



This is a digital copy of a book that was preserved for generations on library shelves before it was carefully scanned by Google as part of a project to make the world's books discoverable online.

It has survived long enough for the copyright to expire and the book to enter the public domain. A public domain book is one that was never subject to copyright or whose legal copyright term has expired. Whether a book is in the public domain may vary country to country. Public domain books are our gateways to the past, representing a wealth of history, culture and knowledge that's often difficult to discover.

Marks, notations and other marginalia present in the original volume will appear in this file - a reminder of this book's long journey from the publisher to a library and finally to you.

Usage guidelines

Google is proud to partner with libraries to digitize public domain materials and make them widely accessible. Public domain books belong to the public and we are merely their custodians. Nevertheless, this work is expensive, so in order to keep providing this resource, we have taken steps to prevent abuse by commercial parties, including placing technical restrictions on automated querying.

We also ask that you:

- + *Make non-commercial use of the files* We designed Google Book Search for use by individuals, and we request that you use these files for personal, non-commercial purposes.
- + *Refrain from automated querying* Do not send automated queries of any sort to Google's system: If you are conducting research on machine translation, optical character recognition or other areas where access to a large amount of text is helpful, please contact us. We encourage the use of public domain materials for these purposes and may be able to help.
- + *Maintain attribution* The Google "watermark" you see on each file is essential for informing people about this project and helping them find additional materials through Google Book Search. Please do not remove it.
- + *Keep it legal* Whatever your use, remember that you are responsible for ensuring that what you are doing is legal. Do not assume that just because we believe a book is in the public domain for users in the United States, that the work is also in the public domain for users in other countries. Whether a book is still in copyright varies from country to country, and we can't offer guidance on whether any specific use of any specific book is allowed. Please do not assume that a book's appearance in Google Book Search means it can be used in any manner anywhere in the world. Copyright infringement liability can be quite severe.

About Google Book Search

Google's mission is to organize the world's information and to make it universally accessible and useful. Google Book Search helps readers discover the world's books while helping authors and publishers reach new audiences. You can search through the full text of this book on the web at <http://books.google.com/>

Gift of

Prof. Edgar E. Robinson



**STANFORD
UNIVERSITY
LIBRARIES**

11/19/14

MARGARET D. HUSTON
STANFORD UNIVERSITY

200

a100



**CHRIST'S VISION OF THE
KINGDOM OF HEAVEN**

SECOND IMPRESSION

CHRIST'S VISION
OF THE
KINGDOM OF HEAVEN

BY

JAMES STIRLING

AUTHOR OF "THE STEWARDSHIP OF LIFE," "FINDERS OF THE WAY," ETC.

Οὐκ ἔρχεται ἡ βασιλεία τοῦ θεοῦ μετὰ παρατηρήσεως

BOSTON : THE PILGRIM PRESS
LONDON : JAMES CLARKE & CO.

1913

ET 170

57

To
JAMES LUKE, ESQ.
MY BROTHER-IN-LAW
I DEDICATE THIS WORK
IN WITNESS OF AN UNBROKEN
DEEPENING FELLOWSHIP OF FORTY YEARS

PREFACE

THIS book deals with the kingdom of heaven on earth, the divine epic of which the parables are the symbolic translation. It is an independent investigation of the cycle of Christ's parables, from the outlook of the temptation and the cross. In pursuing this line of interpretation, questions regarding Christ's continuity of aim, His early recognition of the condition—No cross no kingdom of heaven, His unclouded vision of the kingdom in man, in history, and in judgment, receive their answer. By Christ's "vision" is not meant the prophetic glimpse of a divine era, but the omniscient survey of the kingdom of heaven in its founding, expansion, and consummation. We cannot suppose that any aspect of the kingdom was hidden from Him who was about to bring in by death the conditions of its advent and triumph, who living and dying set it before His soul as the goal of His service and sacrifice.

Christ's parables therefore are not "stories" or "illustrations"; they are *analogies* of the heavenly kingdom, drawn from nature and human nature; not a picture gallery in illustration of the gospel, but a concrete presentation of the divine commonwealth to which the gospel invites mankind.

They bear a relation to the doctrines of the gospel, similar to that sustained by the symbols in the Lord's Supper to the doctrine of the Atonement. The Lord's Supper indeed, employing no human speech, yet speaking every language of man, is the profoundest of all Christ's parables.

Spoken at a time when the development of the kingdom of heaven was yet in the future, the parables were to a great extent prophetic; it may be said indeed that they constituted

Preface

Christ's Apocalypse. For the same reason, many of their number are still prophetic of the kingdom's consolidation and consummation, for, like a river, the kingdom is always here and always arriving.

The parables are here interpreted as concerned with the kingdom of heaven in a primary, and with the *ecclesia* in a secondary sense ; with the kingdom as a realm of love, mercy, salvation, holiness ; with the *ecclesia* as an imperfect, partial embodiment of the heavenly reign. The kingdom to which they give form and visibility, is that which in the temptation arose cross-centred amidst the kingdoms of the world, and supplied, we have warrant to believe, the Saviour's last outlook from Calvary. From foundation to consummation it is the effect of what Jesus Christ became, taught, and accomplished, in His humiliation and exaltation. Hence to grasp the heart and inmost content of the parables, we must come to their study along the line of the temptation and the cross.

Amongst the factors hitherto overlooked or undervalued in the interpretation of the parables, are the distinction between the church and the kingdom of heaven ; the central place of the kingdom in Christ's parabolic teaching ; the kingdom's presence on earth for nineteen centuries ; the long process of degeneration from the truth and spirit of Christ and His apostles ; the uprising of essential paganism under Christian claims and pass words ; the verdict of history on the law of ebb and flood in the fortunes of the kingdom. In view of these and other considerations, and especially to keep the interpretation in accord with the established facts of history, I have often been compelled to reject expositions early advanced and still widely received.

JAMES STIRLING.

Cults, Aberdeen,
Dec. 18, 1912.

CONTENTS

	PAGE
PREFACE - - - - -	7
INTRODUCTION - - - - -	13
I. THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN A REIGN OF MERCY AND SALVATION	
I. THE LOST SHEEP - - - - -	35
II. THE LOST DRACHMA - - - - -	47
III. THE LOST SON - - - - -	55
IV. THE ROYAL MARRIAGE FEAST - - - - -	71
V. THE GREAT SUPPER - - - - -	99
VI. THE UNMERCIFUL SERVANT - - - - -	122
VII. THE TWO DEBTORS - - - - -	142
VIII. THE GOOD SAMARITAN - - - - -	153
II. THE KINGDOM HINDERED BY CON- DITIONS IN MAN AND BY COUNTER- FEIT CHRISTIANITY - - - - -	
I. THE SOWER - - - - -	175
II. THE TARES OF THE FIELD - - - - -	198
III. THE KINGDOM ADVANCES GRADUALLY, MYSTERIOUSLY, TRIUMPHANTLY	
I. THE MUSTARD SEED - - - - -	225
II. THE LEAVEN IN THE MEAL - - - - -	233
III. THE EARTH BEARING FRUIT OF ITSELF - - - - -	245

Contents

	PAGE
IV. A KINGDOM OF SEEKERS AND SUPPLIANTS	
I. THE HIDDEN TREASURE - - -	255
II. THE PEARL MERCHANT - - -	265
III. THE FRIEND AT MIDNIGHT - - -	271
IV. THE IMPORTUNATE WIDOW - - -	281
V. THE PHARISEE AND THE PUBLICAN - -	294
V. THE KINGDOM IN RELATION TO SERVICE AND REWARD	
I. THE LABOURERS IN THE VINEYARD - -	313
II. UNPROFITABLE SERVANTS - - -	324
III. THE TWO SONS - - - - -	331
IV. THE POUNDS - - - - -	338
VI. THE KINGDOM CONSUMMATED IN JUDG- MENT AND SEPARATION	
I. THE DRAW NET - - - - -	351
II. THE UNFRUITFUL FIG TREE - - -	359
III. THE WICKED VINE-DRESSERS - - -	374
IV. THE WORLDLY WISE STEWARD - -	384
V. THE RICH FOOL - - - - -	402
VI. DIVES AND LAZARUS - - - - -	417
VII. THE TEN VIRGINS - - - - -	435

Introduction

INTRODUCTION

SECTION I

THE name "the kingdom of heaven" is found in Matthew's gospel only, where it occurs twenty-eight times. Matthew also uses the term "the kingdom of God" four times. The other evangelists employ "the kingdom of God" exclusively; Luke twenty-seven times, Mark thirteen times, and John twice.

The two names of the kingdom are identical and interchangeable. Reporting the Saviour's reception of little children, Matthew has the words "of such is the kingdom of heaven,"¹ Mark and Luke, recording the same address, write "of such is the kingdom of God."² According to Matthew, the "least in the kingdom of heaven" is greater than John the Baptist; according to Luke, the "least in the kingdom of God."³ In the Sermon on the Mount, as found in Matthew, we read, "blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven"⁴; in Luke, "blessed are ye poor; for yours is the kingdom of God."⁵

It is often assumed that Jesus Christ found not the name only, but the conception of the kingdom of heaven awaiting His adoption and use. To vitalize the Jewish ideal was all that remained for Him to effect. Had not the lawgivers, the prophets and psalmists, burnt the conception of the kingdom of God into the national mind? As King, God gave the law at Sinai; during the time of the Judges, Jehovah was Israel's only monarch; David and Solomon were the symbols of His glorious reign. The coming Messiah crowned with revenge and glory was indeed never absent from the popular mind. True; but the Jewish conception of the divine monarchy was fundamentally different from the kingdom of heaven, conceived and preached by Jesus Christ. For its centre, one kingdom had a

¹ Matt. xix. 14.

