrongly) to involve the entire loss of salvation by a child of God. This is fully discussed in my commentary on *Hebrews*, where it is shown that this is not implied, but that such penalties are consistent with the eternal security of the regenerate.

(*b*) That the prospects of believers being thus subjected to serious positive penalties at the return of Christ negatives the too rosy dispensational views as to each and every child of God being taken to be with the Lord at that event, whether the dead or the living, whether the spiritual or the carnal. But if dispensational schemes do not agree with plain statements of Scripture they should be revised or discarded.

It is the unequivocal force of the pronoun "that" before us that a good servant may become a bad servant and so become obnoxious to his Lord's severe displeasure at His return.

The Sin of the Servant

(1) The declension and downfall of a good Christian begins where all sin begins, in the heart: "but if that bondservant shall say *in his heart*." He did not say it to others, but only to himself. Eve did not tell Adam that she had come to distrust the goodness of God: the mistrust was confined to her own heart until disobedience disclosed it. Therefore give full heed to the wisest of all human observers and "keep thy heart with all diligence, for out of it are the issues of life" (Prov. 4: 23).

(2) The sin of Eve's deceitful heart was wrong thoughts about God: the steward similarly indulged wrong thoughts about his absent lord. Christ strongly emphasized this when later He spake the parable of the pounds. The unfaithful slave is made to say: "I feared thee, because thou art an austere man" (Luke 19: 20, 21). Paul feared for fellow-Christians "lest by any means, as the serpent beguiled [hood-winked] Eve in his craftiness, your thoughts should be corrupted from the simplicity and the purity that is toward Christ" (II Cor. 11: 2, 3). The picture is of a betrothed maiden indulging impure thoughts concerning her espoused husband. To guard sedulously against wrong thoughts of Christ, Who He is and what He does and wishes, is vital to safety as a disciple.

(3) In particular, the false thought about his master cherished by this steward was that he was unreliable, uncertain, especially in relation to his return to his house: "My lord delayeth his coming." Therefore he ceased to be expectant, failed to be watchful, and therefore ceased to act as one who knew he must so behave as his lord would expect to find him. This makes evident that love to his master had waned; he neither studied to please him nor longed to see him; he neither longed to see him nor studied to please him: these are two sides of the same condition of heart.

(4) That he had left his first love is speedily shown by a reversal of his former conduct. Then he fed his fellow-slaves, for they were servants of the lord he loved: now he fed himself, eating and drinking with the drunken. Self-abnegation was drowned in self-indulgence. Then he cared for their welfare, now he oppressed and maltreated them. Thus he abused the power conferred by his lord, and exalted himself and suppressed others. This did Diotrephes: he loved pre-eminence, opposed superior authority, excluded some brethren from the benefits of the family house, and cast out others who objected to his rulings (III John 9, 10).

Alas, alas! this parable and this example have had appalling fulfilment in the history of the house of God. The fourth century saw the general abandonment of the hope of the Lord's return as the only true expectation of the Christian; it saw also the rise of "stewards" who instead of feeding the flock fed themselves, growing rich, self-indulgent, and terribly tyrannical to the people of God.

Nor can the fact be avoided that good stewards of God's house degenerated into oppressors. In that same fourth century arose the movement for purity in the house of God, known as the Donatists. It was crushed with great vigour by the State. Speaking of Augustine's part in that suppression a learned modern ecclesiastical historian wrote of "the great theologian who, *with somewhat less of Christian charity than might have been expected from so good a man*, opposed the Donatists" (E. Hatch, *The Organization of the Early Christian Churches*, 191, my italics). And it is of the same great theologian, in his dealings with the Donatists, that Neander wrote that "he was a *violent* [my italics] opponent of the Donatists," and that it was by him "that a theory was proposed and founded which, tempered though it was, in its practical application, by his own pious and philanthropic spirit, nevertheless contained the germ of the whole system of spiritual despotism, of intolerance and persecution, which ended in the tribunals of the Inquisition." This is the

more noteworthy as an example of a good servant turning to evil, for at first Augustine had in writing plainly reprobated the policy of using force against the Donatists. (*General History of the Christian Religion and Church*, ed. Bohn, 1851, iii, 265 n., 307, 308, 282).

Leo the Great, Bishop of Rome, at that same period (440–461), is another example of a man well able to feed souls with the truth. A letter from him was adopted by the Council of Chalcedon (451) as the statement of truth regarding the person and nature of Christ and this "has since been accepted as authoritative by all the main streams of Christian tradition" (F. F. Bruce, *Light in the West*, 32, 33, where the statement may be read).

Yet this same Leo developed into a stern promoter of the tyrannical theory that the Bishop of Rome is, by divine appointment, the supreme head on earth of God's church, and by his disciplinary measures he did severely "beat" those who opposed him.

Such regrettable fulfilments of the Lord's parable have gone on ever since and still occur. The instances cited are from the period when, very especially, the church was adopted and corrupted by the State, when its members in general surrendered the apostolic prospect of the return of Christ as the true hope of believers, and indulged the false theory that it is the business of the church in this age to build on earth the City of God, as argued by Augustine. The result was worldliness, luxury, ostentation, self-indulgence, tyranny. It is a fearful step when a Christian says in his heart "My Lord delayeth His coming." In practice, if not in creed, he can soon be arm-in-arm with those open enemies of Christ who cry with scorn, "Where is the promise of His coming?" (II Pet. 3: 3, 4).

In this day it is not the thing actually to beat the bodies of one's fellow-Christians from whom one may differ, it simply is not done. But the tongue can lash as well as the whip. Diotrephes was not beating his neighbours physically, but he was "prating against us with wicked words," says John (3 ep. 10), and this would be remembered against him in due time. There was enough of beating of fellow-servants in the controversies between the Reformers of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, in the disputes of the Arminians and Calvinists in the eighteenth century, and in the contentions of the early Plymouth Brethren, as well as by some of their present descendants.

The Punishment

(5) vers. 46–48. That judicial remembrance may take two forms: either a present providential dealing of the Lord with the unfaithful servant, or His actual coming in His day. Four features of the punishment are announced:

(*a*) It will be totally unexpected by the servant.

(*b*) He shall be severely scourged.

(*c*) His portion shall be with the unfaithful.

(*d*) The penalty will be proportionate to the degree of knowledge of the will of the Lord and to the measure of privilege granted.

(*a*) the present chastisement may be some sudden and unexpected visitation. A leader of young people was fomenting rebellion against the authority of the elder brethren of an assembly and was designing to turn the church life on to worldly lines. A day was appointed for him and his supporters to meet the elders, at which he purposed to face the issue at any cost. He had already said many harsh things. But prayer prevailed. The morning of the day appointed, an infectious disease attacked his family—he could not attend, and his plan failed.

The senior deacon at a chapel, in a church meeting, was lashing with words the godly pastor, and fell dead while doing so.

I knew these two brethren.

That the personal advent of Christ to His house will take by surprise the unready and evil slave is self-evident.

(*b*) "Severely scourged" (R.V. mgn.). The word used *dichotomeo* comes in the New Testament here and in Matt. 24: 51 only. It means properly *to cut in two*, as in Ex. 29: 17 (LXX) of the ram for sacrifice being cut into pieces. The cognate *dichotomemata* is used (LXX) at Lev. 1: 8 in the same sense, and is there the parallel to *melizo*, dismember, in ver. 6. It has been taken by some as to be fulfilled literally at the coming of the Lord in judgment, as corresponding to the hewing of Agag in pieces before the Lord (I Sam. 15: 33), the just recompense of the murders and massacres of which the desert chief had been guilty. But taken literally the punishment would scarcely fit the crime of the unfaithful servant of the parable, for beating his fellow-slaves did not amount to hacking them to pieces.

Others have taken the threat to mean that the servant would be banished from the household of the Lord, cut off from that privileged relationship. This too much mitigates the warning. He had beaten others and so deserved himself to be beaten.

And this seems required by the repetition of the figure in the next verses (47, 48), servants being beaten with many or few stripes. Perhaps the *dia* may be taken as giving emphasis to the idea of scourging, and point to the fact that the scourge, when applied with vigour, cut deeply into the flesh.

(*c*) This last sense would allow of the feature that, after being scourged, the slave is pictured as being classed and placed with the unfaithful and hypocrites (Matt. 24: 51), the force of which will be considered at a later stage.

If however the full primary sense of "cut asunder" is maintained, implying the death of the culprit, then a "portion with the unfaithful" will imply that the penalty will work on after death. This very real possibility is discussed in my treatise on Ch. X of Hebrews. But whatever meaning of the warning be adopted its solemnity and severity must be acknowledged and its appeal to the conscience be allowed.

(*d*) vers. 46, 48. The degree of this severity will be determined by strict justice. Some of the Lord's servants have had light as to His return and as to His will for them as administrators of His affairs during His absence, yet have not acted accordingly. Others, who have desired to serve Him, have been uninstructed, and even misinstructed, as to the subject of His return and as to the proper conduct of His house, and have acted at times unworthily and wrongly. The punishment will be in each case proportionate. Knowledge aggravates guilt and will be visited with "many stripes"; ignorance, when not culpable, as by neglect of opportunities for learning, will receive but "few stripes."

Up to the day of the Lord the humble and faithful may count on grace as regards failure, or even as regards sin, if there be repentance (Heb. 4: 16): but the day of the Lord will be a time of justice, of wages, not of mercy (II Cor. 5: 10; Rev. 22: 12).

That the "stripes" vary in number, and so the punishment in severity, virtually settles that the "cut asunder" is not to be taken in its full sense, for that experience could not admit of degrees.

The final principle laid down enforces what had been stated earlier: "And to whomsoever much is given, of him shall much be required: and to whom they commit much, of him will they ask the more."

To different stewards in His house the Lord divides knowledge of the mysteries of God in differing measure. To Paul the revelations were "exceeding great." To prevent him from lapsing into an evil servant, by becoming proud, permanent affliction by an angel of Satan was graciously allotted. Privileged and weighted with these fuller responsibilities, through

fuller knowledge being the more enabled to give to each believer a portion of food in due season, he exclaimed, "woe is unto me if I preach not the gospel" (I Cor. 9: 16), for "I am a debtor," being entrusted by the Lord with food for others (Rom. 1: 14).

And James impresses upon us these teachings of the Lord by saying, "Be not many *of you* teachers, my brethren, knowing that we shall receive greater judgment" (Jas. 3: 1), as being such as were granted fuller knowledge of our Lord's will. It is in the light of these parables that we must ponder the fact that the apostles habitually regarded themselves as "slaves of Jesus Christ" (Jas. 1: 1; II Pet. 1: 1; Jude 1; Rom. 1: 1; Phil. 1: 1; Titus 1: 1). They valued the dignity, faced the responsibility, discharged the duty of that office, and so escaped its perils and secured its rewards (II Tim. 4: 6–8, 18).

By his words in the chapter just cited as to the crown, "the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give to me at that day," the apostle establishes the principles above noted: (1) It was the day of the Lord to which he ever looked forward, for which he waited eagerly; (2) the Lord's dealings at that time will be on the ground of righteousness; (3) the reward, the crown, will be for those who have acted righteously as stewards. And his further words that the crown will be for "all those that have loved His appearing" extends these duties and privileges to all believers, but on the same ground that they have lived in the light of that day of the Lord's manifestation. It was the *epiphany* of Christ, His visible forthshining, for which they longed, not a supposed prior and secret event; and, though their understanding of the era and circumstances of that epiphany may have been variable and imperfect, they *loved* that prospect, doted upon it in their hearts, and lived in such wise as to be well-pleasing to Him whose return was their all-embracing hope.

In the light of that same prospect Peter says, "the end of all things has drawn near." He uses the same expression (*ēngiken*) as John and Jesus used when proclaiming that "the kingdom of the heavens has drawn near" (Matt. 3: 2; 4: 17). Upon that end he had exhorted them to "set their hope perfectly" (I Pet. 1: 13); now he exhorts them to be of sound and sober mind, prayerful, full of love to one another, exercising hospitality, so fostering and displaying that love; and then he extends to all Christians the thought of each being in degree, what the shepherds of the flock are to be pre-eminently, a steward: "according as each hath received a gift, ministering it among yourselves as good stewards of the manifold grace of God" (I Pet. 4: 7–11).

He thus gives the answer to his own question, "Lord, speakest

Thou this parable unto us or even unto all?" (Luke 12: 41). It was spoken in particular to those who were formally appointed as stewards, but the principles to govern them were to govern all the household; each has to live in expectation of their Master's return, and meanwhile each has to serve the rest as a duty of love: "Yea, all of you gird yourselves with humility, to serve one another: for God resisteth the proud [steward], but giveth grace to the humble [slave]" (I Pet. 5: 5). Their one Lord had so girded Himself to serve (John 13: 4): let each follow His example and he shall meet that Lord with joy when found by Him so doing.

This first passage on these subjects is the basis of later instruction to the same effect, and therefore has been treated at some length.

CHAPTER XXIII

THE BARREN FIG TREE

Luke 13: 1–9

THE historian emphasizes that this parable was spoken "at that very season" when the Lord had pressed the instruction just before mentioned. That instruction (ch. 12: 54–59) was that there was "hypocrisy," a want of sincerity and simplicity of mind, in men who, able to gauge the coming weather, were not able to discern the moral features of their time. This would not be so were their moral senses as alert as their natural faculties.

To this was added the warning that they were on their way to appear before a court of law, where, should the judge find them guilty, he would hand them over to the exactor of debts, who in turn would consign them to prison, and there would be no release until they had paid the full penalty and had discharged their whole liability. This was a re-enforcing of lessons already taught.

With this ringing in their ears some brought up the case of certain men of Galilee who, as if pious, had come to God's altar to sacrifice and had there met a bloody death at the hands of the Governor. Were they an illustration of what had just been said? To this the Lord added another tragic happening, that eighteen persons, engaged in the commendable work of purifying their persons at a public bath, had been suddenly killed by the collapse of a tower.

Answering the unspoken thought which easily arises from such dire happenings the Lord warned against the same wrong judgment that his friends formed about Job, even that these unfortunate events showed that the victims, in spite of their religious observances, must actually have been known to God the Judge as specially wicked. On the contrary, his hearers were equally guilty, and a like judgment would duly befall them: "Ye shall in like manner perish."

It was not that each and all there present would die suddenly by massacre or calamity, but that their judgment would be as severe and fatal and inescapable. Yet in fact that generation did end (in A.D. 70) with just such atrocities and calamities. Thousands were similarly slaughtered in those very temple

courts, tens of thousands in the city, and the Jewish race collapsed with the overthrow of their fortifications and houses. Once those callous Roman "exactors" were ordered by God to act as His executioners there was no escape, no release, until the nation as such had expiated nationally its national guilt.

For the situation was as if a landowner had a fig tree that bore no fruit, though planted in a vineyard. A vineyard was a place well prepared and cultivated (Isa. 5: 1, 2), so this fig tree had not been left to do its best under the harder conditions of untilled stony soil, as was common, but had the best of opportunities to be fruitful.

Thus had God dealt with the Jews as a race. The other peoples had been left to themselves; but God had taken much care for Israel's moral and national welfare. Yet for long centuries He had "looked for justice, but behold oppression; for righteousness, but behold a cry" (Isa. 5: 7).

He had been patient, even as the owner had waited during the three years in which a young tree was not expected to bear fruit; but patience has a limit. Fig trees, like vines, are useless save for their fruit, and cannot be allowed to exhaust the soil, and to overshadow other plants to their injury. An unfruitful life is hurtful to its surroundings, upon which each of us should solemnly reflect.

The Son of God knew the mind of His Father, the Owner of the vineyard, and that the dread order "Cut it down" had been issued; Israel had again exhausted the Divine forbearance. Neither a nation nor a person has reason to enjoy the care of God if not bringing forth the fruits of righteousness unto the glory and praise of God. Man exists for the honour and pleasure of the Creator: when he does not serve this just end why should not the sentence of death follow his sinful failure, and he be removed from his place of privilege?

But the "gardener," the Son of God, was on earth in "the vineyard of Jehovah of hosts," the house of Israel (Isa. 5: 7), to make a final attempt and appeal to bring the people back to the true fear of God. It was His request that a short respite be granted, while He persevered in His gracious effort. He did not on this occasion intimate what the result would be, but left the parable to give its warning of the impending judgment: "but if not, thou shalt cut it down." Alas, that the people were by now impervious to remonstrance, and in due course were cut down.

The interchange of view between the Owner and the Gardener suggests how real and practical is the intercourse between the Father and the Son. The Son did not here draw an illusory

picture of His relations and dealings with God, such as could mislead us. This accords with other hints of that intercourse. John 17: 24 shows the Son presenting to the Father His "desire" that a certain majestic future be granted to His faithful followers. Ps. 102: 24 shows Him asking for His own preservation from an untimely death; but as to this He added "nevertheless, not my will, but Thine be done" (Luke 22: 42). Ps. 2: 8 tells that in a coming day it will be in response to His request that the Father will invest Him with the sovereignty of the earth.

Such unconstrained intercourse rules out any element of fatalism in the ways of God, with His Son and with man. It was not by absolute decree that the fig tree was to be cut down; it was a consequence of moral condition. There was no arbitrary fixing of the time when it must be cut down; this could be deferred as long as any prospect of fruit remained. When that prospect ceased respite would end, as it does in each fruitless life.

CHAPTER XXIV

THE GREAT FEAST

Luke 14: 1–24

THIS important heart-searching parable was spoken during a meal in the house of a Pharisee and drew its origin from the circumstances. Instruction should always fit the occasion, as well as prepare hearers for the future.

The parable was introduced by three deep lessons.

1. *The true sense of the Sabbath.* Rabbinical views allowed indeed a sumptuous feast to be prepared and enjoyed, but deprecated a mere meeting of urgent need, as by plucking corn and rubbing off the husk in the hands. These could be held equivalent to reaping and harvesting (Luke 6: 1, 2). They deprecated also the healing of the sick on the sabbath (Luke 13: 14). The physician should not then ply his calling.

Christ swept aside these man-imposed restrictions. It was hypocrisy so to argue and yet to unloose an ox, or lead it to the water and take it back, or to pull an ass out of a pit into which it had fallen.

Thus were the narrow-minded critics confuted, and encouraged to cultivate a larger and healthier spirit. In the kingdom of God, under the royal law, works of necessity and of mercy are always right—the former because the day of rest was ordained for the benefit of man, not for his hurt, and the second because the Divine love never ceases its activities. "My Father goes on working all the time and therefore so do I" (John 5: 17).

2. *Humility versus Pride.* To the mind of the world the conduct of Christ, and of His real follower, is often obnoxious. To rebuke the guests at another man's table is very out of order—it just isn't done. The dining-hall no doubt was spread as was customary. A reclining couch at the upper end for mine host and his most honoured guests, with two longer couches stretching down each side, with a centre space for servants to move about! In good houses rank was indicated by the nearness or remoteness to the head of the table, as still at banquets.

The Lord marked how guests showed each his sense of self-importance by choosing the uppermost seat available on his arrival. He warned them of the risk of being humiliated by the host displacing this one to make place for another he wished to honour; and encouraged each to be lowly, by the possibility of

the host honouring him by taking him from a lower to a higher place at table. It is wonderful that it is mostly at religious gatherings that persons become humble enough to take a back seat.

This counsel is called a parable, which illustrates the simplest meaning of the term, one set of circumstances being placed alongside of another set to enforce a lesson. All the circumstances may be equally simple and obvious, with nothing obscure or unusual to demand inquiry; but being parallel they are a parable.

The lesson, however, was profound. The path of true exaltation is self-humbling; that to final humiliation is self-exaltation. This rule Christ will enforce and enforce; it is inexorable. It is the principle on which He Himself is exalted: "He humbled Himself . . . *wherefore* also God hath highly exalted Him" (Phil. 2: 5–11; Isa. 53: 12, "*Therefore* . . . *because*": Heb. 2: 9, "because of," R.V.: Rev. 5: 9, "worthy . . . *for*"). It is the inescapable path for each that wishes to share His kingdom and glory and escape the penalties of the proud (Matt. 18: 1–6; Mark 10: 13–16; Luke 22: 24–30; I Pet. 5: 5, 6). To be proud, self-sufficient, independent is the way to forfeit the Great Feast; to be poor, abject, outcast is to be qualified for that noblest of banquets.

3. *The Principles of True Philanthropy.* The humble Teacher-Guest talked plainly to his rich and noble host. There he reclined at his lordly table with his aristocratic friends around. The strange unwelcome counsel is proffered that, in place of this brilliant and cultured company it would be nobler and wiser to fill his house with the poor, crippled, blind, and indigent folk whom he took not to his heart, except perhaps as a means of glorifying himself by a parade of almsgiving (Matt. 6: 1–4).

It is to be noted that it was not the dire need of these, very real as it was, that the Lord here urged as the impulse to philanthropy. Much appeal for money and goods to relieve the poor is based solely on this plea, the lowest even though valid.

Christ's ground of counsel is far more searching to the conscience of the giver. Does he provide this feast in expectation that on another day he will be honoured by an invitation to another great house, to enjoy another brilliant and luxurious banquet? If so, his present hospitality is but one form of selfishness, which deprives it of moral worth before God. He may gain what he seeks secretly in his heart but he will get nothing more; he will have received all his reward from man.

Then again—by that process the whole reward will accrue in this present life, nor at all enrich him for the life beyond death. But if love rules out self, and he shall help those who

cannot now recompense him, then, said the Teacher, "thou shalt be recompensed in the resurrection of the just" (ver. 14).

The God-enlightened mind knows that the present is preparatory to the future. The man of the world limits his horizon to this world, and seeks his portion in this life: the man of faith and love sets his heart on the things that are eternal, calculates on a life to which only resurrection can bring him, and therefore sends his riches in advance to the realm whither he has been transported in the visions of faith and hope.

To live for others and for the future is to live truly, wisely, effectively. It is the sure way to provide for the future and to lay hold of the life that is life indeed (I Tim. 6: 17–19).

It is important to observe Christ's description of the resurrection which introduces into that coming life and its recompenses. First it is a "recompense," and secondly, it will therefore be of righteous persons. "Righteous" gives the sense here better than "just," because in the English Bible the latter term has been used to describe one who has been justified in law, declared righteous by the Judge of all through the imputation to him of the righteous atoning death of the Substitute. This imputation is without requirement of any righteous acts of his own, indeed such are definitely excluded; for it is "to him that worketh not" that "his faith is reckoned for righteousness" (Rom. 4: 5; Titus 3: 5).

But *this* righteousness thus imputed is a *free gift*, for we are "justified [declared righteous in law] *freely* by God's grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus" (Rom. 3: 24); and being a free gift it *cannot* be a *recompense*; for the latter by its essential idea is a return on account of some previous service or act, it is a *compensation*; that is, a making the scales even, an equal balance of one thing against another. This Latin term is therefore the exact equivalent of the Greek, *ant-apo-didōmi* used in our passage, meaning "to give back as an equivalent recompense, requital (the *anti* expressing the idea of full, complete return)." (Abbott-Smith, *Manual Greek Lexicon of the New Testament*, 40.)

Therefore in that kingdom, that order of life to which this resurrection affords entrance, one will receive no more than is the recompense which the grace of God will grant for righteous deeds done here and now in this life. This is the regular teaching of Holy Scripture: I Cor. 3: 10–15; II Cor. 5: 9, 10; Col. 3: 23–25; all of which and such-like passages are clinched by almost the last words from heaven of the living Lord: "Behold, I come swiftly, and my wages with Me, to render to each man according as his work is" (Rev. 22: 12).

Taking up this prospect of resurrection unto the kingdom of life, another of the guests interposed the remark, "Happy is such an one as shall eat bread in the kingdom of God." They were just then "eating bread" at the table of their host, showing that he had counted them to be fit for his company and bounty: how much greater the happiness to be counted worthy of the kingdom of God in resurrection life, and to enjoy its honours and fellowships.

"*But* He said unto him." The "but" intimates that the penetrating discernment of the Teacher saw that the speaker needed a sharp lesson. One may hold a correct opinion of that kingdom of glory, and know that introduction to it is by the first resurrection, and yet be too complacent in assuming that oneself is secure of a place in it. The parable will press the solemn possibility that those who had the best of opportunity to enter it will be excluded from it, first by their own folly, and this confirmed irrevocably by the great Inviter and Host.

The scene is a "great *supper*," as our versions translate *deipnon*. The history of the word does not demand this rendering and the circumstances introduced forbid it here. In earliest times it was used of the first meal, whether afternoon or evening. This is so still in modern Greek. But the first two excuses offered for not attending the meal show that, while it could be an afternoon meal, it was not a supper, for men would not go to inspect land or test oxen in the dark.

Three groups of guests are introduced.

1. Those who were the personal associates of the rich host, a man who could afford a large and lavish repast. Their social status is suggested by the hint that the first owned landed property, and the second had bought five yoke of oxen, so had some fair area of land under plough. It reminds of Elisha's father having twelve yoke of oxen at work in one field (I Kings 19: 19). In 1927 I saw in the plain of Esdraelon in Galilee eleven pairs of asses pulling one plough over fallow sloping ground. These first invited guests did not, as did the second group, require to be fetched from the broad streets or narrow lanes of the city, but could be found in their own homes.

2. The second group were obscure, unknown persons, poor, crippled, disfigured, such people as abound in cities, but are not invited by rich citizens to their banquets in mansions. Yet they were of the same city and race as the former group.

3. The third group were distinct from these and remoter from the host and his house. They were tramps on the country roads, or people who slept under hedges for lack of a shelter of any sort: of what race, religion, or occupation, who could

tell? nor did it matter for the purpose of the provoked provider of the feast.

1. It is easy to divine the application of this. The *élite* company of lawyers and Pharisees then gathered were representative of the better instructed of their nation. God had brought their people into close and dignified relation with Himself. From among all the nations of the earth He had chosen Israel to be His special people. To these sons of Abraham His friend were given His promises, covering blessings in time and offering prospects of a heavenly country hereafter (Heb. 11: 8–16).

Now at length through Christ and His messengers, the message had reached them, "Come, for all things are now ready"—you may enter the kingdom, for it has drawn near to you in the person of its King. What this announcement meant we have already considered at length in Chs. II and III. To have entered then by birth from above would have put each in the way of qualifying by good works to enter it hereafter by the resurrection of the righteous. Good works found no place at all in the people in the desert being healed from the bite of the serpents, but had everything to do with the healed securing a place in the land of promise by traversing the wilderness and crossing the Jordan.

But through the long fourteen centuries of their national history Israel as a people had neglected their high privileges. They prided themselves indeed on being peculiarly in the favour of God, but rejected His requirement of righteous conduct on their part. In this attitude the cultured and religious leaders took the front place. Pharisees and Sadducees, lawyers and scribes, men who prided themselves on knowing God's holy law and held the ignorant masses as accursed (John 7: 49), "rejected for themselves the counsel of God" (Luke 7: 30), and excused themselves from repentance and from faith in Christ. Thus they threw away their noble opportunities both then and in the coming kingdom.

The excuses they offered varied in form but were one in spirit and essence. Nominally they had accepted the invitation, or they would not have received notice that the feast was now ready; but to have attended they must for that day have forgone that full attention to property, business, or pleasure, which things were their very life. This they were not ready to do, the sacrifice was too great, the feast too unimportant; so their host was politely shown that they gave him no prior place, but rather esteemed their personal affairs more highly. It was not that land, oxen, or wife were wrong in themselves, but they were more important than the host and his banquet.

In the parable of the seed among thorns the Lord had already warned that the seed and the sowing may prove useless by reason of the thorns of cares, riches, or pleasures, of land, commerce, marriage (Luke 8: 14).

Later He will apply this with equally kind severity to His inner circle of true followers, warning them also, and us, to take heed lest our hearts become overcharged with surfeiting and drunkenness and cares of this life and we thereby become entangled in snares, troubles, and losses we might have escaped (Luke 21: 34–36).

Thus does He impress again the lesson He had just taught His host that day, even that the believer must set supreme value on the future and the heavenly, must set his mind on the things that are above (Col. 3: 1–4), must set his hope undividedly on the favour that will be brought to us at the revelation of Jesus Christ from heaven (I Pet. 1: 13).

Moses had seen into the far distant future, and had turned from present and royal status, riches, pleasures, and prospects to secure that future glory, though it involved bearing the reproach of Christ; but these who had set themselves on Moses' seat declined to make even a small and temporary sacrifice. Their manners and speech were polite, "I pray thee, have me excused"; but their contempt for the Inviter and the feast was plain. Alas, that their successors are still many.

2. God is indignant when insulted by such as ought to be grateful: "The Master of the house being angry"—It is the Son Who thus pictures the Father. Jonathan Edwards's mighty sermon had an awful but just title: "The Sinner in the Hands of an Angry God." These sinners found that it is a "fearful thing to fall into the hands of a living God." Having rejected His invitation they were rejected by Him, and others called into their places and privileges. The religiously important rejected the counsel of God, but the common people and the moral riffraff accepted the gracious welcome: the publicans and harlots pressed into the hall spurned by the spiritual aristocrats who, by knowing the Scripture, had been the first to hear the call to repentance and the promise of reception, and were the first to reject it.

3. Yet the heart of God was not yet satisfied; His provision was ample for more than the humble in Israel: so His message was sent beyond the city into the open country—Gentiles also were constrained to come into the house.

It is marvellous that persecutors have perverted to their fell purposes the words "Compel them to come in" and Jews, heathen, and Nonconformists have been treated with violence "for the good of their souls," as bigots have argued.

But there would be a surprise and reluctance in the hedgerow wanderers that a rich man of the city should wish to have at his table such outcasts and strangers as themselves; wherefore his servants must put upon them moral pressure to assure them of a welcome and constrain them to come in. The gospel preacher must be skilful and urgent. It is only the wise that can win souls. They must have something of the warm heart of the Master they serve.

The *Acts of the Apostles* shows this parable in its fulfilment. First the message was pressed upon Jerusalem and the Jews; then it extended to the Samaritans, despised and distant relations of the Jews; and then it spread outward to the Gentiles. The work is still in progress and will continue till the house is full. In our time the highways and hedges of the world have been largely visited, and when this good news of the Kingdom of God shall have been heralded among all the nations then shall come the end of this age of invitation to the Great Feast (Matt. 24: 14). The servant must be diligent in searching the highways and the wanderer prompt in responding to the call.

Among Gentiles, as still among Jews, it is not many wise, mighty, or noble that are called and respond. The vast majority are gathered from those the haughty of the world deem foolish, weak, and base. Such have naught to recommend them to the mighty of the world, but God has chosen them. "He has not *made shift with them*—taken them because there were no others. NO! He hath chosen them" (Mrs. Booth) (I Cor. 1: 26–31). The denizens of the slums, the vagrants of the hedgerows, know their unworthiness of a banquet and glorify the Lord who welcomes them to His table. But of those who had the first opportunity and turned away the great and good Host has sternly said, "Not one of those men that were bidden shall taste of my dinner" (ver. 24). Let him take full heed who has said complacently, in self-confidence, "Happy is he who shall eat bread in the kingdom of God," meaning himself. Wherefore "let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall" (I Cor. 10: 12).

But what precisely is typified by the Great Feast? Has it the merely general significance, commonly given by preachers, of "salvation," deliverance from damnation, eternal life?

The features shown must be considered with care.

(1) It pictures something to be enjoyed at the resurrection of the righteous.

(2) It is the equivalent of "eating bread in the kingdom of God" to follow immediately upon that resurrection. To this correspond the Lord's words at the last Passover when He insti-

tuted the breaking of bread in remembrance of Himself. He would not again eat bread or drink wine until He should do so again with them "in My Father's kingdom" (Matt. 26: 26–29), "in the kingdom of God" (Mark 14: 25), "until the kingdom of God shall come" (Luke 22: 18). Now this is to be at His second coming, for we "proclaim the Lord's death *till He come*" (I Cor. 11: 26).

(3) A banquet is not a permanent affair, but temporary. Men do not spend their whole life in only eating bread. So the feast does not picture eternity.

(4) In Rev. 19: 6–9 the picture is reproduced. The marriage of the Lamb has come, and the bridal feast (here also *deipnon*, feast, not supper) is announced, and they are declared happy who have been invited. This feast takes place at the opening of the Millennial kingdom. It is the inaugural solemnity and festivity at the setting up of the kingdom of God on earth, the occasion of the fulfilment of the cry of the saints "Thy kingdom come."

This application Christ stated distinctly when He next used the same picture: "The kingdom of heaven is likened unto a certain king, who made a marriage feast for His Son" (Matt. 22: 2).

It is this magnificent, unique, never-to-be-repeated occasion, an addition to the gift of eternal life, to which the Lord pointed, and which must be attained by qualifying by good works for a share in the resurrection of the righteous.

The hints here offered by the Lord were expanded later by Himself and by His Spirit in His apostles. It is an example of the fact and principle that the doctrines of the apostles were rooted in germinal sayings of Christ. Gospels and Epistles are one body of Divine instruction, and what God has joined together let not man put asunder.

It is the province and duty of every preacher and teacher to explain to *all* men the *whole* counsel of God; to offer not only the forgiveness of sins, but also to call men to share in God's own kingdom and glory; to show that the former is secured by true repentance and faith without works, whereas the latter must be made sure by the brethren giving the more diligence to develop the life of holiness made possible by the new birth, the free gift of eternal life (II Pet. 1: 1–11).

CHAPTER XXV

THREE PICTURES OF DISCIPLESHIP

Luke 14: 25–35

THE Son of God had come to earth as man on the gracious errand "to seek and to save that which was lost" (Luke 19: 10). Each who knows himself to be as a lost sheep is carried by the Shepherd into safety, a security that assures that he "shall never perish" (Luke 15: 6; John 10: 27–30). It is not this matter that is presented in the present passage, but a subsequent matter that arises for the saved, and for them only. It is the question of discipleship.

A man may be in some acute danger of death, out of which peril another, at great cost, may rescue him. But it does not follow of necessity that the saved will thenceforth leave his former sphere and attach himself to his rescuer as a personal servant. He may remain in his former place, though ever grateful to his deliverer. In this case his salvation will be real and permanent, but he will not enjoy the present company of his rescuer, or share his hardships and prospects.

When our Redeemer approaches the lost sinner He proposes no terms and conditions upon which He will save him from perdition; nothing is needed but his willingness to be saved by Christ. But when this is secured, the matter of discipleship arises, with its special privileges and severe experiences, and forthwith the Lord lays down exacting conditions.

Disciples are persons who, out of love to the Teacher, have determined to learn His mind and plans and have resolved to devote person and life to furthering His interests. In this absorbing passion all lesser affairs are merged, however legitimate, whether of body, mind, spirit, or home, relatives, business; and there is excluded not only that which is wrong in itself, but all that does not serve the new and ruling purpose—every weight is laid down, as well as every sin (Heb. 12: 1). The immediate and constant recompense is rich:

> They find with Him, e'en though they climb
> A long and rugged road,
> Their cup o'erflowing all the time
> And light life's heaviest load.

In this, as in all things, Christ is the perfect example for His

followers. The Teacher was a disciple: "The Lord Jehovah hath given me the tongue of disciples [R.V. marg.], that I may know how to sustain with words him that is weary" (Isa. 50: 4). He was to His Father God what we, His disciples, are to be to Him. He was not a philosopher cogitating and formulating His own theory of life and duty, but morning by morning He turned to God the open ear to receive directions for each day as it came. Never did He turn from the path and duty thus learned. Fully did He pay the unavoidable price of such fidelity, setting His face like a flint to traverse the appointed path and accomplish the appointed work (Isa. 50: 4–9).

This is discipleship. This is the process by which His followers become skilled in sustaining others by their words. Oh, alas, what floods of words flow from believers which help no hearers; but how sweet and sustaining are the words of the disciple, the one who has been taught. A verbose talker had wearied a company who were eager to listen to R. C. Chapman. When at length he ceased Chapman, after a pause, simply quoted quietly Solomon's words, "The lips of the righteous feed many" (Prov. 10: 21). That single sentence worked healthfully in the other, for, as he was humble enough to acknowledge, he instantly recognized that his were not the lips of the righteous for he had not fed anyone. True are Milton's lines in *Samson Agonistes*:

> Apt words have power to suage
> The humours of a troubled mind,
> And are as balm to festered wounds.

How is it that comparatively few Christians can thus administer healing balm? It is because they are not disciples, but only believers. They do not give the earliest minutes of the opening day to listening to their Lord. Early in his Christian life George Müller discovered that his first business in every day was to see that his own soul was happy in God, or no day would go well; and that for this end the first occupation of the day must be to listen to the Lord, by prayerful meditation upon His Word. Such an Abrahamic life, blessed and made a blessing, costs a high price, for us as for our father in faith.

Of this noble and satisfying fellowship with Himself in the service of others, Jesus gave three pictures. It is like

1. Building a tower,
2. Fighting a battle,
3. Acting as salt.

The first is costly, the second is arduous, the third is perilous.

1. For the purpose of His vast enterprise of spreading the kingdom of heaven on earth, the Lord needs men who at all cost of time, strength, and possessions will co-operate with Him in building His church, who will sink their all in His work. For this mighty task the crowd is useless. "There went with Him great crowds; and He turned" and sifted and sorted them, as once He had done with Gideon's great army.

Disciples may have a household, they may conduct a business, but always and everywhere everything is subordinated to the building of God's house. Or they may be evangelists, but not as a livelihood, oh, no! no! no!—their work is to fetch stones from the quarry and timber from the the mountain forests that God's temple may grow. They may be ministers of the Word, teachers, but not as a profession, a "living," oh, no! no! no! Their toil is to shape and polish the living stones and fit each into its place in the temple of God.

Such labour is arduous; it calls for a rich reserve of love, perseverance, forbearance, long-suffering, wisdom. Let no one take it up unless he knows how to draw from Christ the needful supplies of grace, for true is the saying that an elder in the church needs the head of a wise father, the heart of a loving mother, and the skin of a rhinoceros. In himself he will prove insufficient, like that clever preacher, the minister of a noted chapel, who degenerated into a reciter of Dickens: "lest all that behold him begin to mock him, saying, This man began to build, and was not able to finish." Finely did A. T. Pierson exalt his office when he said that, if any man had been called to the ministry of the Word, and left it for another calling, he stepped *down*, though it were to take the throne of an empire!

2. *Discipleship is also a war*, not against flesh and blood—men are not the chief and directing antagonists—but against Satan and his wicked spirits, who do indeed use and manipulate human agents, but far more dreadfully attack and depress and exhaust the *spirit* of the soldier of Christ Jesus by direct excitement of and pressure on his inward man.

It is a stern and incessant battle, in which no quarter can be given save at the price of defeat, and in which no mercenary can be trusted. No soldier on service can permit himself to be *entangled* in the affairs of this life. This was the misery of those who excused themselves from the banquet—they were *entangled* in affairs not essentially wrong, to which indeed attention in time and degree may be a God-given duty.

Battle involves hardship, weariness, wounds, privations, often death, nor can there be relaxation until victory. There is no discharge in this war. It is sweet to be a child of the Father, it

is blessed to be a servant of Christ, it is excellent to be a saint; it is yet another thing to be also a soldier; but it is that soldier who at all costs conquers who shall share the Commander's triumphal entry and sit with Him on His throne.

Let no believer take these honours for granted: they must be won and the cost is high.

3. Discipleship is as salt that retards corruption. Christ had already told His disciples that this was a function of theirs: "Ye are the salt of the earth" (Matt. 5: 13). This is another picture of battle, for salt does its work by *antagonizing* what is around it. It is *un*like and contrary to corruption. And the corruption *antagonizes* the salt; nor can there be a compromise; each must be victorious or defeated. This demands that the disciple must be unlike the man of the world in all moral and religious respects. He, therefore, though he be a Christian, who is minded to be a friend of the world, thereby constitutes himself an enemy of God (Jas. 4: 4). He commits spiritual adultery, and is no more salt.

Against this dread possibility the Lord warned His followers again and again (Matt. 5: 13; Mark 9: 50) and here. Perhaps our passage is the only occasion when Christ spoke with sarcasm or contempt: saltless salt is so insipid that it does no good *even on the dunghill.* No creature on earth is so useless to God or man as the backslider. "He that hath ears to hear let him hear."

How enfeebling, how treacherous, how disastrous is that line of teaching which asserts that no backslider can have been really converted!

What, then, are the inexorable conditions of this high calling? They are three.

1. First, that the Lord shall have such undisputed hold on the affections and will that even the dearest, the plainly God-created relationships shall recede, so that should there come a conflict of claims between the human and the Divine the former shall be "hated" and the latter be supreme.

In what sense "hate" is to be understood Jesus Himself showed when He declared that they who did the will of His Father were more to Him than His mother and brothers after the flesh. His tender thought for His mother as He hung dying showed that natural affection and duty were not destroyed but active in Him; which eliminates from this "hatred" the evil, vindictive element found in fallen man (John 19: 25–27). Similar are the apostolic injunctions that the husband must love his wife, the mother her children, the child reverence and care for the parents. The force of His words Christ had before given: "He that loveth father

or mother . . . son or daughter *more than Me* is not worthy of Me" (Matt. 10: 37).

Incidentally it is a claim to Deity that Jesus should set up a superior claim to all these God-created relationships. Only God may rightly supersede the orderings of God. Only the God of glory was entitled to require Abram to leave his father's house as a condition of receiving the promised inheritance. It is simply of the nature of the case that God may so demand. It is His right as Creator.

He who puts *any* other being in the solitary place in the heart due to God is an idolater and cannot be a disciple of Christ. For Christ had given this unique place to God, and no one is His follower who does not follow Him in this and do the same.

2. The second condition is that the disciple must "bear his own cross" and take the road in life that Christ took here. The former condition is death to *all other persons* in comparison with Christ; this condition means death to *myself* as an object of service. Not that I trim my life of this or that indulgence, but that I put *self itself* on the cross and deny it any attention or provision. This theme is taken up in Rom. 6: 6 ff; Gal. 2: 19, 20; etc.; a further example of how the apostles expanded pregnant thoughts of Christ. He cannot be a disciple of Christ who nurtures self, for that was a principle of conduct completely foreign to Him: "for Christ also pleased not Himself" (Rom. 15: 1–3).

3. The third condition of discipleship has relation to *possessions*. He cannot be a follower of Jesus who regards Himself as the *owner* of *anything*, for Christ, who was before the true owner of everything, had renounced everything to become on earth a dependent man. He therefore who would be His follower must follow Him in this renunciation to Him of title in everything. The disciple must consent to be dependent and be content with whatever the Lord appoints or withdraws. His "turn of mind" must be "free from the love of money"; he must be content with such things as he has, however little; he must be at peace because the living Lord has promised not to fail or forsake him (Heb. 13: 5–6). Christ lived thus and consequently was free from anxious thought; the disciple will live thus and enjoy the same peace of heart; and no one but a disciple can have this peace and joy. If a Christian is not in the good of this he is not a disciple, and cannot be such until he renounces all that he has to the sovereign disposition of the Lord. Indeed, until one has done this Jesus is not his LORD in any real sense.