² Mark x. 14; Luke xviii. 16.

³ Matt. xi. 11; Luke vii. 28.

⁴ Matt. v. 3. ⁵ Luke vi. 20.

Christ's Vision of the Kingdom of Heaven

warrior's throne, the other an inglorious cross. It is true that Christ's countrymen welcomed His proclamation of the coming kingdom of heaven, so long as they believed that the peasant's robe concealed kingly purple. But to assume that the Preacher and His audience attached the same meaning to the cry "the kingdom of heaven is at hand," would betray a fatal blindness to the inward facts of the situation. From the hour of His return from the wilderness, from the first note struck on the bell of conscience, Christ and His countrymen stood on two separate worlds. Jewish history and theology afford clearest proof that the true conception of the Saviour-Messiah and the true nature of His kingdom never found a lodgment in the national mind. Here and there, from age to age, some prophet or psalmist traced the dim majesty of an approaching Deliverer from sin and self; but the nation lived and died on the sunken level of their theocratic ideals.

Had "the kingdom of heaven," of which Christ was founder and herald, been a familiar conception, how came it to pass that the most spiritual and exalted minds of His age failed to grasp its significance? John, the forerunner, last of the prophetic line, held a station of advantage and honour, singular even amongst the prophets. From their watch-tower, other prophets discerned the whitening summits of hope; John's eye never turned to the future; for not prophecy but fulfilment was the burden of his mission: "in your midst standeth one whom ye know not." Surely John will rise to an inward view of the Saviour-King and His kingdom in those who are being saved from sin? But in disguise came the great event to him, as great events come to all men. By the kingdom of heaven John meant "the people of Israel converted to righteousness, and in consequence blessed with national prosperity."¹ Had he understood the kingdom he would have entered it; "but his conception of the kingdom differed so widely from the kingdom as it actually appeared in the person of Jesus and the society that gathered round him . . . that he stood aloof, a doubting, puzzled spectator."²

Religious guides reveal their spiritual level when called upon to deal with sin and conscience; and John is no exception: He has no plummet to sound the depths of sin; no search-light

¹ Dr. A. B. Bruce: *The Kingdom of God*.

Introduction

to disclose the heart to itself. To the penitent he has nothing to say of a Forgive and Saviour. Addressing a snake-bitten nation, he warns them to beware of the snake that bit them. The question of the "multitudes,"¹ of the publicans and the soldiers, was purely legal, and quite as legal was John's answer. The fortunate must share their plenty with the destitute ; the publican must abjure extortion, and the soldier abstain from violence and from grumbling at his wages. "Fruits worthy of repentance" were measured in accordance with a legal standard.

John has sketched his vision of Messiah the Refiner and Cleanser in deep-cut lines, and the picture presents a crisis of doom rather than a day of salvation. Messiah, hot with divine revenge, enters the vineyard of Israel wielding His doom-dealing axe ;² with His fan in His hand He descends on the national threshing floor to gather the wheat into His garner and burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire. As through his prison bars the fore-runner surveyed Christ's divine patience with aggravated guilt his heart wavered. The unwielded axe and fan, the wrath that refused to fall, constrained him to ask, "Art thou he who should come, or look we for another ?"³

Nicodemus, a man of noble instincts and open mind, could think of no kingdom of heaven but that of which by birth he was a subject. The bare mention of the soul's re-birth as a qualification for entrance into the kingdom confused and perplexed his mind.⁴

But even the Lord's apostles, and the inmost members of that inner circle, failed to grasp the nature and aim, the inwardness and universality of the kingdom of heaven. Salome for her sons, or her sons for themselves, desired that they might sit right and left of Christ in His kingdom ;⁵ thus sadly proving that the longing for a kingdom national and temporal dominated the heart of even him who leaned on Jesus' breast. The apostles indeed, to the last hour of the Saviour's suffering life, surveyed that life through a distorting haze of rivalry and ambition. The foot-washing on the night of the betrayal was designed to purge the apostles' eyes, to set

¹ Luke iii. 10, 12, 14.

² Luke iii. 9.

³ Matt. xi. 3.

⁴ John iii. 9.

⁵ Matt. xx. 21.

Christ's Vision of the Kingdom of Heaven

forth the kingdom of heaven as a commonwealth of souls cleansed by and for self-sacrifice. As late as after His resurrection, Christ found the vision of a worldly kingdom floating still before His apostles' gaze. Their question on the eve of the ascension, "Lord, dost thou at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?"¹ proves that even Christ had so far failed to secure a lodgment in their minds for His great conception of a spiritual throne in the soul of man. If, then, the inner circle of Christ's scholars failed to comprehend the kingdom of heaven as seen from their Lord's point of view, the mass of worldly, traditionalist Israel was certain to bring to the subject a mind absolutely impervious and unprepared.

Had the kingdom of heaven been already founded on earth, and like earthly empires experienced decline and fall, the contemporaries of Jesus who listened to the announcement of its restoration could hardly have forgotten the leading outlines of a monarchy so distinct from the kingdoms of the world. They would have brushed the dust from the page of annals so sad and glorious. But the kingdom of heaven that Christ proclaimed and established was in no sense a restoration, or even a continuation of a commonwealth already founded. Hence priest and rabbi resented it as an un-Jewish innovation, out of line with their history and their hope. Amidst the trappings of conquest the name had indeed been heard, and the shadow of a glorious Messianic state had long crossed the prophet's dream; but the kingdom of heaven came *with* Christ, *in* Christ, and *through* Christ. If He did not create the name He created that which was named. He took the herald words warm from the lips of John; and from the realm of shadow and prediction, carried them into the sphere of realization. With John they were the hands of the clock pointing to the coming hour; with Jesus, the announcement that the event had taken place and shape amongst the events of history. "After that John was delivered up Jesus came into Galilee preaching the gospel of God, and saying, The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand: repent ye, and believe in the gospel."² This voice issues from the interior of the kingdom, from royal lips, from an invisible throne. Like the call of John, it enjoins the bitter herbs of repentance;

¹ Acts i. 6.

² Mark i. 14, 15.

Introduction

but then it invites the contrite, penitent soul to come as God's guest to the great feast of the gospel.

The kingdom of heaven began on earth with God's abode in human flesh ; the indwelling of God in our nature, at Bethlehem, at Nazareth, before disciples were called or miracles wrought, was the proclamation and assurance that God had come to reign in the soul of man. God thus takes possession of our humanity in the head Man of our race ; and in the divine soul of that fountain Man, His will is done on earth as it is done in heaven.

Jesus had been preaching for some two years, and the kingdom for which the subject nation sighed seemed no nearer than when He first sounded its advent. Pharisees, whose love of country fed on hatred of the conqueror, who expected to see the sky reddening and crowding from horizon to horizon with the fire and tumult of foreshadowed battle, were impatient to know when the arsenals would fill with arms, and Israel go forth to victory under the invincible Messiah. Haunted by this heartache, they asked, "When cometh the kingdom of God?" What was Christ's reply? "The kingdom of God cometh not with observation: neither shall they say, Lo, here! or, There! for lo, the kingdom of God is within you." If Jesus meant to teach that the soul was the seat of the kingdom of God, that the kingdom was in its essence spiritual, righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit, the rendering "within you" would best express His thought; but if His aim was to set the invisibility of the kingdom against the spectacular conceptions of the Pharisees, we should translate ἐν τῷ ὑμῶν "in the midst of you." Whilst it is true that wherever found on earth the kingdom of heaven is in the soul of man, it could not have been Christ's intention to affirm that the kingdom was present in the hearts of the Pharisees; but in Him and His disciples was the kingdom present, as New England lay within the *Mayflower*. To the Pharisees and Scribes it was a great surprise to learn that the kingdom of God was spiritual; it was a greater surprise to be assured that its initial advent was past; that in their midst an invisible King had begun His invisible reign.

A Messiah reigning *over* men is infinitely different from a

¹ Luke xvii. 20.

Christ's Vision of the Kingdom of Heaven

Messiah reigning *in* men. The interval that separates them is the distance between Jesus and Nicodemus. The dream of national restoration and glory had sunk so deeply into the brooding soul of the councillor that he carried the kingdom-burdened heart into the presence of Jesus. He was constrained to visit and sound the Galilean wonder-worker, to see if the prophet's mantle concealed the king; and if his miracle-working arm was ready to wield the nation's sword. There seems no connection between the opening words of Nicodemus in the great interview, and Christ's reply, "Except a man be born anew, he cannot see the kingdom of God,"¹ till we grasp the fact that Christ is addressing a man who had the kingdom of God on brain and heart, who as Israelite and patriot lived by anticipation in the Messianic commonwealth. The nation seemed so long forsaken of God, it was so long since any leader came forth from the shadow of Jehovah, that Nicodemus hoped everything from a prophet who had God with him: "No man can do these signs that thou doest, except God be with him."² While his lips uttered these words, his heart cried, "When shall Messiah command the Lord's hosts and restore the kingdom to Israel." To this dream of Israel a nation amongst the nations, and over the nations, Christ replies, "Except a man be born anew he cannot see the kingdom of God." Those alone see the kingdom who are in it and of it, subjects and citizens by spiritual birth. The sons of the Holy Spirit are subjects of the holy commonwealth. They and they only understand its mysteries. The words, "he cannot see the kingdom of God," must have one of three meanings: (1) to discern the presence of the kingdom on earth; (2) to enter it on earth and experience its power; (3) to see its consummation in glory. The first sense best maintains the connection of thought: it intimates the blindness of Nicodemus and assigns its cause. Christ's use of the words, "cannot enter," immediately after "cannot see," points to the conclusion that seeing and entering the kingdom are essentially different acts.