Here is the only cure for the greed and misery of mankind. One day all men will give God His rightful place, and that word

will become true, "Have salt in yourselves, and be at peace one with another" (Mark 9: 50).

Thus persons, self, and possessions must all give place to Christ or one cannot be His disciple, even though one may acknowledge Him as Redeemer and Saviour from hell. In this case one will build in vain, be defeated in battle, be salt without savour. "Or think ye that the Scripture speaketh in vain"? (Jas. 4: 5).

CHAPTER XXVI

THREE PICTURES OF JOY IN HEAVEN

Luke 15

THE exhortations on discipleship closed with the Lord's searching words: "He that hath ears to hear, let him hear." Who had such an ear? The first words of our chapter tell us: "all the taxgatherers and sinners were drawing near unto Him to hear Him."

What an entrancing sight for God, angels, and heavenly-minded men; but repellent to the proud and self-righteous: this man receiveth the depraved and even eats with them! Therefore He cannot be from God, for God is of purer eyes than to behold evil and cannot look on perverseness (Hab. 1: 13). But what these pride-blinded Pharisees and scribes could not discern was that, by the very fact that the sinful had turned attentively to Christ and His instruction, they had turned in heart from their evil ways and their perversity, and therefore the Holy One could welcome and bless them through Christ.

The critics were really the evil and perverse upon whom God could not look with favour, for to all their sins they were adding the guilt of rejecting the Righteous One who was among them. To rebuke them, and if possible to reclaim them, the Lord spake this threefold parable.

The main lesson of the three pictures is one—the joy of heaven when a sinner repents. The Shepherd, the woman, and the father share a like joy in the recovery of the sheep, the coin, the son that were lost. And the challenge of the pictures is one—has my heart fellowship with the shepherd, the woman, and the father, or with scribes and Pharisees and the elder brother?

I. Lost

The sheep had been in the fold, the property of the shepherd; the coin had been a personal treasure of the woman; the prodigal had been a beloved son in the father's home. None of these features is true of an unregenerate sinner. The unbeliever is not one of the Lord's sheep (John 10: 26); he is not the Lord's peculiar treasure, His own possession, because he does not obey His voice and fear Him (Ex. 19: 5; Mal. 3: 16, 17); he is not a

son in the family of God, for he has not been born into it (John 1: 12, 13).

Primarily therefore the picture is of a backslider and his restoration. And this was the presumed status of an Israelite. Israel was regarded as God's son, His firstborn (Ex. 4: 22, 23). Not that each Israelite was personally regenerate, but viewed publicly and nationally they were all on the footing of that relationship to Jehovah, and it is to them as such that the Lord here speaks.

Of course, the nature of sin and its resulting state is alike in all men, and the nature of repentance and return to God is equally alike; so that the teaching as to a backslider may be rightly applied to one unregenerate, and the gospel to the world be explained from this parable. But it is most important to discern the first and intended application, because otherwise the Christian will not feel the dangers in view, nor discern his backslidden state, nor seek the way back and the welcome awaiting.

It has been a vast loss to the children of God that so many searching and cheering scriptures have been diverted from them and restricted to the unregenerate and to mere professors. The epistle to the *Hebrews* is a chief example of this impoverishing misapplication. The right and blessed attitude to such pictures and teachings is seen in that most pious man who wrote Psalm 119:

> I have gone astray like a lost sheep; seek Thy servant;
> For I do not forget Thy commandments (ver. 176).

The sheep was lost by the mere instinct of its silly, thoughtless nature: its wandering was more folly than crime; *but it was lost.*

The coin was lost through no intent or carelessness of its own: it is that aspect of sin which is unintentional, unrecognized, with no act of the will. It is more the unwitting guilt treated in Lev. 4 and 5. Yet the result was a state like that of the sheep—*it was lost.*

The son was lost by his own selfish, perverted, intentional act and deed. It is sin in its most glaring form, and the result was such complete separation from his father and home that he was not only lost but as good as dead: "this my son was dead" (vers. 24, 32).

Thus estrangement from God may come by careless gratifying of normal desires, as when a sheep wanders on nibbling food here and there. The sheep of Christ may foolishly seek gratification away from the Good Shepherd. The longer it does so the greater the distance and the danger.

Or the believer may give way to sleepiness till he become apathetic, insensible to things spiritual, as a coin to its surroundings. Then can act upon him other persons, human or demonic, by whose action he may become lost to the true Owner. It was to Christians that the piercing words were written: "Be not deceived: evil company doth corrupt good manners. Awake out of drunkenness righteously, and sin not: for some are ignorant of God. I speak this to move you to shame" (I Cor. 15: 33, 34). A child ignorant of its father; a believer drunk with sin till as insensate as a coin!

Or again, the son of the house may yield to the flesh; may determine to be independent, self-directed; may prostitute the father's good gifts to selfish gratification; may prefer harlotry to holiness; may yoke himself unequally with a citizen of a far country, the world that lieth in the Evil One, which is his sphere and kingdom; may come to be hungry among the swine. The Lord plainly forbids the false inference that he never had been a true son of the house. That is precisely what he was and knew himself to be, and by it was moved to sorrow and shame: I am not a hired servant, but a son; "I will arise and go to my father." There is no depth of sin to which a child of God may not deliberately descend, nor, praise God, from which he cannot be recovered, when he determines to return. The picture emphasizes the part of the backslider's own will and act in either direction.

II. Found

The shepherd values his sheep. His heart cannot be at rest if one stray, not though he have ninety-nine which had not wandered. Applied to the unregenerate this would teach that all men are by nature the Lord's sheep and that a vast majority of them have not gone astray, are righteous persons who do not need to repent. The proposition is wholly, radically unscriptural and false. "*All* we, like sheep, have gone astray, we have *every one* turned to his own way" (Isa. 53: 6). "There is none righteous, no not one" (Rom. 3: 10); etc; etc. But applied to the regenerate the picture is true: not all of Christ's sheep forsake His fold and care, not all sons of God become prodigals.

The recovery of the lost begins in the heart of the shepherd. The initiative in salvation is with God. The Father sent the Son, the Son came, "to seek and to save that which is lost." Divine initiative is supported by Divine perseverance. What a lesson for him who is wise enough to win souls: "*until he find it!*" Granted the degree of warranted application to unbelievers,

yet not each of these is recovered by the good Shepherd; some elude Him, some resist His kindly grasp and cannot be lifted on to His shoulders. But of all His own sheep the blessed truth is that He will at last recover every backslider: "they shall never perish" (John 10: 28), "He goeth after it *until He find it.*"

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.

But all through the mountains, thunder riven,
  And up from the rocky steep,
There arose 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!"

Will you and I be able to join with the angels as they join in the joy of the great Shepherd? Am I of the company of His friends and neighbours? His friends—those in whom He confides because they do always His commands (John 15: 14, 15): His neighbours—those who dwell close to Him and share His interests.

That salvation and restoration, in one deep and primary sense, is entirely the work of the Lord is shown in the recovery of the lost coin. And His diligence is emphasized by the use of the lamp and the broom, with the continuance of the search until the coin is found. The coin throughout is passive and unconscious. If God did not stir up the dead sinner and the sleeping wanderer they would remain lost; and being thus awakened, it is still by grace that will and strength are imparted to arise and return. "So then, it is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God who hath mercy" (Rom. 9: 16).

But the case of the prodigal shows how God effects His gracious purpose.

(*a*) *He uses circumstances.* Dire need worked upon the wanderer. He met treatment hard and degrading—"he sent him into his fields to feed swine," him who had been reared in luxury. He met neglect by men—"no one gave unto him," though he had squandered much on them. Hardship induced reflection; "he came to himself."

Afflictions tho' they seem severe
  In mercy oft are sent:

They stopped the prodigal's career
And caused him to repent.

"Before I was afflicted I went astray; but now I observe Thy word. . . . It is good for me that I have been afflicted; that I might learn Thy statutes" (Ps. 119: 67, 71).

(*b*) *God uses memory.* He remembered his father; he thought upon the superior conditions of the paid workmen in the fields of his father, in contrast to his own degradation and starvation.

(*c*) *God provokes the conscience.* The youth said first to himself "I have sinned." It is well illustrated in Joseph's brethren. They had gratified their pride, malice, and envy at the expense of their father and their brother, at the cost of hardheartedness and lying. Facing starvation, entangled in troubles, conscience reproves and they say, "We are verily guilty concerning our brother" (Gen. 42: 21).

(*d*) *God incites the will to action.* Moved by these influences the son makes a resolve and acts upon it: "I will arise and go to my father . . . and he arose and went."

Thus are the secret springs of action from God's love and grace, but the step when taken was the man's own act. He would not have taken it had God left him alone. Sometimes, after long patience and effort, God does this. Ephraim was God's dear son, a pleasant child (Jer. 31: 20), but at long last the dread word went forth, "Ephraim is joined to idols; *let him alone,*" and alone he has been left even until now. But when at last Ephraim returns, as when the prodigal returned, it will be his own act and deed, influenced by God but not forced by Him, for God constrains but does not compel (Luke 14: 23; see above, Ch. XXIII). He induces but never coerces. Still true of Ephraim are the sad words of their Shepherd, "I would have gathered . . . and ye would not" (Matt. 23: 37). They had their own way which led to death. The prodigal *could* have stayed by the swine-trough, but he acted upon the decision to which grace brought him.

III. The Welcome Home

Thus the sheep reached the fold, the coin was recovered, the father welcomed the son. And *what* a welcome! The father's haste to meet him; the father's kiss of love; the father's acceptance of his confession without upbraiding; the disregard of the humble readiness to take a lowly office and forgo his former dignity and right; the restoration to sonship, position, dignity;

filth cleansed away; rags replaced by robes and ring; squalor lost in splendour; need swallowed up in abundance, hunger stilled by the best and richest food; misery lost in gladness! To the repentant child God acts worthily of Himself, by the unrestrained impulse of His heart as Father, and endows the lowly "according to His riches in glory in Christ Jesus" (Phil. 4: 19).

IV. The Elder Brother

This disagreeable person is really a main feature of the parable. Here the scribes and Pharisees are made to see themselves. The crisis between them, and the people led by them, on the one hand, and the Saviour, on the other hand, has passed, yet their final casting off as a nation is still delayed; so these elder brethren are as yet treated as sons of God's house.

The younger son had acted with open and abandoned wickedness; the tax-gatherers and sinners were notoriously evil; but these religious leaders had maintained correct behaviour; they never transgressed a commandment, but prided themselves on punctilious observance of God's requirements. The former had gone into a far country of self-indulgence, with neglect of the proprieties of life and religion as required by the law: these stayed at home and were diligent supporters of the house of God.

Yet in the deeper fact, in moral reality, the elder son was living on the very same basic principles as the younger son. "Thou never gavest me a kid that I might make merry with my friends." So he too, like the prodigal, *desired* (*a*) to have something from the father; (*b*) that he might enjoy it with his friends; (*c*) in independence of the father; and (*d*) elsewhere than at home, though outwardly proper and decorous. In heart he was alienated from his father as much as his libertine brother: "As a man thinketh in his soul, *so is he*" (Prov. 23: 7).

This deep moral estrangement from the father came to light in their opposed attitude to the prodigal. Repentance, return, humility, confession, restoration were nothing to him, but much to the father. Brotherly love, sympathy with the joy of their father, failed utterly. He could not and would not forgive and forget. Let the rascal be still lost and dead to the home, what did it matter, who was the loser? The servants might rejoice with the head of the house, but he was stung by the compassion and gladness of his father. O thou proud, self-righteous Pharisee, surely thou art the more detestable of the two!

Yet he was a son of the house, which the father acknowledged in his gracious appeal to him to come in and share the family

joy and festivities, and by owning his past outward deference and service: "Son, thou art ever with me, and all that is mine is thine." How lamentable that one to whom it can be said "all things are yours" (I Cor. 3: 21–23) can in heart be so far from the heart of God.

But be it so if so it must be; nothing can dim the gladness of God in the return of the one lost, in the requickening of the one dead.

Thus did the Lord in His yearning pity define to His critics their true character as before God. Alas, that they who said they could see were blind and pursued their unlovely course to their own undoing, while the tax-gatherers and harlots went into the kingdom of God, for they had an ear to hear. And thus it is to-day.

1. *The hired labourers* (*misthios*). These are not members of the family, like the two brothers, nor even of the household, like the servants. God uses many who are not related to him by the new birth. Gibeonites are made to hew wood and draw water for the house of God. And their "hire," their life among Israel, the people of God, was more secure and pleasant than before, when they were indeed a royal city but in constant insecurity and trouble among neighbours turbulent like themselves. The secret overruling by God of men alienated from His life, His subduing of them to His purposes, is a constant factor in the ordering of His affairs. But hired servants do not share in family joys.

2. *The servants* (*doulos*), household slaves. "Are they [angels] not all spirits sent forth to render religious service [*leitourgika pneumata eis diakonian*] on account of those about to inherit salvation," these latter being "sons (*huios*) who are being brought unto glory" (Heb. 1: 14; 2: 10). In the parable the servants are at hand in the house, though not sons (*huios*), as are the younger and elder brothers.

The office of these servants is of deep interest. They clothe, adorn, and put shoes on the returned son. They prepare the feast and share it ("let *us* make merry," the father to the servants). Their work in this instance is similar to that which they rendered in the fitting of Joshua for his office as a high priest (Zech. 3). There also "those that stood before" the Angel of Jehovah stripped Joshua of the filthy garments and clothed him with rich apparel and set a fair turban on his head.

Thus angels have a definite and important part in fitting a son to resume life in the family and a priest for his sacred office. By

means of effective action upon our minds they help us to get free of defiling thoughts and ways and to put on garments of glory and beauty. In revulsion from the Roman practice of praying to angels—for which Scripture gives no warrant—Protestantism swung to the other extreme and has commonly ignored them and their secret but beneficent service.

Thus the parable sets before us the three classes, hired workmen, household servants, and sons, all in respective relation to the Father Who is Head of the house, all contributing to the functioning and maintaining of His great house, all distinct from the denizens, the citizens of the far country. It is profitable to follow the expansion of this picture in the rest of the New Testament.

Opponents of the doctrine of atoning sacrifice as the basis of reconciliation unto God urge that in this threefold parable Christ does not introduce that teaching, which they therefore assume not to have been an element, or not an important element, in His instruction, and one that may well be neglected or even rejected.

The answer is twofold, first, that the Lord sufficiently taught that truth to show that He did hold and enforce it. At the commencement of His public ministry He taught that He *must* be "lifted up" in order to secure for men life eternal (John 3: 14, 15), and as He closed His days on earth He spoke of His blood "shed for many unto remission of sins" (Matt. 26: 28).

Secondly, the comparative fewness of His references to the subject is sufficiently explained by the fact that all His hearers knew right well that atoning sacrifice, by the shedding of the blood of an innocent substitute, was imperative for acceptance by God of the guilty. From beginning to end the Old Testament testified emphatically upon this, and every teacher of Christ's time could assume that his hearers understood and accepted the doctrine. It could be taken for granted as the recognized basis of all other instruction, and did not need to be continually stated. The Writer of *Hebrews* was not announcing a new discovery, but rather asserting an established truth, when he said that "according to the law, I may almost say, all things are cleansed with blood, and apart from shedding of blood there is no remission" (Heb. 9: 22).

A similar omission is found in Zechariah 3. A man clothed in filthy garments is to be fitted to act as High Priest. He is stripped and reclothed, but nothing is said of the bathing, the anointing, or the sin and burnt offerings, or that of dedication. These were essential features in consecrating a priest, as

Lev. 8 shows; but they were so well known as not to need mention.

It is the same in Ezekiel 16. Sodom, Samaria, and Jerusalem are to be restored from harlotry against God to covenant relations with Him, but nothing is there said of the atonement that makes this righteous.

The argument from silence may be precarious.

CHAPTER XXVII

THE UNFAITHFUL STEWARD

Luke 16: 1–13

I. *Sonship*

"And He said also unto the disciples." The "and . . . also" connect this instruction with that preceding. The hired workmen, the servants, and the sons all had for use more or less of the goods of the householder; but the sons especially so: "all that is mine is thine," said the father. Under the law the elder son, as the firstborn, had the largest share of the patrimony, double that of another heir (Deut. 21: 15–17). This younger son obtained in advance his prospective portion and wasted it. The elder remained at home, and, though his spirit was bad, the father acknowledged his dutifulness by enlarging his portion beyond the double share under the law, telling him to regard the whole property as at his disposal.

Thus did the Lord hint that the age was passing from law to grace as the governing principle, that the time was at hand when the child would become the son, would no longer be under the restrictions imposed on the bondservants of the household but would attain to the full liberty of the grown-up son (Gal. 3: 23–4: 7).

But while this grants larger and nobler control it thereby increases responsibility. Because he was a son it was more wicked of the young man to waste his father's goods than it would have been for a servant or a hired workman to have done so. An unfaithful son of God is thus more wicked than a fallen angel or a worldling. The sin of all is alike, even unfaithfulness as a steward, but position heightens privilege and deepens guilt.

II. *Stewardship*

This principle of stewardship is strictly universal. In a sermon on stewardship Wesley well said that God is and must remain the inalienable Proprietor of everything He has made: it is a right of which He cannot divest Himself! This is the true foundation principle for regulating all use of property of whatever kind: God alone owns, the creature but holds for use on trust.

To His sons in Christ God says what the father said to the elder son: "all things are yours . . . all are yours" (I Cor. 3: 21–23). Yet not at all that we may do as we like with them; that

was the unprincipled conduct of the younger son; but Paul at once defines the only right attitude by adding: "Let a man so account of us as of *under*-servants of Christ [*hupo*-eretees] and stewards of God's mysteries [revealed secrets]" (I Cor. 4: 1).

This applies and gives precision to the instruction by Christ. All men are stewards; teachers and preachers especially so, for they receive fuller light upon God's purposes; and with them are joined in privilege and responsibility the elders of the local church, "for the overseer must be blameless as God's steward" (Titus, 1: 7). This was exactly where the steward of the story had failed; he had dissipated (*diaskorpizo*), squandered his lord's property on other objects than the advantage of the owner.

The connexion with the foregoing parable is shown by the same word being used of the younger son: "he squandered, dissipated his substance" (15:13), which the elder justly described as "devouring" their father's property (ver. 30). Any son of God becomes a prodigal in as far as he may expend any goods entrusted to him upon any selfish end, upon any act or course that furthers no purpose of God. All such conduct is "waste" of God's gifts, and is a failing to be blameless as a steward should be, for "here moreover it is required in stewards that a man be found faithful" (I Cor. 4: 2).

All that is entrusted to us falls under this head of trust property—time, strength, money, business, home, family, influence; but Paul specified the knowledge of God's mind and plans as especially a stewardship. All men have more or less of the former kinds of property; the Christian more than other men has the truth of God as a special trust above other possessions. This heavenly knowledge is granted unto us, not for our own benefit only, but for the saving advantage of our fellows; and therefore Paul said, "I am *debtor* both to Greeks and Barbarians [civilized men and uncivilized], both to the wise and the foolish" (Rom. 1: 14). Upon this solemn responsibility more will be said when we deal with the parable of the pounds in Luke 19.

III. *Penalty*

The steward was not put to death as a criminal, but the just recompense of unfaithfulness was forfeiture of office and its privileges: "thou canst be no longer steward." Judas had been a steward, but he fell from his apostleship (Acts 1: 25). "Look carefully lest there be any man that falleth short of the grace of God" (Heb. 12: 15). "We entreat that ye receive not the grace of God in vain" (II Cor. 6: 1). One may reject entirely God's grace; another may receive it, but in vain because of indolence; yet another may make some use of grace but fail to reach the full

possibilities; and some may be deprived of the whole office of steward and all its possibilities. By contrast, a faithful steward will receive a full reward, as later parables will show.

Nor does it say that the steward had been misappropriating his lord's money, but he had been misusing it, wasting it, not employing it to the advantage of his master. He is therefore put out of office. Sometimes the unfaithful believer is deprived of that which he was wasting—health, home, family, fortune, as the case may have been. Sometimes he loses influence in the house of God, and is no longer accepted by his brethren as a teacher or overseer. Thus past service may not count in his favour and future possibilities and reward be forfeited.

In all this there is an application of the parable of the Sower (Matt. 13). Some soil rejected the seed; some received it but in vain, for it soon was scorched; some grew in measure but thorns choked it, and it brought no fruit to perfection; and some arrived at full growth.

IV. *The Essence of Unfaithfulness*

The shrewd conduct of the steward showed the real inwardness of his sin. He had not been used to field work and was not strong enough to support himself by honourable manual labour: "I have not strength to dig!" But his former dignified position made it ignominious that he should now sponge on his acquaintances: "to beg I am ashamed." But in order that homes should be opened to him he made it light for his lord's debtors. One who owed a hundred measures of oil or wheat was discharged on payment of fifty or eighty respectively. Thus he made friends at the expense of his lord. Self-interest was the spring of his unfaithfulness. The disciple will certainly become unfaithful if he puts self before God.

V. *The Lesson*

It was not Christ who commended this shabby conduct. He merely says that the rogue's master admitted his shrewdness and cunning. What the Lord said was that the men of the world are wiser in their realm of affairs than most sons of God's kingdom are in His affairs. A humbling fact; and well is it if we be humbled about it and get us a heart of wisdom and rectify our ways. The path to this is now indicated by Christ. The R.V. must be noted. It simplifies and illuminates the statement:

> And I say unto you, Make to yourselves friends by means of the mammon of unrighteousness, that when it shall fail they may receive you [welcome you] into the eternal tabernacles (ver. 9).

As so often, the Lord fixes upon the use of earthly treasure as a crucial point to be pressed. So very general is the evil use of money or property that it is styled "the mammon of unrighteousness," though it is not essentially evil. If one squanders this on self one will reach the realm of the dead a poor friendless wastrel. If one uses it for the present benefit of others they will welcome one gladly into that further realm of existence.

That this is the meaning is clear from the words "when it shall fail" (*eklipee*): the singular number calls for "it," the aorist tense speaks of a definite event. It is at death that mammon fails us. Here "money answereth all things," as a fabulously wealthy king had found (Eccles. 10: 19). Here money had procured for him all things: food, clothes, houses, property, position, concubines; everything could be and still can be bought by money: at the moment of death it fails us, fails completely, "for we brought nothing into the world, for neither can we carry anything out" (I Tim. 6: 7). In Hades or Paradise money is not currency.

Christ had before taught that he who should care for the needy in this life shall be recompensed in the resurrection of the righteous (Luke 14: 13, 14). But here is a prior recompense in the world the soul reaches after death. Just as that resurrection of the righteous is to be secured by righteousness, so this recompense is to be secured by benevolence.

That world is actual and active. It is not a boundless and tractless waste: there are "tabernacles," dwelling-places. It is a living realm, where friends recognize and welcome friends. Therefore it is a social realm. And the powerful, and may be terrible lesson is, that our conduct in this life conditions our experience there. Therefore death is not a snap, a sudden break-off, with a new start of things: no, there is moral continuity; we arrive there as we live here, and continue to receive the due reward of our deeds, whether good or evil. The next succeeding instruction concerning Dives and Lazarus will enforce this.

vers. 10–13. This present life in comparison is "very little," that life is "much more." "Unrighteous mammon" is but the foretaste of "true riches." Here we handle that which is Another's; there the faithful will be loaded with what God will grant to him in possession as "his own." And all this advance will turn upon whether in this life, this preliminary training school, the man loves and serves God or mammon. He *cannot* do both: one he *must* do. Mammon is the means of gratifying self. He who would serve God, must do it out of love to Him, and therefore must hate self. If he loves self he will despise God: if he would love God he must loathe self.

It was not a new conception that our behaviour in this life directly affects our experiences in the life immediately after death. In IV Maccabees 13: 15, the seven brothers being tortured unto death by Antiochus Epiphanes encouraged each other to endure, saying, "Let us arm ourselves [comp. I Pet. 4: 1, where the same word is used in Greek], therefore, in the self-renunciation of the divine wisdom. Suffering thus, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob will welcome us and all the fathers will commend us." The Lord showed that this welcome could be secured by benevolence as well as by martyrdom. Both involve the same principle of self-abnegation.

CHAPTER XXVIII

DIVES AND LAZARUS

Luke 16: 14–31

SUCH searching, challenging teachings as the foregoing could not but have diverse effects upon hearers. Those with an ear to hear would be strengthened in the determination to obey, whereas others would be stiffened in their opposition.

I. There were Pharisees listening to these unpopular views and counsels, men who were money-lovers, and they "screwed up their noses at Him," "they scoffed at Him." Upon these He turned with drastic, condemnatory warnings. He announced:

1. ver. 15. *Their false and fatal principle of life:* they justified themselves in the sight of men. They wished to be deemed righteous, but were content with human judgment as their standard. The "ye" is emphatic: ye to whom I am speaking justify yourselves;

2. ver. 15. *A fact in the Divine judgment.* The heart-knowing God holds in abomination what man exalts. His thoughts are not our thoughts, for the mind of man is perverted and blinded by the god of this age (Isa. 55: 8, 9; II Cor. 4: 3, 4). These very men who were held in esteem by man were therefore abominable to God. It is a strong word, meaning loathsome, abhorrent;

3. ver. 16. *The old order was yielding to the new*, and they who clung to the old must perish with it. "The law and the prophets were until John: from that time the good news of the kingdom of God is preached, and every man entereth violently into it."

It is regrettable that this explicit statement by the Lord has been greatly avoided. The new era did not commence at Calvary, Pentecost, or with Paul's captivity at Rome; it began with John the Baptist. Peter accepted this, as is seen in Acts 1: 21, 22; Mark acknowledged it (1: 1–4), for "the beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God" is that "John came" baptizing and preaching.[1] Paul taught that the message of salvation through Jesus was ushered in by the preaching of John, according to the promise and as taught by John himself (Acts 13: 23, ff.).

[1] This is the gospel of the church of God, for this truth that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, is the very basis on which the church is built. See Matt. 16: 16–18.

For those Pharisees this meant that the opportunity of securing a place in the new era, the kingdom of God, was upon them, to be seized or rejected. If they were to avail themselves of the golden hour, they must address themselves to this with the utmost zeal and determination. For there were stern enemies to oppose and destroy them, and severe obstacles to be confronted and overcome, and only the "violent" would force their way into that holy kingdom. (The word here used *biazo*, to force one's way, is found in the LXX at Ex. 19: 24, where the people were ordered not to "break through" into the precincts of the Holy One.) This spirit is still indispensable for that situation still exists: it is "through many tribulations that we must enter into the kingdom of God" (Acts 14: 22).

4. Yet they were on no account to imagine that the advance from the old age to the new set them free to please themselves. Christ had not come to annul the law but to fulfil it. Not the smallest of its precepts should cease to have authority until the need for the precept ceased (Matt. 5: 17), and therefore

5. Every one of them that had put away a wife (except for unfaithfulness on her part, Matt. 5: 31, 32; 19: 9), and had married another, was living in adultery, as likewise each who had married such a divorced woman.

Such keen sword-thrusts of truth could not but further anger the proud and obstinate opponents. They were resolved not to yield to such searching and condemning utterances, wherefore the Lord proceeded to expose yet further their real moral condition, as proud, rich, luxurious, self-indulgent, and hard-hearted.

II. *Life's Contrasts*

The history of Dives and Lazarus is not called a parable, but stated as fact: "A certain man was rich": "a certain poor man named Lazarus." Were it a parable there would have been no occasion to give his name. Moreover, Abraham and Hades are realities, not figures of speech.

The one was rich. Because of this the Latin word for a rich man, *Dives*, has been given to him by later generations, but the Lord graciously refrained from stigmatizing him, and paining his relatives, by revealing his identity. But he was rich, and employed his wealth to honour and gratify himself. His clothing was of fine texture (*byssus*) and royal colour, purple; he passed away his time in mirth and splendour. He was a living example of those whom Butler reproves by saying that the very name of their amusements condemns their manner of life; for they call them *pastimes*, as if to pass time away were their only concern, instead of employing it usefully.

At the gate of his mansion lay an unhappy mortal; too frail to walk, so that others had to carry him to the gate; sick, diseased; so feeble that the dogs could lick his sores with impunity, which was probably the only dressing they received.

Here then is that ancient, present, universal contrast between selfish luxury and neglected misery. Around Nero's marble palace crowd the wretched hovels of the submerged. Is there then a God of right and truth? Or has he retired into His own private bliss, leaving His creatures to prey ruthlessly on one another? In which case is He not as ruthless as they, or more so, seeing that He could redress these bitter wrongs, yet seemingly is indifferent? So reasons misguided man.

A thousand years before our Lord's day a keen observer had pondered this problem and had been almost stumbled as to faith and piety. In Psalm 73 Asaph had described Dives in advance.

> Surely God is good to Israel, even to such as are pure in heart.
> But as for me my feet were almost gone; my steps had well nigh slipped.
> For I was envious at the arrogant, when I saw the prosperity of the wicked.
> For there are no bands in their death: but their strength is firm.
> They are not in trouble as other men; neither are they plagued like other men.
> Therefore pride is as a chain about their neck; violence covereth them as a garment.
> Their eyes stand out with fatness: they have more than heart could wish.
> They scoff, and in wickedness utter oppression: they speak loftily.
> They have set their mouth in the heavens, and their tongue walketh through the earth.
> Therefore his people return hither: and waters of a full cup are wrung out of them.
> And they say, How doth God know? And is there knowledge in the Most High?
> Behold, these are the wicked; and, being always at ease, they increase in riches.

III. *Death Levels all*

"The beggar died," and, lo, immediately angels attend and take charge of him: "He was carried away by the angels into Abraham's bosom" (22). In older English "carry" did not always imply an actual bearing of an object, but to escort one. A magistrate, before whom a crowd had forced Wesley, said: "Carry him back, carry him back, and let him convert all the scolds in the town."

Angels care for little children (Matt. 18: 10); in various ways they serve in life the heirs of salvation (Heb. 1: 14); here we learn that they guide and protect them after death. How shall the saint know the route to Abraham's bosom? Who shall protect him on the way from attack by evil spirits?

"The rich man also died and was buried," doubtless with pomp corresponding to his social status, that is, to his wealth. What happened to the body of the beggar is not stated. Perchance it was with him as with Tom Hood's pauper:

> Rattle his bones over the stones,
> He's only a pauper whom nobody owns.

But they both died and the luxury of the one ended and the misery of the other. Riches cannot stay the swinging scythe of the King of Terrors. And what then? Then:

IV. *Hades Reverses all*

1. Hades is a known locality. It is mentioned in nine other passages in the New Testament.[1] It is the place to which our Lord went at death: "Thou wilt not abandon my soul in Hades" (Acts 2: 27). Here it is the Greek rendering of the Hebrew *Sheol* as used in the psalm quoted (16: 10). This word comes some sixty-five times in the Old Testament, from which passages much can be learned. Its location is shown. Eph. 4: 9 tells us that it was from "the lower parts of the earth" that Christ ascended by resurrection. It includes the Paradise to which the Lord and the repentant thief went at death (Luke 23: 43). A current pictorial description was adopted by Christ; it was known as "the bosom of Abraham." To lie in another's bosom pictured restful, honoured intercourse (John 1: 18; 13: 23).

2. Hades is a dual region, a place of torment as well as of bliss, and the two parts are separated by a chasm that is impassable. The soul is restricted in movement, as well as the body. It has its Divinely imposed limits. Yet its faculties persist: "He seeth Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom" (23). His tongue can cry out, his ears can hear, his memory is active ("Son, remember"), his feelings are acute. He is the same person, simply disembodied.

3. The ancients, followed by the modern spiritist, conceived of the disembodied soul as clothed with a body, far rarer in texture than the material earth body, yet corresponding to it in form and function. This is justified by Scripture, and is one of the points on which the Word of God warrants the ancient idea.

[1] Matt. 11: 23; 16: 18; Luke 10: 15; Acts 2: 27, 31; Rev. 1: 18; 6: 8; 20: 13, 14.

As shown above, Dives in that region and condition has eyes, ears, tongue, and sensations. Similarly, when Samuel was permitted to return to warn Saul, his mantle and appearance, as described by the medium, were readily recognizable by Saul, and the prophet could speak words audible to the king and hear what the latter said (I Sam. 28: 13 ff.).

Thus in that dread place there is a "flame"; its victim is scorched and parched; Lazarus has a "finger," and there is "water" that could alleviate the torment, were this permitted, but it is not. The terms are strong: *basanos*, torture, anguish; *odunao*, agony as of birth pangs.

However fiercely the modern sinner may resent and reject such conceptions they are neither unphilosophical nor were they new when the Lord accepted them. The soul after death being still an entity must be somewhere, in some locality; and being conscious must be susceptible of sensations appropriate to its condition and surroundings.

This instinct as to the reality of that world led to the notion that the person would benefit there by physical counterparts of the utensils and persons that had served it here, which were thereupon buried with the body of the deceased, sometimes including his wives and slaves. The application was often foolish and cruel, but the fundamental idea that the world beyond was real was true.

The inquirer cannot but be struck by the fact that even remote and uncivilized men have retained from of old some basic ideas as here declared by the Son of God. Wandering over the extensive uplands of the Nilgiri Hills, South India, is the wild and degraded tribe of Todas. I saw something of them. They say that at death the soul takes its journey to the distant region of the Hills which is their Paradise. On the way it must cross a vast chasm, the bridge over which is a single hair. If it has been a good Toda it will cross safely; if a bad person it will slip from the hair into the deep and dreadful abyss of torment far beneath, where it must suffer for its misdeeds. Thus does the conscience of even uncivilized men enforce the essential thought that just reward or just retribution follows directly upon death, and dim tradition has retained the notions of Paradise and Tartarus, a great chasm figuring in the now confused picture, even as in that drawn by Christ.

4. Though co-operation between those two regions is denied, intercourse is not. Dives and Abraham can converse. The former makes two appeals:

(*a*) *For personal alleviation.* But this is declared impossible. Lazarus *cannot* reach Dives. This denies the basic allegation of

spiritism that the pious dead of the higher realms of that world live to help forward and upward the less fortunate, and that existence there is a progressive ascent. Dives entertained no such fallacy. He does not ask for a release, for transference to Abraham's bosom, but only for temporary mitigation of his misery.

(*b*) He then pleads that his brethren be warned, "lest they also come into this place of torment" (ver. 28). It has been suggested that this request arose only lest his own wretchedness be aggravated by their company and reproaches. The narrative does not suggest this, and a base motive ought not to be imputed. The love that thinketh no evil would rather hope that genuine pity stirred the once hard heart and he who could not himself escape desired that others should do so.

Abraham replies to each request.

(*a*) Dives must remember the relationship between the past and the present. In his life on earth he received in full (*apolambanomai*) his good things. He gained what he sought and misused it. He lived for the approbation of men, "and men praise thee when thou doest well for thyself." Thus "while he lived he blessed his soul" (Ps. 49: 18); "he received his good things," and he exhausted them. Now he has nothing, not even a friend to welcome him into that tabernacle of misery. It was with him as it is to be with that richer and more majestic being than he, who is yet to reach that dread region, at whom those already there shall be astonished and shall have no words of grateful welcome (Isa. 14: 3–15).

In like manner Lazarus on earth had endured much evil; "but," said Abraham, as he pressed the sharp contrast, "*now*, *here*, he is comforted and thou art tormented" (ver. 25). "Then" and "now," "there" and "here"—up to the hour of death one condition; from that hour an entirely reversed condition.

(*b*) As to his brethren, they must use their existing opportunities and advantages. More they do not need, nor will more be granted. "They have Moses and the prophets: let them hear them." The Spirit of truth speaks in them; the voice of a spook cannot be so impressive or authoritative: "If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded if one rise from the dead" (ver. 31).

In due time One who is the greatest of the sons of men rose from the dead, but in conformity with the principle He had here stated, He did not in that form present Himself to men of the world, but continues to speak by His convicting Spirit in the Scriptures. Moses and the prophets had warned against the worship of Mammon; the later apostles and prophets have

continued and emphasized the warning: therefore how much heavier is the guilt, and how much darker the prospects, of those who now turn away, not only from Moses and the prophets, but from Him Who by His Spirit warns us from heaven.

And this solemn warning is addressed to some who have accepted the faith and been led astray from it, not only to those who never have professed faith. For "they that desire to be rich," that is, as the context shows, who are not content with things indispensable, with food and coverings, but determine to get more than these—they "fall into a temptation and a snare and many foolish and hurtful lusts, such as drown men in destruction and perdition. For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil: which some reaching after have been led astray from the faith, and have pierced themselves through with many sorrows" (I Tim. 6: 9, 10).

A Christian, as yet trustful toward God and tender towards men, may become self-dependent and callous. "Let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall" (I Cor. 10: 12); for if he fall into the temptation and snare of loving money he must reap the full harvest of his sowing as certainly as must the open worldling.

It is on Christians that this certainty is pressed, in order that we may not be weary in communicating of our substance, in doing well, by working that which is good toward all men. "Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap. For he that soweth unto his own flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption; but he that soweth unto the Spirit shall of the Spirit reap eternal life" (Gal. 6: 7, 8). A Dives may be a degenerate believer. Scripture and fact assert it. Who dare deny it? Christ had already applied to His own followers His exhortation, "Take heed and keep yourselves from all covetousness" (Luke 12: 15, with 22 "*therefore*").

5. The state of death and the place called Hades are not the lake of fire, for ultimately the two former are to be cast into the latter (Rev. 20: 13, 14). The scene described is immediately after death, for the five brothers are still alive in the family home on earth. Incidentally, that their number is given implies the literality of the circumstances. Therefore Hades is not eternal; and the eternal destiny of its inmates ought not to be assumed. There will be eternal death and eternal torment (Matt. 25: 41, 46; Rev. 14: 9–11; 20: 10, 14, 15), but what persons are to suffer that doom can not be declared save by the Righteous Judge alone (Matt. 25: 41), and as to the more part of the lost it appears that He will not declare it until the last judgment at the great white throne. It is not warranted to preach *eternal* destiny from what

Scripture here says of Hades. Dives may be an utterly lost soul, but no one can rightly assert this. If his concern for his brothers was sincere, he was not yet utterly hardened. Nor does he make complaint as to his sufferings, like those who blaspheme God because of their pains (Rev. 16: 9, 11). And Abraham acknowledges relationship with Dives by answering his appeal "Father" with the term "Child."

6. The Lord leaves untouched some deep and interesting matters. What constituted the fitness of Lazarus for Paradise? He is not said to have been godly; and if he was so, why was he reduced to such poverty and misery? It is not said that the rich man was irreligious and impious, but only that he was callous. Does this alone assure so severe a punishment? The Speaker left His hearers to solve such problems by the Scriptures, as can be done. He was too skilful a Teacher to weaken the appeal and warning by diverting the minds of hearers to but subordinate topics. Rather would He force upon them the one solemn lesson that life here determines experience there; that immediately after death conditions are drastically reversed, a just balance is reached, and present inequalities are redressed. There all can see what faith asserts here, that

> The ROCK, His work is perfect;
> For all His ways are judgment:
> A God of faithfulness and without iniquity,
> Just and right is He. (Deut. 32: 4.)

Various common assumptions are here rebuked.

That death introduces a complete break in moral state and experience is refuted. On the contrary, moral condition persists and governs experience. The law of sowing and reaping operates rigidly and fully. *Eternal* consequences have indeed been cancelled for the repentant by the sufferings of Christ on the cross; but temporal consequences prevail in the period between death and resurrection.

It is also denied that at death the saved go to heaven and the lost to hell. They all alike go to the realm of the dead, where Christ went, but some to the portion called of old, "Abraham's bosom" and now given the nobler description "with Christ" (Phil. 1: 23), for now He fills, or occupies, all things (Eph. 4: 9, 10).

When the A.V. was made "hell" meant what the Greek Hades means, a vast covered region out of ken of our bodily senses, reached after death. To-day "hell" has come to mean the place of final judgment, the "lake of fire," which misleads the present reader of the A.V.

A result has been that the great facts revealed as to the state intermediate between death and resurrection have been deleted from most Christian thought and preaching, so that both the solace and the solemnity of such knowledge have been lost. Believers have been buoyed up with the fictitious notion that they go from their death-bed to the glory of heaven, and the salutary warning has been lost that their unrepented misdeeds must be faced directly after death. In particular, how lamentable has been the growth in Christians of covetousness, riches, and self-indulgence. Let us rather take to our hearts the facts presented by our Lord, and order our ways accordingly. Then shall we be able honestly and forcefully to press them upon the worldling.

The invigorating, inspiring effect of this view is shown in IV Maccabees 13: 16. As mentioned before, in the second century B.C., pious Jews being cruelly tortured to death by Antiochus Epiphanes, encouraged one another to endure unto the end by the words, "Thus suffering, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob will welcome us and all the fathers will commend us." In this wise they rejoiced at the prospect of being welcomed into the eternal tabernacles.

O GOD, TO US MAY GRACE BE GIVEN
TO FOLLOW IN THEIR TRAIN.

CHAPTER XXIX

IMPORTUNATE PRAYER

The Widow and the Judge

Luke 18: 1–8

SOME Pharisees inquired as to the coming of the kingdom of God (Luke 17: 20, 21). The Lord's reply revealed yet again the character under which the kingdom comes in this age. Not with outward signs that all may recognize, but in transforming grace upon the inner man: "the kingdom of God is within you." Yet more probably the answer meant that the kingdom of God was already amidst them in the person of its King. It certainly was not within those Pharisees addressed, but the King was among them, though unrecognized, unacknowledged.

The close of His ministry was nearing and Christ the more carried forward the thoughts of His disciples to the days to precede His return to establish the kingdom in visible glory. Those would be very dark and dangerous days, the essential character of which would be set by the rejection and murder of Himself (ver. 25). The whole age would bring like suffering and rejection to His followers. Only for them there would be sudden deliverance from trial and peril by His own advent as a flash of lightning; for God has not appointed disciples to share the wrath to be poured upon the godless at that day but to obtain salvation therefrom, that they may live with Christ (I Thess. 5: 9, 10). Yet they must remember Lot's wife, who was not a Sodomite and was in a fair way to escape the imminent judgment upon the godless, yet in heart she wished to enjoy still her life among them, and so lost it (vers. 32, 33).

There will be no other escape from the judgments of the day of the Lord than to be taken away to His presence before He reaches the earth as Judge. He Himself will be the point of attraction, the gathering centre (I Thess. 4: 16, 17), and "to them that wait for Him" will He appear into salvation (Heb. 9: 28). At that moment "one shall be taken, and the other be left" (vers. 34, 35). There could be no reason to ask where the one should be left, for he would be left just where he was, at the mill or elsewhere. The question therefore was as to where the one should be taken. The answer was that there would be a gathering point for those taken, just as they had often seen the vultures gather suddenly to *their* point of attraction. This offers a plain

example of the right way to interpret a parable or picture. The one point to be taught must be isolated and grasped, and accidental details be omitted.

As mentioned in Ch. XXI, some Western minds feel it to be incongruous that the Lord should be compared to a carcase to which vultures swoop. The Oriental would not so think, and the Bible student should reflect that God compares Himself to a moth causing rottenness and a lion tearing and devouring (Hos. 5: 12, 14), pictures equally incongruous as the carcase, yet equally accurate when the precise lesson is seized.

The meaning of "taken" is further fixed by the fact that the verb used *paralambanomai* definitely means to take with oneself as a companion, and in John 14: 3, is employed by our Lord in this exact connexion with His advent, "I come again, and will *receive* you unto Myself."[1]

It was particularly against the dark background and dread dangers of those coming days that the Lord spake the parable of the widow, though its lessons apply to all the period now in progress and then to culminate.

The Eastern widow has ever been a person despised, neglected, a prey to any shark that can devour her.. This poor woman was in such circumstances, with no one to protect or deliver her. Her only hope lay in getting the strong arm of the law to intervene. But as soon as she resorted to the court so did her oppressor: he there became her *antidikos*, the opponent in a lawsuit. Who this adversary at law is Peter tells us, using the same word: "Your adversary, the Devil, as a roaring lion walketh about, seeking whom he may devour" (I Pet. 5: 8).

The disciple is the widow, helpless against the assaults and robberies of the Devil. The patrimony of the child of God is righteousness, peace, and joy (Rom. 14: 17; John 14: 27; 15: 11). Who is it that robs so many children of God of their portion? Why do they lack power to act righteously? and, being thus

[1] Some who accept that "taken" means to be taken as a companion unto heavenly blessedness yet prefer to regard the "vulture" picture as giving the judgment upon the godless who are left. This requires that the question "Where?" means "Where are they left?", a question, as remarked above, unnecessary and unlikely, the answer being obvious. Whereas to inquire where the others are to be taken would be natural and expected, seeing that the idea of some being removed to the heavens was new to the disciples. John 14: 1–3 had not yet been spoken.

Moreover, this view will mean that the birds of prey will be angels. Now Rev. 12: 9 shows that prior to the End days, and before the judgments of God on the wicked, the host of evil angels will have been cast down to the earth. It is therefore holy angels who will execute the wrath of God from heaven. This our Lord intimated in Matt. 13: 41 and 24: 31, and it is plain all through the book of Revelation. Are not carrion-devouring birds of prey equally incongruous as a picture for holy angels?

without the breastplate of righteousness, their heart is robbed of peace and joy.

In this unequal strife with wicked spirits what shall the Christian do? "He spake a parable unto them to the end that they ought always to pray, and not to faint" (ver. 1). The A.V. "men ought always to pray" follows a faulty text. "Them" and "they" are emphatic and show that ch. 18 continues from 17: 22 the instruction to disciples. It is one of the many seemingly small but actually important changes of the R.V. Only believers are able so to pray. And it is certain to be one thing or the other—either we pray or we faint. "If thou faint in the day of adversity, thy strength is small" (Prov. 24: 10); and small it will be if thou dost not pray.

Prayer can be the infant prattling to its parent, or the son communing with the father, or the servant seeking direction from the master; but on occasion it must be the suitor appealing to the court. This last fact and feature in the ordering of the kingdom of God is too largely overlooked, in spite of this parable and many other striking scriptures.

There is a permanent court of senior angels governing heaven and earth. Affairs national and personal are alike amenable to its jurisdiction. From its decision lies no appeal, nor can its orders be frustrated. He who wins there wins finally; for this court has power as well as authority, and can enforce its verdicts. All men and all means are under its control. Life and death are in its hands. "This night do *they* require thy soul of thee" (Luke 12: 20). An arrow shot at a venture in battle can execute its sentence (I Kings 22: 34). It holds recurring sessions: "Now it came to pass on *the* day when the sons of God came to present themselves before Jehovah" (Job 1: 6; 2: 1; Darby; A.S.V.).

The reality of this tribunal and its proceedings are revealed in Job 1 and 2; I Kings 22; Daniel 7: 9 ff., 26; 12: 7–12. These passages show God Himself as President of the Court, as also does Psalm 82: 1: "Elohim standeth in the congregation of El: He judgeth among the elohim," that is, beings of His own nature, spirits. Never has God taken a place among earthly judges and supervised their proceedings, but in that heavenly court His presence guarantees justice.

These scenes display another fact, even that Satan is Prosecutor General and accuses even the godly, as Job, not to say the wicked, as Ahab. And so when the widow goes to the court so does the adversary. He accuses the brethren day and night before God. And sometimes they are delivered unto him for testing and purging as was Job. So to Peter Christ said: "Satan hath obtained you [all] by asking, that he may sift you [all] as wheat,"

where *exaiteo* is a legal term, meaning to demand that one be given up to punishment. (Luke 22: 31, 32).

Job's case goes back to remote antiquity: Rev. 12 looks on to the close of this age, when the Accuser will be deprived of his office and be debarred access to that Court. That will be the era when this whole judicial arrangement will be superseded, by the Man Christ Jesus and His heavenly human associates taking the kingdom and judging men and angels (Heb. 2: 5; I Cor. 6: 1–3). Then the senior angelic rulers will resign their sovereignty into the hands of the Almighty who appointed them, signified by the Elders placing their crowns at His feet (Rev. 4: 9–11). Until that great day the present government proceeds, the angelic court sits, and godly men like Job and the apostles are subject to its jurisdiction as much as the ungodly. The family of the sovereign are amenable to his laws and can apply to his courts.

It was remarked above that the presence of God as Head of the tribunal guarantees justice. It equally guarantees that nothing but justice shall be done. Therefore the widow will have no hope of gaining ought else, and her plea must be "Do me justice of my adversary." The rendering "avenge me" is liable to be misunderstood. In common thought it is too much like "revenge me," as if a vindictive element entered into her spirit and plea. The Judge of all the earth has no respect of persons. His own children cannot beguile or cajole Him into favouring them unfairly. He will do them justice, but nothing else. Therefore that which they ask must be strictly according to His laws, for it is only "if we ask anything according to His will He heareth us . . . and whatsoever we ask we receive of Him, because we keep His commandments, and do the things that are pleasing in His sight" (I John 5: 14, 15; 3: 21, 22).

Whereas if a believer sins he plays into the hands of his adversary and gives him just ground of attack before the Court. How great is this folly. The widow will thus defeat herself and forbid that the Judge help her. "Who shall ascend into the hill of Jehovah? and who shall stand in His holy place? He that hath *clean hands* and a *pure heart*" (Ps. 24: 3, 4). In this matter of appeal to God the same conditions rule under the gospel as under the law: "I desire therefore that the men pray in every place, lifting up *holy hands*, without *wrath and doubting*" (I Tim. 2: 8).

It is blessedly true for the saint, striving carefully to please God by walking by the light of His known will, that, if he fail, "if any man sin, we have an Advocate with the Father," who withstands our Accuser before God (I John 2: 1, 2, and *Hebrews*).

But it is ever to be remembered that the advocate is tied by the rules of the court. It is not for him to persuade the court to sanction injustice: he must show that his client's case is according to law. And the client must appear in court to support his advocate's statement. The widow must herself cry to the Judge with her Advocate, and their united plea must be for justice. Christ is not before God to enable a believer to sin lightly. Upon our repentance He can secure pardon for the guilt, but even so He will not always ask that the *consequences* of our act be averted. Job was benefited by Satan's painful treatment. Peter was left in Satan's sieve, though the Priest prayed that the test might be limited and Peter's faith not collapse utterly and finally.

Yet the Lord did not introduce into the picture the Advocate; not so much because He was not yet ascended to the throne, for He did intercede for Peter; but again because He would make the picture simple and distinct and the lesson the more impressive. The saints must pray, must cry unto God day and night, that is, persistently, perseveringly, importunately, and the more because the Adversary accuses them before God day and night (Rev. 12: 10). If the prosecutor accuses and the accused do not appear the case may go against him by default. Even the Advocate will be hindered by the client's absence. Oh the peril of the prayerless Christian!

Yet even the importunate widow must remember one thing more. If a godless judge can be moved by perseverance to deliver a widow for whom he cares not a straw, how much more shall the Righteous Judge do justice for His own chosen people, for whom He has the deepest concern. Therefore let the widow pray on with full assurance of faith; only she must be prepared for delay, on the part of even the just Judge. For good reasons, such as are for ever revealed in the case of Job, God may be long-suffering over His chosen and leave them a long while under the oppression of the adversary. The *upright* Job must be purified in the inner life of thought, opinion, estimate of himself, of feelings towards his maligners, and in perception of God, until he becomes a humble, *holy* man. "He disciplines us that we may be partakers of His holiness"; not here accepters of His imputed judicial righteousness, but partakers of His own holiness of nature, character, practice (Heb. 12: 10).

When this goal has been gained, and Job could pray for his unkind slanderers, then the discipline was no longer required, and "Jehovah turned the captivity of Job when he prayed for his friends" (Job 42: 10). The widow may have to await the Lord's good time, to wait long and patiently; but when the fit

hour arrives then the Judge orders, His officers at once act, the adversary is defeated, the widow is delivered, justice is done, her case is won: justice is at last executed with speed.

Such is the message for the saint in every dark and gloomy day.

Ye fearful saints fresh courage take,
The clouds ye so much dread
Are big with mercy, and shall break
In blessings on your head.

Blind unbelief is sure to err,
And scan His work in vain:
God is His own interpreter,
And He will make it plain. (*Cowper*)

CHAPTER XXX

THE PHARISEE AND THE PUBLICAN

Luke 18: 9–14

LITTLE CHILDREN (vers. 15–17). THE RICH RULER (vers. 18–30)

THE arguments and incidents in Scripture are often so grouped that parts apparently unrelated have an underlying spiritual connexion. The parable of the widow pressed only the need of persistency in seeking the help of God; it did not touch upon the personal and spiritual conditions which lie at the moral basis of prayer to the Holy One. Man being a sinner has no right to or claim upon the help of God. Sin bars access, even as rebellion debars a rebel from approaching his sovereign. The present parable is added to the former: "He spoke *also* this parable."

Its lesson is so vital that, unlike many parables, it is stated distinctly by the Speaker—"every one that exalteth himself shall be humbled; but he that humbleth himself shall be exalted."

The Pharisee ostensibly talked to God, but really "prayed with himself." He was his own audience. It is the same spirit as when one prays to be seen of men (Matt. 6: 5). A Unitarian minister had conducted a service in Boston, U.S.A. A daily paper reported the proceedings and said that the reverend gentleman's prayer was the most eloquent that had ever been offered to a *Boston audience*!

Such talk does not reach God. The Pharisee was content with his own state and spoke only of his own works. These were right enough in themselves. It is highly proper to abstain from extortion, injustice, adultery, and official corruption as then practised by tax-gatherers. Christians are most solemnly warned that such evils will involve forfeiture of the heavenly inheritance (I Cor. 6: 7–12; Gal. 5: 19–21; Eph. 5: 3–8). These warnings show that children of God may commit such wickedness. Let us not be proud that we are not proud like this Pharisee. Not all real believers can say even in principle as much as he could say: "I fast twice in the week: I give tithes of all that I get." Restraint on bodily appetite, faithful recognition of God's right over our money—these are real virtues, in which the child of God may be sadly deficient.

But the poor man based upon these good deeds his acceptance

with God, which vitiated them all. "Not by works done in righteousness which we did ourselves, but according to His mercy He saved us" (Titus, 3: 5) was the reasoned conclusion of a once self-righteous Pharisee.

The tax-gatherer realized this. Abased in his own eyes because of his guilt he dared not even look toward God. Beating his breast as outward sign of his intense shame, he cast himself wholly upon the Divine mercy, and cried: "God, be propitiated to me the sinner." "Be propitiated" is more than "be merciful," for it discloses the basis in law upon which mercy can be extended without derogating from justice, the ground upon which mercy can glory against justice (Jas. 2: 13).

Here is another instance of how things well known need not be stated. All Christ's hearers knew that the man was standing where the altar of atonement was before him, between him and the sanctuary of God. On that altar was an ever-burning fire consuming the morning or evening lamb. Every Jew knew that this innocent substitute was offered for the benefit of the repentant sinner. "Be propitiated" carried with it the acknowledgment of guilt, as well as appeal for pardon on the ground that the victim had borne the guilt and doom of the sinner.

David showed mercy to his sons Amnon and Absalom whom he ought to have executed for their crimes of incest and of murder. These were not avenged, nor was propitiation made, for God's law did not allow it for these offences. Mercy thus shown at the expense of justice and law proved disastrous, for the vicious Absalom went from bad to worse. Neither of the sons showed any sign of repentance, so that God could not extend mercy to them as He had to their father upon his repentance and confession (II Sam. 12: 13, 14; Ps. 32).

But the tax-gatherer felt his guilt, confessed his sinfulness, relied on the atonement that grace had provided, appealed for pardon, and—note well the definite assurance of the Redeemer-Judge—he "went down to his house justified," declared righteous in law, acquitted of his guilt, discharged from its penalty. It is perhaps the most explicit of all Divine declarations of the present and immediate salvation of the repentant and believing sinner. It stands squarely against the enfeebling notion that assurance of salvation cannot be secured prior to the day of judgment.

In a remote hamlet an old man had gained this blessed assurance. The kind and gentlemanly but spiritually backward rector remonstrated with him for his presumption in telling his neighbours that he was saved. The other replied: "But it says in the Bible, 'My soul shall make her boast in the Lord; the humble

shall hear thereof and be glad' (Ps. 34: 2); and if you were a humble man, sir, you would be glad that I am saved."

A celebrated divine said to a dying parishioner: "I hope, Mary, that you are trusting in the mercy of God." "No, sir," she answered, "I am trusting in the righteousness of God." Her boldness was humility, for she was understanding and believing the truth taught in I John 1: 9, "If we confess our sins, He is *faithful* and *righteous* to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." Upon a debt having been paid by a surety it becomes a faithful and righteous act that the creditor holds the debtor to be discharged. It were unfaithful to the surety and altogether unrighteous did the creditor seek to enforce payment by the debtor.

God will not payment twice demand,
First at my bleeding Surety's hand,
And then again at mine.

Such was the attitude and confidence of the tax-gatherer, and it is the basis of all successful appeal to the Holy One, and will be so to all eternity.

I stand upon *His* merit;
I know no other stand,
Not e'en where glory dwelleth
In Immanuel's land.

The intelligent Christian can, indeed, know higher privilege than the tax-gatherer. Under the law of Moses the latter "went down to his house"; he could not go onward and upward into God's house, for he was not a priest. Now the believer can enjoy this status and privilege, as *Hebrews* teaches. But all this higher dignity and service is for ever based upon the justification secured through repentance and faith, by virtue of the atoning blood of the Lamb of God Who "is the *propitiation* for our sins" (I John 2: 2).

This illustrates further how the doctrine of the Epistles is rooted in the Gospels and amplifies the latter. The Lord did not touch on this higher privilege, for its time had not come; but He laid its foundation in the justification which is the starting point of all later advance.

vers. 15–17. *The Little Children.*

The need and reward of humility is further exhibited in the next following incident. The kingdom of God is composed of people of the spirit of the little child. Therefore unless the

grown-ups turn from self-esteem and become as little children they shall on no account enter into that kingdom; but whosoever shall humble himself as a little child, the same is the greatest in that kingdom (Matt. 18: 1–4).

vers. 18–30. *The Rich Ruler.*

This essential lesson is taught again in the incident next related. The rich young (Matt. 19: 20) ruler was a truly lovable person (Mark 10: 21). He desired to inherit the life eternal, but based his hope on what he could himself do. He, like the Pharisee, could honestly speak of many works very good in themselves; but when his tender spot was touched, his possessions, he showed that self-love prevailed above love to his poorer neighbours, that earth and time were more to him than heaven and eternity, that position and ease forbade him to follow the now rejected Teacher. His basic conceptions of eternal life and the kingdom of God were false.

As the Lord's final words to Peter show, it is indeed not our own works upon which faith and hope can be built. It is relationship of love to Himself, shown by sacrifice for His person and cause, that assure His favour in this age and the enjoyment of eternal life in the coming age, the age of the Millennial kingdom.

It is to be observed that, as in the case of Dives, so here, the thought is not carried forward into the eternal ages, but is now restricted to a portion in "the age the one coming." It indicates a strong emphasis upon that age as a subject upon which Christ would teach us and make it an object of our hope.

CHAPTER XXXI

THE LABOURERS IN THE VINEYARD

Matt. 19: 23–20: 16

As the rich ruler turns away Jesus turns to His disciples. Both Matthew and Mark note that the instruction based on the incident was addressed to the disciples (Mark 10: 23). The instruction is that to be rich greatly increases the difficulty of entering the kingdom of heaven and of God, rendering it most unlikely.

In this place (vers. 23, 24) these two terms are plainly equivalents. The disciples treat them as also being equivalent to being "saved": "who then can be saved?" The Lord did not adopt this thought, but proceeds to deal with the matter of rewards for suffering loss for His sake and the gospel's sake, the rewards being of the nature of wages for labour rendered in His vineyard.

This removes the discussion from the subject of final salvation from eternal judgment, for this latter is secured through faith—not service, it being a free gift of grace. Therefore every man saved from eternal doom must have place in the eternal kingdom or he would be among the lost, not the saved. From this it follows that entering the kingdom in the sense here intended must be entering the Millennial kingdom to precede the eternal ages. If this be rejected, salvation from eternal perdition will be by works, for plainly that which is to be gained according to this passage and parable is reward, wages, not a free gift of grace.

It is to be admitted that riches do increase the difficulty of the unregenerate finding salvation from eternal wrath, but this is not the lesson here. It is disciples who are so solemnly warned against gaining and holding wealth, the deadly danger being that the heart so readily relies on riches instead of upon the living God (Mark 10: 24).

The same warning and exhortation were to be given to Christians by Timothy (I Tim. 6: 6–10; 17–19). The disciple is to be as his Teacher, content with food and coverings, ready, if God so please, to dispense with more. If he desires to be rich, that is, to get more than the indispensable things just mentioned, he is warned against falling into temptation, a snare, and many foolish and hurtful cravings, "such as drown men in destruction and perdition."

It is against *love* of money that the warning is directed, even as Christ spoke of *trust* upon riches being the baneful state. Christians may allow this root of all kinds of evil to spring up in the heart, for some had already done this, with the baleful result that they had been led astray from the faith they had formerly professed and had "pierced themselves through with many sorrows."

Here again the apostles apply the teaching of Christ, the Epistles enforce the Gospels. Yet in spite of this united and emphasized teaching how many believers are there who foster the desire to be "better off," instead of cultivating contentment? In consequence they fail of contentment of heart, restrict or omit generosity and love, never get a working hold of the life that is life indeed, and presently find themselves without foundation, having built the house of life on sand, as pictured in the Lord's early parable (Matt. 7: 26, 27). "This their way is their folly" (Ps. 49: 13). The Christian should ponder the lesson of this Psalm and learn wisdom.

Now the apostles had renounced ambition as to this world and its affairs and had relinquished all things to follow their Guide in His poverty and dependence upon God. And Peter asks, "What then shall we have?" or "What shall happen to us?" The answer of Christ shows that it is the Millennial period He has now in mind, for He puts the time of reward "in the regeneration, when the Son of Man shall sit on the throne of His glory" (28). Zech. 6: 12–15; Matt. 25: 31. As noted at the end of the last chapter, it is "the coming age" that is in view as the time for inheriting: thus Peter later encourages children of God by the prospect of the inheritance at the revelation of Jesus Christ (I Pet. 1: 4, 13).

Now as regards this period of reward it will be found that "many shall be last that are first; and first that are last." Christ had earlier used this somewhat cryptic phrase, and in the same connexion with the coming kingdom (Luke 13: 28–30). The patriarchs and prophets shall be there, but some who hoped to share that royal feast shall be cast without, while others from scattered Gentile lands shall share it, and among all the guests there will be many surprises, for "behold, there are last which shall be first, and there are first which shall be last." This He now repeats, as two evangelists record (Matt. 19: 30; Mark 10: 31). It was to explain this that the parable of the labourers was added: "*For* the kingdom of heaven is like, etc."

Those who were the first to be hired, surely had the best opportunity to secure good wages; those hired last were at a disadvantage, yet were paid as much as the former. For less work

and less toil some labourers gained as much reward. If it should be supposed from this detail that, in the coming age of reward, all servants of Christ will be rewarded alike, this would not only seem unjust but would be flatly against the testimony of Scripture that "each shall receive his own reward according to his own labour" (I Cor. 3: 8), and against the Lord's final words from heaven, "Behold, I come quickly [swiftly, suddenly], and my wages with Me, to render to each man according as his work is" (Rev. 22: 12). Here, moreover, is a clear instance where details in parables are not to be forced to a literal sense, but the essential lessons are to be grasped.

God is the Owner of His kingdom. It is a vineyard from which He expects fruit for His pleasure and praise. He calls men to serve Him in this sphere to this end. Though properly speaking all mankind are His slaves, and can do no more that it is their duty to do, yet He purposes to reward them for their toil, suffering, and seeming loss by attending to His interests rather than their own.

This recompense of reward is granted in part in this life: such as leave aught for Him receive a hundredfold now. For example, as a travelling preacher of the gospel I, like many, many more, have for long periods, in the aggregate for very many years, foregone my home, but have enjoyed the comfort of hundreds of homes opened by fellow-believers "now in *this* time" (Mark 10: 30; Luke 18: 30). But the superabundant wages will be received at the coming of Christ, the Steward of the parable.

But since in the issue reward will vary with fidelity and zeal, for what reason did the Teacher introduce the diametrically opposite features? It was

1. To assert again the fundamental principle of the whole universe, that God is the absolute Owner of everything and therefore has absolute right to do as He likes with His property: "Is it not lawful for Me to do what I will with mine own?" In His kingdom His will, being perfect, is not to be challenged. Murmuring is most unwarranted, most objectionable. It is sufficient for the Owner to say, "It is my will to give unto this last, even as unto thee," the first to be hired.

2. The principle is asserted that this royal will of God is not capricious or unjust: "Friend, I do thee no wrong."

3. The truth is exhibited that the will of God is good, whereas man is evil in nature: "is thine eye evil, because I am good?" The double fact is shown that, "Thou *art* good, and *doest* good" (Ps. 119: 68). This Paul learned, and states it by the description that the will of God is "good and well-pleasing and perfect" (Rom. 12: 2).

4. Finally, and principally, the parable rebukes the spirit of bargaining in our dealings with God and encourages us to leave wholly to Him His dealings with us.

Peter had said: "*we* have left all"; *we* have done what you asked the rich ruler to do: "What then shall *we* have?" In answer the faithful Steward first promises the Twelve the overwhelmingly rich recompense of being rulers sitting on thrones in His kingdom. Nor can His promise have any meaning other than its literal sense and terms. If it does not mean precisely what it says, it can mean nothing. But thereupon He adds the caution that at last they will be best treated who leave the matter entirely to the goodwill of the generous Owner of the vineyard. To the bargainers, the householder said: "Didst thou not agree with me for a shilling a day?" (vers. 2, 13, 14). To the next batch hired he merely promised to give them "whatsoever is right" (ver. 4), and they trusted him and went to work. To the last he made *no* promise, so their confidence was the greater. And each and all received "according to his faith," his trust in the Owner.

"So the last shall be first, and the first last."

Leave to His sovereign will
To choose and to command:
With wonder filled thou then shalt own
How wise, how strong His hand.

"Lord, increase our faith."

CHAPTER XXXII

THE NOBLEMAN AND THE POUNDS

Luke 19: 11–28

A homeless Stranger amongst us came
  To this land of death and mourning;
He walked in a path of sorrow and shame,
  Through insult and hate and scorning:
A Man of sorrows, of toil and tears,
  An outcast Man and a lonely;
But He looked on me, and through endless years
  Him must I love, Him only. (*G. Tersteegen.*)

THE poet's "homeless Stranger" has now reached the last stage of His lonely path. This heavenly Pilgrim has pursued unfalteringly the road appointed by His God. Since that day when He steadfastly set His face to go to Jerusalem (Luke 9: 51), He has twice been there and twice withdrawn: now He will go thither for the last time. His instructed mind is concentrated upon that of which all the prophets had spoken of Him, even the sufferings which must come to Him as Messiah, and the glories that should follow.

I

The estrangement and rejection long developing was about to intensify into murderous fury, and He sought again to prepare for this explosion of malice the small band of disciples still following Him. They had an affectionately mournful readiness to die with Him (John 11: 16), yet did not really grasp that the coming hour was to see not merely another spasm of local religious resentment, such as they had before witnessed, but nothing less than the complete accomplishment of all that dread programme of which all the prophets had spoken.

Hence, as they drew nigh to Jericho and the last stretch of the journey to Jerusalem, and as they saw the surging crowd, and miracles stirring them to enthusiasm, these disciples rose above their melancholy and "supposed that the kingdom of God was immediately to appear" (ver. 11).

This unwarranted hope it was necessary to dispel, if possible, which brought this present parable. The instruction which ought to have dispelled in their minds that mistaken notion ought

equally to have forbidden the later equally mistaken idea that the absent Lord might return "at any moment." When after Pentecost the apostles went forth enlightened by the Spirit of truth they were fully persuaded to the contrary, as is shown in Preliminary Dissertation II of my treatise on the *Revelation*, "Did the Apostles expect the Return of Christ in their Time?" For they recognized, among other considerations, that a considerable time was required for the "nobleman to go into a far country, to receive for Himself a kingdom, and to return" (12).

There were three stages in the absence:

(1) The outward journey to a distant land, itself under then conditions of travel, requiring a great and indefinite time.

(2) The commonly protracted negotiations regarding so weighty a matter as the appointment of a king by the Emperor.

(3) The equally long and uncertain return journey. To the unavoidable inference that the nobleman's absence would be lengthy the apostles had also the Lord's explicit statement, of but a few days later, that it would be only "after a long time" that the lord of the servants could return (Matt. 25: 19).

When Christ was but an infant in Egypt Herod the Great died. Directly thereafter two of his sons set off to Rome each seeking to induce the Emperor to give to him their father's throne. The Jews wished to have no more Herods over them—one such monster had been more than enough; and they sent to the Emperor an ambassage begging that a Roman Governor might be appointed.

At length the Emperor divided the former dominions and Archelaus received Judea (Matt. 2: 22). Upon his return he took fearful vengeance upon those who had supported the appeal against him.

II

This historical background is suggestive.

1. It shows once more that in a parable it is the essential comparison that matters, not exact correspondence in details. Here a shockingly bad man represents the Divinely perfect Man, but only in the one particular that he went to secure a kingdom.

2. History repeats itself because the human factor does not change. The hatred of Christ by the Jews caused them to hound Him to death, and the subsequent murder of His witness, Stephen, was the plainest of declarations that they were determined not to bow to Stephen's Master and Lord. Here again it is the one point of comparison that alone counts, even the objection to the king. Actually the citizens rejected a wicked ruler, the

Jews the Righteous One, but that contrast does not enter the parable.

3. What a world of suggestion, as to one aspect of the present business of Christ in heaven, lies in the hint that He has gone to secure His kingdom. Psalm 2: 8 shows Him making to His God formal application for the sovereignty of the earth: "Ask of Me and I will give Thee the nations for Thine inheritance." Thus did Archelaus apply to the Emperor. Ps. 110: 1 is the answer of God to Messiah, deferring the matter till a suitable and foreseen situation shall arise: "Sit Thou at My right hand, Until I make Thine enemies Thy footstool." Dan. 7: 13, 14 with Rev. 5: 1–9 picture the future formal investiture of the Son by the Father with the afore-mentioned dignity, which precipitates the overthrow of Satan's princedom over the world, the destruction of the enemies of God, and the establishment of the kingdom of God on earth.

III

The Lord went on to explain to His own servants the precise and highest aspect of their life during the whole period of His coming absence. The personal slaves of the nobleman were entrusted with his personal property to be used in his interests while he should be away. Each of these men would have some private concerns, such as family and friends. To these affairs he would be expected to attend worthily of his noble master's honour; yet such matters were so comparatively insignificant as not to be mentioned; all interest was concentrated upon the responsible and honourable duty of representing the absent nobleman, of safeguarding his rights, of increasing his revenue.

The lesson for disciples is obvious and searching. Each of us also has personal affairs, God-appointed, in which we are to behave worthily of our high calling as servants of God. But our supreme duty and honour is that we are sent into the world, as Christ was sent (John 17: 18). He was sent as the representative of His Father; to glorify God in the private life at Nazareth; to exhibit before men the character of Him Whom He represented; to stand for God's rights among His foes; to add to the revenue of worship and service that God ought to receive on earth.

And we in turn are sent thus to represent Christ and to secure His rights and interests. "William Reynolds' *business* is to serve the Lord Jesus Christ, and he packs pork to pay expenses." "Father" Vassar of Boston accosted a lady in the street and spoke to her about her soul. At dinner that evening she told her husband, who said, "If I had been there I should have told

him to mind his own business." "But if you had been there," she replied, "you would have thought that that was what he was doing!"

W. P. Lockhart of Liverpool similarly accosted a gentleman upon the sea front at Rhyl, offered a booklet and inquired if his soul was saved. The tart reply was: "My soul's salvation is my own business." The merchant-preacher replied: "Yes, sir, that is true; but permit me to remind you that it is the most important business to which you can attend." The person accosted was the leading agnostic of that time, the very inventor of the term.

"For me *to live* is Christ," said His most faithful ambassador Paul (Phil. 1: 21), and he enforced the vital message of our parable in the words that "Christ died for all, to the end that they who live should no longer live unto themselves, but *unto Him*, Who for their sakes died and rose again" (II Cor. 5: 15). It was thus that the nobleman's servants were to live *unto him* in his prolonged absence.

IV

What do the "pounds" represent? Essentially the same as the "talents" of the later parable in Matt. 25. Most certainly these do not point to our native gifts of mind and body, or to property, for in ver. 15 these are expressly distinguished from the talents by the statement that the master gave the latter "to each according to his particular (Darby) ability." The ability to use the talent is not the talent.

The features to be noted are:

1. The nobleman or lord was the Owner of the money.
2. He held and used it himself until he went from home.
3. It was only then that he entrusted it to his servants.
4. Even then it remained his property, not theirs. They were but stewards in his interests.
5. The pound retained its intrinsic value even though wrapped in a napkin and unused: "lo, thou hast thine own" (ver. 25).
6. But if put in circulation it increased in the hands of the user.
7. When the master returns the successful user is not deprived of it; but
8. It can be taken from one servant and be added to the store of another.

The clue to this is given in the phrase of Jude "the faith once for all delivered to the saints" (Jude 3). "The faith" is a certain body of truth which the saints believe. That it was "delivered

to them" shows that someone held it before them and handed it to them as a deposit on trust. The form of the verb points to one definite transaction. That this deposit was made "once for all" indicates that nothing new can be added thereto: "the faith" was complete when handed to the saints. When Jude wrote, "the saints" had become a well-recognized title of Christian believers (Acts 9: 13; Rom. 8: 27; I Cor. 6: 1; Eph. 2: 19; etc.).

Yet this deposit of truth having been thus entrusted to Christians will not point to truths already known in Old Testament times, for such truths were already a general possession. "The faith" in question will rather be that particular line of teaching which the Son of God set before men, in expansion of or addition to that which the godly found in the Old Testament. Such truths may be seen in the emphasis upon the relation of God to believers as Father to child, with the confidence and sense of security thus created; in the opening up of the purpose concerning the new society, the church; and in the stress put upon the prospect of a portion in the heavens, rather than now on earth, this being enlargement of the promise to Abraham of the heavenly inheritance. The details and amplification of these parts of His teaching the Lord gave through the apostles whom His Spirit instructed. By the Spirit the Lord continued to do and to teach what He had begun to do and to teach when here (Acts 1: 1).

This deposit of truth answers to all the eight features above outlined.

(1) (2) It was held, introduced, and used by Christ while He was here, the disciples learning it from Him.

(3) It was upon or consequent upon His return to the Father that it was entrusted to the care and use of His servants.

(4) Yet truth remains still His property, His servants being but "stewards of the mysteries of God" (I Cor. 4: 1).

(5) Truth remains truth, of its full intrinsic value, even if a servant hide and neglect it. It is incorruptible (I Pet. 1: 23).

(6) But so long as a believer "trades" with truth, by passing it on to others to enjoy and use, he finds a perpetual increase in his own knowledge and so in his capacity to trade.

(7) When Christ returns the faithful steward will not be deprived of that measure of truth he had acquired, rather will more be added to him who had the fidelity to use all he had before.

(8) On the other hand, neglect of knowledge, by not imparting it, presently brings forgetfulness and loss. This is so even now, and in due time the process will be judicially enforced, and further opportunity of service be forfeited. Age may become infancy. Those addressed in *Hebrews* were experiencing this: "When by

reason of the time [since your conversion] ye ought to be teachers, ye have need again that some one teach you the rudiments of the first principles of the oracles of God" (Heb. 5: 12). They had forgotten their A.B.C.

When an employer finds that a man is idle and neglectful he will take from him the materials he will not use and hand them to a man competent and diligent.

Therefore when the Lord inquires into our conduct in this age the chief matter will be the use or non-use of what knowledge of His truth we were granted. Other affairs will be looked into, but this will be the main point. Have I been a faithful steward of truth, imparting it to others, or have I closed my mouth and not been a witness to the truth? Did I perchance screen myself behind the half truth that actions speak louder than words? The fact is that actions enforce words, but not words that are not spoken.

The Son of God could say that the very object for which He was born, and for which He came into the world, was that He "should bear witness to the truth" (John 18: 37). Let each disciple be diligent to this end, able to avow with His Lord

> I delight to do Thy will, O My God;
> Yea, Thy law is within My heart.
> I have published righteousness in the great congregation;
> Lo, I will not refrain My lips, O Lord, Thou knowest.
> I have not hid Thy righteousness within My heart;
> I have declared Thy faithfulness and Thy salvation:
> I have not concealed Thy lovingkindness and Thy truth from the great congregation (Ps. 40: 8–10).

Then will he be able to present with confidence the added petition

> (ver. 11) Withhold not Thou Thy tender mercies from Me, O Lord: Let Thy lovingkindness and Thy truth continually preserve Me.

V

The King's Return

1. *The nobleman "received the kingdom," i.e.* was appointed king, given the right to rule. The sense is clear, and equally clear in Dan. 7: 18, 22, 27, "the saints . . . shall receive the kingdom, and possess the kingdom," and in Heb. 12: 28, "receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken." In one sense Archelaus inherited the kingdom from his father; in another sense he received it from

the Emperor, the over-lord. When Christians are warned that, if they walk in an evil way, they "shall not inherit the kingdom of God" the meaning is equally clear that they shall forfeit sovereignty in the kingdom.

This solemn warning is stated three times in plain words (I Cor. 6: 7–11; Gal. 5: 21; Eph. 5: 5). The first of these passages is addressed to persons who had been blessedly saved from gross sins and been justified and sanctified. The second passage shows that this special warning was a standing feature of Paul's ministry: "of the which I forewarn you, even as I did forewarn you," *i.e.* while he had been among them. The Ephesian passage is addressed to such as had been "sons of disobedience" but had been saved by grace through faith (2: 1–10). Had they remained sons of disobedience the wrath of God must have been their portion for gross wickedness; but being among the saved this cannot be, yet should they resume that evil life they will be disinherited. This agrees with the warning Christ gave from heaven that it is the conquerors in His battles, not the defeated, who will be crowned, enthroned, and bear the sceptre of authority (Rev. 2: 10; 3: 21; 2: 26, 27).

2. *The nobleman returned in person.* He did not come back in some vague "spiritual" sense, or at the death of one or another of his household; he returned in person, actually and literally, to the same place that he had left. Thus will Christ return. "I go . . . I come again" (John 14: 2, 3). "This Jesus shall so come in like manner as ye beheld Him going" (Acts 1: 11).

3. *He called his servants to account.* Upon his return he dealt with his own servants in regard to their use of the trust money. The exact question was what each had *gained* by trading. He looked for *increase*, not simply that the capital was intact. The apostles were deeply concerned for *growth* in knowledge in their converts, for their *increase* in spiritual life (II Thess. 1: 3; Heb. 6: 1; I Pet. 2: 1–3; II Pet. 3: 18; Gal. 4: 19).

4. *The reward of faithfulness* was authority in the kingdom: "have thou authority." One who could rule himself could rule others. He who could control money could control other affairs. The present is our preparation for the future. The future service will be inconceivably greater than the present: "have thou authority over ten cities," not merely ten pounds. The Oriental would rightly gauge the force of this. Early in this century a certain Pasha in Egypt was inconveniently poor. He secured the appointment of Mayor in a large city, and was presently very rich, as well as important and powerful.

But sweeter to the devoted servant was the praise of his lord: "Well done thou good slave . . . thou was faithful in a very

little." Our Lord appreciates the little things done for Him. Yet, from another point of view our present service is great and noble. It is much to stand for the rights of the absent king; to care for His interests; to safeguard His truth, to spread it among men, to win them from disloyalty and death unto salvation. What then shall future service be if all this is but "little"?

This magnificent reward shall be strictly proportionate to present faithfulness and success in trading with the truth. Ten pounds gained secured ten cities to rule; five pounds five cities. Eternal life is a free gift; reward is for works of faith and is proportionate to them.

5. *Unfaithfulness punished.* The unfaithful servant stood in precisely the same relationship to the master as the faithful; he was one of the nobleman's household slaves. He was neither a foe crept into the household privily, nor merely a hired servant, but one of the nobleman's own people. It is wholly unwarranted to regard him as type of a false professor or one deceived as to relationship with Christ.

He himself acknowledged his position as a slave, the property of his master: he styled him "Lord"! The trouble with him is that he misjudged his master and thought him severe and exacting. This should have incited him to the more diligence in service, but it did not. Has no genuine child of God ever thought Him hard when a dear one was taken away, or health or means were reduced? Do not true Christians sometimes think the Father's discipline severe?

Moreover, this man did not reject or squander his lord's money; he duly guarded it: but he did not secure any *increase*, for he did not use it. He does not represent one who comes to repudiate the faith of the gospel and renounce profession of Christ; nor of one who misuses a knowledge of the letter of the Word to bolster false teaching and mislead men. His wickedness lay not in misuse but disuse of the truth. He held it, he valued it, he hid it for safety, he preserved it intact; he would possibly have fought for it, like the many Christians who fight for their interpretation of Scripture: but he *did not trade with it*, he did not entrust it to others ("the bank") from whom some return would have been secured. And there being no increase he was deprived of his trust and lost all opportunity of advance in his master's service.

This conduct the lord characterized as "wicked" (*poneros*, essentially wicked, wicked in nature), and such it certainly is. Neglect in trusteeship can be criminal in law, though the delinquent may be satisfactory in morals and in home life. Nothing is said against this man in character or life: he was simply un-

faithful to the trust reposed in him as to the pound. It is not enough that a disciple shall be moral, amiable, upright in business, kind at home: all this is good, but at the judgment seat of Christ the vital question will be, Was he faithful in trading with the truth he knew by passing it on to others?

6. *The Enemies*. The contrast between the fearful and negligent servant and the positive enemies is distinct. He acknowledged his lord: they would not that he should reign over them. He lost promotion and reward; they were executed as rebels and lost their lives. This fixes beyond question the status of the servant. The fulfilment of the judgment on the enemies of Christ is shown in the many and copious scriptures that declare the destruction of the rebellious at the return of the Lord Jesus as Judge and King.

It is to be remarked that this parable is no revelation of the manner in which the servants or the enemies of Christ who *die before His return* will be dealt with by Him. The principles of justice will be the same for all, but details as to the judgment of the dead, whether servants or enemies, must be sought elsewhere than in parables or other passages which deal with the Lord's return to the earth. The urgent matter is that the supreme test will be the same for all believers, dead or living, even fidelity in trading with truth known. This is as much a question of private activity as of public service in the gospel. Each has *some* knowledge of God and is responsible to spread it.

CHAPTER XXXIII

THE FRUITLESS FIG TREE

Matt. 21: 18–22; Mark 11: 12–14, 20–25

FOR the last time the heavenly Pilgrim has climbed the long and toilsome ascent from Jericho to Jerusalem. Of old the royal poet could write of the gladness of going unto the house of Jehovah, the gathering centre of the godly (Ps. 122). On the present occasion far other were the feelings of Zion's King: "when He drew nigh He saw the city and wept over it" (Luke 19: 41).

The year of respite of the barren fig tree, for which the patient Vine-dresser had pleaded (Luke 13: 6–9), was now at its end and still Israel as a people were not yielding fruit unto God. Now must it be cut down under the judgment of God, of which imminent tragedy the blasting of the barren wayside fig tree was an acted parable. If an owner gets nothing from a fruit tree there is no reason for its existence, whether it be a nation or a person.

That the fig tree represents Israel corporately, the nation, is further suggested by contrast with Jer. 24, where individuals are spoken of as figs. The tree will thus be the race that bears the individuals.

A little later (Matt. 24: 32–34; Mark 13: 28–30; Luke 21: 29–33) the Lord will distinguish the fig tree from other trees, though they all alike, by becoming tender and putting forth leaves, will indicate that the summer is nigh, that is, that the end of this age is at hand. This particularizing of the fig tree lends some small support to the application of the fig tree to Israel; though strictly this last parable pictures events rather than nations: "when ye shall see all *these things* coming to pass, etc." "These things" affect all nations, not only Israel, and it will be the conjunction of all the signs mentioned that must be seen in order to discern that the end has drawn near.

Preparatory movements in Israel do not by themselves declare the approach of the End. Nor are isolated wars, famines, or earthquakes sufficient basis for the deduction. The whole picture must develop consentaneously, for all the events predicted must be completed in one generation. The words "this generation shall not pass away till all these things be accomplished" are to be taken to mean "This generation *of* which I am speaking" not "*in* which I am speaking."

This is not the place to examine the vast and lurid canvas which pictures the approach and development of the End of this age, but only to learn the lesson from the fig tree. Great attention has been concentrated on the prophetic and dispensational aspect, yet the Lord threw heavier emphasis upon the lesson of faith and prayer.

In this He was repeating the warning and call of the parable of the importunate widow (Luke 18: 1–8). That parable also was set forward into the days before He would return and pressed the indispensable part that prayer must take in the safeguarding of the spiritual state of the disciple at that time. For very, very little faith in Him will survive the dread tests of that period.

Thus here also He forewarned that "because iniquity shall be multiplied the love of the many shall wax cold," and that it is only the one that shall endure right through that tribulation to its very end that shall be saved from further danger by the descent of the Son of Man (Matt. 24: 12, 13). Therefore His application of the speedy withering of the fig tree was, that such faith in God as Himself had showed by so dealing with the tree can effect much more than this, for it can remove whatever mountainous obstacles may confront believers in even that darkest period the world shall ever know.