To see the kingdom signifies, in this context, to discern its presence. The truest, surest seeing is inward; when the heart entertains the King as guest, and is received as citizen into the

¹ John iii. 3.

² John iii. 2.

Introduction

kingdom ; then all the states of the soul come under one will, one law, and one crown. Since the kingdom is entered only by those who have experienced spiritual birth, inwardness and individuality are its two leading characteristics. " Whosoever shall not receive the kingdom of God as a little child, he shall in nowise enter therein." The point before us is the individual reception of the kingdom. Now by the soul only can the kingdom be received ; and as the receiving soul must first be reborn, it follows that the kingdom is spiritual and spiritually received. Hence Paul declares that " the kingdom of God is righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit." And the vital truth, forgotten or ignored by the greater part of Christendom, is, that men must personally receive Christ as the crowned head of His kingdom, to live over again His life and laws in our heart and mind. Whether the heart be Christ's cradle, or Christ the heart's fortress, it is personality in personality.

When speaking of His kingdom, Christ always sounds the strenuous note. The martial strain, " From the days of John the Baptist until now, the kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and the violent take it by force,"² is the prelude of the blessed invitation, " Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden."³ The era that brought Jesus Christ stands by itself as the age of soul-hunger, of God-famine. To the Gentile mind, weary of its barren speculations, even Judaism appeared a green land of springs and water-brooks. The breath of resurrection stirred the palms of Judah. But when Jesus announced the kingdom of heaven, aspiring subjects began to crowd its gates. Whether we read approval or censure in Christ's words, " the kingdom of heaven suffereth violence," the central truth is obvious, that the kingdom was hard to enter. The ardent throng, pressing in and taking it by force, recall to mind British valour streaming through the breach at Delhi. Christ never disguised the straitness of the gate that leadeth unto life. Things as essentially part of ourselves, and as hard to sever, as hand or foot or eye, must, by absolute and painful renunciation, be sacrificed if they hinder our entrance into the kingdom. " It is easier," says Christ, " for a camel to go through the eye of a needle

¹ Rom. xiv. 17.

² Matt. xi. 12.

³ Matt. xi. 28.

Christ's Vision of the Kingdom of Heaven

than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God."¹ This is a sigh from the heart of the Saviour, as He surveyed a rich man passing by the gate that leads into life. Rich men emptying their hearts of wealth have entered; this man could not enter with his riches and would not enter without them.

The utmost that Christ could say to the Scribe who ranked love to God and man before whole burnt offerings and sacrifices was, "Thou art not far from the kingdom of God."² "I will follow thee, Lord," said a volunteer, "but first suffer me to bid farewell to them that are at my house."³ Jesus, discerning the unsettled will, the wavering mind, replied, "No man having put his hand to the plough, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God." Over the gate of the kingdom might be inscribed, He who enters here, must bring the soul, the entire soul, and nothing but the soul.

¹ Luke xviii. 25.

² Mark xii. 34.

³ Luke ix. 61.

SECTION II

THE name of " Pharisee " has long been a term of reproach, in meaning nearly equivalent to " hypocrite." But this judgment requires qualification. Pharisaism took its rise in a separatist movement against the Hellenizing tendencies of the time ; and although the movement was a stand for the form, the letter, rather than the spirit, yet relatively considered, it was a reformation. In Judaism and Christianity, progress has often been a movement backward to the sources. Here failed the Pharisees ; they went not far enough. Had they returned to the law, to strip off its incrustations and seek its interior spirit, they would have prepared the way for John and Jesus Christ. But as a self-elected garrison of purists and patriots they dethroned the law and crowned tradition. Pharisaism as mirrored in the New Testament is a religious sect in its last stage of decay ; when ceremony is religion, and zeal inspiration.

The principle of justification by faith was not unknown to the Old Testament ; yet under the " covenant of works " conformity to the demands of the law was the condition of righteousness. The law had always been a wall of separation between Jew and Gentile. But to the law of Moses, the Pharisees added a " second law," a medley of oral tradition, of endless ritual, and burdening ordinance. " They bind," said Christ of the Scribes and Pharisees, " heavy burdens and grievous to be borne, and lay them on men's shoulders ; but they themselves will not move them with their finger."¹ " Hypocrites ! " He exclaims, " for ye tithe mint and anise and cummin, and have left undone the weightier matters of the law, judgment and mercy and faith. Ye blind guides, which strain out the gnat and swallow the camel."² Even had the Pharisees spent their lives in formal compliance with the law,

¹ Matt. xxiii. 4.

² Matt. xxiii. 24.

Christ's Vision of the Kingdom of Heaven

and not in the ceremonial observance of the *Mishnah*, their righteousness would still have been a holiness of works. But a party who carried formalism to a fine art, who lived in dread of bodily defilement, who never knew when they might violate their pledge, neither to buy nor sell, nor eat anything that was not tithed; whose ingenuity ransacked nature in order to find all the substances with which the candles of the Sabbath might *not* be lighted—and whose two renowned schools, headed by Hillel and Shammai, divided on the question whether an egg laid on a festival might or might not be eaten—could only be described by the Lord of truth as those who had made void the word of God by their tradition, and “shut the kingdom of heaven against men.”¹

To see the Pharisee at his worst, we must follow him, where he chooses the chief seat in the synagogue and feast, where he enters the widow's house to devour it, where he stands in the temple despising the penitent tax-gatherer, and giving thanks at the remembrance of his own holiness, or where, like the publicans, his avarice breaks out in extortion and excess.

Yet might a Pharisee attain a high moral level. Nicodemus belonged to the sect of the Pharisees; so did Joseph of Arimathæa, “a good man and righteous . . . who was looking for the kingdom of God.”² Simeon, “righteous and devout, looking for the consolation of Israel,”³ and Anna, the prophetess, who “departed not from the temple, worshipping with fastings and supplications night and day,” who “spoke of him to all them who were looking for the redemption of Jerusalem,”⁴ were white flowers on the Pharisaic tree. The inquirer who on his knees asked, “Good Master, what shall I do that I may inherit eternal life?” and who, having heard the Commandments re-read by their Giver, said unto Him, “All these things have I observed from my youth,” and of whom it is recorded that “Jesus looking upon him loved him,”⁵ was a Pharisee. Saul of Tarsus had attained the highest, whitest, coldest peak in the range of morals: “as touching the law a Pharisee; as touching zeal, persecuting the Church; as touching the righteousness which is in the law,

¹ Matt. xxiii. 13.

² Luke xxiii. 50, 51.

³ Luke ii. 25.

⁴ Luke ii. 37, 38.

⁵ Mark x. 21.

Introduction

found blameless."¹ Yet even to these apply the Saviour's words, "Except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the Scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no wise enter into the kingdom of heaven."² Thus it plainly appears that *the kingdom of heaven demands a new type of righteousness.*

The Pharisee and the Romanist meet on the same moral level. The two systems are equally traditional, equally mechanical. One has priestly magic, beads, images, penance, purgatory; the other, formulas, phylacteries, gnat-straining and hand-washing. The sculptor wishing to cast the figure of a man, forms his mould in sand, into which he runs the fluent metal, and whence emerges the statue of king or hero. Nature, on the other hand, begins her man with a germ of life, evolving bone and muscle, limb and feature. This man excels the sculptor's creation by the distance between death and life. The first is the Pharisee, the second the new man in Christ Jesus. The Pharisee conforms to the mould of tradition and legal restraint, the new life needs no outward mould, but obeying an inward law of agreement with God, is righteous; for righteousness is no more than the rightness or accordance of man's heart with the holiness of God. All that was common between the kingdom expected by the Scribes and Pharisees and the kingdom ushered in by Christ was the name. They began at different points, moved in opposite directions, and sought ends infinitely diverse.

Jesus was the poet of the kingdom of God, and still more was He its prophet. The kingdom of heaven as viewed by poetic and prophetic eye is the theme, the substance, the burden of all His parables. Sometimes the name is absent, but the kingdom is present; the Teacher is either conducting disciples through its centre, or revealing the aspects of its provinces. The physical sciences, it has been observed, always bear the impress of the places where they began to be cultivated.³ In a profounder sense is this true of the teaching, and especially of the parabolic teaching, of Christ. Looking over the constellation of parables, one is struck with the purely local framework in which the kingdom of heaven is set. The housewife wraps the leaven in the meal and leaves it to its secret ministry. The hidden treasure found and hidden again; the pearl

¹ Phil. iii. 5, 6.

² Matt. v. 20.

³ Humboldt.

Christ's Vision of the Kingdom of Heaven

merchant setting one thing against all ; the fishermen casting their net on Galilee ; the vine-farmer amidst the barring grey and gold of dawn, engaging grape-gatherers in the market-place ; the lord of the vineyard and the husbandmen ; the ten bridesmaids bearing their lamps—are all drawn from scenes and incidents amongst which Jesus and His scholars had passed their lives.

But whilst the symbols are local and lowly, the conceptions they enshrine are universal and infinite. Jesus, ever conscious of His royalty, and ever praying "Thy kingdom come," the prayer He taught His disciples, never allows a single feature of earthly empire to sully or degrade His vision. His last view of the kingdoms of the world and the glory of them was that which arose before His soul on the high mountain in the hour of His temptation. Henceforth the joy of a heavenly reign, of a commonwealth of souls, dearly bought and spiritually born, made Him blind to the allurements of earthly power.