Therefore the Lord added (Mark 11: 24) the stupendous assurance: "Because of this I say unto you, All things whatsoever ye pray and ask for, believe that ye receive them: and they shall come to pass to you." In what sense can things be received before they are received? By faith being assured that God has ordered that the matter in question shall be done, and therefore that it is as good as done. But how can such assurance of the decree of God be gained? By various processes, but more particularly if God has promised in His Word to do a certain thing. Moreover, one who walks habitually with God can receive secret intuitions of what the Lord purposes to do. This requires indeed very much care and spiritual perception, for it is easy to mistake one's own powerful desire for a Divine intuition. And again, circumstances may be so ordered of God as to make plain to the spiritual mind the course He is taking and His intended end.

Thus the Spirit can give to the utterly lowly heart a perception of the will of God; upon this faith rests; by this prayer is directed and inspired; in the light of it faith takes any steps required; and so the mountain removes, the path clears, the goal is gained.

To teach so supreme a lesson made it well worth while that a fig tree be withered. But the heart must be actually in a moral state which shall offer not the smallest resistance to the influence of the Spirit of God, or such inward perception and assurance

will be impossible. Therefore Christ added yet again the searching test and condition: "Whensoever ye stand praying, forgive, if ye have ought against any one; in order that your Father also Who is in heaven may forgive you your trespasses."

God cannot forgive sin so long as the disciple persists in it. This prevents inward intimacy with God. An unforgiving spirit is so utterly opposed to His spirit of grace as to render it out of the question that He shall grant fellowship to the hard of heart. But He does most gladly hearken to the prayer of the upright, and reveal to him His purpose. Thus is faith first kindled and later rewarded.

CHAPTER XXXIV

THE TWO SONS AND THE WICKED HUSBANDMEN

Matt. 21: 23–46; Mark 11: 27–12: 12; Luke 20: 1–19

THE king of Israel has now fulfilled the scripture which pictured His triumphal entry into His capital. The shouting has ceased, the crowds have melted, and the Captain of Jehovah's hosts, in mufti, has reached the fortified stronghold of His foes, the temple of God, where the Scribes, the Pharisees, the Sadducees sit entrenched as claiming the authority of Moses.

They have sanctioned the turning of that Holy Place into a market-place: *He*, with righteous indignation and irresistible energy, drives out the legalized thieves and purges the den of robbers, that it may be the house of prayer that it was consecrated to be. He reconsecrated it by healing the blind and the lame. God's house, viewed spiritually, is to be the place where blind sinners may see God and worship, and crippled rebels may learn to walk in His ways.

Thus the Lord deliberately attacked the rulers by terminating the abuse which they had tolerated. The battle is now joined, and the chief priests at once retaliate by challenging His right to accept the acclamation of the people given by quotations from Scripture which apply to the Messiah. He replies that it is the fulfilment of another scripture, and that if these were silenced the stones would echo the praise.

They therefore challenge His right to be acting against their authority, and demand to know who gave Him authority so to act. What human authority could be necessary for one to heal the sick? One of their own class had long since admitted that they all knew that Jesus had come from God or He could not do the works He was doing (John 3: 2). Christ retorts by challenging their authority to challenge His authority. If they are truly competent to guide and rule the people, they will be competent to determine so essential a matter as the origin of John the Baptist and his message. If they cannot reach a sound conclusion on so public and urgent a matter, then they cannot be the God-empowered successors of Moses and the prophets, or of the God-instructed priests of His house, for these had a special duty to teach the people the mind of God and were specially qualified to do this (Deut. 17: 8–13; Mal. 2: 5–9). Baffled, His enemies expose their lack of Divinely given authority to challenge

Him, and He properly declines to answer their question, and at once presses the battle against them by the parable of

The Two Sons

Both received from their father his direction to work in the vineyard. The one point-blank declined to obey, but shortly repented his refusal and obeyed. The other deferentially promised obedience, but actually did not obey. The chief priests could not but admit that it was the former who did the will of the father, and they were met by the scathing application that they, the polite and punctilious professors of religion, were the real disobeyers of the will of God, whereas the moral riff-raff of society, the openly profane, had repented of their sins at the preaching of John and set out to walk by the law of God. These cultured and official leaders of religion had seen the marked change in life that was displayed by those who had submitted to John's baptism, yet they did not alter their attitude to John and his call. They had thus showed themselves to be what John had said, a "generation of vipers."

This heavy blow God's Champion followed up by a still heavier, even the parable of

The Wicked Husbandmen.

This picture the Lord drew from Isaiah's song (ch. 5):

> Let me sing for my wellbeloved a song of my beloved touching his vineyard. My beloved had a vineyard in a very fruitful hill: and he made a trench about it, and gathered out the stones thereof, and planted it with the choicest vine, and built a tower in the midst of it, and also hewed out a winepress therein: and he looked that it should bring forth grapes, and it brought forth wild grapes (vers. 1, 2).

Christ used parallel language:

> And He began to speak unto them in parables. A man planted a vineyard, and set a hedge about it, and digged a pit for the winepress, and built a tower, and let it out to husbandmen, and went into another country (Mark 12: 1).

The meaning was clearly given in the prophet's words from the mouth of God: "What could have been done more to My vineyard, that I have not done in it?" Nor could the application be missed, for the prophet had made it: "The vineyard of

Jehovah of hosts is the house of Israel"; and the fruit He desired was justice, but the rulers oppressed the people; He expected righteous government, but heard only the cry of the oppressed (Isa. 5: 4 and 7).

The Lord now enlarges and applies the parable. Jehovah had committed the care of His people to responsible leaders, judges and priests (Ex. 18; Deut. 33: 10; Judges). Often and sternly had He reproached these for unfaithfulness (Isa. 56: 11; Jer. 50: 6; Ezek. 34; Zech. 11: 15–17). The then present leaders were like those of old: diligent indeed in Jehovah's vineyard, but to serve their own interests, not to bring profit to the Owner. Over the long centuries God had sent His servants the prophets to reprove their selfishness and oppression of His people, but it had been in vain: and it would still be in vain, for, as Christ would shortly declare, He would send unto them prophets, wise men, and scribes, of whom they would kill and crucify some, and others they would scourge and persecute (Matt. 23: 29–36).

Now at last, as a final attempt to recall them to reason and righteousness, the Owner had sent His Son, but Him they killed so as to retain undisturbed possession of their place and power over the people. They envied Jesus His popularity, which was undermining their position. Even the heathen Pilate could discern this (Matt. 27: 18). Thus out of the basest of emotions there grew the most desperate madness and the extreme of criminal violence: "they took Him, and cast Him forth out of the vineyard, and killed Him" (Matt. 21: 38, 39).

The parable lets a lurid light fall upon those leaders of Christ's day. They *knew* He was what He claimed to be, the Son of God: "those husbandmen said among themselves, This is the heir." In public they denied it; among themselves they admitted it. Sin is a moral poison that induces the most fatal insanity. Those greed-mastered husbandmen did not stop to consider what the lord of the vineyard would certainly do. Nor did the chief priests and elders ponder what the Holy One of Israel, by reason of His own nature, must certainly do if they committed the judicial murder of so great a Prophet.

Challenged as to this they admitted that the Lord of the vineyard would do two things: "He will miserably destroy those miserable men, and will let out the vineyard to other husbandmen, who shall render him the fruits in their season" (Matt. 21: 41). But application of this to themselves they would not make, and when Christ made it, by applying to them Ps. 118: 22, 23, they recognized that He meant that they would be broken to pieces, and scattered as dust with an irretrievable ruin; but only resentment was provoked, and they would have seized Him at

once and fulfilled the parable on the spot by killing Him then and there.

The inward exercise of the heart of God is deeply moving and instructive. He Who by absolute foreknowledge knows fully what He will do, is represented by His own Son as soliloquizing over the situation: "the Lord of the vineyard said, What shall I do?" (Luke 20: 13). There is in God a simplicity, a naturalness which must be kept in mind when we try to form a conception of Him. It is one of the features that is revealed, and it is to be pondered together with the inscrutable, unfathomable elements of the Divine Being.

Mark's report settles definitely that Jesus was Son to the Father before He came to the earth. It makes this clear by the Lord's words: "He *had* yet one, a beloved Son." He did not become the Son of the Owner by being sent: rather was He sent because He was the Son. To deny this is as unreasonable as it would be to deny that the servants were servants before they were sent.

The second part of their forecast as to what the Owner would do Christ accepted and applied by the warning, "The kingdom of God shall be taken away from you, and shall be given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof."

Strange notions have been tacked on to these words, by suggesting that the Anglo-Saxon peoples, the Teutonic races, were pointed to as the "nation" in view. The reason offered is that these peoples have been more largely blessed by the gospel than any others, so that they have held a larger proportion of converted persons, and that from them the message of the kingdom has gone forth as from no others.

This is an instance of misreading features of one's own times, a very easy mistake.

Some again regard these Teutonic races as being the present descendants of the ten tribes of Israel; the British peoples being the chief of these, Ephraim, and their fellow-Teutons in the United States of America being Manasseh. They regard the folk known as Jews as being descended from Judah and Benjamin, who they allege were the people dwelling in Palestine in the time of Christ.

Even could this be supported historically, as regards our Lord's prophecy now before us, it would only mean that the kingdom of God had been taken from Judah and given to Israel, which is clearly not what He said.

The whole conception must be challenged.

1. The Teutonic races are not one nation, but many nations. But the Lord spoke of "a nation."

2. When was the kingdom of God taken from those to whom Christ spoke and given to this other nation? Was this transfer postponed for the fourteen centuries till the Reformation made the Teutonic peoples Protestant? The transfer to these could not have been made earlier.

3. Are the Teutonic races, as nations, so tilling the vineyard that the fruits of righteousness are brought forth unto the glory and praise of God? Alas, the dreadful facts are quite the reverse. Has Germany brought forth these fruits in this present century? Two awful world wars deny it. Has America? Let 300,000 divorces annually answer. Let 11,000 murders a year reply. Is England doing so, or her associated countries? There is far too much justification for the caustic gibe of Mark Twain that, "No doubt the meek shall inherit the earth: look at the British people!" In the Teutonic countries moral decay advances rapidly.

The words of our Lord must be considered strictly. He always spoke with Divine precision.

4. "The kingdom of God" is the parallel to "the vineyard" of the parable. The vineyard was the people of Israel viewed as the sphere on earth where the authority of God was acknowledged. This realm was committed to those elders, judges, kings, and priests who ruled it by the authority of God, and whose duty it was to see that righteousness prevailed and God thus receive fruit. It was to these rulers that the Lord was speaking, and it was from *them*, not from the people of God at large, that this authority would be taken and transferred to others.

It is not a question of spreading the good news of God's grace to sinners, but of exercising faithful supervision over God's affairs and rights on earth. The kingdom is wider than the church. What then is the "nation" to whom this supervising authority over God's interests is entrusted? Scripture speaks of only one such body of persons. Peter describes them as "a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God's own possession," as ideally Israel was of old (I Pet. 2: 9). Notice —a "royal priesthood," persons in whom are combined the two ruling offices, the king and the priest. John, addressing his fellow-Christians, says of them that Christ has "made us to be a kingdom, priests unto His God and Father" (Rev. 1: 6).

As yet this authority of Christians is exercised only by spiritual efforts; by conflict with the hosts of wicked spirits who harass and hinder God's affairs; by prayers, supplications and intercessions for all men and for human rulers in particular; by precept

and example which instruct and strengthen others in good works; by persuading rebels against God to submit to His lawful authority. Of all this spiritual activity the great King and Priest on the throne of God is the Leader and Inspirer.

And when at the appointed time He takes over the actual political rule of heaven and earth, then will those who have been faithful in the present phase of the kingdom share with Him His administration in glory. Then will it be seen that the kingdom of God as a sphere of authority was taken from those who formerly misruled it and has been given to the saints of the Most High and they shall receive the kingdom, and possess the kingdom for ever, even for ever and ever (Dan. 7: 18, 22, 27). This last cited prophecy our Lord virtually repeated, applying it to the Jewish rulers of His day.

Forfeiture of misused authority is a severe measure but wholly unavoidable. Every supreme authority must remove incompetent or perverse officials. Let every church, as a portion of the heavenly company, ponder the warnings "I will move thy lampstand out of its place" (Rev. 2: 5), "I will spue thee out of my mouth" (Rev. 3: 16). Let every member of that church of the firstborn sons take to heart the reminder that Esau lost his rights of the firstborn (Heb. 12: 23, 16, 17); and let every aspirant for sovereignty in the kingdom of God heed the exhortation of the Sovereign Lord: "hold fast that which thou hast, that no one take thy crown" (Rev. 3: 11). Let every Diotrephes tremble.

O Lord of Grace, so work in our hearts that no one of us; like those rulers of old, resent Thy kindly warning and so assure against himself its fulfilment.

CHAPTER XXXV

THE WEDDING BREAKFAST

Matt. 22: 1–14

THE plot of the indignant Pharisees to destroy Him the Lord met by this further attack and warning. The parable resembles that spoken earlier (Luke 14: 15–24), but has important differences. Both set forth phases of the kingdom of God or heaven, but

(1) that was a *deipnon*, the closing meal of the day, which suggested that the hearers were faced with the last opportunity they would have of sharing in the kingdom. This is a breakfast (*ariston*), the first meal of the day, suggesting the opening of some new era.

(2) That supper was provided by a great man who would favour his friends; this feast is made by a king in honour of the marriage of his own son, the heir apparent. This gives the clue as to the event here pictured. For the "marriage" of God's Son is declared in Rev. 19: 1–9. It is to take place at the opening of the next age, the commencement of the Millennial kingdom, so that the occasion is properly regarded here as a breakfast.

As noted earlier, John the Baptist had designated Christ as a bridegroom (John 3: 29) and the Lord had confirmed this allusion to His future status; but He hinted that before that great day could arrive He would have left this earth, and the consummation of His purpose and desire must wait (Matt. 9: 15). The present parable leads on to that sublime hour but does not complete the picture by any mention of the bride. But when in Rev. 19 the thrilling announcement rings out in heaven, "Hallelujah, for the Lord our God, the Almighty, reigneth," this makes plain at what epoch the marriage is to take place.

Yet in the passage in *Revelation* the occasion is called a marriage supper (*to deipnon tou gamou*), which does not contradict the distinction just noted; for as coming at the close of this age, the crowning privilege of all the benefits that led up to it, it may rightly be termed a supper, whereas viewed as ushering in the new age it is a breakfast. It is a question of aspect and emphasis.

The main point on which the parables unite is that they present those invited as *guests*, and guests at a feast. Now the guests at a supper are not the family of the host, nor are they the bride at

a wedding breakfast: they are guests. That is to say, the persons contemplated in these parables, though regenerate, are not presented in that character, nor as members of the heavenly company, the wife of the Lamb.

Nor is a feast a permanent affair. It is indeed a time of pleasure, and it is truly an honour to be invited to a royal wedding; but it is only a temporary matter. Therefore the message of God as set forth in these parables is not to be expanded to the full width of the offer of eternal salvation in Christ. Eternity is not here brought into view, nor the eternal status of the individuals in question, nor the eternal doom of the rejector of Christ, whatever in fact these may be.

The Lord's hearers on these occasions were expecting a kingdom of glory to be set up on earth as announced by the prophets, and they counted rightly that "blessed is he that shall eat bread in the kingdom of God" (Luke 14: 15). It is to this anticipation that the parables are directed and should be limited. Many scriptures reveal the eternal aspect and prospect of men, but this is not here. The heart attitude of a hearer towards this coming kingdom of God may indeed indicate his heart attitude to God, His Son, and things eternal, but this is not the aspect dealt with in these parables.

The Old Testament had already set in relief the guests in contrast to the king and his spouse. Ahasuerus and Esther were distinct from the princes and servants invited to the marriage feast (Esther 2: 18). The mighty King of Psalm 45, Messiah, had companions and a Queen, and she also had her personal retinue, "the virgins her companions" (vers. 7, 9, 14). So also in Rev. 19. Immediately after the announcement concerning the Bride and the marriage, the angel proclaims "Blessed are they who are bidden to the marriage supper" (ver. 9), and the same feature is seen in the parable of the ten Virgins, as we shall presently observe.

The interpretation of these passages, and others, has been confused and frustrated by the contracted vision which can see in the Word of God only "saved" and "unsaved," "heaven" or "hell," time or eternity, intermediate conditions or stages being unperceived. Thus the precious good news as to eternal salvation has been—it cannot be said drawn out of these parables, but thrust upon them.

The present parable deals with two classes who receive the king's invitation; the former class, who are the first to be invited and who make light of the matter; the latter, who accept the welcome.

We have seen that the last preceding parable, that of the wicked husbandmen, was directed against the leaders of Israel, rather than the whole people. It is not to be overlooked that the Lord is still dealing with these leaders in particular: "And Jesus answered [their hostility] and spake *again* unto *them*" (ver. 1). They received two notices that the kingdom of heaven was open to them: (1) that through Christ and His messengers of His day, the twelve (Matt. 10) and the seventy (Luke 10). His and their call was the same: "the kingdom of heaven (or of God) has drawn nigh unto you"; and (2) the renewed call from Pentecost and onward. The leaders led the way in spurning both appeals, and after the second some of them maltreated and killed the King's messengers, as they had treated His Son. This aggravated hostility provoked the King to destroy those murderers and to burn their city, in A.D. 70.

The reason why the city also was destroyed was that the populace in general took sides with their rulers in rejecting the call and in persecuting the messengers. The number of those who accepted the gospel was comparatively so few that they are not here noticed.

Upon Israel as such having scorned the call of grace the other class comes into view; the royal invitation goes out beyond them into all the world. As many as are found, bad as well as good, are gathered in. Let it be noted that, though all these when called are equally outside of the kingdom, yet even so God distinguishes as to their moral state; some are bad, some good. This made no difference as to their welcome, but justification apart from works ought not to be so preached as to give an impression that God does not mind whether men are moral or immoral (Acts 10: 34, 35).

It is to be observed that the picture as drawn does not take account of the vast majority of the countryside who could not have been reached by the servants with the invitation to the feast, and for whom it is not to be supposed there would have been space at the one feast. The unevangelized myriads are not here contemplated. That they miss the feast does not imply that they are treated like the rejectors and murderers.

When the Lord talked with Nicodemus (John 3) He spoke of the kingdom of God in its widest aspect and with eternity in view, for it was a life that is eternal which He offered through His coming death. In this parable the kingdom is presented under a limited aspect, that of an invitation to a special and privileged occasion of a temporary nature.

This same distinction can be seen in the teaching of the apostles.

John repeats the Lord's assurances to all men that eternal life, with freedom from eternal judgment, is guaranteed to every believer (John 3: 35, 36; 5: 24; 10: 27, 29). He also recalls the Lord's pointed warning that the privilege of enjoying personal fellowship with Himself depends upon holiness of walk (John 13: 8). The one is a general benefit, the other a special privilege.

Paul declares to all men the present justification from all sins through faith (Acts 13: 38, 39). But to such as had accepted this message, he speaks of the kingdom of God and that the path into it involves many tribulations (Acts 14: 22). He states positively that we are justified on the principle of grace, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, and freely (without conditions attached, *dorean*, Rom. 3: 24); he is equally definite that sharing the glory of Christ is conditional upon sharing His sufferings (Rom. 8: 17; II Tim. 2: 11–13; etc.).

Peter is clear that our redemption has been effected by the blood of Christ (I Pet. 1: 18, 19). He writes to those who have thus obtained a precious faith in the righteousness of God (II Pet. 1: 1). Such have also been called unto God's eternal glory, which obviously is a special privilege and far higher than being accounted righteous before His law (I Pet. 5: 10). But this calling and choice of God to share His glory the justified man must "make sure" by all diligence. As justified by faith he is in God's kingdom in its widest sense, but only by the "more diligence" will he gain a *rich* entrance into the kingdom in its eternal development.

Thus the message of God as proclaimed by Christ and the apostles contained a general offer to all men of life eternal, but included a call to special privilege. We take it that the marriage feast of the parable belongs to the special class of benefits, and is another instance of the feature that germinal sayings by Christ are the basis of apostolic teaching.

That this dual character of the message has been generally overlooked has impoverished preaching and weakened its appeal and warning. It has caused serious misapplication and misuse of our Lord's parables, with embarrassment to the theologian and perplexity to the general student and hearer.

It is not until the wedding is filled with guests that the King enters to see them. This carries on the foreview to the end of this age, when the marriage of the Lamb shall have come. The King is God the Father, for He it is Who arranges the feast for His Son.

As a guest can be cast out of the feast the scene is not laid in the realm of resurrection glory, for all who will share in the

resurrection, the first, at this time, are to reign with Christ, and none of these can be cast out of the King's house and presence (Rev. 20: 4, 6). It would therefore seem that the marriage feast as here pictured is on earth and the guests are alive when the King comes in.[1] As before remarked, this is a feature of all our Lord's parables. Those who heard the message, both accepters and rejectors, and had died, will be dealt with appropriately and on the same principles, but they are not introduced into the parable.

Have theologians pondered what is implied in this statement of God's Son that His Father will come in to see the guests? How can it have any sort of fulfilment if the Father is necessarily and eternally invisible, as theologians commonly affirm? The alternative will be that this feature of the parable, and the case of the man not suitably attired, have no meaning.[2]

Outer Darkness. Few expressions have been treated with more laxity and liberty than this, though, seeing its solemnity, it should have received very exact study.

It cannot point to the world of the dead, Hades, for there Dives and Abraham could see one another. Nor can a lake burning with fire be a place of darkness, and moreover that most dreadful of all regions is visible to the eye, for its torment is "in the presence of" [under the eye of, *enōpion*] holy angels and the Lamb (Rev. 14: 10; 19: 20; 20: 10).

With its too common inexactness the A.V. gives simply "outer darkness," ignoring the two definite articles of the Greek. The R.V. gives "the outer darkness." English does not readily allow "the darkness the outer" of the original language, which is a pity, because the repetition of the article throws emphasis upon the second noun: it is not just any darkness but darkness outside some region of light.

Only our Lord used the term; and only Matthew records it (Matt. 8: 12; 22: 13; 25: 30). Christ repeated the statement of Matthew 8: 12, as reported by Luke (13: 24–30), when "outer darkness" became simply "without." This somewhat reduces the severity of the thought. Nor is the change without significance. The region is simply outside some other region, contiguous to it.

On each occasion those cast into outer darkness weep and gnash their teeth. The only other place where this sign of grief and rage is mentioned is Matt. 13: 42, 50, when the angel reapers

[1] This and cognate themes I have discussed in *The Revelation of Jesus Christ*, 322–324.

[2] The above theological question is discussed in the author's *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, pp. 30, 33–35, which please see.

cast the wicked into "the furnace of fire." This is not set by the Lord as at the final judgment, the great white throne, but at the "consummation of the age," that is, in connexion with the clearing of the wicked from off this earth when His millennial kingdom is about to be established. But, as remarked above, darkness and flaming fire are incompatibles. Such impotent chagrin and rage can mark both spheres and therefore do not identify them. Moreover such distress is possible in this life, and does not require death to induce it: "I am faint and sore bruised: I have roared by reason of the disquietness of my heart . . . my groaning is not hid from Thee" (Ps. 38: 8, 9).

A too little considered feature of the three references to "outer darkness" is that each pictures a house of feasting. In Matt. 8 and Luke 13 Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob are represented as reclining at table and others from all quarters joining them, while the "sons of the kingdom," those to whom the house and its pleasures more naturally belonged, see this feasting but are driven away from it into outer darkness.

In our present passage it is the same. The King *comes in* to see the guests, that is, into the banqueting hall. It is thence that the man is cast out.

In Matt. 25 the lord of the house has returned thither from his journey, which is to be celebrated as a time of joy, implying a feast; it is to share this joy of their lord that the faithful servants are welcomed, whereas the unfaithful man is cast into outer darkness. In the second instance the man is bound hand and foot.

This element of the one picture really gives the clue to the interpretation, when it is remembered that in the East such a festivity usually took place at night. Staying in a native quarter in Alexandria I was the other side of the road from a large Oriental mansion. One night the whole house was brilliantly lit, a blaze of light from every room, evidently for some special affair. By contrast the street outside and the garden around were in black darkness, and nothing further was required to correspond to the term "the darkness the outer," which term equals the darkness which is without, outside the house.

It were but an event to be expected that an Oriental despot, of royal or lesser rank, if offended with one of the slaves, should order that he be bound and thrown into the garden. There the unfortunate man, with the common Eastern emotionalism, would bewail the dark and the cold, and the danger from hungry dogs and jackals, and would gnash his teeth at being deprived of the pleasures forfeited.

This is the picture; and, whatever may be the reality, it is not

the same as the enemies of the king being slain in public, as in the parable of the pounds (Luke 19: 27), nor as the tares, the very "sons of the Evil One," being cast into the furnace of fire, as in Matt. 13. Such obviously distinct pictures must be viewed as distinct, and distinct meanings be sought. To blur the picture and confound the lessons can be only confusing and misleading, as has commonly been the case in the treatment of this parable.

In relation to things future and unseen, wisdom would lead each to say with the village idiot, when asked if he knew anything, "Some things I know, some things I don't know"—a much wiser state of mind than when a preacher speaks dogmatically on such a theme, as if he knows everything.

Of Hades, the Abyss, the "Lake of fire"—of these *some* definite knowledge is imparted, though much is left unrevealed. Of "the darkness which is outside" much less is revealed; and it is not for us to speculate, least of all to be positive.

It is outside the kingdom of heaven when pictured as the temporary festivity at the return of the lord of the house or as the wedding feast of the son of the house. It is marked by loss of liberty (bound hand and foot), by forfeiture of privilege (the "joy of the lord"), by decrease of knowledge (the pound withdrawn), by deprivation of service and reward ("have thou authority"). It will be healthful that these solemn elements weigh upon our minds and warn and stimulate, though where and how the realities they picture will be experienced may not be known.

In the interests of sound interpretation as well as of moral effect, it is vital to recognize that it is not utter strangers to God that are warned as to this outer darkness. No, it is "sons of the kingdom," those to whom by calling it naturally belonged; it is the "friend" who had accepted the invitation and taken his place; it is the personal slaves of the house, of the lord of the house, who are bidden to value their rich privileges lest they lose them and fall under his displeasure. The apostles regularly describe themselves as slaves.

It was "his own bondservants" to whom the lord of the house entrusted the talents. What relationship this term indicates is not questioned when it is used of the shepherd calling "his own" sheep and going before them (John 10: 3, 4). To avoid this meaning in the former case is to deal deceitfully with Scripture as well as with one's own soul and that of the hearer. The blessed Lord who loved and redeemed them, made it abundantly plain that one of His own servants may render himself obnoxious to this intensely solemn penalty of being bound and cast forth from the grand reality of the marriage supper, of the

joy of the Lord. Nor is the spiritual reality at all unknown now. There are children of God, servants of Christ, who through misconduct have forfeited the once-enjoyed liberty of sons, no more share the joy of their lord, and are in distressing darkness of soul. *Experimentally* they are outside the kingdom of God, which is righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit (Rom. 14: 17).

But the very fact that this is possible to one of "His own" itself proves that the penalty cannot be eternal, for all such have eternal life and can never perish. No one grasping the illustration used would suppose that the unhappy slave would be left in the garden to starve to death, or that the dark night would last for ever. Day would dawn, his bands would be loosed, life would be resumed, *but he would have missed the joyous festival* for ever, for the wedding feast would never be repeated. That is to say, the special pleasures, honours, splendours which are to accompany the return of the Lord from heaven and the setting up of His kingdom at the consummation of this age, are to be a reward for fidelity, for righteous and dutiful conduct in His absence, and without this manner of life they may be forfeited.

Note. The verb used in Matt. 25: 21, 23, *eis-erchomai*, means either *to come* into or *to go* into. It offers here the picture of the lord and the servant being in a court or office where the reckoning takes place, and to the faithful slaves the lord of the mansion says, "Go into the inner banqueting hall," where the welcome home festivities will be held. This in sharp contrast to the command that the unfaithful slave shall be thrust in the opposite direction, outside the house into the darkness.

The Wedding Garment

What then is this indispensable garment? The answer is to be found by inquiring, for *what* is it indispensable? The answer is, for sharing a wedding feast. The common interpretation is that the garment points to that righteousness of God which is imputed by grace to the believer in Christ, by virtue of which he stands acquitted before the bar of God. But this at once, and wholly without warrant, changes the Lord's picture, and instead of a King, a royal palace, and a wedding feast it substitutes a Judge and a criminal court of law. It is as if one looking at Buckingham Palace thought he saw the Old Bailey, and supposed that a man evicted from the Palace was of course to be taken to Newgate to be hanged!

Now if we look at the passage in the Old Testament (Isa. 61:

10) where righteousness is compared to a robe, we see that the connexion is not that of a criminal being accounted righteous but that of a bridegroom and bride decking themselves for the wedding, which is the counterpart of the parable. For here also it is not a question of a person escaping penalty in a court of law, but of being suitably attired for a wedding.

And if we look on to the passage in the New Testament (Rev. 19: 6–9) which deals with the marriage of the Lamb and the wedding feast to celebrate it, we find the following exact and full description of the attire of the Bride for that great day:

> Let us rejoice and be exceeding glad, and let us give the glory unto Him: for the marriage of the Lamb is come, and His wife hath made herself ready.
>
> And it was given unto her that she should array herself in fine linen, bright and pure: for the fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints.

It is here made very plain that the robe of the bride is not the righteousness of *God*, made available for the guilty by that *one* act of righteousness which the *Son of God* rendered on the cross (Rom. 5: 18); no, it is called specifically "the righteous *acts* of the *saints*." The word is plural (*ta dikaiōmata*), and its meaning is fixed by its application to the many deeds of judgment which God will work at the End of this age: "Thy *righteous acts* have been made manifest" (Rev. 15: 4). This practical righteousness, the habitual doing of righteous deeds, is the fine linen with which the bride is clothed for her marriage. She has herself woven the robe.

It is true that no one can so live who has not first had God's righteousness reckoned to him judicially; nor can even such a justified person live righteously save by the power supplied by God through His Holy Spirit. Therefore it is of grace through faith and obedience that the bride can weave her trousseau; but *she must do this*, or it will not be granted to her to array herself in the fine linen, for *the linen will not be there*. All Queen Esther's clothes and ornaments were made out of the king's treasures, but *Esther* had to *put them on*, or she would not have been fit to be presented to Ahasuerus.

It has been commonly supposed that the guests at the wedding of the parable were supplied with a suitable garment out of the monarch's store, such, we are told, being the general custom. But even if this be taken for granted, the fact is not altered that each guest had *himself* to *put on* his white robe. This does not correspond to the imputed righteousness that justifies. The

sinner does not reckon this to himself; it is *God* that reckons it to the sinner's account.

Moreover, once *that* righteousness has been imputed, and the judicial standing of the sinner rectified, this reckoning is irreversible in law, nor can the justified be later ejected from that status. From that hour it becomes possible that the believer shall walk in practical righteousness, doing by the Spirit only right acts. Upon this habitual walk will depend his enjoyment of the privileges now open to him in Christ by faith. And if he does not thus array himself he may be denied that share in the wedding feast to which he has been called in Christ. This is common experience now. The disobedient believer ceases, while disobedient, to enjoy those firstfruits of the great harvest day which the Spirit imparts to the sanctified. If this "earnest" be forfeited how shall the inheritance be gained?

Obviously the principle here involved must apply to guests at least as much as to the bride. Thus the lesson of this parable is not how guilty sinners may escape eternal damnation, but how invited guests may gain or forfeit the kingdom of heaven viewed as a feast at the opening of the Millennial era. It illuminates and enforces our Lord's early instruction to His disciples concerning breaking or keeping even the least of God's commandments, and so teaching others; instruction emphasized by His explicit assurance "For I say unto you, that except your righteousness shall exceed that of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no wise enter into the kingdom of the heavens" (Matt. 5: 19, 20).

Convicted but resolute the Lord's adversaries resort to deceit and sophistry, but are exposed and baffled. The war of words ends and Jesus holds the field: "no one was able to answer Him a word, neither durst any man from that day ask Him any more questions." After most devastating denunciations of the hypocrites who had resisted the truth, and heartfelt lamentation over their now doomed city, the Lord of the temple abandoned it to them and to destruction, never more to enter it until He shall return in heavenly glory and be welcomed where He was rejected.

CHAPTER XXXVI

THE OLIVET PARABLES

Matt. 24 and 25; Mark 13; Luke 21

THE battle of words with His enemies is over; there remains the battle of deeds, in which His endurance will outmatch their malice.

Throughout those intense disputes His spirit had been hidden secretly in God's pavilion, kept from injury from the strife of tongues (Ps. 31: 20). Now He sits in quiet on the slope of Olivet, commanding a view of the whole city. The writer found it deeply moving to the heart to sit on that same Olivet, overlooking the city to-day, spending a brief hour with Jesus, listening with the four disciples as He outlined the still awaiting programme for Jerusalem and the nations.

After the stormy contests with His foes it must have been sweet to the heart of the Son of man to sit in quietness with faithful followers and enlighten their receptive minds. It is still sweet to His unchanged heart to converse to-day with the devoted, and prepare them for those stern days yet to come.

The purpose of these pages does not permit an examination of the discourse further than as the background of the parables that were designed to illuminate it and enforce its lesson. For, as with all prophecy, the object here is not mental but moral; not the mere informing of a curious mind but the equipping of soldiers for battle; nor are others likely to profit.

It must be clearly perceived that the instruction given is the Lord's answer to the question "What shall be sign of Thy parousia and consummation of the age?" It ought to have been much more noticed than is the case that the parousia and consummation are closely connected by the two nouns being governed by but one article and joined by the copulative "and." The question was not concerned with two dissociated events but two associated events. It is contrary to this grammatical feature to regard the parousia as to occur independently of the period known as the consummation of the age and possibly many years before it. The connexion of the two events is further shown by *one* sign denoting the approach of both.

The Lord first ran rapidly over several features that should be but the "beginning of travail" and lead on to the "end" (*telos*), Matt. 24: 3–14. This "end" would be marked by the seventieth

seven of years announced by Daniel, and would include that special tribulation also mentioned by him (Dan. 9: 27; 12: 1). It is only after that period has been surveyed by Christ that He announces His parousia (vers. 15–28) and replies to the question of the disciples as to the sign of that parousia, declaring that it will be "immediately after" the period of tribulation.

Thus the "end" (*telos*) reaches *its* end in the "consummation" (*sunteleia*), which latter term is more restricted than the former and may denote the point where the end of one thing touches the beginning of another thing, and so here the extreme end of this age in connexion with the start of the next age, the Millennial. (So Trench, *Parables*, but see p. 83 above, note 1).

Therefore the question and the answer carry forward the mind to the closing days of the present age. It follows that the consummation is part of this age, which excludes the thought that this age ends with a parousia of Christ some time before even the tribulation and still longer before the consummation.

Some further consequences follow. *First*, the great theme of the discourse being the closing period of this age, this must be the setting of the parables that illuminate the theme. *Second*, that as the closing years of the age are alone the theme, it is unwarranted to regard the prophecy as a forecast of the whole age of the church of God on earth. Yet, *third*, because that closing period is part of this age, the principles, warnings, encouragements which will apply then pre-eminently will have applied in measure throughout the whole age.

To illuminate this subject of the end and the consummation of this age the Lord used six similitudes, only the first of which is called a parable.

1. *The Fig Tree.* "Learn the parable from the fig tree" (vers. 32, 34). This fig tree is not Israel in particular though it includes matters connected with that people. Its parallel is "all these things," or events, before enumerated. These embrace international wars, various famines and earthquakes, with general persecuting of the God-fearing and the Christian (Mark 13: 7–13; Luke 21: 12–19). This last passage shows that this persecution will be universal and will precede the earthquakes. Therefore until this general persecution, no wars, etc., can indicate that the End days have commenced.

Many believers will then stumble, even so fearfully as to betray other believers to persecutors. False prophets and abounding wickedness on earth will induce a satanic atmosphere that will chill the love to Christ and one another of the majority of

Christians. Yet some will hold on faithfully to the end of the age and their testimony to the truth will diffuse the good news among all the nations of the whole inhabited earth. In particular they will spread the message of the coming kingdom of God, which in such days of fearful distress will be truly good tidings, the only message of hope suitable to the times, but of course fiercely resented and resisted by the Prince of this present world system and his minions.

Now it is when "*all* these things" are seen to develop concurrently that it will be certain that "He is near, even at the doors," that is, that the Judge is at the door about to enter the court (Jas. 5: 9). It will not be enough that one or other of these events occur, even if frequently and on a larger scale than formerly. The fig tree does not come into leaf over a long period, one leaf here and another later shooting gradually forth; it bursts into leaf all over as soon as the summer heat pours upon the land. For many years there has been too facile an inferring that the coming of the Lord is near because bigger wars, severer famines, heavier sicknesses than usual have been known. When that series of events predicted start they must needs come in concentrated and quick succession because they are all to be completed within the life of the one generation of men living at the End.

2. *The Master of the House.* This second picture presses the need of constant watchfulness. No householder would suffer sleep if he knew about what hour a thief would approach. The advance of these signs should deter disciples of that coming period from growing careless and watchless. All through this age lethargy of soul has been dangerous; most especially will it be so at that coming time.

But what is the peril? What is at stake? What will be the penalty of sleeping just then? The coming Lord has just indicated this. When the Flood came it took away all not in the ark. The word used (*airo*) suggests taking away with violence, as was the case with that Flood. But Christ immediately drops that word and says that by His parousia this one shall be taken away by Him as a friend takes with him a companion (*paralambanomai*), while the one not taken is left where he may be at that moment. Now from heaven the ascended Christ employed again this figure of the thief and his unexpected approach, and most distinctly warned Christians that, if they were not watchful when His advent hour should come as a thief, they would in no wise know when He came (Rev. 3: 3). There seems no other meaning or force in this warning except that some who might

have been taken by Him will not be taken. It is "to them that wait for Him" that "He shall appear a second time unto salvation" (Heb. 9: 28), that salvation here promised to such as "shall endure unto the end" (ver. 13), and which Peter describes as "the salvation ready to be revealed in the last time" and as "the favour that is to be brought unto you at the revelation of Jesus Christ" (I Pet. 1: 4, 5, 13).

There is here another warning against rigidity in interpreting figures and pictures. In Luke 13: 25 the master of the house who shuts the door is the Lord, a very natural title for Him Who is Head over the house of God: but here the master of the house is the disciple who ought to be on the alert against the thief.

3. *The Faithful or Unfaithful Steward.* The lessons now given had been given earlier. See Ch. XXII, on Luke 12: 41–48. The most of what was then said was now repeated, with two differences. Then the unfaithful man was called simply "servant" (slave), now he is stigmatized as an "evil" slave (*kakos*, bad in disposition and depraved in conduct). Here again, the pronoun "that" asserts that it is the formerly "good" steward who has degenerated into an "evil" servant. Therefore now the Lord describes him not simply as "unfaithful" but as a "hypocrite," for such he was, maintaining his former position but false to its responsibility. Alas, that such are found in the house of God; and as their conduct so shall be their portion from the Lord in His day of visitation.

4. *The Ten Virgins* (Matt. 25). This so striking similitude of the kingdom of heaven is recorded by Matthew only, but in the earlier instruction just mentioned (Luke 12: 36) the Lord had prepared the mind for it by referring to Himself as returning "from the marriage" ceremonies. If we are to assume here the ordinary customs of the time of Christ, the bridegroom had been to the house of the bride's father to claim her, and, after the usual extended programme there, was now returning with her to his own place, there to complete the festivities before proceeding to their future united career. There is an early text which adds after "bridegroom" the words "and the bride." Though insufficiently attested the addition shows that very early readers of the parable understood the picture as now suggested, that the bridegroom was taking the bride to his own house.

If this is rightly assumed, it makes clear why the bride does not appear in this parable, for she is already with the bridegroom, and these virgins are those described in Ps. 45: 14, as "the virgins

her companions that follow her" and who are to be brought unto the King, as was intended with these ten virgins. This forbids regarding the virgins as representing the bride, the heavenly church, who are to reign with Christ. Indeed, virgins invited to a wedding feast were an incongruous simile for the bride without whom a wedding feast could not be held at all, whereas five of the virgins miss the feast. Will anyone hold that half the bride will do so?

This being the position it at once rules out the very common and very misleading notion that the cry "Behold, the Bridegroom! Come ye forth to meet Him" pointed to the revived interest in the subject of the Lord's return which developed early in the last century. It would have already allowed the foolish virgins a century and a half in which to buy oil! And the door to the feast is even yet open. Moreover, this cry awakens *all* the virgins, but the revived interest in the subject a century ago by no means awoke all the people of God.

This unwarranted and confusing idea is shut out by the very first word of the passage: "*Then* shall the kingdom of the heavens be likened unto ten virgins." It is a particle of time (*tote*), "then": When? When shall this likeness exist? Of course, at the time with which the Speaker is dealing, "the consummation of the age," not before; and therefore at the end of the End, at the time when this age and the next age are about to meet.

In my treatise on *Revelation* (255 ff.) it is argued that the descent of the Lord for His church will be under Bowl 6, that is, at nearly the close of the judgments which will overthrow the Beast and clear the ground for the kingdom of God on earth. It is therefore in the great and final days of the seventh Bowl, after the Bridegroom shall have taken the Bride to the Father's house, and is about to return with her to His own appointed sphere and rule, that the parable of the virgins belongs. "*Then* shall the kingdom of heaven" be as here presented. It would seem that nothing can alter the force of this particle as fixing the precise stage of events to which the picture applies.

At that time the privilege of attaining to bridal glory will have been missed, but the honour of being a guest at her wedding will remain. The urgent warning is that this also may be forfeited.

How utterly, how painfully mistaken is the notion that the Bride is removed before the End sets in at all; that that event is the occasion when the Master of the house rises up and shuts the door; and that thenceforth the door of salvation is closed and no one can be saved. If only preachers knew their Old Testament! Joel foretold the coming of "the great and terrible

day of Jehovah," and that it will be immediately preceded by wonders in the heavens, and by blood, fire, and pillars of smoke in the earth, while the sun shall be darkened and the moon be turned into blood. All this is repeated in *Revelation*, more especially under Seal 6, and therefore at the consummation of the age. Yet even then, cries the prophet, "Whosoever shall call upon the name of Jehovah shall be delivered" (Joel 2: 30–32), which Peter expands to mean "saved" (Acts 2: 21).

Nor is it bare deliverance from judgment that is available. It is at this exact juncture that the angel bids John to record the sweet words, "Blessed are they that are bidden to the marriage supper of the Lamb" (Rev. 19: 9).

"*Virgin*" as a moral picture means undefiled (Rev. 14: 4; II Cor. 11: 2); it is therefore not appropriate as a picture of the unregenerate sinner never yet cleansed from his old sins, nor of a Christian who has committed spiritual adultery with the world (Jas. 4: 4). It represents such as duly esteemed the bridegroom, had been honoured by him to be invited to his wedding and had accepted the invitation; they were dressed suitably (in contrast to the man who attended the feast without the appropriate garment—see Ch. XXXV); and they all had lighted lamps to show the way in the dark. In these necessary preparations all the virgins are alike, and it seems wholly arbitrary to say that they do not import as much in the foolish virgins as in the wise.