If Jesus has left anywhere to reverent minds a key to the unfathomed mystery of His temptation, it is to be found in His dominating vision of the kingdom of heaven. The path of inquiry into the temptation must ever begin at the cross—the field of drawn battle between the kingdom of heaven and the reign of evil in the universe. Travelling back from the Redeemer's death to His life, and from the outward to the inward, we may reverently assume that the kingdom was the burden of Christ's communion with the Father ; and that what He bore to God in prayer He brought to men in parable. Whilst the parables are set in earthly types, they are the vision, in various aspects, of a heavenly commonwealth. They breathe a love of this heavenly state, which we may venture to call divine patriotism. The love of the kingdom of heaven of which the Speaker was Heir-apparent, and in which He lived and moved, animates all the parables. These come in midway between the battle of the wilderness and the battle of Calvary. The two battlefields interpret the kingdom in the parables ; and the kingdom in the parables gives us access to the inner meaning of the temptation and the cross. Not till we know the place of the kingdom of heaven in the Redeemer's soul, can we see why the kingdoms of the world and their glory were offered by the tempter. And not until two facts

Introduction

are realized—the foreseen slowness of the kingdom's coming, and the Saviour's infinite yearning for its advent, can we comprehend what armed the tempter with his power.

Having therefore seen that the kingdom was ever with Christ, that it went with Him when He prayed, was before Him when He died, that it was ever waiting for embodiment in parable, let us consider how the divine soul, thus kingdom-laden, came into temptation. This was the situation: Earth saw her most majestic guest, the sum of all human generations, Son of Man and Son of God, placed at the parting of the ways, with the crowns of the world and the crown of the kingdom of heaven in His view. All the crowns were as yet unwon. The temptation lay not in any tendency to choose between the kingdoms of the world and the kingdom of heaven, but in making the earthly kingdoms subservient to the advent of the heavenly. With the reminiscence of creation in His mind, and the conscious possession of creative power, came to Christ the conflict between obtaining empire for God, over man and in man, by the exercise of this power, or by the unfathomed submission of the cross. Why should self-sacrifice under holiest impulses and in highest interests decline the exercise of creative will? Bread is drawn from the veins of earth, from light and air; if then God turns earth into bread for common use, why not bring bread from earth for hunger in the wilderness? Miracle must begin somewhere; should it begin here, with the wild beasts as spectators? Should the ministry be ushered in with miracle—in the city, and in the Father's house, the heart of the theocracy—by descending from the temple tower amidst the assembled worshippers?

Temptation never comes singly, or to one side of our nature only; we are assailed on the physical, mental and moral sides of our being. And what is true of men, may in a profounder sense have been true of the Summary of the race. The Wrestler in the wilderness, grappling with the giant powers that have overcome the captains and leaders of mankind, could not have overcome with the quotation of texts of Scripture. The recognition of satan and his repulse may stand for the emergence of the Redeemer's soul from the eclipse, but surely cannot record the coming on and course of the darkness. Two conceptions of appalling sublimity arise from the two great

Christ's Vision of the Kingdom of Heaven

depths of the Saviour's life : one is the contact of His soul with the tempter, the other with death. In some way, unexplained and inconceivable, the tempter had made his voice heard within ; as afterwards death made the suffering of the Redeemer's soul the soul of His suffering.

The wilderness was the outward scene of the conflict ; the conflict itself had the soul for its arena. The view from the high mountain can only be an accommodation to human thought of an experience soaring beyond the range of human realization. We may assume that the creative eye that had seen our planet and all the worlds start on their paths through celestial space, and had surveyed the revolving kingdoms, battlefields and cities of the world, still retained that vision. Jerusalem and Rome, Nineveh and Babylon, Thebes and Athens, were not new to the eyes that wept on Olivet. The thrones of India, China and Persia would flash upon the inner eye ; and all those kingdoms with their courts, armies, armaments, and cities ; with their motley pageant of races, tribes and kindreds ; marriage processions and funeral trains, laughter and anguish, chains and sceptres, hunger and feasting, rags and glory—rolled onward to the shores of night. Now, could we call the being human who, holding a commission to redeem the world, Himself a Galilean peasant, did not sigh for power to overthrow the thrones of wrong, to break the fetters and empty the prisons, to descend from a throne of old renown to arrest the ear and eye of the world, to borrow the flowing tide of social and political influence—thus as a Saviour to clear a platform for a universal assault on the soul of man. To all men, especially to men largely gifted and highly born, two alternative ways present themselves—to receive from the world its patronage, or to give to the world sweat and tears and sacrifice. The captains of our race may, like Cromwell, cradle their country in their bosom, or, like Napoleon, wade through blood to power. The kingdoms of the world and their glory were in the offer of Jesus to an extent that had never tempted the ambition or the patriotism of any world-conquerer before. The offer of the crowns of the world and their glory is an attempt to rise to the height of the Redeemer's ideals ; whilst it makes the assault along the lines of national expectation. Christ is but

Introduction

asked to work the wonders and accept the sovereignty that were to distinguish the expected Messiah. This aspect of the temptation, the need to resist the expectation of His disciples, and the challenge of His enemies to exercise His power as the evidence of His claim, ended only with the cross. "What sign shewest thou?"¹

Jesus was asked to espouse the broken fortunes and undertake the leadership of His country. The Israel desired by His contemporaries was not a penitent, but a militant nation, not a church of saints but a camp of heroes, led by a crowned and sworded man of war. A war of independence, the restoration of the dispersion, a rally of Israel in the homeland under her own Prince-Messiah—this was the national dream. Let it be remembered that in the temptation, the allurements of sovereignty flashed across an enthusiasm for the triumph of the kingdom, divinely ardent. Even a human heart such as burned in David Brainerd or Henry Martyn, if confronted with the slow cross on the one hand, and an enterprise launched upon the tides of power on the other, whilst every thirty years witnessed the burial of the human world in a universal grave, would yearn to harness empires to the chariot of salvation. What then must the foreview of the slowness of sacrifice and the millenniums of human waste have been to the sublime Servant whose reigning impulse was the passion of salvation! Whilst the cross is the measure of what the kingdom was to the Saviour, the ever recurring parables in illustration of the absorbing theme, declare how near the kingdom of heaven lay to His heart, how essential He regarded the grasp of its genius by His disciples, and how imperfect is the instrument of human speech to convey the heart of God to the heart of man.

It was on the last night of His cross-bearing life, whilst the enthusiasm of the kingdom was consuming His soul, that the Saviour uttered the startling words, "I have overcome the world."² This signifies that since the kingdoms of the world and the glory of them have been cast behind, Gethsemane and Calvary lie in the foreground. Consider Christ's position at the time when He claims to have overcome the world. He has attained the age of thirty years; He possesses no country house

¹ John ii. 18.

² John xvi. 33.

Christ's Vision of the Kingdom of Heaven

in Nazareth, no town house in Jerusalem ; He is of no business or profession ; He is neither priest nor scribe ; He has no seat in the National Council ; He is rarely, if ever, seen at the tables of the great ; He has never been accepted by His people as teacher or prophet ; He has initiated no socialist crusade against capital ; He has never raised His voice or struck a blow against the political subjugation of His country. Had Herod or the Roman Emperor glanced into the upper room, surveyed Jesus of Nazareth amongst the eleven, and heard Him declare, " I have overcome the world," he would have laughed the Speaker to scorn.

When with His last breath Jesus exclaimed " It is finished," the cry appeared to close a life of failure. What were the circumstances ? He had left an insignificant following ; one of the twelve betrayed Him ; the rest forsook Him and left Him to His fate ; not even waiting to bury His dead body. The world's perjurers had sworn His life away ; Pilate, in the spirit of the world, had delivered Him over to the tender mercies of cant and hypocrisy ; the flowing tide of the world was with the priests, the rulers, and the Pharisees.

Read under the bleeding feet of the Saviour on the cross, before the tomb when Joseph and Nicodemus have laid Him down with the humanity of the past, and the stony door has moved into its groove and received the attesting seal, the words, " I have overcome the world," seem the saddest, strangest, emptiest ever uttered.

But on this low level are the foundations of the kingdom laid. The cross is the throne of the new world ; He who bleeds upon it is king and law-giver. In absolute obedience and soul surrender is the divine will accomplished, the divine heart disclosed, the world vanquished. To Christ the cross is no accident, no surprise, no disappointment. His life was the chosen way ; His death the chosen end ; His tomb the chosen point of departure for ascension into dominion and heaven. Interpreted by the cross, the kingdom is spiritual in its king, in its subjects and power. The war of independence against Jewish ideals, against the prince of this world, against sin and death, has been fought and won. Thus is the kingdom, viewed in the light of the temptation and the cross, in aim and spirit, in the conditions of its foundation, in the character

Introduction

of its Sovereign and the sphere of His dominion, *the anti-thesis of the Messianic state expected by the Jews.*

This is the kingdom that vitalizes and suffuses the parables ; they are the shadow of which this is the soul and substance. The fact that so many parables were required to interpret and illustrate the kingdom, proves its newness to Jewish thought and expectation. The new wine demanded new vessels. The necessity of explaining the kingdom by analogies demonstrates its spirituality. Whilst the parables interpret the kingdom, it in turn supplies the leading principles of parabolic interpretation.

Finally, it remains to ask, What is the relation of the kingdom to the church ? A question so vital to the interpretation of the parables, demands an examination of the terms and their contexts, where the latter fix the meaning. As Christ has only twice used the term *ecclesia* (congregation), we have no opportunity of considering it in various contexts. The two instances of its use, however, give us the local and universal meanings of *ecclesia*. The injunction, " Tell it to the *ecclesia*,"¹ the local church or congregation, refuses to be changed into, " Tell it to the kingdom of heaven." The context, moreover, renders the interchange impossible. Christ's words, " Upon this rock I will build my church,"² refuse to be transposed into, " Upon this rock I will build the kingdom of heaven." The substitution of church (congregation) for kingdom of heaven, will demonstrate that the terms are neither equivalent nor interchangeable : " Seek ye first his *church* and his righteousness ;³ thou art not far from the *church* ;⁴ it is easier for a camel to go through a needle's eye than for a rich man to enter into the *church* ;⁵ he sent them forth to preach the *church* ;⁶ from that time the gospel of the *church* is preached, and every man entereth violently into it ;⁷ the *church* is within you ;⁸ the *church* cometh not with observation ; except a man be born anew he cannot see the *church* ;⁹ the *church* suffereth violence and men of violence take it by force."¹⁰ The non-interchangeableness of the terms is

¹ Matt. xxiii. 17.

² Matt. xvi. 18.

³ Matt. vi. 33.

⁴ Mark xii. 34.

⁵ Matt. xix. 24.

⁶ Luke ix. 2.

⁷ Luke xvi. 16.

⁸ Luke xvii. 20.

⁹ John iii. 3.

¹⁰ Matt. xi. 12.

Christ's Vision of the Kingdom of Heaven

more striking still, if instead of "church" we read "congregation."

For once Christ has used the term "church," He has used the term "kingdom" fifty times. This fact in itself can only mean that the two names stand for two different things. Had Christ meant the church, it seems strange that for twice he called the society by that name, He should have a hundred times named it the kingdom of God or the kingdom of heaven. Had the terms signified the same thing, or two things practically equivalent, the preponderating use of one term is inexplicable. If, moreover, the two terms are not interchangeable, we go further, and affirm that they are not equally *important*. The kingdom of heaven is an infinite, the church, a finite conception. The kingdom of heaven, or the kingdom of God, is frequently found in the parables, the church never. Were the church the subject, the omission of the name is at least singular; but the fact goes to prove that the church is not the subject. The terms "church" and "kingdom" cannot be interchanged because their contents stand to each other as whole and part. Yet their identity has been too often assumed. This assumption has wrought harm in many ways. Amongst the inevitable results has been the introduction of a vicious principle of interpreting the parables. Instead of lifting up the church to the level of the kingdom, the kingdom has been lowered to the level of the church, where some corporations bearing that name have lost nothing but Christianity, and retained nothing but the world.

The kingdom of heaven is God's rule in the soul of man; the church (congregation) is a society having for its aim the furtherance of that rule. "Although religion ought to pervade and govern the whole of society, just as the nervous system pervades and governs the whole human body, yet religion, for this very reason, needs to be specialised in institutions of its own, as the brain is specialised and localized in the human body."¹ The brain and the nervous system, however, both belong to the category of matter, and therefore differ only functionally. The kingdom and the church, on the other hand, are not parts of a whole; the kingdom is a whole of which the church, ideally conceived, is a part. The church

¹ Dr. W. Gladden: *The Church and the Kingdom*.

Introduction

is functional, instrumental, a means to an end ; the kingdom is none of these ; it is to the church what the soul is to the brain. On the divine side, it is God's presence, life and reign in man ; on the human side, its root principle is faith, the condition of divine citizenship, of peace and holiness. Only in its human embodiment is the kingdom of heaven visible ; the church on earth is never invisible. Here, the church at best is a mixed society ; the kingdom is holy ; for no unrighteous soul enters its life and rest, and it enters no unrighteous soul. The kingdom of heaven and the church can never be co-extensive ; for the kingdom was present when and where there was no church ; and the merely *visible* church may be present where the kingdom is absent. We pray "Thy kingdom come," not that it may come into the world, but that it may come into men, through faith and repentance.

Citizenship in the kingdom is a higher standing than churchmanship ; one means subjection, loyalty, residence in the Christ-life and government ; the other may have no such significance. The kingdom of heaven is not an ideal, if by "ideal" is meant that which has a conceptional existence only. The kingdom is as real as the will and life, the holiness and peace of God. The church in its ideal conception is the kingdom localized ; in its actual state, it is the kingdom in conflict with the world, or in subjection to it. Whilst therefore the church has often been, and was ordained to be, the kingdom's instrumentality for the permeation of society, not seldom has the organization bearing that name proved the chief barrier to the kingdom's advancement. In few lands is the Christianity of the New Testament a greater stranger than in the countries subject to the Roman apostasy. But even churches claiming to have been reformed, whether under monarchic rule or the reign of numbers, are sometimes not the exponents but the opponents of the kingdom of heaven. "I am disposed to think," says Dr. A. B. Bruce, "that a great and steadily increasing portion of the moral worth of society lies outside the church—separated from it not by godlessness, but rather by exceptionally intense moral earnestness. Many, in fact, have left the church in order to be Christians."¹

¹ *The Kingdom of God.*

Christ's Vision of the Kingdom of Heaven

It cannot be too strongly impressed upon every student of the parables that the kingdom of heaven, not the church, is their theme. The church, indeed, in an indirect and secondary sense, as the kingdom's embodiment and instrumentality, is present in them; but only as a means to an end—as a medium for furthering God's dominion in the soul of man, until the local and functional disappear in the universal reign of righteousness and peace. Where God reigns in the individual, in the congregation, or in the aggregate of congregations, the kingdom of heaven is present, as daylight is present in a room, but although daylight filled all the rooms in the world, the sunlight shed and the sun that sheds it are a vaster quantity than all the light thus contained. The kingdom of heaven presupposes the cross, and the cross presupposes Jesus Christ. The reign of heaven signifies all that enters the soul through Christ crucified—reconciliation, forgiveness, sonship, holiness, eternal life. The kingdom's being is independent of the church; its well-being is in and through the church. As the kingdom of heaven comes, as souls come under its dominion, they form congregations for worship, fellowship and instruction; and congregations act as leavening centres on the social mass; and as the bread and wine in the Lord's Supper show forth Christ's death without the fluctuations or the limitations of human language, so the parables by earthly analogy conceal and unveil the kingdom of heaven—mysterious, spiritual, here and coming, local and universal, militant and triumphant.

I

**The Kingdom of Heaven a Reign of
Mercy and Salvation**

I

THE LOST SHEEP

“ And he spake unto them this parable, saying, What man of you having a hundred sheep, and having lost one of them, doth not leave the ninety and nine in the wilderness, and go after that which is lost, until he find it? And when he hath found it, he layeth it on his shoulders, rejoicing. And when he cometh home, he calleth together his friends and his neighbours, saying unto them, Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep which was lost. I say unto you, that even so there shall be joy in heaven over one sinner that repenteth, more than over ninety and nine righteous persons, who need no repentance.”

LUKE XV. 3-7.

SURVEYING the Galilean throng, of which Jesus Christ is centre, we distinguish an inner ring of social outcasts as far removed from temple and synagogue, from national hope and religious recognition, as a camp of gipsies from modern life and civilization. These publicans and sinners, shunned, scorned and desolate, had at first listened timidly and afar off to the Saviour's message. But that message found, drew, and captivated them. Its amazing tenderness and compassion carried their hearts by storm. This prophet knew, pitied and loved the scorned and excommunicated. They drew near for they were drawn, they crept closer and closer in response to His welcome; they would hang on His lips for ever, for while they listened, hardness, defiance, bitterness, gave way to sorrow, longing and hope. In this lowly man they found an advocate, an interpreter, a refuge.

Outside the circle of the fallen and the desperate hung a stern company of Scribes and Pharisees, within hearing of the Saviour's voice, but out of sympathy with His message. Some of these men may have invited Him to their tables and intended to extend their patronage; but now in their austere eyes He stands at the bar of legal holiness, convicted of receiving sinners and eating with them. Surprise, mortification,

Christ's Vision of the Kingdom of Heaven

indignation, could no longer seethe in the silence of the heart. Insulted morality found vent in speech.

It was not strange that men with the antecedents and ideals of the Pharisees should hold aloof from open transgressors of the moral law. Feeling predisposed to infection they fled the infected. Unable to uplift the fallen, they doomed them to hopeless quarantine. That a man so perfectly human as Jesus Christ should enter, and manifestly prefer the plague zone, appeared to them inexplicable. To see a prophet with Messianic claims, consorting with men unknown to the ranks of righteousness and without weight in the commonwealth, puzzled the advocates of legal holiness and theocratic glory. They expected that a heroic Messiah, foreseen by all the saints, sung by their sublimest poets, would, with the task before Him of making Jerusalem the capital of the world, identify Himself with the national aspirations, and seek to enter endless dominion through the gates of the temple. Messiah as a prophet, they reasoned, would draw just men around His feet ; as a prince, He would summon station and authority to His standard. Without the patriotism and righteousness of Israel He would be a general without an army. Theocratic hopes and legal holiness could therefore have suffered no greater shock than Christ's warm welcome to the abandoned cast-aways. In giving audience and manifest preference to the banned and excommunicated, in attending their feasts and healing their plagues, He forfeited the allegiance of the moral aristocracy of the nation.

The Scribes and Pharisees passed their vote of No confidence in "this man." Their verdict they expected to fall with annihilating force. But some men's slander is an order of merit, nay, a coronation. A Messiah in the confidence of the Pharisees would have meant despair for the world. Till the end of time the indictment "this man receiveth sinners and eateth with them," outshines in the eyes of the heavy-laden and broken-hearted all the crowns the Saviour wears.