"*Sleep.*" In another respect were they alike: "they all slumbered and slept." Well into the night the bridegroom had not come, and they all yielded to the craving for sleep. They did not go as far as the wicked steward who used the delay of his lord to his own indulgence in vice, but they just succumbed to the natural longing to sleep. The "natural," not only the "carnal," can paralyse the "spiritual" (I Cor. 2: 13–15. See Ch. XL). To gratify the lawful desires of the soul can render the believer dull as to the spirit.

When in the fourth century the church gained that respite, peace, ease, prosperity which are the quite allowable portion of our "natural" man, then she fell asleep as regards the coming heavenly portion, and ceased to long for and await the Lord from heaven, the Bridegroom. Thus will it be at the very end of this age; the love of the many will wax cold; and even those who have set out to gain all to which they will be invited may succumb to the moral atmosphere and sleep.

The Call. But if all sleep, who will know that the Lord is now at hand and sound the cry "Behold the Bridegroom"? It

can be seen here that words may be used sometimes with a general comprehensive force, and are not to be taken strictly; also that *all* that is said concerning a given time or theme must be taken into account. Speaking of that dread end of the age, the angel told Daniel (11: 33, 35) that there would be teachers (see R.V. margin) who would instruct many. So not all the godly will fail, yet so perilous would be the conditions that even some of them should fall, so that by failure they should be refined, purified, and made white. This agrees exactly with the pictures of the white wedding garments before considered, as needful for the great feast.

It thus appears that "all" does not always mean "all" absolutely, but can be used in a general sense. This is no uncommon usage. We say "all the world was there." This may be kept in mind in reference to I Cor. 15: 51.

But further as to who will arouse the sleeping virgins. Rev. 14: 6, 9 show that in the End time angels will take part in arousing the godless and warning the godly. The Lord has just before said that they will be His agents to gather together His chosen then on earth (Matt. 24: 31). It may be part of their kindly service to awaken the sleeping at that time and enable them to be ready for the feast.

And perhaps the then recent removal of the Bride may be an awakening call.

The Lamp. Sometimes the "lighted lamp" points to the public witness of the Christian by conduct or speech (Matt. 5: 16; Phil. 2: 15, 16), but this meaning is foreign to the picture here. The lighted lamp was to show each the way to the Bridegroom's house. This confirms that these parables of the feast assume that it took place at night. This present age is a period of moral and spiritual darkness. Men walk in the dark as regards the plans of God and the steps to their fulfilment, nor do they know whither they themselves are going. But the word of God is a lamp unto the feet and a light unto the path (Ps. 119, 105). It shows the believing and obedient the way he should take in this murky, squalid scene (II Pet. 1: 19). And each must have his own little lamp to swing at his feet as he picks his steps.

All these virgins had the lamp; they carried it with them; it was at hand even while they slept. The foolish as much as the wise valued it as a necessity to their purpose to share the feast, for without its light they could not find the way to the festal hall. This is no picture of the unregenerate, careless as to the coming of the Lord, and muddling on through life without attention to the word of life.

The Oil. Yet a lamp must have oil if it is to give light. The written word of God must itself be illuminated by the Spirit of truth if it is to give light upon life's problems and shine upon our way into the kingdom of God. All those virgins had had oil, the foolish included, for their lamps were "going out" and therefore must have been alight. Wisdom consisted in having provided in advance a supply of oil with which to replenish the lamp and revive its flame. The Christian cannot live on his past, whether it be food (manna), drink (water from the rock), or light (knowledge of the will of God, guidance in His way). This wisdom to provide a reserve the wise virgins showed, but the foolish did not.

Their being virgins was not affected by this imprudence, nor their purpose to share the best that grace had opened to them; but how to secure that best they had not considered. They had taken too much for granted; as that the coming of the Bridegroom might be "at any moment," or that their small supply of oil would last out. It is not enough for the believer to have been born again of the Spirit of life and to have walked for a time by the light the Spirit of truth affords. It is not enough to assume that this initial work of the Spirit is all that can be known or needed.

Believers innumerable are in just this state of relying upon their first experience of the Holy Spirit. Even in the present emergencies which occur in daily life they suddenly find themselves unequal to the strain, perplexed, harassed, not knowing what to do or what course to take. Much more will such be surprised and distressed when those closing days burst upon them as a snare falls suddenly upon the unwary bird (Luke 21: 34–36).

There is not only a first acquaintance with the blessed Spirit when He imparts the new life, but also "the communion of the Holy Spirit," and this is gained only by a consistent continuous walk with Him. Thereby the soul becomes assured of His adequacy to supply every need, to illuminate every problem, to throw light on every step. Thus the obedient heart, having nothing of its own, enjoys the fulness of the Spirit, and knows that it possesses in Him an adequate reserve upon which to draw as occasion requires. He who thus lives and walks by the Spirit will indeed need to trim his light, but will not have to say in hasty concern that it is going out. Faith is the wick which draws up the oil, which appropriates continuously the grace of the Spirit, and faith will ever need watching and renewing; but if the oil is there the light will brighten.

Nor is this fulness ought that one virgin can impart to another.

Each must acquire it direct from the Son of God, the only Giver of the Spirit. And each virgin must "buy" *this* communion of the Spirit. A free gift on the side of the ascended Lord, it nevertheless costs something to acquire. Abandonment of sin, surrender of self-sufficiency, bestowment of time in the quest, concentration upon the high privileges to be secured, turning resolutely from every attempt to make the light burn apart from life in the Spirit—this indicates the price to be paid.

Nor is this the work of a moment. Regeneration is a sudden and complete act of the Spirit; to enjoy His sufficiency is otherwise, and those virgins only who were ready, who were in the present possession of the reserve, "went in with the Bridegroom to the marriage feast: and the door was shut" against the unready.

Yet it is to be presumed that the latter had succeeded in securing oil, for they found their way to the house. So far is it from being true that the Holy Spirit will be withdrawn from earth when the Bride is taken up that rather the exact reverse is shown. Even then He will be available for those who seek His grace, as an innumerable throng will do during the great Tribulation (Rev. 7: 9–17), and as those represented by the foolish virgins will do at even the later crisis presented in this parable; but these will have missed the wedding feast.

Here again, missing a feast is in no sense the same as being sent to the gallows as a rebel. One marvels at the inexactness of those who confuse such scenes. The picture drawn is sad enough, without aggravating the sorrow by including an execution ground. Let us look at the picture attentively:

> the door was shut. Afterward came also the other virgins, saying, Lord, Lord, open to us. But He answered and said, Verily I say unto you, I know you not.

The scene is of a fine oriental mansion at night, with its heavy entrance door shut. Some persons are outside asking to be allowed to enter. The master of the house on the other side of that great door cannot see the applicants or recognize their voices. If he had opened the door he must have seen that they were people he knew, for they had been invited to his wedding. But no Oriental will throw open his door at night, for it cannot be known what enemy may rush in. Such was the insecurity of the East, as still is the case in some regions. So he gives the refusal stated and the reason for it, "Verily, I say unto you, I know you not."

Put into common English these words (*Amēn, lego humin,*

ouk oida humas) say, "I really don't know who you are." To bring in here the omniscience of the Son of God is of course wholly unwarranted, for then Christ would be made to deny His deity. The scene must be taken as drawn, both here and in Luke 13: 25, 26 where the same words are found.

In marked contrast is the picture of Matt. 7: 22, 23. Here there is no barred door of a house, but a public scene. The Lord and the suppliants are face to face, and to these He says explicitly, "I never at any time made your acquaintance" (*oudepote egnōn humas*). This is definite, final; but the weaker phrase to the virgins must not be made to mean the same. It shows no more than that they had missed the wedding feast. Yet rightly estimated this loss is so heavy as to enforce the closing exhortation: "Watch therefore, for ye know not the day nor the hour." For when the Bridegroom returns, the journey will be so swift that the unready saint shall have no time for preparation; only the ready shall go in to the feast: "one is taken and one is left" (vers. 40, 41).

5. *The Parable of the Talents.* This and the parable of the pounds are essentially the same, and the general exposition will be as in Ch. XXXII. The lessons must be deeply important to disciples for the Lord to have repeated them after but a few days.

The principal difference is that the former parable spoke of the trust sum as a "pound" (= perhaps £3. 10. 0 Sterling), here it is a talent (= say £240).[1] Also that here each slave received according to the master's estimate of the ability of each.

By this it is again shown that details in parables are not always absolute revelations, but may be but relative, and to be considered in relation to other statements. The difference here may suggest, (1) that truth in itself is of equal value, so that as regards title and possibility every servant of Christ owns the whole revelation. In this sense it is true of all believers that "ye have an anointing from the Holy One, and ye know all things" (I John 2: 20). (2) On the other hand, the fact is that different servants receive from the Lord very different measures of understanding of His mysteries.

Whatever other factors may operate, the one the Lord here indicated is that men differ in capacity, and so the Spirit divides to each as He pleases (I Cor. 12: 11). God does not attempt to put a lake into a bucket. The man with larger capacity for knowledge has larger privilege of service, heavier responsibility to be faithful, with richer reward if he wins it.

[1] Values as before the late war.

The solemn matter of the useless servant and the outer darkness has been considered in Ch. XXXV on the Wedding Breakfast.

This present parable indicates that the "house" and household of God and its administration will continue on earth down to the return of the Lord. If this is confusing to some, seeing that the Bride of the Lamb will have been removed to heaven somewhat earlier, the confusion probably exists in the mind (not in Scripture) because they persist in thinking that the bridal company includes every person regenerate in this age, and that her removal necessitates and effects more changes than Scripture indicates. They do not allow for the fundamental and invariable feature that the human factor causes that the realization is always less than the ideal. For this the wisdom of God allows and His Word reveals it.

6. *The Sheep and the Goats.* Again the Teacher specifies the exact hour when this judgment scene will have fulfilment. It is "When (*a*) the Son of Man shall come in His glory, and (*b*) all the angels with Him."

Were no other information available it would be a fair assumption from the context that this will be the same event as the return of the bridegroom from the wedding and of the master or lord of the house from his long absence.

But, in truth, on this matter the Old Testament is as specific and detailed as is our Lord. Joel 3: 1, 2, 11, 12:

> For, behold, in those days and in that time, when I shall bring again the captivity of Judah and Jerusalem,
>
> I will gather all nations, and will bring them down into the valley of Jehoshaphat; and I will plead with them there for my people and for my heritage Israel, whom they have scattered among the nations, and parted my land.
>
> Haste ye, and come, all ye nations round about, and gather yourselves together: thither cause thy mighty ones to come down, O Lord.
>
> Let the nations bestir themselves, and come up to the valley of Jehoshaphat: for there will I sit to judge all the nations round about.

Here the Lord is shown as coming down, and His mighty ones with Him, and judging the nations gathered at Jerusalem. It is the time of the regathering and restoration of Israel, with God dwelling thenceforth in Zion, His holy mountain (ver. 17). What Christ adds is that He Himself, the Son of Man, is Jehovah of the prophecy and will fulfil its predictions. And again, in

Zech. 14: 2, the subject is the same gathering of the nations to Jerusalem, and (ver. 5) the prophet declares that "the Lord my God shall come, and all the holy ones with thee."

Nor was this the first time that Christ had thus spoken of Himself. He had told that the Son of man will come "in His own glory and of the Father and of the holy angels" (Luke 9: 26; Matt. 16: 27), in the light of which mighty and life-testing event all disciples should live. Nor is later Scripture silent on the subject. Heb. 12: 22, 23 speaks of a "general festal assembly of myriads of angels." And Rev. 19: 11–16 gives a vivid picture of the Word of God coming forth from heaven to earth to judge the nations, with the armies of heaven in His train. This is pre-millennial, for the battle brings the overthrow of the armies of earth, leading on to the saints of the first resurrection ruling the earth with Christ for the thousand years (Rev. 20: 1–6).

All relevant Scripture unites as to this great occasion. Thank God indeed that the present desperate state of affairs international has an end. Yet never by man's own efforts; these will produce yet deeper wickedness, confusion, godlessness, and misery; but God's King and Judge shall intervene. Many scriptures indicate that it will be a decimated earth to which the King will descend. The universal desolations pictured by the prophets and in the *Revelation* will have reduced the population of the earth to a minimum (Ps. 46: 6–9; Rev. 6: 8; 8: 9, 11; 9: 15, 18), and of Israel there will be left but a "very small remnant" (Isa. 1: 9; Zech. 13: 8, 9).

This court will be an earthly counterpart of a heavenly scene. To Ahab, King of Israel, Micaiah said: "I saw Jehovah sitting on His throne, and all the host of heaven standing by Him on His right hand and on His left" (I Kings 22: 19).

The judgment will be with infallible discrimination. It is only the practised eye of the Eastern shepherd that can readily distinguish between the sheep and the goats of a Syrian flock. This divine-human King has been watching from heaven the doings of men on earth and He knows which of them are "sheep" and which "goats," "for the eyes of Jehovah are in every place keeping watch upon the evil and the good" (Prov. 15: 3). In the late tornado of persecution which had been directed against His "brethren" (Matt. 24: 9, 10; Luke 21: 12–17; Rev. 7: 14), even those who at direct risk of bitter trials and death had owned relationship to Himself, some who had not espoused His person or cause had acted kindly towards His known people. This had involved them also in risk of retaliation from the persecutors, and this the Lord will own had been done to Himself, and it

will assure eternal life to those who so acted. It is the same gracious acknowledgment of the oneness of Himself and His suffering people as when He challenged Saul the persecutor with the arresting question, "Why persecutest thou ME?" (Acts 9: 4).

Let it be noted, for it is particularly noteworthy, that thus men will secure eternal life who had not consciously thought of Christ or directed their actions to Him: "When saw we Thee hungry, a stranger, or in prison?" So that *it is possible that men* without intelligent faith in Christ can secure Him as their Saviour, and can so live as to be called by Him, the Judge, "righteous"—"Come ye righteous." Nor is this a situation unexpected by God; rather He had foreseen it from the foundation of the world, and prepared the then coming kingdom for just such "righteous" persons (Matt. 25: 34).

With this in view we may see in Peter's words more than perhaps Peter saw in them when he spoke them. To a company of Gentiles, not yet believers in the Lord Jesus, he told of something remarkable he had just learned, even that "God is no respecter of persons: but in *every nation* he that feareth Him, and *worketh righteousness*, is acceptable to Him" (Acts 10: 34, 35). The angel that went to Cornelius had known this attitude of God before the apostle had learned it, for he said to the Centurion, "Thy *prayers* and thine *alms* are gone up for a memorial before God" (Acts 10: 2, 4). Cornelius had so lived that his own subordinates could say that he was a righteous man, who feared God and was respected by the alien race he ruled (ver. 22).

It was with intent that we remarked before that the gospel ought not to be so preached as to give the impression that it does not matter whether a man's life is good or bad. For while no works of ours are suitable as the *ground* of our being declared righteous (that is, justified), before the bar of God, yet all serious endeavours to act rightly, even in one as yet a non-Christian, give to God as Judge valid *occasion* for reckoning to that one the righteous atoning work by which His Son provided a legally valid righteousness for the good of all men. This is Paul's argument in Rom. 2: 1–16; see especially vers. 6, 7, 10, 11, 16.

Of course, this does not apply to moral persons who may have had the gospel presented to them and who neglected or rejected it.

If this does not agree with the theology or preaching of any reader, he will be wise to revise his theology until this plain teaching of Scripture can find its place in his thinking and preaching. For it is certain that no one of us can be better informed than the angel, the apostle, and the King.

. . .

The Goats. The Good Shepherd was about to give His life for these as much as for the sheep. Yet it is He who utters the awful sentence "Depart from Me, ye cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the Devil and his angels," and Who explained to the four disciples listening to Him that "these shall go away into eternal punishment: but the righteous into eternal life." Happy is he who can say "my heart standeth in awe of Thy words" (Ps. 119: 161).

There is then a fire which having been kindled shall burn on for ever, it is "eternal fire." If at some point of time, however remote, its victims are to cease to exist, why should the fire continue thereafter and be eternal?

The fire will have been kindled by the time that this judgment of the nations sits, the commencement of the Millennial kingdom. See also Rev. 14: 10, 11; 19: 20; 20: 14, 15. This dread torment was prepared for the Devil and his angels, though these will not be cast thereinto until the close of the Millennial age. But such of the sons of men of the End days as wilfully followed his lead, under the Beast and the false prophet, will share his doom, and will reach it before himself. Among these men the "goats" were found. As regards "goats" of earlier times, and who had died, these will be raised from the death-state to stand before the great white throne at the close of the Millennial kingdom, and, if their names are not found in the book of life, they will reach the same place and doom as those mentioned in the parable.

This most solemn of all subjects is discussed at length in my *Revelation of Jesus Christ*, pp. 353–362. It suffices to quote here what bears on the parable before us and especially the last verse (46):

> After all that has been argued as to the force of *aion* (age), there seems no good ground for giving to it, in relation to the punishment of the wicked, any less force than it has in the scriptures cited in all other connexions, and especially when the same writer in the same book uses it without any qualification to diminish its meaning.
>
> That competent classical scholar, Dr. Richard Weymouth, held the doctrine of annihilation. He discussed this subject with my relative, Rev. George Goodchild. They finished by considering Matt. 25: 46: "These shall go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into life eternal." Dr. Weymouth said: "All I can say about this verse is, that philologically eternal punishment is not in it, but theologically it must be!" This simply means that taking *aion* as it stands in secular literature, and this as understood by a modern Westerner, the term means a limited period, but taking it in the light of its Scripture usage, connexions, combinations, and teaching, it has the force of everlastingness.

Scholars of Weymouth's day were accustomed to treat the New Testament too much as if it were classical Greek. Later research has corrected this, and if one were to write thus to-day he would be open to the criticism of Dr. W. R. Inge as in *Things New and Old*, p. 103: "the popular doctrines of future probation, and of the ultimate salvation of all men, are not only without the slightest warrant in the New Testament, but are contradicted by recorded sayings of our Lord. Arguments to the contrary based on the supposed meaning of the word *aionios* only prove that the disputant is a poor Greek scholar."

It is healthier to the soul that these most weighty words of the Judge should settle upon the heart of every hearer with an unrelieved solemnity, stirring the unsaved to flee from the coming wrath, and urging the believer to seek and to save those who are lost.

CHAPTER XXXVII

CLEAN FEET

John 13: 1–17

THE grand foreview of the great drama that will close this age is completed, and now the Lord is deeply concerned to prepare His followers to walk worthily throughout the age until that end be reached.

The scene and the Saviour pass from Olivet to the upper room. The apostle whom Jesus loved is now old. From perhaps fifty years ago he recalls that room and what took place that night. He will not repeat what the three earlier Gospels had made common knowledge among the saints, rather he will supplement that by recording other things that the Lord said and did in order that saints may be saints, may become in practice what they are by position.

With the instinct of true love John lifts into relief the characteristic features of Him whom he loved, features distinctive of that memorable night.

And first, that Jesus was acting in the full consciousness of the mighty crisis that was at hand. He knew something hidden at the moment from the disciples, even that an hour of destiny had struck—the hour that He must die. Yes, but for His heart the agony was swallowed up in the glory that lay just beyond it: "He should depart out of this world unto the Father." He had come forth from the Father, and what that separation had cost He alone knew: now He would return to the Father, and again He alone knew the bliss this would be to Himself and the Father. Thus does the future impart strength to surmount the present.

But He knew a second indescribably momentous fact, even that "the Father had given all things into His hands" (ver. 3). He was the God-appointed holder and ruler of all persons, things, and events. What dignity, what majesty goes with this!

It was in the power of this supreme position and authority that He now acted, and the King of glory washed the feet of His human slaves. What dire necessity there must therefore be that their feet shall be clean!

But John perceives and records the impulse that then moved the Son of God: it was love, love divine: "having loved His own who were in the world, He loved them unto the end," to the uttermost (ver. 1). He was leaving this squalid scene; they

must remain exposed to its defiling touch. He would teach them how to pass through it in purity, kept perpetually from its contamination clinging to them and accumulating upon them.

There was a third element that the Saviour knew, even that the dread Prince of this world-system was concentrating upon His own destruction, and had even then inspired Judas to serve his fell purpose. He would defeat that Prince by rising triumphant from the fatal conflict; but this would fearfully intensify his attack upon the followers of the victorious Lamb, and he would bend all his wiles and resources to entangle, overthrow, defile, and discredit them. For this the Lord would prepare them.

Love is observant. Every detail of his Lord's action on that occasion was fixed indelibly on John's memory. It is not ours to walk with Christ in the flesh; but if we have gained John's love to our Lord we shall walk daily with Him by pondering His ways and acts in the Gospels, and His Spirit will render this even more effectual and sanctifying than the privilege of His bodily presence could be (John 16: 7).

The Lord is reclining at the head of the couches which stretch down the room in two rows, with space between and space around where servants can move and wait on the guests. While the passover meal is going on and conversation flows, Jesus rises from His place and disrobes Himself of His upper garments. The disciples watch in silence. What will their Lord and Teacher now do? He takes the towel of the slave and girds Himself with it. Peter is astonished, but the Spirit taught him later the lesson intended, and he thus applied it to himself and to us: "Yea, all of you gird yourselves[1] with humility, to serve one another: for God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace to the humble" (I Pet. 5: 5). Oh, what grace he had seen that night in that humblest of the humble, the man Christ Jesus. As one of position and wealth wrote:

What grace, O Lord, and beauty shone
  Around Thy steps below!
What patient love was seen in all
  Thy life and death of woe.

One with Thyself, may every eye
  In us, Thy brethren, see

[1] "*Engkomboōmai.* The *engkombōma* was the white scarf or apron of slaves which distinguished slaves from freemen." (Grimm, Lex.)

That gentleness and grace that springs
From union, Lord, with Thee. (*Sir E. Denny*)

"Then He poureth water into the bason" (ver. 5).

To His great forerunner, Moses, it had been commanded: "thou shalt also make a laver of brass . . . and put water therein" (Ex. 30: 18, 21): "also"—in addition, that is, to the altar and the atonement just before mentioned. So, then, the laver is not to provide a sacrifice, atonement, pardon: this is secured by the altar and its sin-offering. The laver was made that the priests should wash their hands and their feet on every separate occasion when about to enter the presence of God or to mediate at the altar for the benefit of the sinner or the worshipper. And this ever-renewed cleansing was imperative under penalty of death.

The laver stood between the altar and the house. No one could rightly wash at the laver who had not first been cleansed by blood at the altar: yet no one could safely approach the house, the place of nearness to God, who had not received the double cleansing of blood and water: "that ye die not" was the warning which made washing at the laver imperative. Witness in this age Ananias and Sapphira, and see I Cor. 11: 29, 30; etc.

Man reverses God's order and puts the water at the entrance door and the "altar" as far from the guilty suppliant as possible. Thus is the gospel wholly falsified and "drawing near" to God with boldness made impossible. But almost equally mischievous, at least as regards priestly access and service, is the idea of washing with blood, so creating the crippling notion that *all* is obtained and realized at the altar, at justification, and so the necessity and virtue of the water, the cleansing ministry of the Spirit by the Word, is unrecognized.

The force of this priestly cleansing the Lord would now impress upon His servants. They were the nucleus of that holy and royal priesthood of which Peter and John speak (I Pet. 2: 5; Rev. 1: 5, 6). The benefit of the altar they had already received when they wrote these scriptures, for Christ had loosed them from their sins in His blood, when He shed it on the cross; but it was indispensable to priestly service that hands and feet, acts and walk, should be actually and perpetually kept clean. Judicial cleansing by blood must be followed by actual cleansing by water. The former secures justification, without approach to the laver and the water. See Ch. XXX above on the tax-gatherer. But priestly privilege equally demands the laver and the water. Therefore, at the Redeemer's death, water commingled with the blood that poured from His pierced side, as

John particularly specifies in his narrative and on which he comments in his epistle (John 19: 34, 35; I John 5: 6).

For this double cleansing David had cried to God after his fall and foul defilement: "Purify me with hyssop, and I shall be clean: Wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow" (Ps. 51: 7). Hyssop was the herb used for sprinkling the atoning, justifying blood (Ex. 12: 22); washing was with water to remove outward uncleanness, as in the cleansing of the leper (Lev. 14: 8, 9; etc.).

The Writer of *Hebrews*, deeply versed in the types, stresses the same dual necessity for the priestly privilege of "drawing near" unto God: "let us draw near, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience [a conscience that accuses of evil committed] and having our body washed with pure water" (Heb. 10: 22). The "heart" is the inner life, known only to God and the man; the "body" is the outer life seen by all, God and angels and men. The blood of Christ relieves the conscience; the "water" cleanses our practice.

In Eph. 5: 25–27 Paul also stresses the same truths and explains what the "water" is: "Christ also loved the church, and gave Himself up for it: that He might sanctify it, having cleansed it by the washing of water with the Word, that He might present the church to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing: but that it should be holy and without blemish."

The love of Christ is the source of all blessing.

The sacrifice of Christ on the cross is the basis of all blessing.

The presentation of the church to Christ, as a chaste virgin to her betrothed (II Cor. 11: 2), is the goal and summit of blessing. But this demands that her members shall be externally perfect, without spot or wrinkle or blemish. And this development of her redemption by the purchase of blood the Redeemer effects by the cleansing wrought "by the laver [composed of] water in the Word" (*to loutro tou hydatos en rhēmati*).

Rhema, word, denoted firstly a spoken word, but it had been applied in the LXX to a written message: "This is the interpretation of the thing (*rhema*, the words written on the wall, Dan. 5: 26). Comp. Deut. 10: 2: "I will write upon the tables the words" (*ta rhemata*). This usage the Lord adopted. He applied *rhema* to the written record of what God said to Moses at the Bush: "that which was spoken unto you by God" (Ex. 3: 6; Matt. 22: 31). It was by that record that God spoke to later generations.

Therefore when Paul said that Christ acts upon His people "by water in the word," it means not only by that which prophets and apostles and Himself spoke verbally, but also by the written

record, the Holy Scriptures. This we know has been fact ever since God's words were put in writing.

As we have shown in Chs. III and IV water is a type of the Spirit of God. He is the living water that both satisfies and cleanses.

> And every virtue we possess,
> And every victory won,
> And every thought of holiness,
> Are His alone.

But water cannot be used unless there be a vessel to hold it: "thou shalt make a laver . . . He took a bason"—"and put water therein. . . . He poureth water into the bason." This vessel is the Word of God: "the laver of water *in the Word.*" The Spirit Who inspired the words at first, inspires them continually, makes them living and active (Heb. 4: 12), so that they work in him that believes them (I Thess. 2: 13). The Spirit is in the Word: he who with an obedient spirit resorts habitually to this laver finds in it this heavenly Water.

This is a characteristic of all words. A foul word works corruption in the mind that receives it; a pure word works health; a kind word brings comfort; a wise word gives light; a warning word works deliverance. A father rebukes some undesirable habit in his son. If the boy heeds the reproof it saves him from that habit and cleanses his life from it.

Thus does the Lord by the Spirit speak His words unto disciples. If we heed and obey, the word cleanses us. Happy is he who has ever an open ear for the Spirit's reproof as to his walk and an obedient heart to act upon it. The Lord washes our feet by speaking to us about our ways: we, on our side, like the priests, must wash our own feet by obeying what the Lord says, and so maintain our priestly access and service.

A few minutes after the symbolic cleansing the Lord will say, "Already ye are clean because of the word which I have spoken unto you" (John 15: 3). This was not the judicial cleansing by the blood at the altar, but the practical cleansing by the water in the laver: its connexion is not the law court and one's legal standing there, but the vine and its fruitfulness.

There is silence as the Lord moves from disciple to disciple until He reaches Peter. We think we see Simon draw up his feet on the couch and cover them with his skirt. "Lord, THOU washest *my* feet? This is unseemly: I do not permit it. On no account shalt Thou ever wash my feet." This well-meant expostulation must be overcome; how much more the careless

or obstinate attitude of many to the doctrine and reality of sanctification!

The Lord met Peter's twofold objection by a double answer. "What *I* do *thou* knowest not as yet, but thou shalt get to know hereafter." Let it suffice that *I* think proper to do it! And for all succeeding generations let it suffice that the Lord by His condescension pressed on us the necessity for clean feet as well as a cleansed conscience, for the laver as well as the altar, for the water in addition to the blood. For removing guilt the blood is sufficient, for a holy walk the water is equally indispensable.

This is taught plainly and emphatically, even could we not understand it. Type, precept, and experience assert it. It is for us to be as concerned to get the benefit of the laver as of the altar. And they who do thus permit the Lord to cleanse their walk by His words, get to understand both the need and the benefit.

To Peter's renewed objection the Lord said firmly: "If *not* I wash thee, *not* hast thou part with Me" (ver. 8). What is the solemn force of this double negative that it caused Peter's opposition to collapse at once and he became eager that more should be done than Christ desired: "Lord, not my feet only, but also my hands and my head"?

The Revised Standard Version makes the Lord say, "you have no part *in* me." That would mean that if a believer's feet be not washed, if his walk be defiled, he loses all benefit in Christ. Salvation is thus made to be dependent upon sanctification, so that there can be no assurance of eternal life until a man has walked worthily unto the end of his days.

But the Lord did not say "*in* Me" but "*with* Me" (*met 'emou*). The preposition *meta* with the genitive is found about 371 times in the New Testament. In Luke 1: 72 it is rendered by "towards"—"to show mercy towards our fathers." There is nothing to hinder it being rendered "with"; and so Darby in this place: "to fulfil mercy with our fathers." In Acts 15: 33 it is rendered "in"—"they were dismissed in peace." Here also "with" were easily suitable; as Young's *Literal* gives it, "they were let go with peace from the brethren unto the apostles."

As far as I have observed in all the other nearly 370 places the preposition is rendered by "with" and *could not* be translated "in." This is certainly the case in all the other 27 passages I have noted where the exact expression (*met 'emou*) is found. The R.S.V. rendering is a *mis*translation. In view of the facts given it could hardly be an oversight.

The Lord said "with Me," the force of which can be learned from such passages as:

1. Matt. 26: 38, 40, "watch with Me";
2. Mark 14: 18, 20, "eateth with Me";
3. Luke 11: 7, "with me in bed";
4. Luke 12: 13, "divide the inheritance with me";
5. Luke 15: 31, "Son, thou art ever with me";
6. Luke 22: 28, "ye have continued with Me";
7. Luke 23: 43, "with Me in Paradise";
8. John 8: 29, "He that sent Me is with Me";
9. John 15: 27, "ye have been with Me from the beginning";
10. John 17: 24, "that they may be with Me";
11. II Tim. 4: 11, "only Luke is with me";
12. Rev. 3: 20, "shall sup with Me";
13. Rev. 3: 21, "shall sit with Me";
14. Rev. 22: 12, "I come quickly, and My wages with Me."

Nos. 1, 6, and 9 speak of sharing with Christ now in His trials. Nos. 2 and 12 tell of intimate intercourse with Him now and hereafter. No. 7 promises His company in the world of the dead, Paradise, even as Paul speaks of "departing to be with Christ" being "very far better" (Phil. 1: 23). Nos. 10 and 13 speak of the infinite honour of being with the Lord in His coming glory and of sharing His royal authority. No. 14 indicates that at His return He will bring "wages" (*misthos*), as Paul again says: "Each shall receive his own reward according to his own labour" (I Cor. 3: 8).

Meditation on these scriptures will make abundantly clear the present privileges of being with Christ in His trials and the future prospects of being with Him in His glory, and it is small wonder that Peter's objection collapsed when the Lord's words flashed into his very soul that such high and vast privileges were imperilled by an unclean walk. All Scripture testifies this: Ps. 93: 5, "Holiness becometh Thy house, O Jehovah, for evermore"; Isa. 52: 11, "touch no unclean thing . . . cleanse yourselves, ye that bear the vessels of Jehovah"; II Cor. 6: 17, 18; 7: 1, "touch no unclean thing . . . And I will be to you a Father. . . . Having therefore these promises, beloved, let us *cleanse ourselves* from all defilement of flesh and spirit [of outward practice and of thoughts and feelings], perfecting holiness in the fear of God."

And when the diligent saint finds the task severe, let him turn to the same gracious Lord that washed Peter's travel-soiled feet, for He is unchanged, the One Who still loves and sanctifies His blood-bought church, if she be willing, as Peter became willing and eager.

"He that is bathed needeth not save to wash his feet, but is clean every whit" (ver. 10). Some take this bathing to refer to justification; so Griffith Thomas, *Principles of Theology*, 187. But justification is not by water but by blood. Similarly a well-known hymn takes "clean every whit" to refer to justification:

> "Clean every whit"—Thou saidst it, Lord,
> Shall one suspicion lurk?
> Thine, surely, is a faithful word,
> And Thine a finished work.

But plainly the words "clean every whit" can only be true after the feet have been washed, for they would not be true so long as the feet were defiled.

Is not the picture that of the Eastern guest who bathed before leaving home but who would arrive at the festal house with his sandalled feet soiled by the filth of the road? It was the rule to provide water that these be cleansed before entering the banquet hall, which courtesy one host neglected to show to Jesus, though his invited guest (Luke 7: 44).

And may there not be a deeper reference? The Lord is dealing with those who were to be the priests of the new covenant, little as they may yet have grasped this. Now at the consecration of Aaron and his sons as priests the first item was bathing in water.[1] Later, there followed the habitual washing of hands and feet, to maintain complete cleanness. Aaron had been typically justified, redeemed, delivered by blood in Egypt, long before his appointment as priest; so that the bathing did not effect his justification.

Is not baptism by immersion that which speaks symbolically of this bathing? for so the justified believer renounces once for all the life of sin, divests himself of the old man and his doings (as the priest was stripped of his old garments), and rises from the baptismal bath to put on the new man and his virtues as a priest unto God, to serve in His house. Therefore Ananias said to Saul, "Arise, and get thyself baptized, and wash away thy sins" (Acts 22: 16); that is, make public confession that your former attitude and course were wrong and you renounce them, and "call upon His name" which before you blasphemed.

Being thus "bathed" through "the laver of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit" (Titus 3: 5), the believer pursues his course in this evil world, needing only the daily cleansing of

[1] The word translated "washed" has the primary sense of "lave," whether the whole or part of an article (Strong, *Concordance*, 7364). Hence, to bathe ,and so rendered twelve times in Lev. 15: 1–18. Thus Darby in Lev. 8: 6 also.

his walk by the grace of that renewing Spirit applying the word of the Lord to conscience and practice.

And now the Divine Servant returns to His proper place at the head of the table and says, "Ye call Me Teacher and Lord, and ye say well, for this is what I am." Now therefore I have taught you your duty and I command you to perform it: "Ye also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have given you an example, that ye also should do as I have done to you" (vers. 12–15).

Some regard this as creating an obligation to a literal ordinance of feet-washing. Yet there is no hint that the apostles so regarded it or so acted. The only other reference to the washing of feet obviously refers to the Oriental custom mentioned above. A widow is commended "if she hath used hospitality to strangers, if she hath washed the saints' feet" (I Tim. 5: 10).

But the spiritual counterpart is as priceless as it is difficult. Two Christian students had an altercation and parted in anger. A third friend was grieved. Just before sunset he went to the room of one and said only, "Brother, the sun is going down!" It brought to the mind of the other the exhortation "Be ye angry, and sin not: let not the sun go down upon your wrath; neither give place to the devil" (Eph. 4: 26, 27). At once he sought the offended brother, there was reconciliation, and the devil found no room in their hearts to fan the spark of anger into a flame of malice. Thus had the water in the word removed the defilement.

It is useless to apply a scrubbing-brush to a brother's feet: the service must be rendered in the tender, humble spirit of our great Example. "If ye know these things, happy are ye if ye do them," for "My brethren, if any among you [the brethren] err from the truth and one turn him back [into the way of truth]; let him know that he who turneth back a sinner [a brother who has missed the true way] from the error of his way shall save a soul from death [from premature death under the chastisement of the Lord, as in I Cor. 11 above], and shall cover a multitude of sins," for these shall be covered by the precious blood upon the repentance and recovery of the wanderer (Jas. 5: 19, 20).

CHAPTER XXXVIII

THE VINE AND THE BRANCHES

John 15: 1–16

THE words that close ch. 14, "Arise, let us go hence," have led some to think that chs. 15–17 were spoken outside the city on the way to the Garden. Ch. 18: 1 states that it was after the Lord had spoken with His Father that they "went forth . . . over the brook Kidron." As this seems to forbid the former notion, others suppose that they had all risen from the table and that it was then, but before they left the upper room, that the rest of the instruction was given, and the prayer offered. The matter is unimportant. It is clear that the whole is one body of instruction.

To strengthen His followers for the coming labours and conflicts in His absence the Lord dwelled much upon three chief topics:

1. That the period of His absence, however long, was limited, and would terminate in His return (14: 1–3).

2. That their supplies of heavenly grace would be adequate, for He would put them in His own relationship to the Father, by granting to them the right to attach His name and title to their prayers. Hitherto they had brought their requests to Himself; now they, like Himself, were to go direct to the Father in His name.

3. That, in addition, He would send to dwell and work in them the same Spirit that they had seen working in and through Him. That Spirit had been *with* them, and they had been enabled to do notable deeds; shortly He should dwell *in* them, which would effect a mighty advance in their spiritual experience and their active service.

Upon this great matter of the indwelling of the Spirit the Lord said: "In that day ye shall know (*a*) that I am in My Father, and (*b*) ye in Me, and (*c*) I in you" (14: 20).

A first result of the Spirit's indwelling would be a distinct increase in knowledge. This knowledge would concern the inner relations of the Father and the Son, and of the Son and His followers. The promise is emphatic: In that day of the Spirit's coming "Ye shall know." When therefore persons who know their sins are forgiven, and who confess Christ as Saviour, do

not know and do *not* understand these other profound truths mentioned, the presumption is that the indwelling of the Spirit is not with them a fact, that their inward stage is that of the apostles before Pentecost, not after. The Epistles reveal how fully the promise was fulfilled to their Writers. They speak familiarly upon the relationship of Father and Son, "in Christ," "Christ in you," "abiding in the Father and the Son" are constant expressions. This indicates the true, normal character of Christianity. It is the natural development of the Son's early teaching concerning "your heavenly Father."

Yet these conceptions are in themselves difficult, if not inconceivable, to the natural mind, even if cultivated and honest. That two persons should be each *in* the other; that many persons should be *in* one person; that one person should be *in* many persons—these are special ideas difficult to grasp; nor can they be comprehended (*gnōsesthe*, John 14: 20), except by direct illumination by the Spirit of truth.

Because of this difficulty, and to relieve the mind of it, the Lord added the parable of the vine and the branches. This greatly illuminates the whole subject.

I. The vine is planted in the soil: "I am in My Father." It draws from the soil all it needs for life and fruit. This is the sole explanation that the Son of God gave of His life on earth, even as it is the sole explanation of His pre-incarnate life. He did but state an unavoidable fact of the Godhead when He said, "Verily, verily I say unto you, the Son is not able to do anything from Himself, save what He seeth the Father doing" (John 5: 19); because it is not possible that the Persons of the Godhead should act independently of each other, for that would be schism in God and His unity would be at an end.

The very existence of the Son is derived from the Father. He is begotten though not made. This means that He is not a created being but eternal: Yet He has ever been begotten, that is, His existence is not independent, but derived. But He is the only Son Who thus derives existence directly from the Father. All created beings have existence from God through the Son. Therefore He is the "only begotten Son," as He Himself said and other scriptures repeat (John 3: 16; 1: 18).

When He assumed human nature into indissoluble union with Himself He necessarily continued the pre-incarnate relationship to the Father, even as He said, "I live by reason of the Father" (John 6: 57). He attributed to the Father all that He was and owned and thought and did and said and expected. This includes:

(*a*) John 5: 26. *Life that is inherent*, not contingent, not de-

pendent on conditions or on the action of others: "As the Father hath life in Himself, even so *gave* He to the Son also to have life in Himself."

(*b*) *His possessions.* "All things whatsoever the Father hath are mine. . . . The Father loveth the Son and hath given all things into His hand. . . . All things have been delivered unto Me of My Father" (Luke 10: 22). . . . Jesus knowing that the Father had given all things into His hands" (John 16: 15; 3: 35; 13: 3).

(*d*) *Deeds and Words.* "I do nothing of Myself, but as the Father taught Me, I speak these things. . . . I speak the things which I have seen with My Father. . . . My teaching is not Mine but His that sent Me. . . . I am in the Father, and the Father in Me. The words that I say unto you I speak not from Myself: but the Father abiding in Me doeth His works" (John 8: 28, 38; 7: 16; 14: 10).

(*e*) *His Prospects.* It was from the Father He received authority to raise the dead, and to execute judgment (John 5: 21, 22, 25–29; 17: 2); it was from the Father He asked His eternal glory with Himself (John 17: 5); it was from the Father He asked to be raised from the death-state into which He was going in obedience to the Father's will (Heb. 5: 7); it is from the Father He will ask for possession of earthly authority, as part of His universal inheritance: "Ask of Me and I will give Thee the nations for Thine inheritance" (Ps. 2: 8).

Thus, though with the nature and powers of a distinct individuality, the Son is uniformly presented as living by reason of what the Father is to Him. The secret of this perfect inward communion with the Father was faith. He is the very author of faith, being the first who ever trusted God. There never can have been a time when the Son did not trust the Father: it is unthinkable. This reliance, this prayerfulness, this expectation were uninterrupted amid the strain, temptation, tumult of His earthly course. He trusted from His birth: "Thou didst make Me to trust when I was upon My mother's breasts" (Ps. 22: 9, 10); "I will trust in Him" (Heb. 2: 13).

In daily experience this confidence worked out by loving obedience to the Father; "I have kept My Father's commandments and abide in His love" (John 15: 10). This faith working by love was ever the principle of His unbroken inner union and communion as Son with the Father; and therefore there was in the Son an unimpeded display of what the Father is in nature, character, and works: "believe Me that I am in the Father, and the Father in Me," so that "he that hath seen Me hath seen the Father" (John 14: 11, 9).

Therefore there never was, nor ever could be, any exercise of His Divine powers by the Son in independence of the Father; and as man on earth He laid aside their exercise in order to live as men must live, by conscious dependence upon God, and so be our example and our life. And this is at once the hardest and most needful lesson our proud, self-sufficient heart must learn, even that in God "we live, and move, and exist" (Acts 17: 28) and that apart from the Son of God we can do nothing godly (John 15: 5).

II. "Ye in Me and I in you" (John 14: 20). The branches are in the vine and the life of the vine is in the branches, the sole source of their fruit.

It is simply essential to observe that the metaphor is dealing strictly with a *living* and *interior* connexion between the Son of God and believers. In no degree is the parable connected with the justification of a guilty condemned rebel before God or with how such a dead sinner can obtain life eternal. For the eleven disciples to whom the Lord was speaking these initial and fundamental questions had been already settled. Being believers on Jesus as the Son of God they were already possessors of eternal life (John 5: 24; I John 5: 11, 12), which therefore was *not* the subject upon which the Lord was now instructing them.