Jesus was patient with the accusers ; He knew that they were thinking of law while He thought of mercy. He saw that men who expected the advent of a glorified Pharisee could not, without change of heart, accept a Saviour who would bear away in death the sin of the world. He met their murmuring

The Lost Sheep

by opening a door in heaven, so that accusers and accused might hear the joy-bells ringing there. Joy and sorrow are the inspiring founts of great poetry; anguish and ecstasy forsake the levels of prose. With joy before the throne, with joy uplifting His own soul, the Saviour poured forth the Father's heart and His in three parables of joy. The lost sheep, the lost drachma, and the lost son reveal the holy universe joyfully opening its doors for the reception of repentant sinners. They reveal the Pharisees standing without the heavenly house; their murmurs rising as a discord through the harmonies of universal holiness. "He spake unto them this parable, saying, What man of you, having a hundred sheep, and having lost one of them, doth not leave the ninety and nine in the wilderness, and go after that which is lost, until he find it?"

In opposing Christ's reception of sinners, that is lost men and women, the Pharisees proclaimed war against an inherent principle of human nature, redeemed and unredeemed. Further, they impeached the saviourhood resident in the divine nature. Human nature in both sexes knows the meaning of loss, of seeking the lost, and rejoicing over the lost and found. The lost sheep draws the shepherd away from the ninety and nine; the woman lighting the lamp and sweeping the house for the lost drachma, almost forgets the remaining nine. Thus Scribes and Pharisees in resenting the search after lost men and women are at war with themselves as men. They would seek the lost sheep; their wives and sisters would sweep the house in search of the lost drachma. The incident of loss endears and transfigures our possessions. Our lost youth excels in blessedness and value all that remains of life. The same law applies to our lost friends. Death reveals the best in our departed and covers their frailties. The epitaphs bereavement writes above the dead, if sometimes untrue to fact are seldom untrue to feeling. Ascending higher, man through the entrance of sin attains a nearer place in the love and home of God. His extremity calls forth a more glorious revelation of the Divine nature, and his return is the cause of gladness only known to him who has lost and found again.

The joy of finding, so deep in human nature, is infinitely deeper in the divine. Rejoicing over what was lost more than over

Christ's Vision of the Kingdom of Heaven

what was left is common to God and man. The sheep owner and the woman who lost the drachma are symbols of divine feeling, but they fail to express the measure of divine grief and divine joy. Man, in order to be a true parable of God, must have possessed and lost a partaker of his own nature ; he must have lost a son. In that case the loss is bereavement, loss of love and companionship, loss of a sympathizing, comprehending other-self, unlike the lifeless coin or mindless sheep. The sheep and drachma are not lost to love ; and when they are found it is not bereaved affection that rejoices. The sheep owner and the woman who lost her drachma are drawn from common life ; and they serve to express the operation of human instincts ; but they fail to set forth fatherhood. The Lost Son is required to supply symbols of God losing and seeking, finding and rejoicing. It is therefore not without reason that some see in the Lost Sheep and Lost Drachma an introduction to the great drama-parable, which in the terms of human love and loss, sorrow and joy, reveals the divine Father.

These three parables vibrate with divine joy. Joy is the centre round which they move. Man and woman rejoicing over the recovery of lost treasures and possessions sufficed to show the inevitableness of human joy ; but none less than man on the high plane of bereaved fatherly affection could symbolize the joy of God hailing, receiving, coming forth with pardon and oblivion. "This man receiveth sinners and eateth with them," seemed to the accusers a burning indictment ; but it utterly fails to express the facts. This man seeks, yearns, finds, loves, rejoices over returning sinners. He rejoices to be received into their broken hearts, where He spreads the joyous supper of salvation.

Christ was condemned for receiving lost men and women. *Because* they were lost He received them ; this was His defence. Indeed, had they not been lost, He could not have received them as a Saviour receives. What the lost sheep was to the sheep-owning shepherd, what the drachma was to her who lost it, that and infinitely more was each lost sinner to the Saviour. He has property in us ; He has made, He has loved, He has redeemed us. He bewails our empty chair in the Father's house, our vacant station at the cross, our

The Lost Sheep

empty place in the kingdom of heaven. The shepherd feeling his loss and pursuing the lost, is Jesus entering our orphan world, and finding out the publicans and sinners.

There are shepherds whose own the sheep are not ; this is an owner. His are the hundred sheep. In them he has invested his all ; for them he lives ; with them he spends his days and nights. He leaves friends and home to lead the flock into safe retreats and green pastures.

One morning he discovers a vacant place in the flock which he counts and names. Part of his possession is gone. A new feeling comes over him. He is poorer. He thinks of his sheep's aimless wandering. In the eye of imagination it is lost in the jungle, caught in the thicket, or falls over the precipice. The sheep is lost ; for it has slipped out of its owner's possession and protection. Far from its owner and shepherd, and exposed to mortal peril, it is dead to the owner and the flock. That is the symbol ; the taxgatherers and sinners are the reality. They have escaped from the law's enclosing fold ; they are deaf to the call of the law and the prophets ; to temple and synagogue they are lost. From the rod and staff of Israel's Shepherd they have wandered afar. They are hungry, diseased and desolate. But unlike the lost sheep, they are *conscious* that they are lost.

The shepherd-owner leaves his flock in the wilderness—in the pasture whither he had led them, and where he discovered his loss. At this point the ninety and nine are of no immediate concern. We must centre undivided interest on the shepherd owner going after " that which is lost until he find it." Whether at sunset he closed the door of the fold, or at dawn left the grazing sheep, we see him sad, earnest, determined plunge into distance. If ever he and his lost sheep meet again the initiative must be his ; he must go after. His thought, purpose and will go forth in one direction. He never owns to himself that the sheep is dead ; to him it is still living and worth the toil of search. It is lost, but he will seek until he finds it. He broils in the sun and freezes in the night ; his sandals wear to shreds ; his wallet is almost empty ; he crosses the paths of the wolf and the lion ; still he will not return without the sheep he had lost. Jesus Christ's career from the throne to the cross lies enclosed in the words, " going

Christ's Vision of the Kingdom of Heaven

after that which is lost." If the Pharisees had read deeper, they would have seen, instead of a meeting with sinners, a search, a quest, an over-taking of the lost. "He goeth after that which is lost." This unbeginning love of God went after man before the cross.

The shepherd-owner, knowing every sheep track and mountain path, came to the pit where the lost sheep lay. Wanderer and finder are far from the fold; but the shepherd will not pitch his tent in the distance. He is there solely because he is a saviour. Bending over the sheep, he exemplifies Jesus receiving sinners and eating with them. In the eyes of the Pharisees the atmosphere of sin seemed congenial to Christ. Whereas uplifting from the pit, putting sin away, expelling by blood its virus, were His passion and mission. "When he hath found it he layeth it on his shoulders rejoicing," is a picture of infinite tenderness. The absence of impatience and irritation on the shepherd's part, the silent joy with which the wanderer is laid on his shoulders, tell at once of the outward grace and inward joy with which Jesus receives sinners. No harsh word, no chilling glance, no memory of past years, of life in the far country. His ocean heart swallows up the sinner's past. Sinners deep in the pit of guilt may look up; the face that bends over them has tears for their distress, but no frowns for their wandering.

The lost one is exhausted, perhaps grievously wounded; certainly exposed and undone. The shepherd must descend to its level. Will it suffice to stand beside the pit and cry, "Arise and follow me," or go before and say "This is the way"? Had a teacher without the uplifting, transporting power of Jesus Christ, stood amongst the tax collectors and sinners, and called them forth from the pit of their past, he would have augmented their despair. They were unable to take the first step Godward, and so was the world. The sinner is forever lost unless divine compassion follow him to the pit where he lies. Although he knew his way home, that knowledge is not power. He must be lifted from his degradation and laid on the shoulders of Him who taketh away the sin of the world.

The shepherd in his joy could not share with another the blessedness of the burden: "he layeth it on his own shoulders."

The Lost Sheep

In the universe one only could find the lost, and one only could carry it into the kingdom of God. In God's salvation, Jesus Christ is all or nothing ; none may stand with Him under the burden of the soul and its sin. It is after the sheep has been brought home that joy seeks other hearts to feel and other tongues to utter it.

As the lost sheep lay separate and alone before the sinner's inward eye, each far-travelled heart would say, " That is I." They had felt the infinite ice-fields between them and the national shepherds and national fold. What amazed them was the discovery that they were missed ; that they were regarded still as an integral part of the flock ; and that divine love, far from spurning, had been calling and seeking them. They had now an explanation of the inward drawing towards Christ, who had been arresting and uplifting them, though they knew it not. They came into the secret of the Saviour's joy as He screened them from temple and synagogue. Watching the shepherd's steps, they, as plague-stricken men forget their quarantine, forget the presence of accusing Scribe and Pharisee. When the shepherd laid the sheep on his shoulders, when he turned homeward his face, they felt that holiness was touching, uplifting, and bearing them away from condemnation. The burdened shepherd's gladness proved to them and to men in all after time that religious guides have oftener obscured than revealed God to the human mind. What the Son of God bore on His shoulders, Pharisee and Scribe—the national shepherds—had trampled in the dust.

How the publicans and sinners, the torn and bleeding lost sheep who had crept so near, must have blessed the murmuring that led the Shepherd-Saviour to spread such a feast of love ! With what amazed delight must Jesus' words have met their straining ear ! Think of those parched and blighted hearts drinking from the head waters of salvation !