He was speaking about a distinct and advanced spiritual experience which they should know "in that day" when His Spirit should indwell them and which could not be known until then. He should form Christ *in* them; as Paul said to some who had been brought to the Lord years earlier: "I am again in travail until Christ be formed in you" (Gal. 4: 19). It is thus possible that true believers may live for years in a similar relationship to Christ as were the disciples before Pentecost, an attitude of saving faith and real devotion, yet an external relationship, not an inward, established, vitalizing union.

Thus for the Ephesians also the apostle prayed that the Father would grant that they might be "strengthened with power by His Spirit in the inward man; in order that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith" (Eph. 3: 14–17). This Paul illustrated by a figure closely akin to that of the branch being *vitally* associated with the vine and drawing thence its life energy. He adds the double picture of being "*rooted* and grounded in love." The tree may stand in the soil and yet be "idle and unfruitful" because its rootlets are not actively appropriating the chemicals and moisture of the soil (II Pet. 1: 8). Thus one may be "in Christ" for salvation but Christ not be in him for fruit-bearing; the position indeed in order, but this deep interior, vitalizing appropriation of Christ not operative.

It was this which the Lord heavily stressed that night: He said in effect: (*a*) I shall associate you with Myself as branches in the Vine: (*b*) yours is the responsibility to "abide" in this inward union, this fruit-bearing communion. The A.V., alas, nullifies this heavy stress by translating *meno* by three English words ("abide, continue, remain"); whereas, by using the same word twelve times in these sixteen verses, the Lord by repetition drove home the lesson as repeated blows drive home the nail.

Nor is it only that believers may not have known the indwelling of the Spirit: the cases of the Galatian and Ephesian Christians were otherwise. They *had* received the Spirit (Gal. 3: 2, 5; Eph. 1: 13); yet must the apostle mourn and pray that the fruit of this might be produced. This is a finer and more searching reflection, in harmony with the Lord's exhortation that it is ours to maintain that relation to Him which is in question, or it may be lost. This will become plain as we consider what "fruit" is.

III. *Fruit.* The Divine Speaker made clear what qualities it is that He expects to be produced in His disciples as grapes from the vine.

(*a*) *Love* is the first such quality. "A new commandment give I unto you, that ye love one another; even as I have loved you, that ye also love one another. By this shall all men know that ye are *My* disciples, if ye have love one to another" (John 13: 34, 35; 15: 17). Hitherto they had been jealous of one another and irritable (Matt. 20: 24; Luke 22: 24). The Acts and Epistles show how after Pentecost love flooded their hearts and shone in their deeds.

(*b*) *Peace.* "Peace I leave with you; My peace I give unto you" (14: 27; 16: 33). They had watched their Lord in painful and testing circumstances, but had never seen His brow clouded or His eye anxious. The later histories show them with deep peace of heart under much tribulation.

(*c*) *Joy.* "These things have I spoken unto you that My joy may be in you, and that your joy may be made full" (15: 11). They so fully heeded His words that they gained the joy that had been His strength under provocation (Matt. 11: 25, 26 with Luke 10: 21; Acts 16: 25; Phil. 4: 4; I Pet. 1: 8).

This peace and gladness did not arise from circumstances nor could be damped by them. It was not generated by self-effort, or even by external imitation of Christ; it was *fruit*, the outcome of that deep inward union of spirit with Christ pictured by the branch partaking of the life of the vine.

. . .

IV. *Fruitlessness.* It is truly searching that, as the Lord contemplates, that may become true which is a feature of the vine, even that a branch in Him may fail to bear fruit, that is, a Christian may either never become loving, peaceful, joyful, or may cease to be so. There are in fact too many who can tell when and where they trusted on the Saviour and became at peace *with* God but either never enjoyed or have ceased to enjoy the peace *of* God. Believers not ruled by love; Christians anxious and fretful; saved persons cast down and gloomy—it need not be, it ought not to be, but alas often it is so.

The graces named and the other fruit of the Spirit mentioned in Gal. 5: 22, may be absent. Of the fig tree God had sorrowfully to complain, "I come seeking fruit and find none" (Luke 13: 6); of His older vine, Israel, He said, "wherefore brought it forth wild grapes?"—an even more dreadful condition than being without fruit, and one seen in the "brethren" at Corinth who actually practised or sanctioned immorality and were doing wrong one to another (I Cor. 5: 1, 2; 6: 8).

V. *The Penalty.* (*a*) "Every branch in Me that beareth not fruit," My Father, the husbandman, "*taketh it away*" (ver. 2). Early in the season the vine branches develop buds in clusters. Every branch that does not produce its cluster is cut out of the vine, so that all the sap may go to the fruit, for the wood of the vine is useless for any other purpose than bearing grapes (Ezek. 15). It is thus made plain that this inward relationship of spirit with Christ may be cut short, and will be so if the believer be unfruitful. There is no exception; it is true of "every branch" that is without fruit; and the number is sadly many of those who never enjoyed or who have ceased to enjoy and display this holy, fruitful fellowship with the Son of God.

(*b*) The penalty goes further than excision, for Christ added (ver. 6): "If a man abide not in Me, he is cast forth as a branch, and is withered; and they gather them, and cast them into the fire, and they are burned."

"Withered." How painfully accurate a picture of some who were once full of sap, were green and fruitful, but now are shrivelled, unattractive, useless, a discredit to their profession.

"They gather them." It is men who gather branches and remove them: it is angels who take away lives from the land of the living: "this night *they* require thy soul of thee" (Luke 12: 20); "delivered unto Satan for the destruction of the flesh" (I Cor. 5: 5).

"Cast into the fire and burned." A premature end to a useless life! What a calamity! What loss in this world of love,

joy, and blessed, holy fellowship with the Son of God; what loss hereafter in His day, when the fire shall consume the useless or hurtful works done through the body!

It is vain and harmful to assert that these cannot have been really regenerate persons, but only professors. It is not dead sticks stuck on to the vine that are pictured, but branches livingly associated with it. Otherwise they could not be cut out of it.

If the subject here were how a sinner can be saved from hell, then the teaching that salvation can be lost by backsliding would find here its justification. But this not being the subject the conclusion drawn is unwarranted. Yet we who maintain firmly the truth of the eternal security of the justified must be the more ready to acknowledge that the inward heart-fellowship with Christ, which *is* the subject of the parable, may be forfeited, with the severe temporal consequences indicated. Thus understood the parable follows and enforces the same teaching and warning already found in earlier parables and instruction, and gives a close and personal application to those who have thus far kept in union with Christ.

VI. *The Secret of Abiding in Christ* is simply enjoyment of the love of Christ and loving obedience to His commandments (vers. 9, 10). What a stupendous fact is stated: "Even as the Father hath loved Me, I also have loved you." Into what a clear, radiant, invigorating atmosphere the obedient servant is lifted. How vitalizing is the energy of Divine love! How satisfying, how tranquillizing is the consciousness that one is loved by the Father and the Son! Into this, and nothing less, the disciple is brought by grace: his part is to abide in this sunshine and enjoy it.

But in this Divine realm one invariable law produces and preserves its harmony and bliss—the law of obedience to the will of the God of love. While the Anointed Cherub, then the next to the Person of Jehovah, obeyed that law he enjoyed that Divine love. While Adam did that holy will, all was well. But self-will dragged them from that holy realm of love into misery and destruction; nor can the soul be restored to the heavenly bliss save upon the acceptance of this indispensable condition of keeping the Lord's commandments.

By position, the believer is seated by grace in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus (Eph. 2: 4–6): his enjoyment of this is strictly and necessarily conditioned by obedience to the words of the Lord. The servant is not above his Lord. Unfailing obedience was the secret of the unfailing enjoyment by the Son of the love of the Father: "if ye keep My commandments, ye

shall abide in My love: even as I have kept My Father's commandments, and abide in His love" (ver. 10). It is necessarily the condition of our enjoying the love of the Son. This is neither arbitrary nor accidental: it is the eternal law of communion; it lies in the very nature of the case.

When a traveller, weary from battling by night with a tempest, passes into the light, shelter, warmth, and quiet of his home, how glad and restful he feels. The door through which the Christian escapes in heart from the turmoil of this dark, tempestuous world into the sphere of heavenly love is that of the obedience which love gladly renders to the beloved heavenly Lover. He who having found that place of love and joy and peace, foolishly, wilfully, wickedly resolves to have his own way and do his own will, thereby passes out through the door of Disobedience into the world where false lights mislead and false delights deceive, where communion with the Holy One is impossible, where fruit unto God withers, where "the backslider in heart shall be filled with his own ways" (Prov. 14: 14).

Even so it is true that "he himself shall be saved" in the day of the Lord, even though as one dashing through flames escapes with his life (I Cor. 3: 15); but, oh, it is far, far better to heed in this life the call of Israel's patient gracious Lord, "Return thou backsliding Israel . . . I will heal their backsliding, I will love them freely . . . I will be as the dew unto Israel . . . they shall blossom as the vine" (Jer. 3: 12, 14; Hos. 14: 4–7). Only let the backslider repent betimes, and hasten to return before the warning come to reality, "they gather them and cast them into the fire and they are burned." Thus speedily did Peter repent with tears, and was restored to fellowship and fruitfulness.

VII. *The Privilege of the Fruitful.* Cambyses, son of Cyrus the Great, died 521 B.C. An usurper had already seized the throne of Persia. Seven Persian princes resolved to overthrow him. Darius Hystaspes was one of these and was appointed king by the others. The seven had agreed in advance that the head at any time of either of their families should be free, whenever he pleased, to enter the palace unannounced (Herod. iii. 84). Thus we read later of "the seven princes of Persia and Media who *saw the king's face*, and sat first in the kingdom" (Esth. 1: 14; comp. Ezra 7: 14, "seven counsellors"). In like manner there had been in Israel chief men "who *saw the king's face*" (II Kings 25: 19). And the Lord informs us that in heaven there are certain angels "who do *always behold the face* of My Father who is in heaven" (Matt. 18: 10). This does not mean that they never leave that august Presence, or how should they

attend to their duties toward little children on earth, but it means that they enjoy the high dignity of free access, unrestricted by customary court formalities or limited to set occasions.

It is this high privilege, and indeed something higher, that the Son of God promised that night to the fruitbearers of His people: "I chose you and appointed you, that ye should go and bear fruit, and that your fruit should abide [in contrast to the withering mentioned]; in order that whatsoever ye shall ask of the Father in My Name, He may give it you" (ver. 16). And again, "In that day [when the Spirit should have come and indwelt them], ye shall ask in My name: and I say not unto you that I will make request of the Father for you [on your behalf, *peri humōn*]; for the Father Himself loveth you, because ye have loved Me, and have believed that I came forth from the Father" (16: 26, 27).

Thus does the Son grant to those who love and obey Him, and are therefore fruitful branches, His own unrestricted right of access to His Father; with the assurance that their love to Himself had kindled in the heart of the Father a special affection to them because they showed a special affection to His Son (*phileo*). Six times directly, and once by implication, the Son granted the right to use His name in presenting their requests to the Father (14: 13, 14; 15: 16; 16: 23, 24, *bis*, 26).

He who presents at the bank his own cheque asks for the money in his own name, that is, by virtue of his own right to the sum: but he who presents another's cheque thereby disowns personal right and bases his request wholly upon the name of the other. And if that other has far more than himself to his credit, and if he gives him an open cheque, then he can obtain as much as the name of the other represents to the bank, far beyond what his own name would yield. Thus did the Owner of all things by gift from the Father grant to His faithful, fruitbearing followers His own rights, saying "Whatsoever ye shall ask . . . if ye shall ask anything of the Father He will give it you in My name" (15: 16; 16: 23).

One who heard Christ that night, and who proved a branch that bore much fruit, entered upon the good of these rich promises. Years later John wrote: "Beloved, if our heart condemn us not, we have boldness toward God; and whatsoever we ask we receive of Him, because we keep His commandments and do the things that are pleasing in His sight. And this is His commandment, that we should believe in the name of His Son Jesus Christ, and love one another, even as He gave us commandment. And he that keepeth His commandments abideth in Him, and He in him. And hereby we know that He abideth in us, by the Spirit which He gave us" (I John 3: 21–24).

This final word is proved, and can only be proved, by the growth in the disciple of the fruit of the Spirit, righteousness, peace, joy, and above all unfeigned love one toward another. "Herein is My Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit; and so shall ye be My disciples" (15: 8).

VIII. "*My friends, if.*" The degree to which this intimacy with the Lord may proceed He intimated in the words of verses 14 and 15: "Ye are My friends, if ye do the things which I command you. No longer do I call you servants; for the servant knoweth not what his lord doeth: but I have called you friends; for all things that I heard from My Father I have made known unto you."

The men listening knew their Old Testament, and surely must have remembered that only two men had ever been spoken of by God as His friends, even Abraham and Moses, the two greatest figures before Christ.

Three times the title is applied to Abraham (II Chron. 20: 7; Isa. 41: 8; Jas. 2: 23). To his slave a man gives orders, to his friends he imparts his plans. It is exceedingly affecting to listen to Jehovah talking with Himself and asking "Shall I hide from Abraham that which I do?" (Gen. 18: 17–19). No; him He would inform of His purposes, and the ground of this Divine confidence was that God knew that Abraham would walk in obedience to His commandments and train his household to do so.

Similarly, it is said of Moses (Ex. 33: 11) that "Jehovah spake unto Moses face to face as a man speaketh unto his friend." And the ground for this intimacy was given by God later when He said that to ordinary prophets He would speak by vision or dream, but "My servant Moses is not so; *he is faithful* in all My house: with him will I speak *mouth to mouth*, even manifestly, and not in dark speeches; and the form of Jehovah shall he behold" (Num. 12: 6–8).

To this same high intimacy the Lord now promised to exalt the socially humble men around Him. He had communicated to them the secrets which His Father had entrusted to Him, thus treating them as His intimates, His personal friends; and this He would continue to do by His Spirit until they should have been guided into all the truth, even as to the remote future as planned by God (16: 12, 13). But the ground for this would of necessity be the same as in their great forbears named, "ye are My friends, if ye do the things which I command you."

The test therefore of whether a believer is in the good of this promise is whether he is growingly familiar with the far-reaching purposes of God; whether he has the mind of Christ; or whether

he is still acquainted with only the first principles of the faith. How pitiful it is when a Christian will even complain that ministry is too deep and difficult for him, and he desires only milk, not solid food! Let us rather give good heed to the exhortation to "press on unto full growth" (Heb. 6: 1).

None of the men then addressed by Christ were ever so irreverent as to speak of Him as their Friend or themselves as His friends: on the contrary they described themselves as His slaves (*doulos*).[1] And to all eternity it shall be so, in the new and heavenly world: for there, as here, then as now, "His slaves shall serve Him"; and therefore the high privileges shall be theirs that "they shall see His face" and shall bear His glory, for "His name shall be in their foreheads" (Rev. 22: 3, 4).

Thus this last parable and closing promise spoken by the Lord in the hour of His deepest humiliation, is the basis of the highest revelations of the dignity of the disciple and of the church found later in the writings of the apostles by the Spirit. It was at once the farthest point to which He could then develop the teaching He had commenced, and also the starting point of that fuller instruction He would give by His indwelling Spirit after He had risen and ascended to the Father. Truly did T. D. Bernard call these chapters of John *The Central Teaching of Jesus Christ.* It is this instruction that is termed by the Writer of *Hebrews* the "so great salvation" which the Lord Jesus was the first to impart, and which was confirmed and expanded by them that heard Him. It is for us to give good heed to it, and not be careless as to it. It is for us to honour Him as Lord by being instantly obedient to all His commandments. Fulfilling this wholly indispensable condition the branch, without hustle or struggle, will bear much fruit to the honour of the Vine and the glory of the Husbandman.

[1] Rom. 1: 1; Gal. 1: 10; Col. 4: 12; II Tim. 2: 24; Titus 1: 1; Jas. 1: 1; II Pet. 1: 1; Jude 1; Rev. 1: 1.

CHAPTER XXXIX

THE BODY

I Cor. 12–14; Eph. 1: 23; 4: 1–16; 5: 23, 29, 30

LUKE's narrative of the apostolic age (Acts) shows that there is *continuity* between the earthly life of our Lord as narrated in the Gospels, the period of forty days between the resurrection and ascension, and the following apostolic period. A single word of Scripture may be a casket holding many gems of truth. Such is the word "begin" in Acts 1: 1: "all that Jesus *began* both to do and to teach." The word tells that the earthly ministry of Christ was but the *beginning* of His works and words, which activities He continued by His Spirit in the apostles and prophets. This continuity denies the theory that the three Synoptic Gospels are "Jewish," the Acts "interim," and only Paul's Epistles properly Christian, the other Epistles and the *Revelation* being again "Jewish." On the contrary the whole New Testament is a continuity, a progressive unfolding of the Divine mind and purposes, an expansion of God's covenant with Abraham, after the interlude of the Law.

Therefore the Epistles are found to be a developing and enforcing of "all things whatsoever" the Lord had commanded (Matt. 28: 20), which can be seen in the Pauline use of the human body to illustrate the same truth of vital communion with Christ as was taught in His last parable of the Vine.

Two general features of this figure "body" must be noted:

(*a*) Though worked out in much detail, it is not primary or dominant in Paul's letters. He uses the figures "temple," "betrothed virgin," and "bride" both before, in connexion with, and after that of "body." By some writers this balance has not been preserved and the figure "body" has been overstressed.

(*b*) The figure is not employed by the apostle to teach ecclesiastical or prophetical truth. Its use is confined to the present and practical relationship between Christ and His people. He employs them in His affairs as a man his body, and they therefore display His life, energy, character before the world that cannot otherwise see Him. It is misleading to argue from this figure about the constitution and discipline of the church or its future prospects at the coming of Christ. It is equally misleading to think mechanically about a figure of speech, as if this "body"

must be composed of just so many members, neither one more nor one less. It is evident that the number varies continually from one generation to another. Nor is there warrant for transferring the figure to heaven or the hereafter; its Pauline use concerns the present relationship between the Head and the members and His use of them in His affairs.

The detail lessons are treated in so masterly and simple a manner as to be quite obvious. They will not be here examined. It will suffice to indicate six chief, progressive features that cover and rule all details.

1. I Cor. 12: 1–3. *The Control of the Body.* This is vested solely in the Head: "Jesus is LORD." To acknowledge this in all matters will secure the fulfilment of all that is made possible, all that is designed by the relationship before described in the figure Vine and branches. It is from not "holding fast the Head" (Col. 2: 19) that all diseases and disorders of the body of Christ arise. All wisdom, all planning, all control are in the Head, and from Him flows all vital force to animate and energize the members. When a Christian says, "*I* think so and so," or "This is *my* opinion," he has already relaxed his contact with the Head. The master-mind of Paul revealed the basic principle of man in the flesh when he said of his unregenerate days, "I verily *thought* with *myself*" (Acts 26: 9). Of life in the Spirit he said, "not that we are sufficient of ourselves to *account* [reckon] anything as *from ourselves*" (II Cor. 3: 5). His concern and assurance lay in having the mind of Christ (I Cor. 2: 16).

This cancelling out of all self-sufficiency, this replacing of self by the Head, is so drastic, so death-dealing to the flesh, that no one will find moral strength for it except by the energetic working of the Holy Spirit: "no one can say, Jesus is Lord, but in the Holy Spirit."

In Paul's time the title "lord" was used in three senses. As the equivalent of our polite "Sir," as in John 4: 11, when the woman said, "Sir, thou hast nothing to draw with." But its specific uses were as a title of the gods ("my lord Jupiter") and of the emperor ("my lord Augustus"). Therefore to deny it as a title of dignity to the gods or the Emperor was at once blasphemy and treason, which was the legal ground of the death sentence against the Christian. It therefore required divinely given energy for the disciple to risk torture and death by confessing Jesus as LORD.

On the other hand, no one invigorated and speaking by the Spirit of God could be persuaded to yield to the stern demand to curse his Lord by saying "Jesus is anathema." Thus the

venerable Polycarp, urged by the proconsul to "revile Christ" and save his life, replied: "Eighty and six years have I served Him and He hath done me no wrong. How then can I speak evil of my King Who saved me?" and he went calmly to the pyre (A.D. 155).

Therefore Peter exhorted fellow-disciples to "sanctify in your hearts Christ as LORD" (I Pet. 3: 15). Make your heart a temple where Christ rules as Lord. This acknowledgment of His Lordship, as Head of the body, carries with it that obedience to His commandments which He declared to be the condition upon which the branch abides in the Vine and bears much fruit. It is also the condition upon which a church of believers can prosper. So in ch. 14: 37 of I Corinthians the apostle calls for acknowledgment of the "commandments of the Lord" relating to gatherings of saints.

Such thorough crucifixion of the self-life can be as painful to the spirit as rack and flames to the body, but death is the path to resurrection. The sanctifying of Christ as LORD is the secret of freedom, health, and fruitful service.

2. *The Spirit in the Body* (I Cor. 12: 4–13). The first stage in the creation of Adam was the forming of the body. But it was lifeless. Into this body God breathed another created element termed "breath" or "spirit." This gave animation, and Adam became a living entity, a soul (Gen. 2: 7). Thus by this spirit myriads of particles formed into many members, became one animate, corporate person, and Adam could carry out his God-designed activities.

A similar but nobler creative work commenced at Pentecost. The Lord had before made many disciples. They had been *associated* with Him and with each other: at Pentecost they were *incorporated* into Him and each other as one "body," one living organism: "Ye in Me and I in you" became fact (John 14: 20). This was effected by the indwelling of the Spirit. As the spirit of man pervades every part and particle of his body, so does the Spirit of God pervade every member of this body of Christ.

The most perfectly modelled finger would not become part of a man by being stuck on to his hand; but a piece of grafted flesh can become part of him if a vital union takes place and his spirit comes to pervade it. No one becomes a member of Christ by an external ordinance or formal membership of a church. Nor does even the new birth by faith in the Redeemer suffice for this. All the first disciples of Christ had experienced that new birth, but it was not that regeneration by the Spirit but His

subsequent personal indwelling that joined them into that new corporation, the body of Christ.

The A.V. mistranslates verse 13 of our chapter 12 by reading: "by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body . . . and have all been made to drink into one Spirit." From this "are" arises the unwarranted inference that this is a continuous universal experience of believers. The Greek says:

(*a*) "In one Spirit," not "by one Spirit." The Lord is He Who baptizes, not the Spirit: the Spirit is the medium into which we are baptized, corresponding with the medium of water into which the body is immersed.

(*b*) It also says, "we *were* baptized," not "are"; we "were" made to drink, not "have been." The statements are in the aorist or historic tense, and cannot be rendered here by the English present or perfect tenses. It refers to what was fact in the cases of Paul and his then readers (Acts 9: 17; I Cor. 1: 4–7); it does not assert that the same is automatically the case with each believer.

(*c*) It does not say "drink *into* one Spirit," but "of one Spirit." Is the former idea comprehensible? Here also there is reference to "*a fact gone by*" (Alford *in loco*). It is not an assertion that every believer has the like experience.

Many Christians have no such experience and therefore do not display the due accompanying signs of it. Can one be immersed, or have been filled with drink, and not know it? Another figure of this experience is "anointing." Could a priest or a king be anointed with fragrant oil and those around not perceive it? A further figure is "sealing." Can there be such a thing as an invisible seal? or of what use could it be?

The question is wholly practical. A believer not baptized in the Spirit, not indwelled by Him from having "drunk" of this living water, is not yet a member of this spiritual body. Here surely is the simple explanation that saved persons can remain unused by Christ, not being members of Him.

As one wishing to be baptized in water must present himself for that purpose to one willing to immerse him, so must one who wishes to be baptized in the Spirit present himself for this purpose to the Lord, in full devotion to Him to do His will and further His purposes. For to this end is the Spirit given.

And when this indwelling, pervading presence of the Spirit of God is realized, then and thereby the fact of incorporation into the body of Christ will become a dominating factor in all life, and the anointed, consecrated disciple will understand that word of A. N. Groves, when he and his wife had dedicated themselves

unreservedly to the Lord, "We had no object now in life, but living to the Lord and the church."[1]

Paul's discussion which follows reveals two basic facts. First, how the Spirit manifests His presence in the body (ver. 7), and that He is sovereign in the imparting of the various supernatural workings by which He thus manifests Himself (ver. 11).

The Headship of Christ and the operations of His Spirit are the two divine and dominating factors in the body. Other features result.

3. *The Diversity of the Body* (vers. 12–18). As the body of man is composed of members varying in many particulars, so is the body of Christ. Variety is intentional and conspicuous, not only in natural characteristics but also in those spiritual powers and functions named in vers. 8–10.

4. *The Unity of the Body* (vers. 19–31). This unity is one of organism, not organization. The Lord's desire for oneness in His people (John 17: 20–23) was not for an external organization but for an inward oneness, resulting from and like to the oneness of the Father and the Son. The oneness of the Godhead is not something external and organized. Therefore in the "body of Christ" it is inward, of the Spirit; the oneness illustrated by the Vine and its branches and now by the unity of many differing members in one body.

Man can form an external organization, with an elected head, defined constitution, and acknowledged regulations. This is legality, effective for its purposes, but foreign to the very genius of the church, the body of Christ. This organism is formed and animated by the one Spirit of life. It is *this* unity that the Christian is exhorted to keep with all diligence (Eph. 4: 3). Woe to him that violates it: blessed is he that guards it, at whatever cost, short of sacrifice of truth.

This unity in diversity and diversity in unity is again emphasized (vers. 27–30).

The first sentence should read "ye are body of Christ," not "the body." Those addressed were only part of the body. It is an interesting instance of the Greek idiom by which the absence of the article makes the noun to denote a characteristic: You hold to Christ the position of body to its head. This is seen at ch. 3: 16 also: "Ye are temple of God"; this is what marks you: but they were not the whole temple of God.

It is to be noted that each of the seven questions put in verses

[1]See my *Anthony Norris Groves*, 100, *2nd ed.*

29 and 30 supposes a negative answer: "Are all apostles?" NO! and so on. Therefore, "Do all speak with tongues?" NO!

Yet it is also to be observed that the people of God are positively exhorted to *desire earnestly* these heavenly gifts and especially the greater of them, and particular the power to prophesy (ch. 14: 1). The theory that the gifts were not intended to be permanent in the church is a poor excuse for the general spiritual poverty. It finds no support in this or any other scripture.

But there is something greater: "And a still more excellent way shew I unto you" (12: 31). A still more excellent way of doing what? Verse 7 governs the whole discussion and gives the answer: a more excellent way of manifesting the presence and nature of the Spirit that animates the body of Christ. This way is

5. *The Law of the Body.* The law that rules the Spirit that animates this body is the royal law of Divine Love, the law that rules God Himself, for He is love. This principle of conduct, here so exquisitely analysed and described, means that

(*a*) *Love is Essential* (I Cor. 13: 1–3). Without it the highest gifts of tongues, prophecies, understanding of things Divine, faith at its severest exercise, sacrifice of means and life—all without love as their inspiring motive have no worth to the heart of God. He *is* love, and naught is of Him which is not consonant with His heart.

(*b*) *Love is Triumphant* (vers. 4–7). Opposition is fuel to its flame. It presents an impenetrable shield to every fiery dart of temptation; and no matter how severe or long be the battle of life, Divine love conquers at last in the child of God because it "endureth all things."

(*c*) *Love is Permanent* (vers. 8–12). "Love never faileth"; it never falls down in the battle or falls out of the race (*oudepote piptei*), nor becomes superfluous. Other supernatural workings will not be needed when the perfect, heavenly state shall have been gained at the coming of the Lord. But faith in God, hope of His blessing, love to Him and all men—these are permanent, and of these love is the greatest, and therefore

(*d*) *Love is Supreme* (ver. 13). The various exhortations which follow in ch. 14 are but applications of the law of Divine love to the questions and affairs reviewed. Indeed, all the commandments of God in all ages and to all persons are fully summarized in the word near the close of this Epistle: "Let all that ye do be done in love" (16: 14).

Such is the office of the body of Christ. It is the organ through which the Spirit of the Lord works. In it He exalts

Christ as Lord and Head. In it He furthers Christ's purposes. In it He is the secret energy by which this body builds itself up in love and grows up into a stature worthy of its exalted Head. This is the special theme of the Ephesian passage cited. A deformed body is unsuited to a noble head. Let each give diligence to "grow up into Him in all things" and to foster such conformity in others.

But woe unto him who frustrates the working of the Spirit in himself or others. For even as the branch in Christ may fail to bring forth fruit, so may one indwelled by the Spirit "grieve," do "despite to," and at last "quench" that Spirit (Eph. 4: 30; Heb. 10: 29; I Thess. 5: 19). This last word *spennumi* means to quench a fire or a light. If the fire of Divine love in a Christian be put out, how cold will that heart become! "if the light that is in thee be darkness, the darkness how great" (Matt. 6: 23). A branch may be cut out of a vine, a limb from a body, and a lampstand be removed from its place.

But if that heavenly love dictates our ways by ruling our hearts, then all shall be well; for "he that abideth in love, abideth in God, and God abideth in him" (I John 4: 16).

CHAPTER XL

THE TWO WOMEN— AN ALLEGORY ON SLAVERY OR LIBERTY

Gal. 4: 21–5: 1

I. The Occasion of the Allegory

THE true nature of the Christian calling is that God hath called us into "the fellowship of His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord" (I Cor. 1: 9). Fellowship (*koinōnia*) equals partnership, sharing jointly. It means far more than doing business with or deriving benefit from another. The Son of God is the dearest of all objects to the heart of the Father. We are called to share this unique affection, even as that Son said: "that the world may know that Thou didst send Me, and lovedst them, *even as Thou lovedst Me*. . . . I have made known unto them Thy name, and will make it known; that *the love wherewith Thou lovedst Me may be* in them, and I in them" (John 17: 23, 26).

Consequent upon this partnership is the further stupendous thought intimated by the Son in the words that "the glory which Thou hast given Me I have given unto them"; and this glory is to be shared in its native realm of highest heaven, even as the Son said to the Father, "I desire that they also whom Thou hast given Me be *with Me where I am*, that they may behold My glory" (John 17: 22, 24).

It is evident that this exalted position and prospect is altogether additional to and superior to the initial blessing of a criminal being pardoned and the sentence of death remitted. This latter is indeed indispensable, but does not of necessity involve the nobler privileges. What, then, is the ground of these latter? It is shown in the Lord's final words at that time to His Father, "that the love wherewith Thou lovedst Me may be in them, and *I in them*" (John 17: 26). It is *only* the Son that excites *this* degree of the Divine affection: He only is worthy of it: and it is *the Son in the disciple* that the Father thus loves.

It is one thing for the believer to be seen by God in Christ judicially, and therefore exempt eternally from wrath: it is another thing for Christ to be actually in the believer by moral development, and this it is that is *the hope of glory* (Col. 1: 27). Hence the urgency of Christ and the apostles that this moral conformity to Him should advance apace in the believer.

Such partnership between man and Christ was obviously not possible so long as the Son was in His original form of God, for the creature cannot become partaker of pure Deity. Therefore it is into fellowship with the Son *as Jesus Christ our Lord* that we are called. The Father sent Him into the world as man, that He might redeem us from sin and perdition, and bring back with Him "many sons unto glory" (Heb. 2: 10).

This whole possibility and prospect must of necessity be an outcome of the gracious disposition of God toward mankind, and so Scripture speaks of God's "kindness and philanthropy," His loving thought for men (Titus 3: 4). Even had man never sinned, yet his continuance in dutiful relationship of creature to Creator would have given him no claim to be exalted above the highest angels to share the glory of the Son of God. Much more must this be so with fallen man.

Therefore all must be wrought by God on the ground and principle of grace, for no success in keeping the law of God could have availed to bring unfallen man to that supreme bliss and glory: and certainly no effort of fallen man to keep that law could avail, even could he keep it, which, however, he is disabled from doing by the weakness of his depraved nature (Rom. 8: 3–8).

Yet man has an instinctive consciousness that he is under obligation to obey his Creator, and it is most difficult to dissuade him from the attempt to establish right relations with God by his own efforts. Only the Divine Spirit of truth can convince him that his nature is completely incapable of the task, and that he must abandon it and rely for the pardon and favour of God wholly upon the redeeming work wrought for him by the Son of God upon the atoning cross.

And even when this has been reached the same instinctive tendency may persist, and the justified man endeavour by his own works of law to maintain the relation into which grace has brought him in Christ. This was the deadly peril of the Galatian believers, and it is the paralysing principle of all ritualistic, external religion. To combat it, and to save Christians from returning to legality and self-effort, was the great purpose for which Paul wrote to the Galatian children of God, and for which he employed the allegory before us.

II. The Allegory

Like every allegory this instructive specimen is constructed upon a plan of duality, a first set of circumstances being set over against a second set.

First, it must be noted for clarity that the word "law" is used in verse 21 in two senses. "Tell me, ye that desire to be under law" (no article); ye who propose to conduct relations with God on the principle of law: "do ye not hear the law?" The term is not here, as often, restricted to the law promulgated at Sinai and elaborated through Moses, for the word of God and the events cited occurred four centuries before Moses. The term is applied to the whole Book of God, the Old Testament, including (as here) histories, and also psalms, and prophets. Compare

John 10: 34 referring to Psalm 82: 6;
John 12: 34 referring to Psalm 110: 4; Isa. 9: 7; etc.;
John 15: 25 referring to Psalm 35: 19; 69: 4;
I Cor. 14: 21 referring to Isa. 28: 11.

The dual features are:

1. *Two women*—the slave and the free-born, Hagar and Sarah, bearing
2. *Two Sons*—Ishmael and Isaac; these correspond to
3. *Two mountains*—Sinai (= Jerusalem in Palestine) and the Jerusalem above; with which are connected
4. *Two covenants*—one with Moses and one with Abraham. There are
5. *Two generating powers*—the flesh, and the promise; producing
6. *Two lines of conduct*—by the flesh, persecution; by the spirit, endurance of faith; ending in
7. *Two issues*—disinheriting or inheriting.

The general and conclusive argument is that these two sets of conditions and circumstances are irreconcilable and one cannot be in them both.

1. A woman cannot be both free-born and born a slave.
2. Ishmael is not Isaac and Isaac is not Ishmael. One cannot be descended from both and inherit from both.
3. Sinai is the place of Divine law; the heavenly Jerusalem is the sphere of Divine grace and glory.
4. The law of Moses was later than the covenant with Abraham. The provisions of the former cannot disannul the promises of the latter (ch. 3: 17, 18). If one chooses the terms laid down by Moses he must needs forfeit the benefit of the promises to Abraham.
5. Ishmael was born of Abraham indeed, but from the latter's natural energy and desire. Isaac was born on a far nobler level: he was the son of Divine promise and begotten by supernatural energy Divinely working in his parents.[1]

[1] The children of Keturah (Gen. 25: 1) were not the subjects of Divine promise nor of any supernatural faith or working, as in Sarah.

6. That which is born of the flesh abhors that which is born of the Spirit and ever opposes it. The moral fact is that nature in man abhors the work of the Spirit in man. Hence the age-long persecutions of men who walk with God, the persecutors being often sincere men (John 16: 2; Acts 26: 9).

7. It is even now the case that those who are under the law find the flesh in them provoked to rebellion against its provisions, so that they forgo the righteousness, peace, and joy which obtain in the kingdom of God. This must extend to the future also; the inheritance of sons cannot be secured by works of law, but only by the faith that lays hold of the promise of God.

This involves deep and far-reaching principles in the ways of God.

i. The man of faith enters into the high privileges of the promises to Abraham. "We brethren, as Isaac was, are children of promise" (ver. 28). God's promise to Abraham ran, "in thee shall all the families of the earth be blessed" (Gen. 12: 3). The extension of salvation in Christ to Gentiles is in pursuance of this promise. The covenant at Sinai excluded Gentiles unless they became members of the nation of Israel by the rite of circumcision; but the promise had been given to Abraham before he was circumcised, and is therefore independent thereof (Rom. 4: 19–24).

As no one had or could keep fully the law each was under its curse upon the law-breaker; but Christ redeemed us from that curse, in order that unto the Gentiles might come the blessing of Abraham in Christ Jesus. So "if ye are Christ's, then are ye Abraham's seed, heirs according to promise," for "they that are of faith are blessed with the faithful Abraham" (Gal. 3: 13, 14, 29, 9).

It follows from this argument, as established in *Romans*, *Galatians*, and *Hebrews*, that the gospel age is not an interim dispensation inserted into the era of law (so that the latter is to be revived when the church has been completed), a filling up of a parenthesis in the history of Israel: but this gospel era is a turning from law, as the main principle of relationship between God and man, to the covenant with Abraham on the basis of grace on God's part and faith on man's part.

It is *the law* that is the interim age; *it* was the supplementary insertion, the temporary addition (Rom. 5: 20; Gal. 3: 19) to serve the end of causing man to feel his, and its, inadequacy to meet his need Godward. And the law was added only until Christ should come and enable men of faith to inherit the full

blessing of God under His covenant promise to Abraham and his descendants in faith. Thus the law and the prophets extended only till the Forerunner of Messiah appeared (Matt. 11: 13; Luke 16: 16), and from that point came the resumption of the covenant with Abraham.

ii. As Hagar is Mount Sinai, the place of the law, Hagar's child, Ishmael, must point to the children of Israel under that law. Ishmael was a slave-child, and Sinai, says Paul, "genders to bondage," and is the same as the earthly Jerusalem whose children are in bondage. It is the painful fact that the pious Jew, striving to please God by works of law, the pious ritualist under every religion, the pious people who profess no creed yet seek to do what they think right, are alike in being in bondage of spirit and do not know the "liberty of the sons of God." Conscious of the imperfection and insufficiency of their best efforts, aware that the law is against them because of their failures, and has just claims that they cannot meet, such souls are in bondage, like the debtor under ancient law cast into prison for a debt he can never discharge.

It is of great importance to recognize what precisely Ishmael represents as a type. He was begotten of Abraham, the servant of God. He cannot point to the vast number who have no relation at all to God. But he was a product of the very natural desire of Sarah and Abraham to have a son who should inherit the promise of God now seemingly impossible of fulfilment. *It was nature's attempt to serve God's purpose.*

Thus Ishmael was not a product of carnal lust in Abraham. Had that swayed him he might legally have indulged with the slave girl the very day he acquired her, and continually. As yet there was no law, Divine or human, to the contrary, and "where there is no law, neither is there transgression" (Rom. 4: 15). Therefore Ishmael does not represent the baser and evil desires and doings of human nature, but rather the endeavour of the higher, better side of the religious man to serve God, but *along his own lines*, by his own efforts, without faith and Divine grace.

What a wide field does this cover in nominal Christian spheres and activities. How very much that passes for "Christian" worship and service is but the outworking of the natural man. In I Cor. 2: 13–3: 3 Scripture distinguishes between the carnal, the natural, and the spiritual, all as working in the regenerate man. The carnal shows itself in things actually and essential evil—jealousy, strife, fornication, drunkenness, covetousness, reviling, forcing money from others (extortion), and such-like

wickedness. But the natural is the higher side of man, yet it is nevertheless only a product of man, not of the Spirit of God working a *new* life in man. It is not spiritual, but natural.

Let the believer search and try his *religious* ways. Is his preaching the product only of his natural powers of mind, of research, of study, even of God's Word? Does he rely on logic and rhetoric, or, like Paul, on the Spirit of truth alone to convict hearers? (I Cor. 2: 4). Why is the Christian hospitable? Is it only because he finds natural pleasure in company and would think life dull without it? Why does he give money to good causes? Why does he like fine architecture, coloured windows, splendid vestments in public worship? Why will some attend the singing practice of the church who do not gather for prayer? Why does a missionary lantern meeting usually draw more together than a Bible exposition? Why are religious movies and films so attractive? What prompted a T.V. of Holy Communion?—the Sacred Supper degraded to a public show? Is it the heavenly man or the natural that relies on startling advertisements of meetings and sensational reports of them? Is it trust in God or natural prudence that leads to regular circulars and reports of a man's gospel labours?

In such, and a hundred other matters, it can be the natural instinct and desire that prompt in even religious exercises, and the product as God sees it is—Ishmael! The Christian's thought and wish may be to further the cause of God, but the product is Ishmael!

"Howbeit what saith the scripture? Cast out the handmaid (bondwoman) and her son: for the son of the handmaid *shall not inherit* with the son of the free woman" (Gal. 4: 30). This principle is unalterable when it is the matter of the *inheritance* of the free-born *son*. Only this must here be distinctly apprehended and emphasized, that it is from the *inheritance* that Ishmael, the natural man, is disqualified: it is no question of him losing his life as a criminal sentenced by law to die.

This last situation would exist in every person who sought to base his position before God on his own works, for he would be under the curse of the law he had failed fully to keep. But for two thousand five hundred years before Sinai God had shown the way of escape from that curse, even an atoning sacrifice of blood, and Abel, Noah, Abraham, Job and others had availed themselves of that redemption by offering sacrifices typical of the redemptive work of Christ. This situation continued under the Mosaic law, and the repentant sinner had the clear assurance of pardon on the ground of sacrifice (Lev. 5: 10, 13, 16, 18; 6: 7), and thus the tax-gatherer "went down to his house justified"

(Luke 18: 14). Pardon never was obtained by works, but by faith and atonement.

But this is not the position when Ishmael is viewed here typically. Here it is a question of which son of the already justified man shall be his heir under God's covenant. For *this* purpose so faithful a servant as Eliezer had been set aside, for he was a slave: "This man shall not be thine heir" (Gen. 15: 4). Scripture does not speak of a *covenant* as to pardon, justification, eternal life. No sovereign enters into a covenant with rebels. He may make overtures and offers of pardon; but he will not make a covenant with them until they have ceased hostilities, laid down their arms, and accepted his mercy. Thus it was *after* Abram had been accounted righteous by faith (Gen. 15: 6) that God entered into *covenant* with him, and this concerned not salvation only but *an inheritance* (vers. 7–21).

Now Abraham desired of God that Ishmael might be his heir under this covenant: "Oh that Ishmael might live before Thee" (Gen. 17: 18); but God said, "Nay"; Isaac the heir was to be born supernaturally, "and I will establish My covenant with him" (ver. 19). Thus does even the justified man still desire to maintain the presence and status of the natural element, the product of his better, not his baser, activities. And God granted blessing upon Ishmael, saying, "I have heard thee, behold I have *blessed* him . . . but My *covenant* will I establish with *Isaac*."

It is therefore clear that Ishmael was not regarded as accursed, but he could not inherit the covenant. This distinction is of vast significance. There is no curse, but rather earthly blessing upon the higher natural products of a justified man, such as music, art, literature, architecture, scientific attainment, all in short that we term aesthetic. But they have no place in the *covenant* blessings of God with Abraham, but have rather to be "cast out," so that only the new, spiritual, heavenly nature, begotten in man supernaturally, may prevail; and it alone can *inherit*.

This is inevitable at last even though Ishmael may be circumcized (Gen. 17: 23), that is, even though the natural man may be dedicated to God. For it will be found at last that even consecrated natural instincts will war against the higher spiritual life, even as Ishmael mocked at Isaac (Gen. 21: 9).