" When he cometh home he calleth together his friends and his neighbours, saying unto them, Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheeep which was lost." His heart, full of joy whilst bearing the sheep, now overflows. As burden-bearer he hungered for kindred hearts to share his joy ; but he had no friends and neighbours nearer than home ; and Christ had none nearer than heaven. The apostles were present :

Christ's Vision of the Kingdom of Heaven

but we are not certain that they had yet overcome the popular aversion to tax gatherers and excommunicated sinners. Men to whom the Pharisees had seemed pillars of the Messianic state, could not easily realize that sinners, excommunicated by claimants of the prophetic succession, should be dear to God.

The Western mind cannot fully enter into the shepherd's joy. The Arab and his horse are comrades; the Eastern shepherd and his sheep personal friends. Man, left alone with the merciless desolations of nature, goes out in sympathetic affection to creatures who, like himself, sleep and wake, suffer and rejoice, know weariness and rest. He is conscious of being left in trust; the defender and providence of his flock. They know and trust him, their welfare and happiness are entwined with his own. A common experience of cold and heat, of darkness and dawn, peril and suffering, unites shepherd and sheep. A common enemy crowns their unity. When the lion and the bear "took a lamb out of the flock," David "smote him and slew him." Jacob, reviewing his pastoral life, declares, "In the day the drought consumed me, and the frost by night; and my sleep departed from mine eyes." Of the good shepherd the Saviour says, "When he putteth forth his own sheep, he goeth before them, and the sheep follow him; for they know his voice. The good shepherd giveth his life for the sheep."

These passages prove that the shepherd ideal remained as high in the time of our Lord as it had been in the days of Jacob and David. Innocent creatures living under the shepherd's eye, dependent upon his care and chivalry, his companions day and night, grow upon him. Contrasted with dumb, contemptuous nature, they are fellow citizens of the silences and the mysteries. To the good shepherd the twenty-third Psalm was vastly more than to another; and when the man who would have given his life for the sheep brought the wanderer home, his own joy and the gladness of friends were deep; for it was not the recovery of a possession, but of an object of attachment, a living companion in loneliness and silence, a sharer of the pleasures and perils of physical life. Had the shepherd's house filled with friends and neighbours dominated by our Western unwillingness to make friends of creatures outside the human family, he would have found his

The Lost Sheep

joy freezing on heart and lip. But the Oriental shepherd's dwelling, filled with shepherds and sheep-owners who had lost and found, was a living symbol of heaven.

Each of the three joy-parables depicts a home-scene, and has for centre a human hearth. The sheep-owner "cometh home" with his sheep; the woman calls her friends and neighbours to the house where the coin was lost and found; it is in the house that the elder son hears music and dancing. What scorn Scribes and Pharisees threw into the word "sinners." Referring to Christ as "this man" they almost apologize for the allusion. Their unconcealed contempt finds a crushing rebuke in Christ's words, "I say unto you." "Let us not in this 'I say unto you' miss a slight yet majestic intimation of the dignity of his person."¹

Joy in heaven over penitent sinners is here represented as future; "for not yet," says Trench, "had He risen and ascended, bringing with Him His rescued and redeemed." But heaven must know when and where repentance occurs on earth; the nature of joy demands instant and not deferred expression. It is better to give the future the signification, "henceforth there shall be joy in heaven over one sinner that repenteth, more than over ninety and nine righteous persons which (seemingly) need no repentance" to enter the kingdom of heaven. That is to say, repentance will be the distinctive mark of the kingdom of heaven when the Redeemer has ascended, and the Holy Spirit come into office and power. Joy is placed in the future, while repentance, its cause, is present—"one sinner that repenteth." After the ascension, repentance assumed first rank in doctrine and experience: "Him did God exalt with His right hand to give repentance to Israel."² "Repentance and remission of sins" constituted the burden of apostolic preaching. Joy arose in heaven on the day when penitence drew near to hear Him, and will arise as often and as long as the lost and the penitent enter the kingdom of heaven. The shepherd's gladness began the moment he found his sheep. His friends and neighbours were not then present to rejoice with him; but the ransomed family of God are ever in the Father's house, and their joy is 'over the act of repentance, the beginning and condition of salvation.

¹ Trench.

² Acts v. 31.

Christ's Vision of the Kingdom of Heaven

The declaration, "there shall be joy in heaven," opens the invisible, highest world. More than any other saying of our Lord it reveals the inner home life of heaven. Christ's references to the heavenly life are generally indirect; this is a direct, literal manifestation of life in the presence of God. It is indeed a glorious gospel from which we learn that not only the events of our earth, but the conditions and revolutions of a single human soul, supply the theme of heavenly songs.

Who are the ninety and nine righteous persons which need no repentance? This question leads us to ask, Who were Christ's hearers? The parable, whatever its wider ends, was meant in the first place for local application. Besides Christ's recognized disciples and the curious crowd, collectors of customs and notorious sinners, Pharisees and Scribes helped to swell the mighty throng. The tax-gatherers and sinners came to hear the heart-reading prophet; the leaders of legalism were surprised and affronted at their gracious welcome. It is clear that in the first of these classes Christ saw repenting sinners. They were the lost sheep and lost coin found, the lost and dead son coming to life again. It is obvious that the sheep-owner seeking his sheep, the woman sweeping the house to find the lost coin, and the father running to meet his lost son, are a threefold embodiment of redeeming love, of God in Christ. The third party, the Scribes and Pharisees, whose hostile criticism called forth the parable, must be the righteous persons which need no repentance. If not, the Scribes and Pharisees have no place in the teaching of the parable which we learn "He spake unto them." The Pharisees could hardly fail to recognize themselves in the "ninety and nine righteous persons, which need no repentance." When they applied the name "sinners" to a class of Christ's hearers, they assumed for themselves the antithetic term "righteous." If Christ had issued an invitation to the "righteous," they would have unanimously responded. On the contrary, an invitation to "sinners," would have been passed on to the lost sheep beyond the fold of Israel. Christ's word, "righteous" should therefore be read in the light of its context. The Pharisees view the sinners and themselves in their respective relations to the law. The "sinners" are sinners because they have broken the law; the accusers, like the ruler, have observed all these

The Lost Sheep

things from their youth ; and are therefore righteous from the legal point of view. Jesus defending His reception of sinners, who knew and sorrowed over their sin, takes the ground He occupied when He said, " I came not to call the righteous, but sinners." The Pharisees had asked, " Why eateth your Master with the publicans and sinners ? " Christ replied, " They that are whole have no need of a physician, but they that are sick." The " sick " in this place are the publicans and sinners ; sick souls conscious of their sickness ; sinners in God's sight and in their own. " They that are whole " are the " righteous " of our parable. The assumption that by the term " righteous " Jesus meant *holy*, has caused a long search to find men who " need no repentance." Men have discerned a reference to those who have already repented, to the ransomed in heaven, to angels unfallen ; but the parable was primarily a living word for living circumstances. Sinners forgiven, saints in glory, angels unfallen were not prominent in that historic throng. But two classes whom public opinion had agreed to label " the righteous " and " the sinners " were present. In these two classes, what they seemed and what they were, lie the terms of interpretation.

Jesus who spoke of the Jewish nation as " the lost sheep of the house of Israel," could not have regarded any part of that nation as having no need of repentance. He who was named Jesus because He should " save His people from their sins," who was " exalted a Prince and a Saviour to give repentance unto Israel," was not wanted by men who in their own opinion were *not* sinners.

The Pharisees were conscious of outward conformity to the law. They could not charge themselves nor could the law charge them with positive transgression of its precepts. " As touching the righteousness which is in the law," they, like Saul of Tarsus, " were found blameless " ; they had " a righteousness of their own, that which is of the law " ; which Paul contrasts with the " righteousness which is of God by faith." The righteousness of the law receives concrete expression in the Elder Son : " He was angry and would not go in. He answered and said to his father, Lo, these many years do I serve thee, and I never transgressed a commandment of

· Matt. x. 6.

· Phil. iii. 9.

Christ's Vision of the Kingdom of Heaven

thine ; and yet thou never gavest me a kid that I might make merry with my friends ; but when this thy son came, which hath devoured thy living with harlots, thou killedst for him the fatted calf." This man is not merely one of the Pharisees ; *he is Pharisaism itself*. He is the orthodox Pharisee ; the self-made saint. He has never transgressed any of the commandments ; and where there is no transgression there is no need of repentance. Whilst claiming to have kept his father's commandments, he is in the very act of rebellion : " he would not go in." He condemns his penitent, forgiven brother ; he arraigns the father for receiving him ; he justifies himself. This is the spirit that sat in judgment on the merciful Saviour when He received sinners ; this is the " righteousness " that " needs no repentance."

II

THE LOST DRACHMA

" Or what woman having ten pieces of silver, if she lose one piece, doth not light a lamp, and sweep the house, and seek diligently until she find it? And when she hath found it, she calleth together her friends and neighbours, saying, Rejoice with me, for I have found the piece which I had lost. Even so I say unto you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth."

LUKE XV. 8-10.

If we assume that this parable, like that of the Lost Sheep, is addressed to Scribes and Pharisees, we are haunted by a sense of repetition, and search in vain for a distinctive message. We feel that the two parables convey the same instruction. This fact in itself should lead us to ask ourselves, Are we pursuing the true line of exegesis? Standing between the Lost Sheep and the Lost Son, the Lost Drachma must be more than reflected light; it must be a new window opened in heaven. Even Olshausen, prince of interpreters, finds our parable "obscure." "I cannot persuade myself," he observes, "that it contributes no new feature to the general picture which the three similitudes hold forth, and that consequently the contrast between the *γυνή* and the *ἀνθρώπος*, and the *δέκα* and *ἑκατὸν* is merely accidental."