This casting out of Ishmael "was very grievous in Abraham's sight because of his son" (ver. 11), even as it can be painful to a cultured Christian to dispense with the pleasant enjoyments afforded by his cultivated natural man; but God endorsed Sarah's judgment upon this matter, and encouraged Abraham not to be grieved, for "in *Isaac* shall thy seed be called," even while

at the same time He renewed His blessing on Ishmael for Abraham's sake.

A wealthy young lady was converted. She was cultured. She told me that she knew that literature would be her chief obstacle to a fully consecrated life, so, as she said, she treated it as if it was the right hand that would cause her to stumble, and she cut it off and cast it from her. Thus did she cast out Ishmael.

The natural can be a serious danger to the spiritual man, to Isaac and not only to Ishmael. The latter was a wild-ass, restless, roving, contentious (Gen. 16: 12). Thus does the Christian in whom the natural prevails find his heart a desert, where unsatisfied cravings cause restlessness and conflict as everyday conditions. But Isaac was a quiet man, who meditated in solitude as evening fell and the day's duties were over (Gen. 24: 63). Not for him were the innocent evening revelries of the camp. He learned to bring God into life's disappointments (Gen. 25: 21). When violent men robbed him once and again, depriving him of the fruit of his toil and of a sheer necessity for life (water), he quietly yielded the situation, and found that God would lead him to a God-given sphere and provision (Gen. 26). Yet to even so heavenly-minded a man the natural proved a snare. His natural and proper desire to protect the wife he loved drew him from faith in God as to her, and caused him to lie about her (Gen. 26: 7). Later, his natural and permissible liking for a certain food led him to give one son preference over the other, because he gratified his father in this (Gen. 25: 28), which preference brought trouble (ch. 27).

This "casting out" cannot in practice be complete in this life though the situation be accepted in heart. There are factors in man's natural life which are God-appointed for the earth, to which he is required to attend. Wedded, family, and social relationships; eating and working; pleasure in God's handiwork in creation, are examples. The heir of the glory of God is to walk in these things worthily of his high calling as an heir to a throne. Yet even so, the future outweighs the present, the heavenly dominates the earthly, the spiritual the natural; and the heir of God restricts these proper matters to their lesser place, curtails them to the just minimum, and can dispense with them without regret when this furthers his spiritual development and the interests of the heavenly kingdom which is his all-inclusive concern.

Thus he uses this world but does not abuse it; he knows that in that heavenly realm marriage does not obtain (Luke 20: 35, 36); that food is for the belly and the belly for food, but God

shall bring to naught both of these (I Cor. 6: 13). He enslaves his body lest the natural shall overpower the spiritual and he be disapproved at last and forfeit his crown (I Cor. 9: 27); he anticipates that when that which is perfect shall have come all these natural elements in his life shall cease (I Cor. 13: 10); and as Ishmael shall then be completely cast out, he dispenses with him now as fully as may be. John Woolman, the Quaker draper, pursued this heavenly way and he wrote: "Things which served chiefly to please the vain mind in people I was never easy to trade at: seldom did it, and when I did found it weaken me as a Christian."

Abraham was the head of a large clan and carried heavy responsibilities. He could lead away three hundred fighting men on a raid (Gen. 14: 14). It must be presumed that enough other men were left to protect the camp and herds. If we suppose 500 men in all, these would have as many wives, plus the usual children. Yet this man of affairs so ordered daily life that he could avoid the strain of noontide heat (Gen. 18), and when unexpected guests appeared he could welcome and attend them. Thus he unawares entertained angels as well as their and his Lord. He then accompanied his Lord over the uplands of Judea for the many miles from the tent at Mamre to the nearest point where they could look down from the mountain ridge into the deep valley of the Jordan, 4,000 feet below, where the doomed cities lay sinning in the sunshine. Thus did the Lord of the covenant and the man of the covenant have leisure for each other, the One graciously enjoying the company of His friend and the other learning the secrets of his Lord.

To-day, alas, too many earnest servants of the same Lord have little leisure for Him when He interrupts their busy life in the person of some passing guest or needy soul. As soon as decency and good manners permit they must bow Him politely from the door and rush off on some self-arranged task. Thus can natural zeal in good work shut the door on the heavenly Guest and open it to the rush and whirl of the modern world. Too often there presently is seen that when the Devil drives the pace is indeed killing, for he lands vigorous Jehus in the Lord's army into the deep ditch of nervous exhaustion or premature death. Thus not only the carnal but also the natural may be a foe to rob the Christian, for

> It is not always open ill
> That risks the promised rest;
> The better often is the foe
> That keeps us from the best.

Blessed is he who is learning what these further lines describe:

From out this crowded, rushing life
My heart retires to Thee, my God;
Withdraws from worldly strain and strife
To tread the path that Jesus trod;
With soul from inward turmoil free,
To love and serve and worship Thee.

Man's hectic madness fills his world,
But troubles not Thy holy place;
His battle banners ne'er are furled,
But here is peace before Thy face;
Eternal light no cloud can dim,
Eternal calm, eternal hymn.

And, oh, to know this place is mine!
Though yet by faith, in measure small:
To breathe its air, to sip its wine,
To dwell where God is all in all—
This, this is LIFE, before the throne,
And all is death save this alone.

In this supremacy of the spiritual and subordination of the natural, as in all other matters, our Lord is our Example. He loved and honoured His mother, and cared for her welfare to the last, providing for her ere He died (John 19: 25–27); but nevertheless He set higher than His mother, His brethren, and His sisters, those who received and obeyed the word of God, which fact three evangelists record (Matt. 12: 46–50; Mark 3: 31–35; Luke 8: 19–21).

iii. All this is deeply instructive to the spiritual mind, while deeply mysterious to any other mind. The explanation of the casting out of the natural lies wholly in that which Isaac represents as *the heir* to the *covenant*. In this respect he stands high above Ishmael, though as to justification before God they were both on the same footing of atoning sacrifice. In this last basic position there was no preference of Isaac over Ishmael, no casting out of the latter.

In our Epistle Paul makes this clear. In ch. 3 he deals first with the justification of the ungodly and shows that man cannot completely fulfil the law and can escape its curse only through the redemptive work of the cross. But the Divine purpose of this redemption is that believers may receive the blessing of Abraham, including particularly "the *promise of the Spirit* through faith" (1–14). Now the precise purpose of this indwelling of the Spirit is that man may cease to be under the law, ruled by it as by a steward and guardian, a child not having yet reached its

majority; but shall attain the status, freedom, and dignity of a grown-up son (3: 15–4: 7), and being a son be therefore *an heir*. The whole argument is directed to this climax of sonship and heirship. This is Isaac, this is the new man in Christ, begotten by the direct regenerating act of the Spirit of God. In this status and sphere, in this new creation, all is from above, from heaven, and the natural has no more place than the carnal, not because it is evil (as is carnality), but because it is of the earth and not the heavens. "Wherefore if any man is in Christ, he is a new creature: the old things are passed away; behold they are become new" (II Cor. 5: 17).

It is obvious that when this new man is at last full grown, proportionate to the stature of Christ, and has been literally translated to the heavens, the native sphere of his new life, the natural elements which belong to the earth will have been completely replaced in him by the heavenly instincts which transcend them and will transfigure them. Ishmael will have passed out of the scene and Isaac alone will inherit, even as the literal Ishmael departed from the camp of Abraham and Isaac inherited all things.

iv. This implies what the apostle proceeds to state. Jerusalem that is of the earth was in bondage. The capital city having been captured by the Romans all the Jewish people passed under bondage to them. So also it was as to their spiritual life. The Romans indeed could not enslave this, but it was in bondage to the principle of self-effort, of works of law.

But the Jerusalem that is above is a free city, free from both outward and inward bondage, free from all law save the royal law of love which its King Himself obeys and which involves all permanent duty and rule.

Now this City had been revealed to Abraham as part of his promised inheritance, and he with Isaac and Jacob, had steadfastly embraced that promise and lived in the light of that high and heavenly prospect. So far from the earth, even its natural and right things, binding them, they were content to be pilgrims dwelling in tents, and pursuing their set course toward that City (Heb. 11: 8–21).

Only comparatively few of their descendants are shown to have joined them in this quest and life. The more part, even of the pious, seem to have been content to serve God as godly men of the earth. But when the time had come for the Sovereign of that heavenly realm to visit this earth, then both His Forerunner and Himself, in clarion tones, announced that that kingdom of *the heavens* had now drawn near to them, and men were

called to a thorough change of mind and attitude, even to set their minds on the things above, not on the things on the earth. This was a resumption of that calling to the heavens which had reached and won and held Abraham.

Therefore John the Baptist emphasized that promised reception by believers of the Spirit, and consistently with this the Son of God went on to show man how so to live that they might be "*sons* of their Father Who is in the heavens" (Matt. 5: 9, 43–48; Luke 6: 35). It was the dominant note of His message; and so far is the discourse on the Mount from being "Jewish," or only the laws for the earth in the Millennial days, that most definitely and characteristically it is a statement of the true Christian life and the full Christian relation to God of sons to Father.

Therefore the reward for such response as the Lord required was placed in the heavens: "great is your reward *in heaven*" stands at the very commencement of His ministry (Matt. 5: 12); and a last promise before He returned to heaven was that He was going to prepare there a place for faithful disciples and would come again, receive them to Himself, and translate them thither (John 14: 1–3).

Now it was part of this call that the carnal must be utterly abandoned; and, in addition, the Lord educated them to cast out Ishmael, so that the Father should find such worshippers as He greatly desires, whose relations to Himself should not be marked by the natural elements of this mountain or that city, of externalism and formality and ritual, gratifying the natural man, but consist of unmingled exercise of the spirit, and so be true worship. Since God as to His being is spirit, it is the unmixed devotion of the spirit of His sons that is in harmony with Himself.

All the apostles emphasized this line of thought, and they strove to educate and develop their children in faith in this growth and sonship and to have their hearts and hopes set on that heavenly world. And in this connexion they called for a casting out of Ishmael so as to be wholly free. Therefore, pleads the apostle in another place, "let us cleanse ourselves from all defilement of flesh [the outer life] and spirit [the inner man], and go on perfecting holiness in the fear of God," that is, let us cast out Ishmael that we may know God as Father (II Cor. 7: 1). The price is trifling, the prize magnificent, and its foretaste on earth by the Spirit is abundant. As A. N. Groves wrote: "To feel ourselves the Lord's free-born children in the way of holiness, is a most privileged place, amidst all the bondage of earth's cares" (*Anthony Norris Groves*, p. 300).

This noble allegory elaborates the noblest of themes. It is a concentration of the high and holy calling to the heavens which earlier scriptures have set before our hearts, and it shows the sufficiency of the grace of the Spirit to enable faith to respond and so to receive the benefits promised.

Also, it is in line with all the previous presentations of the subject in that, before closing this same Epistle, solemn warning is given that it is possible to miss the inheritance announced; for writing of every kind of defilement of flesh and spirit, the Apostle solemnly says, "Of the which I forewarn you, even as I did forewarn you, that they who practise such things kingdom of God [no article: equals, royal authority] shall not inherit" (ch. 5: 19–21—see also Eph. 5: 5; I Cor. 6: 7–10).

Oh to know experimentally and fully the power of that great word: "If the Son shall make you free [shall emancipate you from slavedom] ye shall be free indeed" (John 8: 34–36)! Let us give diligent heed to the closing appeal of the allegory: "For freedom did Christ set us free: stand fast therefore, and be not entangled again in a yoke of bondage" (ch. 5: 1).

CHAPTER XLI

THE OLIVE TREE

Romans 11

THE allegory of Ishmael and Isaac lifts the heart to the exalted truths of sonship and inheritance, the full development of the heavenly seed of Abraham and its eternal portion in the heavens. This is Christianity in the proper sense of the term.

This accentuates the inquiry as to the prospects of the earthly descendants of Abraham under God's covenant with him. Have they dropped wholly out of the counsels and promises of God, so that henceforth only the heavenly side of the covenant remains? Many have said so; but Paul is emphatically against it, and he spoke by the Spirit of God.

The Jewish people of old were puffed up by the rich favours bestowed on them as children of Abraham in contrast to the lot of the Gentiles, and dismissed these from the favour of God. They failed to recognize that the primary promise to their great Ancestor was precisely that all the human race should be recovered for God (Gen. 12: 3).

Now, with the subjugation of the Jewish State by the Gentile Romans, and with the gathering out from both Jews and Gentiles of a new society, brought into the heavenly privileges of the covenant with Abraham, there was grave danger that Christians should likewise misread the events transpiring and dismiss Israel from God's favour and be puffed up by the honours bestowed on themselves. Against this Paul wrote distinctly: "I would not, brethren, have you ignorant of this mystery [secret now revealed], lest ye be wise in your own conceits, that a hardening in part hath befallen Israel, until the fulness of the Gentiles be come in; and so all Israel shall be saved" (vers. 25, 26).

This climax of the great argument is explicit and emphatic. It urges:

i. That the hardened condition of the Jewish race was only partial. As in the time of Elijah there was a remnant faithful amidst general apostasy, so was it in Paul's time, and so it has been ever since. If there had been a total and final rejection by God of the race, whether in the time of Elijah or of Paul, no remnant could have existed. But Paul, though a most bigoted, fanatical Jew, had been saved, and he was only one of many.

Every converted Israelite the centuries through has added to the proof that God has not cast off His people as such, and that the Divinely inflicted hardening is only "in part."

ii. It is further declared that this hardening is to be only temporary: it is to last only "until" a certain development has been reached. Just as Israel's call of old by God was of an election from among the nations, so is the present society, the church: "God is visiting the Gentiles to take out of them a people for His name" (Acts 15: 14). When this outgathering has been completed, "and the fulness of the Gentiles has come in" then "all Israel shall be saved," that is, all Israel living at that point when the fulness of the Gentiles has been gathered in to the church. The statement plainly declares that at that time there will still exist a distinction between the fulness of the Gentiles and Israel, which excludes the idea that Israel is to lose its racial identity and standing and be merged into the church.

iii. The apostle next shows that this future salvation of Israel is foretold in Scripture. From the very many Old Testament passages available for this purpose he cites Isaiah 59. This chapter describes the apostasy and wickedness of Israel at a season when there is not a single person able and ready to intervene, and that thereupon Jehovah Himself acts, puts on the battle attire of a warrior, and attacks His enemies. It is particularly to be noticed that the season is that when He will deal with Gentile enemies as well as Jewish: "to the coast-lands He will repay recompense." His onset will be like a rushing stream driven on by a mighty wind (Isa. 59: 18, 19). This stirring scene cannot possibly picture a gradual, peaceful, universal success of the gospel. It is made abundantly clear that at the time in question there will be no such condition as that Jew and Gentiles will all have believed the gospel and be merged into one universal church. Now it is at this juncture in affairs international that the promise Paul quotes will find fulfilment:

"A Redeemer will come to Zion, and unto them that turn from transgression in Israel, saith Jehovah. And as for Me, this is My covenant with thee, saith Jehovah: My Spirit that is upon thee, and My words which I have put in thy mouth, shall not depart out of thy mouth, nor out of the mouth of thy seed, saith Jehovah, from henceforth and for ever." This shows that the restoration of those that then turn from transgression in Jacob shall endure for evermore. The next chapter (60) continues the distinction between Israel and the Gentile nations, proving that these also will have permanent existence as nations.

The foregoing is important for understanding Paul's argument and citation in Romans 11, for it proves that the expression

"until the fulness of the Gentiles shall have come in" cannot mean until all Gentiles shall have turned to Christ and become part of the church of God, seeing that the Gentiles as a whole will continue *as nations*.

The apostle renders the prophecy thus:

"There shall come out of Zion the Deliverer": the participle becomes a proper noun—the Deliverer promised:

"He shall turn away ungodliness [impiety] from Jacob." The maintenance of the name "Jacob" declares that it is with the sons of Jacob *as such* that the fulfilment will be concerned, emphasizing that it is Israelites as such that are in view. Compare the exact counterpart of this in Heb. 8: 8–12, where Jeremiah 31: 31 ff. is quoted, and the national names Israel and Judah are retained as the parties to whom God's covenant will be extended. Paul continues:

"And this is the covenant from Me to them, when I shall have taken away their sins" (Darby, *New Translation*). This strict rendering of the aorist conjunctive, *aphelōmai*, is an instance of the importance of exact translation. "When I shall have taken away their sins" shows that this precedes their being brought into covenant relation with God. It is the repetition of the fact mentioned in our last chapter that Abraham had been justified by faith prior to God entering into covenant with him.

The exactness of God's Word ever repays attention. The parallel prophecy in Jer. 31: 34 announces the extension of the covenant to Israel and Judah and that its particular feature will be a change of heart towards the laws and commands of God. Having specified the resultant inward and spiritual acquaintance with the Lord, the prophecy concludes with the comforting assurance: "For I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin will I remember no more." Citing this prophecy the Writer of the *Hebrews*, with Divinely given precision, notes that the assurance of pardon *follows* the promise of the covenant and the changed heart: "*after* that He hath said . . . *then* saith He, Their sins and iniquities will I remember no more" (Heb. 10: 15–18). The Isaiah passage quoted by Paul, when rendered strictly as above, shows that actually the pardon precedes the establishing of the covenant. The Jeremiah passage is not against this but shows that the forgiveness will be permanent, "I will remember no more." The one scripture declares that the pardon precedes the covenant, the other shows that the proof of pardon will be a changed attitude to the law of God; and this radical inward change, and the establishment of the covenant, are the Divine assurance that the pardon will have everlasting effect.

The situation which the apostle thus presses upon Gentile believers is, that Israel still has a distinct place in the purposes and promises of God; that the setting aside is but temporary; that a time will come when a remnant shall be preserved from extinction; that all of these shall be saved, and shall enter the blessings of the covenant of God with their ancestor Abraham.

It is this great and vital situation that he illuminates by the parable of

The Olive Tree

I. *The Root.* Every tree must have a root. In Isa. 11: 10 Messiah is spoken of as "the root of Jesse." In this same Epistle (15: 12) Paul applies this to Christ. In Rev. 5: 5 one of the heavenly Elders uses the term of the Lion of the tribe of Judah, "the Root of David," the son of Jesse; and in Rev. 22: 16 is found the last statement but one by the glorified Jesus, "I am the root and the offspring of David, the bright, the morning star," the One upon whom at last all shall set their hope.

Inasmuch as the favour of God to all the universe flows through the Son, He is the root of every blessing, heavenly and earthly. In this the olive tree corresponds to the Vine (John 15), with its root of faith and love drawing from the Father.

II. *The Tree.* From this Divine Root there grew the purpose and promise of God that the fallen race of man should be recovered, and His lost dominion over this earth be restored. The manifest development of this purpose came in God's covenant with Abraham that it should be through him and his descendants that the plan should mature (Gen. 12; etc.). The race of Abraham became therefore the olive tree, the richly endowed sphere of Divine grace, like a fruitful tree. In Jer. 11: 16 the prophet says to Israel, "Jehovah called thy name, A green olive tree."

III. *The Branches* are the individual parts that grow out of the tree, the separate persons that have part in the Divine covenant. The apostle distinguishes these into two classes.

1. *The natural branches.* The literal descendants of Abraham became naturally the heirs of the blessings promised to him.

2. *The ingrafted branches.* The Gentiles had no natural connexion with Abraham, but from time to time sundry of them (as Rahab and Ruth) had been incorporated into the commonwealth of Israel, and in the new era of the gospel this became the privilege of many more upon faith in Christ, the Seed of Abraham and the Messiah.

Of these the apostle says that they "became partakers with them [the natural branches] of the root and fatness of the olive

tree" (ver. 17). They were not like grafts which never "took" and therefore never received the sap of the tree flowing up into them and establishing a vital union of tree and branch. Doubtless there are such as by outward profession are attached to the tree but have no living association therewith; but plainly such are excluded here by the fact that those in view did "partake of the root and fatness of the olive tree."

This again corresponds to that interior union with the Vine which makes disciples fruitful.

IV. *Branches broken off.* It is as evident here as it is in the parable of the Vine that this sanctifying connexion with the olive tree ("the branches are holy," ver. 16) may be terminated, and in certain cases has been ended. If connexion with the olive tree determines the matter of eternal life or eternal death, then it must be admitted that eternal life may be forfeited by those who have partaken of it. But does this picture include that question? Where is it taught that the eternal condition of a man is secured by union with the "Vine" or the "olive tree," and depends upon the maintenance of this union?

The "olive tree" being that development of the purposes of God which commenced with the covenant with Abraham, then

(*a*) The eternal salvation of all the saved prior to Abraham must have been secured without incorporation into the olive tree, and salvation cannot depend thereupon.

(*b*) We have before noted the fact that Abraham had been accounted righteous (justified before God) prior to the offer and establishment of the Divine covenant with him. Therefore the justifying of the sinner, the judicial transaction which grants to him a secure eternal standing before God the Judge, is not connected with or dependent upon the covenant, or, as the picture describes it, upon union with the olive tree.

(*c*) In the Old Testament there are at least twenty-five passages which threatened the Israelite with the penalty of being "cut off from his people," for numerous flagrant wickednesses. There is little doubt, if any, that this meant judicial death, at the hand of the law or by direct action of God. There is not a hint in any place that this carried the certainty of eternal death. This subject is not raised even distantly. It meant, however, that such were broken out of the olive tree, the covenant of God concerning the seed of Abraham. All *its* privileges were lost. Apart from the remnant according to the election of grace, this was happening to Israel on a national scale in the time of Paul.

It is indeed very certain that not by any means all Abraham's natural seed shared his personal faith unto righteousness, and therefore did not secure eternal salvation. Paul has already stated

this most plainly earlier in this Epistle to the Romans (2: 28, 29; 4: 12, 16, 17; ch. 10). But this is not the topic in the parable of the olive tree. The cutting off of the branches is parallel to that earlier judgment of being "cut off from his people," and goes no further than losing a place in the privileges of the covenant. But as this was made with Abraham as a man already justified, his justification was not based upon it, nor would have been lost by being cut out of it; which must be the case with his true children by faith also.

In Scripture justification stands on its own ground of atoning sacrifice, and is acquired by personal repentance and faith; it is an individual transaction direct with God, and does not result from, nor is preserved by, subsequent and advanced transactions with God. But the olive tree pictures collective relationships, by many branches being on one tree.

V. *Branches Ingrafted.* Upon the setting aside of Israel the mercy of God was extended to all men, as had been from the first His intention. Thus the picture expresses the feature that Gentiles come by faith into the system of blessing initiated by God with Abraham. This has been considered in our last preceding study of the Galatian Epistle.

VI. *Ingrafted Branches Broken Off.* Such is the solemn warning given to Gentile Christians. They like the Jew may be cut out of the privileges pictured by the olive tree. Again this is parallel with branches being cut out of the Vine; the high and rich life of communion with the Lord can be forfeited, as to which sad facts confirm solemn scriptures. The later dignities and rewards possible to such a life are thereby lost. But no question of eternal salvation arises.

VII. *Conditions Involved.* It is by lack of faith that one is broken out of the olive tree: it is lack of fruit that causes the branch to be taken away from the vine. The believer stands by faith. Justification is an act of God in response to an act of faith: abiding in the Vine or the olive tree is a process and requires a persistent faith. It is only he who *eateth*, keeps on eating, who never hungers; it is he who *drinketh*, keeps on drinking, who never thirsts.

The Gentile Christian is exhorted to ponder both the goodness and the severity of God (vers. 21, 22). He is neither more beloved nor more favoured than the natural branches, the Israelites, as may be learned from the superlative terms of endearment used by Jehovah toward them (Isa. 54: 4–8; Jer. 31: 3; Zeph. 3: 17; etc.). He may expect no more leniency than they, if he lapse with them into unbelief. "If He spared not the natural branches, neither will He spare thee." All will be well "if thou

continue in His goodness: otherwise thou also shalt be cut off" (vers. 20–22). How opposed is this teaching of Scripture to the false and foolish complacency that allows of no solemn warnings being applied to those who have partaken by regeneration and the Spirit of the root and fatness of the olive tree.

VIII. *Branches Reingrafted.* The apostle returns finally to his proper theme, the restoration of Israel: "and they also, if they continue not in their unbelief, shall be grafted in: for God is able to graft them in again." If the wild scion was grafted, contrary to nature, into the good tree, how much more shall "the natural branches be grafted into their own olive tree" (vers. 23, 24).

It is not Israel in unbelief, self-will, and self-confidence, arrogant and defiant, that God will restore: all the sinners of His people at that time shall die by the sword of Antichrist (Amos 9: 10); the proud shall be taken away, for it must be fulfilled that "I will leave in the midst of thee an afflicted and poor people, and they shall take refuge in the name of Jehovah" (Zeph. 3: 11, 12).

Thus shall the covenant with Abraham reach fulfilment. The heavenly seed shall reach the glory of the heavenly city; the earthly seed shall fulfil the counsel of God on the earth; each being brought to its goal by redemption and discipline on God's part, and repentance, faith, humility, obedience on their side.

Then shall the promise to Abraham (Gen. 12: 3), and the call of Isa. 55, be realized in the residue of men seeking unto the Lord, even all the Gentiles upon whom His name shall be called (Acts 15: 14–19).

"For God hath shut up all unto disobedience, that He might have mercy upon all. O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! how unsearchable are His judgments, and His ways past tracing out! For who hath known the mind of the Lord? or who hath been His counsellor? or who hath first given to Him, and it shall be recompensed to him again? For of Him, and through Him, and unto Him, are all things. To Him be the glory for ever. Amen" (Rom. 11: 33–36).

CHAPTER XLII

THE BRIDE AND THE CITY

Rev. 19; 21; 22

ALMIGHTY God is no opportunist improvising measures to meet emergencies. He is no amateur chess-player watching painfully for a chance to check a skilled opponent. Rather does He work all things after the counsel of His own will (Eph. 1: 11). "He doeth according to His will in the army of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth; and none can stay His hand, or say unto Him, What doest Thou?" (Dan. 4: 35).

The counsel of His will as regards the universe entire is that it shall be an inheritance for the Son of His love, "Whom He appointed heir of all things" when as yet nothing had been made (Heb. 1: 2). Sin in Satan disputed this purpose and alienated from the Son much of the inheritance. The Son by death in manhood redeemed His inheritance, and in due season shall enjoy it in undivided possession. There will be new heavens and a new earth wherein righteousness shall dwell triumphantly.

If a likeness be true the original will resemble it, however much it may transcend it. Therefore that form of God in which the Son was originally is, it would seem, the archetype of which man is an image (Phil. 2: 6; Gen. 1: 26; Jas. 3: 9). Therefore when the Son appeared to men before He became incarnate He was like unto one of the sons of men, and even in the heavenly world this was so (Ezek. 1: 26; Dan. 7: 13).

Love is the nature of God and love seeks companionship. Therefore it has ever been the purpose of the Father to bring a company of the sons of men, made after the likeness of His Son, into union with the Son, for the satisfaction of His heart and the furthering of His interests and rights in the universe.

This is the meaning of some of the human race being transferred at last from man's native region, the earth, into the native region of the Son of God, the heavens. So far is this transfer being a necessary outcome of pardon being extended to rebels, that it is rather a very special and exceptional honour, designed firstly for the fullest possible exaltation and joy of the Son of God, and then as a display in the coming ages of "the *exceeding riches* of God's grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus" (Eph. 2: 7). This implies that this particular display of the grace

of God to the heavenly people will far exceed any display of grace in other persons or companies.

It is evident that God can never exalt any of His creatures to be *above* His Son, so that this Divine counsel is the richest and noblest that the wisdom of God can ever devise or His power execute. Therefore the revelation of this secret counsel (mystery) "completes the word [message] of God," for in it are "hid *all* the treasures of wisdom and knowledge" (Col. 1: 25; 2: 3; comp. Darby and Alford).

At the close of the Word of God this union of the church glorified with the Son of God is pictured by the double figure of a Bride and a City (Rev. 19: 6–8; 21: 9 ff.).

The Bride

This is a figure of affection most personal, tender, and intimate, and of the special solicitude, care, and enrichment that results from this affection.

The Father has appointed over His kingdom a King, even the Lamb Who suffered in meekness, the Lion Who conquered by might. It is the perfect combination of these two qualities that qualifies Him as the perfect Ruler. But a King desires a consort to share His glory and to satisfy and to display His love. In Rev. 19 the hour for the fulfilment of this desire has arrived: "the marriage of the Lamb is come," and heaven rejoices with exceeding gladness and cries, Hallelujah!

1. *The Time.* The Lord has already descended as a thief and taken to Himself those who were looking for Him (Heb. 9: 28). The armies of the Beast are now mustering for the last battle (Rev. 16: 13–16); but it has not yet been fought: the Word of God and His armies have not yet rushed in irresistible might upon the Beast and his forces (Rev. 19: 11–21). At this point, before the Mighty One goes forth to war, He celebrates the nuptials with His now ready bride, so that when He shall be manifested she too shall be manifested with Him in glory (Col. 3: 4; I John 3: 2, 3).

2. *Anticipations.* From of old the Father had designed for the Son of His love this bliss of having as His own peculiar possession, and in His own proper realm, the heavens, a consort formed of ransomed sinners of the human race. They were given to Him by the Father (John 17: 6) in a more special sense than the more general gift of universal heirship and ownership (Heb. 1: 2; John 3: 35; Matt. 11: 27). He purchased them at

the fabulous price of His own priceless blood: "Christ also loved the church and gave Himself up for her" (Eph. 5: 25), "in order that He might redeem us from all iniquity and purify unto Himself a people for His own possession, zealous of good works" (Titus 2: 14).

This so ancient design had been intimated long in advance. Eve had been brought to Adam to be his joy and help in dominion over the renewed earth (Gen. 2: 18–25). Rebekah had been brought to Isaac, the son and heir (Gen. 24), and Ruth, the alien, to Boaz, the mighty and rich (Ruth 2: 1), as if to intimate that Gentiles would be joined with Jews in the bridal blessing. In a quite special sense Israel, as a people, had been taken by Jehovah and associated with Himself in a privilege and nearness granted to no other people, a relationship often pictured by this same figure of husband and wife (Isa. 50: 1; Jer. 3; Ezek. 16). And though for unfaithfulness Israel has been given a bill of divorcement, yet, as a people, shall she, on repentance, be again received into relationship, as the passages cited, and many others, show, and shall stand on earth at the King's right hand, the place of honour (Ps. 45: 9–11). God does not change His mind as to His gifts and calling, though human folly and sin may defer the accomplishment of His call and the enjoyment of His gifts.

All this, however, was of earth as to its sphere, and but anticipatory of the higher joys and honours designed for realization in the heavenly portion of the one kingdom. From the time of Abraham at least God had spoken to men of that world above and men of faith had embraced the prospect and fixed upon it as their hope (Heb. 11: 9–16). In this present age of Christ's rejection by the world that has become the sole prospect of faith, for in this world the faithful are promised nothing but the bare necessaries of a pilgrim and are exhorted to "set their hope perfectly [that is, undividedly and uninterruptedly] on the favour that is being brought unto us at the revelation of Jesus Christ" (I Pet. 1: 13). This supreme favour is that of being associated with our glorified Lord in a fellowship so intimate, so tender, so glorious, and so useful, as is pictured by a bride and her husband.

This union will crown and complete the programme of God for the universe. It will perfect the joy of the Son, for no union so intimate and sweet is known in creation. Then shall He "see of the travail of His soul and be *satisfied*" (Isa. 53: 11). And it is the highest honour that ever can be available for the redeemed, since the Bride sits with the Bridegroom on His throne.

It is objected that it is unseemly to suppose that the glorified Lord has *two* brides. Some meet this by supposing that Israel

nationally will cease and its believing members be merged into the church: others regard the Bride of *Revelation* as not the church, but Israel. The confusion results largely from inability to grasp figurative language, and not seeing that the same figure may rightly illustrate two situations, one earthly, the other heavenly. In Rom. 7: 1–4, the figure of marriage union includes the real inward union of spirit between the risen Christ and the individual believer, yet no one would be so foolish as to object that therefore Christ has myriads of wives.

3. *Who form the Bride?* As to what persons will form this exalted company there have been differences of opinion. Some seem to include at last all the saved of all the ages. This is contrary to the figure used. A bride is only one among the myriads of a king's subjects, though the most exalted of them in rank. If all were the bride, over whom would she and the king reign? As remarked before, the bride cannot be the guests at the wedding feast. Again, Rev. 21: 12 will show Israel as associated with but not the same as the bride, and verse 24 of that chapter to 22: 2 distinguishes the saved nations from the bride.

Others have limited the bride to the saved of this present age. But it is hard to see how those men of faith of any age who embraced the heavenly hope, lived in consequence as pilgrims and aliens among men, and looked for the heavenly city as their portion, shall not have part in those privileges. That in those earlier days the figure of bridal relationship may not have been made known to them, and that so they did not perhaps appreciate fully what glories were latent in their hope, would be no reason for them not reaching its fulness in the fulfilment. None of us now appreciates fully what is in store. In Heb. 11: 40 their and our perfecting is conjoined.

But again, the school of teaching last in question insists that all the saved of this age, without exception, will certainly share this regal, bridal glory. That this is the present call, offer, and ideal of God is true. See Eph. 5: 25–33; Col. 1: 21, 23; for God is calling us "into His own kingdom and glory" (I Thess. 2: 12), even "His eternal glory" (I Pet. 5: 10), not to some creaturely glory, Such terms declare far more than forgiveness and the possession of eternal life, in which blessings all the saved share alike and for ever. But to share God's eternal glory is evidently far more and far higher than to partake in those initial mercies common to all the saved of all ages, without which indeed they would not be of the saved at all.

Yet it is too often overlooked that in no sphere does God *coerce* the subjects of His grace. He respects fully the gift of

free will wherever He has granted this noble endowment. Hence the creature can "fall short of the grace of God" (Heb. 12: 15) and receive that grace in vain (II Cor. 6: 1), which last is not the same as to reject that grace entirely. Let it be observed that:

(*a*) It is God's desire (*thelō,* wish, longing, but not *fiat*) that all men should be saved. For this He has made provision in Christ Jesus, "Who gave Himself a ransom for all" (I Tim. 2: 3–6). But not all are willing to be saved, and not all will be.

(*b*) It was the call of God that all who left Egypt with Moses should reach Canaan, and at the Red Sea the entrance of them all was celebrated in advance (Ex. 15: 13–17). But only two of the adult men entered the land.

(*c*) It was the offer of God that all of that redeemed nation should be priests (Ex. 19: 6). In the fact only one family of them has had this honoured service.

(*d*) Of that family one branch secured the privilege in perpetuity on account of the faithfulness of its head (Num. 25: 10–13); but

(*e*) Of this family one branch, that of Eli, was deprived of the honour on account of unfaithfulness (I Sam. 3: 10–14).

(*f*) God would have gathered into safety all Jerusalem's children, as a hen gathers her chicken under her wings, but *they would not*; and they had their own way to their undoing (Matt. 23: 37–39).

Will it be affirmed that all of this has no lesson and warning for the heirs of the heavenly calling? Then were it the case that *not* all Scripture is written for our admonition upon whom the ends of the ages are come (I Cor. 10: 11).

Because of this unvarying law, that God respects man's freedom of action, and holds each responsible for its use (and otherwise how shall God judge man?), it follows that the response of the heart of man is required to the offer of the heart of God, and without this response the privilege offered will not be secured. Every offer is open to all of the persons to whom it is made; it is realized by such only as embrace it; and moreover, it is "through faith and long-patience (*makrothumia*)" that every boon promised is at last gained, in this age as in earlier times (Heb. 6: 11, 12). Hence arise the "ifs" and exhortations and warnings of the New Testament so very frequently addressed to believers and churches. It is greatly to be deplored that many parry the force of the mass of passages of this order by transferring them to false professors, whereas they are so often plainly addressed to true believers, and sometimes to believers of quite noble quality, as for example, in *Hebrews*: see chs. 6: 9–12; 10: 32–36. We grieve for the responsibility they must carry at the judgment

seat of Christ who have thus promoted laxity of life by encouraging believers to disregard the warnings God has multiplied.

4. *The Fitness of the Bride.* It were well indeed that nothing should lessen the effect upon the conscience of the treatment of the subject in this passage. The whole stress is laid upon the moral fitness of the bride for the grand occasion. "His wife hath *made herself* ready" for the union; "it was granted unto her that she should *array herself*."

Her bridal attire is not that meretricious splendour of the great harlot, purple and scarlet robes, glittering with gold, jewels, and pearls (17: 4), which did but conceal the hidden deformity and corruption. The holy bride wears only fine linen, glisteringly white and pure. Of old, such was the attire of the high priest when he entered annually into the Holy of Holies before the Presence (Lev. 16: 4). That fine linen was spun by human hands (Ex. 35: 25), and similarly the attire of the bride is of her own making: "the fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints" (19: 8).

Even the A.V. rendering does not allow of this being that righteousness of God which is imputed to the sinner upon faith in Christ, for it is there termed "righteousness of *saints*," not the righteousness of God. But the meaning of the former term is fixed by its prior use at 15: 4. The A.V. there renders inexactly, "Thy *judgments* are made manifest," but the R.V. properly by "Thy righteous acts have been made manifest" (*ta dikaiōmata*). "This clean, glistering, byssus-made fabric represents the righteous actions of the saints . . . the sum of the saintly acts of the members of Christ, wrought in them by His Spirit" (Swete); and so William Milligan (Expositor's Bible, *Revelation*, 322):

> These acts are not the imputed righteousness of Christ, although only in Christ are the acts performed. They express the moral and religious condition of those who constitute the bride. No outward righteousness alone, with which we might be clothed as with a garment, is a sufficient preparation for future blessedness. An inward change is not less necessary, a personal and spiritual meetness for the inheritance of the saints in light. Christ must not only be on us as a robe, but in us as a life, if we are to have the hope of glory (Col. 1: 27). Let us not be afraid of words like these. Rightly viewed, they in no way interfere with our completeness in the Beloved alone, or with the fact that not by works of righteousness that we have done, but by grace, are we saved through faith, and that not of ourselves; it is the gift of God (Eph. 2: 8). All our salvation is of Christ, but the change upon us must be internal as well as external. The elect are foreordained to be conformed to the image of God's Son (Rom. 8: 29); and the Christian condition

is expressed in the words which say, not only "Ye were justified," but also "Ye were washed, ye were sanctified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, and in the Spirit of our God" (I Cor. 6: 11).

And the literal rendering of this last passage "ye washed yourselves" (R.V. margin), emphasizes yet more the truth in question, and shows the harmony of Paul and John upon this truth.

It should be noted:

That the imputed righteousness which justifies is put on the believer by God, not by himself, being reckoned to him, not assumed by him. See Rom. 4: 6: "the man unto whom *God reckoneth* righteousness," and so uniformly. Further, that this reckoning takes place at the first act of faith of each individual; whereas this arraying of herself is to take place at the bridal day at the close of the career of the whole church of God, and is viewed as an united act.

There is a precision in the words of God corresponding exactly to the facts of things. The wife "arrays herself," and yet it is "given unto her" to do this. (Here again the A.V. weakly gives "that she should be *arrayed*," hiding the vital point that it is her own act). If the Spirit of holiness had not made holiness possible no member of the church could or would have done holy acts; but though every holy deed is done by the grace of the Spirit, it is the *saint* who *does* them. It is *God* who works *in* us both to will and to work; but it is *we* who must work *out* this salvation into a life of holy deeds (Phil. 2: 12, 13); and if we grieve and quench the Spirit, and so frustrate the work of God within, then the fine linen will not be woven. And in no other attire will any one share in the bridal glory, though in the imputed righteousness every believer stands justified in law. But the pardon of a one-time rebel woman is by no means the same as her becoming later the wife of her sovereign, nor does any necessity exist why the king should think of such an honour for her.

All this is illustrated in the history of Esther. From being a captive slave she is to be exalted to be queen. Everything of clothing and ornament that she needed was the gift of the king, for she had nothing suitable. But *she* had *to put them on*, so as to approach the king, as it is written, "Esther put on her royal apparel" (Esther 5: 1).

Eph. 5: 25–27 is clear and weighty:

(1) "Christ also loved the church": this is the divine origin of all her prospects.

(2) "and gave Himself up for her": this is the amazing price that frees the slave-girl, or pardons the rebel, and by which the

king acquires all rights in her. But though redemption has been effected once for all, she cannot pass straight from the slave market, or the condemned cell, to the royal palace and the throne. Much is required to fit her person for such total change of scene and life; and so

(3) Christ purchased the church "that He might sanctify her," might make her actually holy, even as she is already righteous by imputation. And this so indispensable work, He effects by "the laver [composed] of the water in the word" (*tō loutrō tou hudatos en rhemati*). The laver in the Tabernacle was a vessel into which water was put so that the priests should wash repeatedly and keep clean. The bathing at their consecration was necessary but was not sufficient for entrance into the holy places. Cleansed lepers had to bathe, but that did not grant access to the presence of God in the Tabernacle (Lev. 14). The priests must also wash their hands and feet again and again, on penalty of death, twice threatened, if they attempted service to God unwashed (Ex. 30: 17–21). Thus also Jesus took a basin, poured water thereinto, and proceeded to wash the feet of His followers, so as to impress heavily upon us that actual holiness is indispensable to fellowship with Him: "If I wash thee not thou hast no part with Me" (John 13). He did not say "*in* Me," that would have made final salvation to depend on daily state; but "with Me," as My companion and servant. See Ch. XXXVII.

The laver is here (Eph. 5) used as a picture of the Word of God: "water in the word." The water (as always when a type) means the Spirit of God: "living water . . . this spake He of the Spirit" (John 7: 37–39). Christ speaks to the redeemed believer: if obedience be at once rendered, the grace of the Spirit is at once experienced, making obedience possible. This is the law of matters spiritual: "Go wash . . . he went, and came seeing": "take up thy bed and walk"; and upon each obeying, doing at once what he could not do, the energy was given to do it. A father speaks to his boy about a disagreeable habit: if the boy gives heed, the word of the father cleanses that habit out of the boy's life: if he disregards his father, he remains disfigured in character and life.

Justification is an initial benefit, granted once for all; santification is a lifelong process; the priest must wash his hands and his feet to the end of his course; and therefore

> Let no man think that sudden, in a minute,
> All is accomplished, and the work is done:
> Though with thy earliest dawn thou should'st begin it,
> Scarce were it ended with thy setting sun.

This gracious and indispensable work in the believer is wrought by Christ speaking to the church. Thus it is *given* unto her to become pure. But words must be obeyed or they remain inoperative, and thus "it is given unto her to *array herself*" by doing the righteous acts directed by the Word of God. All is of grace; but of grace used, not abused, of grace obeyed, not neglected. For the grace of God instructs us "to the intent that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly and righteously and godly in this present age," and only so living are we truly "looking for the blessed hope and [even the] appearing of the glory of our great God and Saviour Jesus Christ"; for He gave Himself for us that He might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto Himself a people for His own possession, zealous of good works" (Titus 2: 11–14). Therefore "every one that hath this hope set on Him purifieth himself, even as He is pure" (I John 3: 3).

To the justified, who "have obtained like precious faith with us in the righteousness of our God and Saviour Jesus Christ" (II Pet. 1: 1–4), Peter adds the encouraging assurance that "God hath granted unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness," thus making holiness of life possible. Unto this end God has further "granted unto us His precious and exceeding great promises." As a father, starting his loved son in business, may hand him a roll of promissory notes issued by a bank, and payable on demand, so God has enriched His children for all the demands of a holy life. We secure the promised spiritual wealth by the prayer of faith and by obedience to our Father's instructions; and as His character thus becomes increasingly developed in us we become "partakers of divine nature." This is not the same as having eternal life, though a consequence of it. All human beings have human life, but their natures differ; some being harsh by nature, some kind; some active, some indolent; and so on. All of the family of God have the life of the Father, but they differ in the degree in which what is natural to God (as to be holy, or to love enemies) becomes natural to them. And this difference is proportionate to the measure of the appropriation by each of the Divine promises. Neglect of the promises leaves the soul poor, as to neglect banknotes leaves the pocket poor.

Further, parental discipline, through the trials of life, however caused, is another contributing element. The Father *scourges* every son He receives, that they "may become partakers of His holiness" (Heb. 12: 10). As justified they already possess His righteousness; but they are to be made to share His holiness; and blessed is he who humbles himself under the mighty hand of God, even when the wicked may be the hand that presses,

instead of resenting and resisting the discipline. Such advance in holiness and so in preparation for the bridal honour and joy.

(4) *Without blemish.* It is in view of the bridal day that Christ has loved, redeemed, and now is sanctifying the church, "in order that He might present the church to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish" (Eph. 5: 27). These terms, "spot, wrinkle, holy, without blemish" have reference to external appearance: the two former denote surface defects, the two latter visible excellence. The last is a specially significant and priestly term. An animal to be dedicated to God, and accepted by Him, had to be without visible blemish, and sternly did the Holy One complain when blemished beasts were presented (Mal. 1: 6 ff.). The priest, too, had to be without physical defect, or he could not officiate in holy things. He was to keep himself scrupulously clean in walk and associations, and also he must be without blemish as to external form (Lev. 21). Now the persons pictured as a bride are also described as "priests unto God" (Rev. 1: 6). Both figures demand the same moral condition; the one for priestly access and service, the other for intimate association with Him who "offered Himself without blemish unto God" (Heb. 9: 14).

The standard is high, yet attainable by the Spirit through obedience to the Word. The histories of Joseph, Samuel, and Daniel are narrated at length and in detail. Each was surrounded with gross moral depravity, but God records nothing against them. This does not mean that they were actually sinless—only Christ was that; but it does mean that they walked before men without visible defilement and disfigurement of life. And thus Paul wrote to believers in a wicked heathen city, "that ye may be blameless and harmless, children of God without blemish in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation" (Phil. 2: 12–16). It is possible for the believer to "keep himself unspotted from the world" (Jas. 1: 27), and he who thus walks in white garments here and now shall be permitted to array himself for fellowship with Christ as part of the bride at last (see Rev. 3: 4, 5 and consider II Cor. 7: 1 and 11: 2, 3). It is for each to weave his own pure bridal attire, by the grace of God and solely to the praise of the glory of that grace. The Bride will thus be to the pleasure and honour of the Bridegroom.

The Marriage Feast. The union of Ahasuerus and Esther took place in the privacy of the royal palace: the wedding feast followed later (Esther 2: 16–18). Thus here also (Rev. 19: 9) there is simply an announcement of the honour of being one of the

king's guests: it is not stated that the marriage supper takes place at this precise moment. Inasmuch as it seems that the guests will include persons on earth when the Bridegroom returns here (Matt. 22: 1–14; 25: 1–13), it appears that the "feast" will take place on earth at the opening of the kingdom era. See also Luke 22: 18, 30.

Here, then, are three distinct ideas: (1) The guests are not the bride; (2) there is to be an interval between the "marriage" and the "feast"; (3) the latter is to be on earth. As has been shown, these features offer a clue to the exact meaning of some of Christ's prophetic parables.

The omission of the bride and of her union from those parables is significant, but the significance has been largely missed by later teaching of the New Testament as to the bride having been read back into the parables. The omission harmonizes with the feature elsewhere attributed to the bride that she is to be composed, not of all the saved, even of this age, but of such from among the saved as are, by grace, ever watchful, prayerful, separated from the world, undefiled, walking in white garments of their own weaving. Within the vaster company of the rest of the saved is the realm where the Lord's parables, and many other passages, have application. Blessed are they who are guests, and unhappy are they who miss even this privilege, such as the guest without a wedding garment, or the foolish virgins, or the unfaithful steward. And beyond this area again lies the still wider realm of those at the End Times who had never even heard the Bridegroom's fame nor seen His glory (Isa. 66: 19), but to whom will then go forth the call of Isa. 55: 1, "Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters."

The Lord when here stated the principles upon which He will deal with His household, and these principles will apply to all who have been of that household throughout this age; but the strict application, as made by Christ, was to those servants He will find on earth when He shall actually return, and it is to these then alive that the details given will apply. Therefore He did not in His parables introduce the bride since she will have been completed and removed prior to His descent to the earth. From this lack of mention it has been inferred, but without warrant, that she will have been removed before ever the End Days arrive, and that she will include every child of God, dead or still on earth, of this whole age. These inferences, and others dependent upon them, have confused the subject, and also have greatly weakened the solemn warnings as to the moral state which must characterize each who is to attain to the highest status and honour in the kingdom.

Such distinctions as have been noted were before suggested in the Old Testament. At Esther's marriage feast there was not merely one general crowd of guests, but they were differentiated into "the king's princes and servants" (Esther 2: 18). All of these two classes were honoured with the royal invitation; yet it is obvious that they were not Esther, the queen, nor did they include all the king's subjects. What if some of the guests at the marriage supper of the Lamb should be those angel princes who have served faithfully through the spiritual conflicts with rebel princes of these earlier ages? What if the servants shall include those ministering spirits who even now render deacon's service to the saints, with a view to preparing them for the coming inheritance (Heb. 1: 14)? In any case these would not be the bride. One such styled himself a "fellow-slave" with John and his brethren (Rev. 19: 10). The programme of the Most High is far wider and grander than most realize, and includes all His creatures, heavenly and earthly. And by far the greater part of what He has been pleased to reveal falls for fulfilment this side of the great white throne. Yet all too many readers and preachers seem to think of little but eternity, which, moreover, they restrict to "heaven" and "hell," overlooking entirely that there is to be a new earth also. This limitation of thought results in applying to eternity passages which have not to do therewith, with consequent confusion in interpretation.

Psalm 45 is the Song of the Royal Bridegroom. Observe the *personnel* introduced. The Bridegroom is at once the Mighty Warrior with a sword (3–5) as in the context of our passage (Rev. 19: 11–16), and is also God (6). Yet His God has blessed and anointed Him (2, 7); so that He is God exalted by God, a mystery made plain by the clearer New Testament unfolding of the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Next, the Bridegroom has a queen whose place of honour is at His right hand. Then He has "companions" (fellows—comp. Heb. 3: 14 ("partakers of" should be "companions of"): Rev. 3: 4, 5; 14: 4; 17: 14; and I Kings 12: 8. Thus also the queen has "the virgins her companions that follow her" (14), as in Matt. 25: 1–13, and these shall share in the "gladness and rejoicing," that is, in the feast within the palace (15). Others mentioned are certain princesses (9); the people and the family of the queen (10); and beyond these nearer circles are the outside peoples, as of Tyre; that is, Gentiles are seen approaching and honouring the King (12), in which noble employ the queen is called to lead: "for He is thy Lord; and worship thou Him" (11).

All this is highly suggestive of the reality and variety that will mark those future days when heaven and earth will be con-

joined, one Kingdom, in connexion with Him Who is Lord of *all*. It introduces a rich diversity which elevates the mind far beyond the fundamental but only initial distinction between saved and unsaved, which is the furthest that so many ever penetrate into the wondrous counsels of the Almighty. Here is verily a fair field and no favour; yet "know ye not that those running in a race *all* run, but *one* receives the prize: even so run that ye may attain" the prize (I Cor. 9: 24; Phil. 3: 12–16).

Thus will be fulfilled those earlier intimations, given by John the Baptist and our Lord, of Christ becoming a Bridegroom (John 3: 29; Matt. 9: 15). The *Revelation* is rooted in the Gospels: its visions expand and complete the parables.

The City

Rev. 21: 9–22: 5

The seer had heard the marriage of the Lamb acclaimed (19: 6–9), but he had not seen the bride. Later he had noticed that, as to its adornment, the holy city resembled a bride (21: 2), which combination of the two symbols suggests some correspondence between the bride and the city. At length the angel promises that he shall be shown the bride, the wife of the Lamb (21: 9). But the fulfilment of this is that he is shown a city (ver. 10). It is disputed whether the description is (*a*) simply pictorial, symbolic of the glories and offices of the persons who will form the bride; or is (*b*) a description of an actual city of the form, size, and materials named, to be the abode of the persons who form the bride; or (*c*) it is a combination of both.

Opinion (*b*) cannot be carried through consistently without doing violence to figurative language. The River of water of life is, as we conceive, incontestably a figure, namely, of the Spirit of God. But this feature being a symbol, so will be that of the "tree" that grows by the "River," with its "fruit" and "leaves," and the healing qualities of the latter, as well as the broad *plaza* through which the "River" runs; and by consequence the other details also will be symbolic.

But these figures having behind them realities of the spirit world will not the rest also have corresponding realities, and there be a veritable "city," though of a spirit order suitable to the world above? It is quite possible; and this city may be that one of the many abiding places on high which the Lord has gone to prepare for the faithful (John 14: 2). And the reason for the employment of symbols may be that there simply is no other way of creating in our minds any just conception of the reality.

Thus opinion (*c*) may be true, and it can be supported by Old Testament passages to which this vision answers. For example, chapters 60, 61, and 62 of Isaiah give the feature that the earthly Zion and the earthly Israel are addressed with a sort of intertwining of the terms used; now it is the one, now the other that is addressed, and both the city and the people are regarded as a bride adorned for her Husband.

This finds some further support in the former New Testament mentions of the New Jerusalem (Gal. 4: 21–31; Heb. 12: 18–24; Rev. 14: 1).

In the *Galatian* passage the Jerusalem then existing, and in servitude with the Jewish race, her children, was a reality prefigured by the slave-woman Hagar and by mount Sinai, whence issued the law, which, through the sheer inability of human nature to keep its precepts, imposed only bondage. But Sarah, the free-woman, and Isaac, her free-born son, prefigured the heavenly Jerusalem and the free children of God born under grace. The nature of the analogy requires that this Jerusalem be as actual as was the other and as Hagar and Sinai, Sarah and Isaac. Yet this scripture gives no information as to *what* may be the reality intended by the term "Jerusalem that is above."

In the *Hebrews* passage the heavenly Jerusalem corresponds again to Sinai and must be conceived as being equally a reality, and the more that all the other connected features are realities, that is, the blood, the covenant, its Mediator, the spirits of just men, the Judge, the firstborn, and the angels. But here also no notion is conveyed as to the nature of the "city of God," and no more can be inferred than that this must correspond to the nature of God, of angels, and of glorified men, that is, that as these are by substance spirit, not of matter, so must be the heavenly city.

It is thus in the third passage (Rev. 14: 1). The Lamb is localized and so are the 144,000. Persons with local presence must be in a place. This place is here termed "Mount Zion," but what this term describes is not shown, though it can be inferred that in dignity and use it answers to Mount Zion at Jerusalem, which was (*a*) the royal dwelling; (*b*) the centre of worship; (*c*) the seat of government; (*d*) the heart of the empire (Ps. 122: 1–5). These features are found in our present vision: (*a*) 21: 3; (*b*) 21: 22; (*c*) 22: 1, 3; (*d*) 21: 24–27; 22: 14.

Yet admitting that persons will have a suitable place of dwelling, it still does not follow that the description before us is that of the dwelling-place rather than of the persons, and certainly opinion (*a*) is the view of the vision which yields more practical moral instruction. It is more important that we should

know the character, service, and honours of the heavenly Israel than of the heavenly Zion, even if the latter be a reality. And surely this view is implied in the strict correspondence of the phrases: "I will show thee the bride . . . and he showed me the city"; for the "bride" is a company of persons, and therefore the "city" should represent persons. This does not transgress the canon that a symbol cannot be explained by a symbol, because the angel did not offer to *explain* to John the symbol "bride," but simply to *show* him the bride. It is a second vision of the same subject. It is common in Scripture to employ several symbols of one theme, no one of them being adequate to give a full conception. For example, in this book Christ is both lamb, lion, star, root, etc. As here, when John has been told he shall see a bride he is shown a city, so in ch. 5: 5 though a lion had been mentioned he was shown a lamb (ver. 6).

The Greek *polis*, "city" is used quite as regularly for the inhabitants as for the place. Matt. 8: 34; 11: 20; 12: 25; 21: 10; Mark 1: 33; 6: 11; Luke 4: 43; Acts 13: 44; 14: 21; 17: 5, 16. The same is true of the Latin *civitas* and its English derivative *city*.

On earth Israel will have the chief position, and the nations must own this and serve them (Isa. 60: 12–16). Therefore the gates, the means of access to the heavenly people, bear the names of the tribes of Israel. God is a God of order, and has graded the universe rank on rank as He sees to be best for each realm. Sin has disturbed the balance by causing the higher ranks often to abuse their powers at the expense of the lower orders. This drives the latter to attempt to reduce society to a uniform level. But sin in each human heart still frustrates this attempt at betterment, for as soon as the lower attain power they in turn become tyrannical. In the kingdom of God the plan of God is maintained, the universe will still be graded; but love will banish selfishness, the higher will serve the lower, and harmony and joy prevail, so that the lower will honour the higher, and God be praised by all.

The measuring of land or property is always a suggestion that some person is taking detailed account of it with the view to possession and control. This "city" is to be God's personal dwelling, and this is the occasion when He will enter upon possession in person.

The city comes down from the heavens to the earth and God dwells with men (Rev. 21: 2, 3). Thus the realm where the Son of God was abased and died shall become the sphere of His glory and life-giving power. Yet it is to be noted in this connexion with the earth that the "city" becomes a "tabernacle": "the tabernacle of God is with men." Now the chief feature of

the Tabernacle in Israel was that it was *movable*. Does this suggest that this heavenly centre of God's glory will move from place to place in His universal kingdom, as a sovereign visits one region or another of his dominions?

The seer notices seven *negative* features, of things common to cities but absent from this city.

(1) There is *no temple* (21: 22), no special spot where the Deity must be sought. The Temple provided approach to God but debarred access to Him. The Holy Spirit thus signified that the way into the immediate presence of God was not yet made manifest, was not thrown open to all. But God in the midst of His people will be accessible. In that realm of perfect relationship each who approaches to a glorified saint shall find God in him. Then shall be realized completely the words that shall be true of the earthly Jerusalem after an earthly manner, "The name of the city shall be Jehovah Shammah, Jehovah is there" (Ezek. 48: 35). Then shall that be known in manifest reality which in measure the church reveals even to-day, "The hour cometh when neither in this mountain, nor in Jerusalem, shall ye worship the Father . . . true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and truth" (John 4: 21, 23). Such worshippers as the Father is now seeking He will then have found in fulness.

(2) There is *no external light* as of sun or moon (21: 23). The glorified shall know the full force of the promise, "They shall teach no more every man his neighbour, and every man his brother, saying, Know Jehovah: for they shall all know Me, from the least of them unto the greatest of them, saith Jehovah" (Jer. 31: 34); and also what this other word includes shall then be fully developed, "And as for you, the anointing which ye received of Him abideth in you, and ye need not that any one teach you; but as His anointing teacheth you concerning all things, and is true, and is no lie, and even as it taught you, ye abide in Him" (I John 2: 27).

(3) *No Lamp*. There shall be no need of man-made lights, as of a lamp (21: 23). He Who is even now the Light of the world shall be known as such in perfection by the saints of those high places: "the lamp thereof is the Lamb." It is to be much observed that, to all eternity, in heaven and on earth, the Lamb remains the lamp, the light-bearer, from whose face the light of the knowledge of the glory of God shines forth over the universe.

These last two features are emphasized by repetition in 22: 5. At present saints are called by God to enlighten one another, by books, conversation, discourse, holding forth the word of life (Phil. 2: 16), and by good works (Matt. 5: 14–16). The reason

for this is that, as yet, we see the Lamb, the light, but dimly, and in differing degrees, and therefore the more enlightened in experimental acquaintance with Him can help to illuminate minds less enlightened or wholly dark. But the glorified shall know Him by direct spirit-consciousness, and of each such that word shall be fully true, "if therefore thine eye be single, thy whole body shall be full of light" (Matt. 6: 22).

This unclouded knowledge of God shall be dispersed by saints over the whole race: the nations shall learn of God from His heavenly people, and the kings of the earth shall honour these their instructors (21: 24). Already those very few rulers and races that have consented to learn from the servants of God, out of His Word, have found it a great gain: then this shall be so universally.

4. *No night.* In consequence of fulness of light there shall be no night, this also being emphasized by repetition (22: 5). Ignorance of God shall not again fling its black pall over the minds of the glorified as in the former time of their ignorance, inducing the moral unhealthiness which the light of the Sun of righteousness alone can heal. But perpetual light will demand perpetual vigour to endure it. Frail mortality requires the night for recuperation of mind and body. In that perfected state this shall no more be so, for none shall say, I am sick, either in soul or body. The resurrection man is full of power (I Cor. 15: 43).

(5) *The gates shall not be shut* (21: 25). There shall be perfect security, and unrestricted access to God in His people.

(6) *Nothing unclean* shall on any account enter. No unclean thought shall sully the mind, no unclean desire clamour for indulgence, no unclean being, angel, demon, or man, shall approach to tempt. Oh, what a ravishing and rest-giving prospect is this to one who has caught even now a glimpse of the loveliness of holiness as seen in the Lamb of God.

(7) *No curse.* Again by consequence, there shall be no more curse (22: 3), for there shall be nothing in heaven or earth that demands that the Holy One shall curse it. So shall perfect bliss and perfect blessedness prevail for ever in perfect fellowship with the Father and the Son.

It enhances the effect by contrast that seven *positive* features are given of the life glorified.

(1) *The River of the water of Life.* John 7: 39 declares that when Christ spoke of rivers of living water He referred to the Spirit of God: "This spake He of the Spirit, which they that believed on Him were to receive." This appears to apply to every place in Scripture where living water is used as a type. To drop the

beautiful figure in the present place is to reduce the passage from the sublime to the ordinary. But as before remarked, this River being a symbol, so must be its accompaniments, and the whole vision. An essential truth here revealed is, that to all eternity, and in every realm of the universe, the Spirit of life is the life of the spirit in all who live.

Now this River is shown here as flowing through the City, which is the final and richest fulfilment of the Lord's promise quoted above, that the believer shall be the channel through which the Spirit of life shall become available to others. It is of the River as flowing through the City that the nations shall drink.

(2) *The Tree.* In the Adamic Eden (Gen. 2: 9) there were two special trees, those of knowledge and of life, and in addition there were trees beautiful and trees fruitful. These all depended upon the river for their vitality. All this will find its highest fulfilment in the glorified church, in their knowledge, life, beauty, and usefulness; and all this in them will be by the Spirit.

This application of the figure of the tree to man follows Ps. 1, the second passage where the river and the tree are seen together. There the godly man is himself the tree; and it is shown that the meaning and the secret of being planted by the river, that is, of drinking uninterruptedly of the Spirit of life, is heart-delight in the law of the Lord.

In the third passage where the tree and the river are seen (Jer. 17: 7, 8) the lesson is varied and enforced. A real, working trust in God is given as the secret of the communion of the Spirit, assuring beauty, fruit, and superiority to adverse influences.

In the fourth scripture (Ezek. 47) the special truth taught is that the river flows down past the *altar*. There had been no Pentecost had there been no Calvary: atoning death opens the way to the gift of life. This is taught equally by other figures. It was only upon the blood that the anointing oil might be placed (Lev. 14: 17), and it was with oil and blood mingled that the priest must be sprinkled and sanctified (Lev. 8: 30).

I stand upon His merit,
I know no other stand,
Not e'en where glory dwelleth
In Immanuel's land.

In this fifth and last passage (Rev. 22: 1) the river flows out of the *throne*, which is essentially the same lesson as in Ps. 1, even that full submission to the royal authority of God is the condition of fellowship with His Spirit, for it is to them that obey Him that God giveth the Spirit (Acts 5: 32). The kingdom is to be

brought into complete subjection to God not only for His glory but for its own welfare.

(3) *The throne of God and of the Lamb.* The glorified saints will be the supreme instrument for the display of the Divine authority and for the administration of the whole kingdom: "the saints shall judge the world," including angels (I Cor. 6: 2, the *cosmos*). Having learned to obey they shall rule: having full knowledge of the laws of the kingdom they shall administer these.

It is the throne of God and of the Lamb jointly, one throne, one sovereignty, and this for ever, even as it was before said, "the kingdom of the world is become the kingdom of our Lord and of His Messiah; and He shall reign for ever and ever" (11: 15). To deny the equality of the Son with the Father would subvert the economy of the universe at its very summit. This negatives the idea that the Son will cease to reign when He shall have subdued all things unto God. Just as the "up" of II Cor. 12: 2 and 4 is not warranted by the Greek *harpazo*, so in I Cor. 15: 24 the verb *paradidomi* does not warrant the rendering "He shall deliver *up* the kingdom to God, even the Father." This "up" imports a more absolute handing over of the kingdom than is intended. The sufficient force of the word is seen in verse 3 of the same chapter (I Cor. 15), where Paul says, "I delivered unto you [the doctrines] which also I received." He did not cease to retain the teachings by handing them on to others. Part of the importance of this is, that if the Son should cease to reign then it could not be that His heavenly people should reign for ever, as is declared of them (22: 5). The subordination of a son to a father (an eternal fact in the Godhead, for the inner relationships of the Deity can never change, or God would not be unchangeable, not eternal) does not hinder a royal father making his son co-regent of the kingdom. It were a fitting reward if that son had suppressed a dangerous rebellion.

(4) *The Servants.* His slaves (*hoi douloi*) shall render to Him the service due to God (*latreusousin auto*). Though exalted to the throne they continue to be His slaves. Thus in Ps. 45: 11 it is said to the Queen in reference to the King, "He is thy Lord, and worship thou Him." The Lord said to the eleven "I have called you friends" (John 15: 15); but evermore they, shunning the irreverent familiarity of some moderns, called themselves His slaves (Gal. 1: 10; Eph. 6: 6; Phil. 1: 1; Titus 1: 1; II Pet. 1: 1; Jude 1; Rev. 1: 1; etc.). Willing slaves they were, serving out of love, but slaves. This relationship is inherent in the very constitution of things: the creature ought to be the slave of its Creator; but when it is Divine love that exacts the service, and responsive love that renders it, the relationship and the

term are relieved of all the bitter and disgraceful elements that attach in the case of a creature being reduced to slavery by a fellow-creature.

(5) *They shall see His face.* In Persia there were seven princes who "saw the king's face" (Esther 1: 14). This meant freedom of access to his immediate presence at all times, a high privilege not available to others.

For man to become capable of such access to God requires that heavenly body which is granted at the first resurrection or by rapture. Man as he is, with a body of the earth, is not capable of enduring the unveiled splendour of the Divine majesty: "man shall not see Me and live," not even the friend of God, Moses (Ex. 33: 20), for God is dwelling "in light unapproachable, whom no one of mankind ever saw, neither to see is able" (I Tim. 6: 16). The earthly nature would shrivel under that intense light, for "flesh and blood is not able to inherit the kingdom of God" (I Cor. 15: 50). But unfallen angelic nature can support that vision of God: "in heaven their angels do always behold the face of my Father who is in heaven" (Matt. 18: 10); and such as attain to the resurrection from among the dead, become equal unto the angels, being *sons* of God by being sons of the resurrection (Luke 20: 34–36). This attaining demands that "sanctification without which no one shall see the Lord" (Heb. 12: 14). The "Lord" here is the Father, since every eye is to see the Son at some time.

At the time that the Son of God said that certain angels behold the face of God, He was not Himself in heaven displaying that glory; therefore it was before the Father personally that these angels stood and it was the face of the Father they beheld. Let us, too, esteem this the highest of honours and give all diligence to be accounted worthy of it.

(6) *His name on their foreheads.* The high priest of Israel bore on his forehead a gold plate inscribed "Holy to Jehovah" (Ex. 39: 30, 31). Thus he was separated visibly from general life and dedicated wholly to God. In this office he was the representative of the whole people. He bore the iniquity of the holy things which the people set apart for God, so that they might be accepted by the Holy One (Ex. 28: 38). It is in the spirit of this that the heavenly saints in association with the High Priest, Jesus, the Son of God, shall be priests unto God and act with reference to His rights and to the gifts offered to Him by the nations, as well as be dispensers of His gifts. Comp. Heb. 5: 1. On the earth the saved of Israel will hold similar office (see Isa. 61: 5, 6), so realizing at last one of the earliest post-redemption promises to their race (Ex. 19: 3–6).

How shall a Christian sincerely expect that name to be placed then on his forehead if he does not bear it now morally, by living before men a life of whole-hearted dedication to God?

Name means also character; it being on the forehead implies visible resemblance to God, in character and glory.

(7) *They shall reign for ever.* They shall be kings as well as priests. Disciplined to obey in the school of suffering, they shall prove qualified to rule in glory. Self-serving wholly eliminated, they shall be true kings, serving God in serving the true interests of His and their subjects. For God Himself is the chief Servant of the universe: God's King moved among men as the Servant (Luke 22: 27); and for ever true for kings are the words of Solomon's sage elders to the vain king, his son, "If thou wilt be a servant unto this people this day, and wilt serve them, and answer them, and speak good words unto them, then they will be thy servants for ever" (I Kings 12: 7). Let each who aspires to reign with the Son of man in His kingdom walk now in His steps, by bringing himself, with Paul, under bondage to all (I Cor. 9: 19); because inflexible, as a law of the entire universe of moral beings, is this repeated dictum of the Lord of all, "Every one that exalteth himself shall be humbled; but he that humbleth himself shall be exalted" (Matt. 23: 12; Luke 14: 11; 18: 14).

This is the bride, the wife of the Lamb, this the glory of the church completed and triumphant. Truly eye saw not, ear heard not, nor did ever enter the heart of man "whatsoever things God prepared for them that love Him" (I Cor. 2: 9, 10). But it says not that *these* things are prepared for such as only place in Christ a faith for deliverance from hell beneath, but who, like Simon the Pharisee, develop but little *love* for the Deliverer (Luke 7: 47), because their sense of sin being feeble their gratitude for pardon is small. No; the kingdom is promised to them that *love* God (Jas. 2: 5); it is to them that *love* Him that even now God works all things together for good (Rom. 8: 28). And the test and proof that we love God is that we keep His commandments (I John 5: 3). Until that glorious marriage day the believer is a betrothed virgin (II Cor. 11: 2), and it is for her to set her affection undividedly on her Beloved, lest love should wane, as at Ephesus of old (Rev. 2: 4), and as shall be prevalent as this age ends and the bridal day nears (Matt. 24: 12, 13).

But for those whose love for Christ burns ardently to the end, and triumphs over all seduction and opposition, what bliss of intimacy awaits, what glory in His kingdom, what noble service in the universe.

1. Is this vision Millennial, eternal, or both? Certainly it is eternal, for the throne of God, the dominion of the Lamb, and the sovereignty of the saints are for ever and ever. But it is also Millennial, because the marriage of the Lamb takes place just before He comes forth to set up His kingdom on earth (19: 6–8). Perhaps this explains why the nations need healing; for the Millennial age is not perfect; at its commencement, throughout its course, and at its close, sin still exists. But healing issues in being healed, and the beneficent ministries of the saints shall help toward the perfect condition when there shall be no more curse.

2. Eternity will not annul time. The rendering of Rev. 10: 6 by "there shall be time no longer," has suggested to some minds an unphilosophical notion. The R.V. margin "delay" gives the right meaning. No finite mind can ever think *eternally*. Only the Divine mind can do this. The creature must ever require periods of time to enable it to locate events and to think coherently. For the finite intellect eternity must ever be divided into periods. A mighty angel, or a glorified saint, may conceivably grasp the duration of a vastly longer period than man can now understand, but for the creature there must always be "ages of ages" continuing without end. Therefore in this "city" there are still "twelve months," and therefore there are years, that is, succession and rotation, that is *time*.

3. Let this vision stand as the Biblical picture of what *God* means by people "going to heaven." It is considerably different from the popular conception that "heaven" is the only alternative to "hell," and that "being saved" is the same as "going to heaven." On this present earth during the Millennium, and on the new earth in the eternal ages, "the nations of them that are saved" shall enjoy the blessing of redemption by the precious blood of Christ; yet these will live on earth, not in the regions above, in heaven.

The heavenly portion is for that limited section of the saved known in Scripture as "the church of the firstborn ones who are enrolled in heaven" (Heb. 12: 23). (1) Their calling to this superior dignity is of grace. (2) Their pathway to it is marked by sharing the sufferings of Christ. (3) Their attaining thereto is the reward that grace will give for the sufferings which grace enabled them to bear unto the end. They might have avoided the sufferings, as in fact many, alas, do; in which case they would have fallen short of the grace and have forfeited the reward.

For faith is a living seed out of which can be developed by the diligent virtue, knowledge, self-control, godliness, brotherly kindness, and love. "Wherefore, brethren, give the more dili-

gence to make your calling and election sure: for if ye do these things ye shall never stumble [that is, on the pathway of suffering to the eternal glory to which the God of all grace called you in Christ]; for thus shall be RICHLY supplied unto you the entrance into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. . . . Ye therefore, beloved, knowing these things beforehand, beware lest, being carried away with the error of the wicked, ye fall from your own stedfastness. But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. To Him be the glory both now and for ever. Amen" (II Pet. 1: 5–11; I Pet. 5: 10; II Pet. 3: 17, 18).

INDEX

(*Books in italics*)

Abel, 358
Abbott-Smith, 234
Abraham, 13, 21 *f.*, 45, 61, 100, 110 *f.*, 134, 165, 174, 194, 236, 259, 261 *ff.*, 305 *f.*, 344, 355 *ff.*, 366 *ff.*, 372, 375
Absalom, 158, 276
Achan, 157 *f.*
Achsah, 36
Adam, 12, 83, 341, 348, 375
A.D. 70, 303
Agag, 225
Age, this and that, 51
Ahab, 322
Ahasuerus, 302, 309, 382
aion, 324 *f.*
Alexandria, 306
Alford, Dean, 88 *f.*, 177 *n.*, 221, 349, 374
Amnon, 158, 276
Ananias and Sapphira, 142, 157, 328
Angel, executioners, 85, 206, 340: ministry, 252, 263; courts, 271, 322
Anglo-Israelism, 298 *f.*
Anna, 177
Anointed cherub, 341
Anthony Norris Groves (Lang), 350, 364
Antichrist, 75, 118
Antiochus Epiphanes, 259, 268
Apostolic succession, 103, 141
Athanasius, 106
"At hand", "has drawn near," 19
Augustine, 106, 114, 131, 223 *f.*
Augustus, 347

Babylon, 91 *f.*, 101, 103, 174, 218
Baedeker, D., 182
Balaam, 75
Balak, 75
Baptism in water, 25 *f.*
Baptists, 45
Belshazzar, 208
Bengel, 109, 177 *n.*, 211
Bernard, Canon T. D., 61, 345
" of Clairvaux, 131
Bethesda Chapel, Bristol, 90
Binding and loosing, 141 *f.*
Bishops, 102
Bloomfield, Dr., 177 *n.*
Boaz, 375
Bonar, Dr. A. A., 92
Book of Common Prayer, 78
Book of Wisdom, 219
Booth, Mrs., 238
Boston, 275, 285
Brighton, 79
Broadbent, E. H., 104
Bruce, F. F., 131, 221, 224
Bryce, Dr. James, 104
Buddha, 184
Bunyan, John, 114
Burns, William C., 199

Caleb, 36
Calvin, Calvinists, 121, 224
Cambyses, 342
Campbell, R. J., 79
Capernaum, 49, 125
Central Teaching of Jesus Christ, 345
Chalcedon, Council of, 224
Chapman, R. C., 241
Children and salvation, 150 *f.*
China, Dowager Empress of, 156
C. H. M., 93
Christadelphianism, 77
Church of God, 64
Church, The, Churches and the Mysteries (Pember), 104
Clean water, 27
Cleopatra, 113 *n.*
Clifford, Dr. John, 79
Cloister and the Hearth, The, (Reade), 104
Collyridians, 105 *f.*
Confederate Church, The, 90, 101 *ff.*, 106, 108
Confessions of Augustine, 114
Consubstantiation, 129
Coptic Church, 104
Cornelius, 323
Creed, Exposition of (Pearson), 107
Cyrus, 208, 342

Daniel, 156, 382
Darby, J. N., 116, 120, 121 *n.*, 220, 286, 331, 333 *n.*, 368, 374
Darius, 156, 208, 218
" Hystapes, 342
David, 158, 163, 174, 177 *f.*, 190, 194, 276, 329, 369
Deck, J. G., 37
Decretum of Pope Gelasius, 106
Delitszch, 15 *n.*
Demas, 220
Demons, 200

Denney, Sir E., 328
Dickens, Charles, 242
Dictionary of Christian Antiquities (Smith), 106
Diotrephes, 91, 145, 223 *f.*, 300
Dispensations, change of, 19, 260
Dives, 260, 305
Divine Enterprise of Missions (Pierson), 195
Divine nature, 381
Donatists, 102, 223 *f.*

Earth, new, 135, 384, 394
Eden, 11, 390
Edersheim, Dr. Alfred, 43, 96 *n.*, 216
Edwards, Jonathan, 237
Elders, appointment of, 219
,, the, 24, 272
Eli, 163
Ellison, H. L., 96 *n.*
Epistle to the Hebrews (Lang), 105, 305 *n.*,
Esau, 189
Esther, 302, 309, 379, 382, 384
Eve, 12, 222, 375
Eternal life contrasted with special privileges, 304
Exclusive Brethren, 90, 129
Exposition of the Creed (Pearson), 107
Expositor's Bible (Revelation), 378

Finney, C. G., 68, 195
Flood, the, 313
Friend of the Bridegroom, 22

Garments, 215
Gehenna, 146, 180, 202
Gladstone, W. E., 159, 210
Gnostics, 78, 80, 105
God the Universal Proprietor, 158, 255, 281
Godet, 178
Goethe, 66
Gospels not "Jewish," 41, 117
,, and Epistles connected, 61, 117, 239, 244, 277, 280, 304, 345 *f.*, 385
Gossner, J. E., 146
Greek Orthodox Church, 35
Griffith, Thomas, Dr., 107 *n.*, 333
Grimm, 327 *n.*
Groves, A. N., 349, 364

Hades, 140 *f.*, 183, 214, 258, 261, 263 *ff.*, 305, 307
Hagar, 144, 149, Ch. XL, 386
Harlot, the great, 103, 109
Har-Magedon, 85 *f.*
Hatch, Dr. E., 104, 223
Heaven not the place of all the saved, 135
Hebrews, Commentary on, 152, 222, 226, 305 *n.* 2
Herod, Herodians, 96 *ff.*, 176, 284
Herodotus, 218
Hidden Life of Prayer (McIntyre), 200 *n.*
His Life and Ours (Weatherhead), 76 *n.*
Hislop, A., 104
History of Christian Religion (Neander), 223 *f.*
Hood, Tom, 263
Holy Roman Empire, The (Bryce), 104
Hort, Dr. F. J. A., 206
Horton, Dr. R. F., 79
Hymenaeus, 74, 108, 168
Hypocrisy, 94 *ff.*, 202

Infant baptism, 102
Inge, Dean, 325
Inquisition, the, 223
Isaac, Ch. XL, 375, 386
Ishmael, Ch. XL

Jacob's well, 33
Jannes and Jambres, 74
Jehovah's Witnesses, 77
Jeremy, Epistle of, 174 *n.*
Jerome, 106
Jerusalem, 85, 303, 357, 363, 386
Jesuits, 78
Jesus and the Pharisees (Ellison), 96 *n.*
Jezebel, 75, 101, 103
Job, 168, 271 *ff.*, 358
John the apostle, 106
Jonathan, 190
Joseph, 382
Joshua, 204
,, the high priest, 252 *f.*
Judge, Christ declines to act as, 203
Jupiter, 347
Justification, 371
Justin Martyr, 114

Kadesh Barnea, 165
Kellog, Dr. S. H., 93
Keys of the kingdom, 141 *ff.*
King, The, and Other Verses (Lang), 132
Kingdom not postponed, 19 *f.*, 32, 134
Kingdom of God, on entering, 24 *ff.*, 145 *ff.*, 208

Lake of fire, 307
Laver, the, 328 *f.*, 380
Leo the Great, 224
Letters of J. N. D., 220 *f.*
Letters of Samuel Rutherford (Bonar), 92
Leviticus (Kellog), 93
Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah (Edersheim), 43, 96 *n.*
Life, to lose it, 41
Light in the West (Bruce), 224
Literal Translation (Young), 331
Living Water, 28 *ff.*, 33 *ff.*

Lockhart, W. P., 286
Lord, title, applied to the Father, 63; to Christ, 347 *f.*
Lot's Wife, 269
Luther, 111, 128
Lutherans, 121

Maccabees IV, 259, 268
Manual Greek Lexicon (Abbott-Smith), 234
Mark Antony, 113 *n.*
Mary, worship of, 104
„ assumption of, 105 *f.*
McIntyre, D. M., 200 *n.*
Melito, 106
Micaiah, 322
Milligan, Dr. W., 378
Milton, John, 241
Miraculous gifts, 48
Moffat, Dr., 80
Moravian prayer, 91
More, Sir Thomas, 108 *n.*
Moses, 13, 110, 165, 174, 177, 194, 237, 265, 392
Moslem interpreter, 11
Mount Zion, 386
Muller, George, 42, 197, 241
Mystery Babylon the Great etc. (Pember), 104
„ , meaning of, 61

Nadab and Abihu, 157, 210
Natural and spiritual, 360
Neander, 223
Nebuchadnezzar, 25, 85
Nero, 262
New Church, 78
Newman, Cardinal, 78
New Theology, 79
Newton, B. W., 121 *n.*
„ John, 150
New Translation (Darby), 368
Nicodemus, 24 *ff.*, 46, 113
Nietzsche, 80
Nile, the, 35
Nilgiri Hills, 264
Nitocris, Queen, 218
Noah, 358
Notes on Leviticus (C.H.M.), 93

On Christian Doctrine (Augustine), 131
On Loving God (Bernard), 131
Open Brethren, 91
Organisation of the Early Christian Churches (Hatch), 104, 223
Outer darkness, 305

Papacy, 103, 108
Papal infallibility, 106
Parables apply to living persons, 85, 116, 291, 305, 324, 383
Parables, Notes on the (Trench), 81, 83 *n.*, 86, 114, 312
Paradise, 107, 258, 263 *f.*, 267, 332
Parliaments of Religion, 80
Pearson, Bishop, 107
Pelatiah, 157
Pember, G. H., 25, 104
Pepys, Samuel, 211
Pergamum, 75
Persia, seven princes of, 342
Peter not the rock, 139
Pharisees, 94 *ff.*, 176, 180
Philetus, 74, 108
Pierson, Dr. A. T., 52, 185, 195, 218, 242
Pilgrim Church, The (Broadbent), 104
Plymouth Brethren, 90, 224
Pope, the, 103
Prayer Focused and Fighting, 200 *n.*
Praying and Working (Stevenson), 92, 146
Praying is Working (Lang), 200 *n.*
Priesthood, false, 103, 141
Principles of Theology (Thomas), 107 *n.*, 333
Progress of Doctrine in N.T. (Bernard), 61

Queen of heaven, 106, 141

Rabab, 61, 369
Rangoon, 40
Reade, Charles, 104
Rebekah, 22, 61, 375
Reformation, Reformers, 45
Reply to Sir T. More (Tyndale), 108 *n.*
Reuben, 189
Revelation of Jesus Christ (Lang), 12 *n.*, 221, 284, 305 *n.*, 315
Revised Standard Version, 80, 331
Reynolds, William, 159, 285
rhema, 329
Rhyl, 286
Richards, Dr. Timothy, 80
Robinson, John, 121
Roman Catholic Church, 101, 128, 139
Rome, 66
Root of David, 369
Rotherham, 177 *n.*
Russellism, 77
Russia, 181
Ruth, 61, 369, 375
Rutherford, Samuel, 92

Sadducees, 96 *ff.*, 176
Samuel, 264, 382
Sarah, 100, 149, 355, 386
Saul, 264
„ of Tarsus, 111, 177, 205, 333
Seed, God's word is, 66
Serpents, fiery, 30

Shakespeare, 66
Sheol, 140, 214, 263
Shimri, 189
Shwe Dagon pagoda, 40
Simeon, 177
Simon Magus, 81
Smith's Dictionary, 106
Sodom, 162, 269
Soil, four kinds, 66 *ff.*
Solomon, 194, 204
Son, the only-begotten, 336; the eternal Son, 298
Speaker's Commentary, 177 *n.*
Spirit of God, indwelling of, a fountain 34 *f.*, 335, 349; on praying to, 36 *Note*
Stars, a symbol, 13
Stevenson, Dr. W. Fleming, 92, 146
Strong's Concordance, 333 *n.*
sunteleia, 83 *n.*
Swedenborg, 77 *f.*
Swete, Dr. H. B., 378
Synopsis of the Books of the Bible (Darby), 116

Tartarus, 264
Taylor, J. Hudson, 154
Teacher, Christ the, 47
Temple, its Ministry and Services (Edersheim), 216
Tersteegen, G., 114, 283
Teutonic races, 298 *f.*
Thief, the coming as a, 85 *f.*
Thyatira, 75, 101
Tiberias, 49
"Time no longer," 83, 394
Todas, 264
Tongues, speaking in, 351
Torrey, Dr. R. A., 195
Tract XC (Newman), 78
Trade Unionism, 159
Transubstantiation, 103, 128, 131
Trench, Dr. R. C., 81, 83 *n.*, 86, 114, 312
True Christian Religion, 77 *n.*
Two Babylons, The (Hislop), 104
Tyndale, William, 108 *n.*

Unevangelized, the, 114 *f.*, 323
Unitarian minister, prayer of, 275

Vassar, "father," 285
Vultures, 212, 269

Water and wind, 24
Watts, Isaac, 185
Wesley, 158, 186, 205, 262
Weatherhead, Leslie D., 76 *n.*
Weymouth, Dr. R., 324 *f.*
Who is the God of the Bible? 77
Wind and fire, 21
Wordsworth, Bishop, 177 *n.*
World Council of Churches, 80
Wycliffe, John, 47

Youth for Christ, 199

Zechariah, 177