If the words, "He spake unto them this parable" are taken in their obvious sense, "this" must refer to the Lost Sheep, as addressed to Scribes and Pharisees. If, on the other hand, "this" is made to cover the whole three parables, then the threefold portraiture must be treated as one parable; or the Lost Sheep and the Lost Drachma must be regarded as introductory to the Lost Son. But this is inadmissible; and the interpretation that creates such an exigency is open to suspicion. If, however, we limit the application of "this parable" to the Lost Sheep, what of the Lost Drachma and the Lost Son? Were not these also addressed to the Pharisees?

Christ's Vision of the Kingdom of Heaven

Let it here be said that it is a questionable exegesis which sees in any one of the three parables an appeal to *one class* and the pursuit of a single purpose. If we confine our view to the apologetic aspect, we recognize what is perhaps the dominant purpose ; but we overlook the *revelation* and the *message* with which these glorious parables are freighted. The Lost Sheep, for instance, is so far apologetic that it vindicates the Saviour's conduct in receiving sinners ; but it goes much further ; it carries the war into the assailants' camp ; charges the lines of self-righteousness, showing that the censorious legalists fight against love and mercy as they live and reign in God.

In the elder son Pharisaism is condensed into one personality. He who runs may read in that legalist a compendium of self-righteousness. But the elder son is not the heart of the parable ; not the part that made penitents glad on that day, and has made them glad ever since. The accusing Pharisees might trace the analogy between the lost son and publicans and sinners ; but the publicans and sinners discovered the lost son within their own hearts.

The Lost Drachma, while closely related to the Lost Sheep, and the Lost Son, must be regarded as bearing its own distinctive message. It is first a *call* and then a *defence*. The operation of human instincts condemns Pharisaism and interprets God. We may safely assume that there was an element in the human throng which the parable of the Lost Sheep did not cover. The shepherd seeking his sheep revealed God in Christ coming after man whom He had lost. But it is a feature of deep soul concern, to doubt its right to the acceptance of a general invitation. The deeper the lamp is lowered into the sink of the penitent heart, the more is that heart impressed with the exceptional enormity of its guilt. Such souls require to be called by name.

The question, "What man of you?" was a direct appeal to the Pharisees and in a wider sense to the multitude. The words, "What woman?" convey an indirect appeal to penitent women amongst the "sinners." Had the parable been addressed to the Pharisees, who exclusively belonged to the male sex, abundant illustrations could have been drawn from the lives of men. That a woman is placed in the centre of the parable points rather to the encouragement of the

The Lost Drachma

assailed than the conviction of the assailants. Had the complex throng been entirely composed of men, the interpreter must with Olshausen have felt the obscurity of this parable. But when the inward eye falls on female penitents among the "sinners," light arrives. When we begin to reconstruct the crowds amongst whom Jesus spent the days and hours of His ministry, we are inclined to compose them of men. The itinerating company of Christ and His disciples seems not to accord with the secluded habits of Oriental women. And then the twelve and the seventy were men. Woman, because she was woman, would remain in the background. It is when the Saviour has breathed His last we learn that female disciples had followed Him from Galilee. We knew that mothers came to invoke His blessing on their infants, and might in the absence of proof have inferred that women would seek His presence when God's hand lay heavy on their souls. Accordingly we find "women and children" in the great multitude of five thousand men which "followed him on foot out of the cities." A "sinner," moved by love and sorrow, finds her way to the Saviour's feet in the house of Simon the Pharisee. Had this been the first woman "sinner" to venture into His presence, she would not have been the last. Her merciful reception, her triumphant vindication, her charter of peace sealed without and within, must have encouraged others to seek the presence of the Forgiver and Healer. The parable of the Debtors serves to illustrate the situation out of which that of the Lost Drachma appears to have arisen. In both cases it is an offence to Pharisaism that Christ receives sinners; on both occasions Christ utters a parable in defence; each apology is an invitation to assailed penitence. The "sinner" in Simon's house could not mistake the debtor who owed five hundred pence, nor fail to recognize her own position in the debtor's inability to pay. The "sinner" is at the heart of both parables. While the woman was the great debtor greatly forgiven, it is not meant that Simon also was forgiven. The contrast, addressed to his judgment, lies beyond his experience. He has never come to the point of having nothing to pay.

So the Lost Drachma presents a picture in which the

¹ Matt. xiv. 21.

Christ's Vision of the Kingdom of Heaven

accused and not the accusers occupy the primary place. It is true that the Lost Sheep and the Lost Drachma contain in common the words, "I say unto you." If the first were addressed to the Pharisees, the second would also seem to be addressed to them ; but the flowing tide of penitents was to the Saviour of infinitely greater moment than the cavilling of the Pharisees. The sinners continually arriving, and the Pharisees venting affronted indignation were concurrent events; and we might reasonably assume that if Christ spoke in parables, the broken-hearted would have the foremost place in them. The anticipation is justified. In the threefold picture there is much more of the Lost Sheep, the Lost Drachma and the Lost Son than of the Pharisees.

Woman in Luke's Gospel receives significant recognition. Therefore a parable appealing to women, and interpreting the Divine heart by their own, might be expected in this evangelist. His hand has drawn the scene in Simon's house, and reported the parable that has so many points of contact with the Lost Drachma.

The introduction of the drachma instead of a coin in common use cannot be accidental. Had we met it in other places in the Gospels it could not have attracted special notice here. But considering that in the New Testament it is found here only, we are led to ask, Is its presence in this parable without significance? If a *man* had been represented as losing a coin, would the drachma have been the coin selected? Had a merchant lost a coin in his shop, would he have been said to lose a drachma? One thing seems certain, that a coin not in common currency could not have been so highly prized for its commercial value.

Interpreters often seize a suggestive aspect of the coin carrying the imperial image into the dust. As Trench points out, the drachma bore no such image. "It must not be left out of sight," he observes, "that the Greek drachma, the coin particularly named, had not, like the Latin denarius, the emperor's image and superscription upon it, but commonly some device, as of an owl, a tortoise, or a head of Pallas."

It is often assumed that the ten drachmas indicate the amount of the woman's possession, but this would be like expressing an English woman's fortune in American dollars.

The Lost Drachma

If the interpretation is assisted by whatever proves the woman's poverty, this view has its merit. While, however, the diligence of search can thus be understood, the inevitable joy is less apparent. A woman will more deplore the loss of a jewel worn by her mother and grandmother, than its equivalent in current money. It is not obvious that the woman was selected because of her poverty. A descent in numbers is not a descent in values. As the lost son was more to his father than the drachma to the woman, so the drachma may have been more to its owner than the sheep to the shepherd. The drachma points not to a pecuniary loss, but to the disappearance of an ornament. The woman losing her drachma appears to allude to the custom of women wearing coins as jewels. In Palestine women at the present day may be seen wearing coins on their temples.¹ If the parable refers to this custom, we have a simple explanation of the small number of coins. Coins worn on brow or temple would be more readily lost than from the purse. Viewed thus, the drachma is not one of ten pieces of silver, recently acquired and soon to be exchanged for food or raiment. As an ornament, perhaps an heirloom, it is surrounded by purer, higher associations. Of these vanity is the lowest. Passing through the mint of feeling, hallowed by memory and imagination, it is stamped with more than an emperor's image, transmuted into higher metal than silver or gold. Worn on the brow, its loss would soon proclaim itself to female friends and neighbours.

As home is the place where an Eastern woman's life is mostly spent, she lights the lamp and sweeps the house, judging that the coin was most likely lost there. Much significance has been read into lighting the lamp and sweeping the house. The actions are temptingly suggestive; and they may be used by the preacher to illustrate spiritual truth; but since they are means to an end, they must be held in subordination to that end. In the interests of interpretation it is far more important to know that the drachma was lost in the

¹ "They" (women of Nazareth) "differ, however, in their headdress, carrying on each side of the face a rouleau of silver coins fastened to a sort of pad which is fitted to the head. Doubtless it was to coins worn in this fashion that our Lord alludes in the parable of the Lost Piece of Silver."—*Tristram*.

Christ's Vision of the Kingdom of Heaven

house, sought in the house, and found in the house. It was a revelation to the outcasts ; they were not forgotten ; they were precious even in the dust.

Have we not in this group of parables a three-fold measure of moral distance. The sheep strays from the national fold ; the coin is separated from its living wearer, in the house—the theocracy ; the son is lost in a distant land, measured from the meridian of home. Seen in this light the Lost Sheep and Lost Drachma present sin according to human computation ; the Lost Son according to the Divine. The sheep was lost in the land of the fold, the coin in the house of Israel. In either case the truth implied was not far to seek—the possibility of recovery and reinstatement. If it is right to assume that a woman is introduced in order to appeal to women in the crowd, we may well think of what that hour of revelation meant to those women. They were in the dust, hidden, down-trodden ; like the coin, they had fallen from the light of the brow into the darkness ; they saw the nine coins shining on the brow of religion, but the lost jewel had left a vacant space ; they were still of account to the owner and wearer. They were in the house ; they were the daughters of Abraham. The new lamp was lighting the old house from floor to roof ; mercy had girt herself to find, to uplift, to restore.

In the woman who lights the lamp, some see the Church, others the Holy Spirit. They feel that some deep reason underlies the introduction of a woman between the shepherd and the bereaved father. Doubtless : but should the determining reason for the change of sex be sought in the seeker or the lost ? If it be admitted that the sheep, the drachma and the younger son represent the lost sinner, why should not the shepherd, the woman and the father signify God in Christ seeking His own ? It is hard to see how the woman could signify the church, which at the time our parable was spoken had no existence ; and we cannot believe that Christ would illustrate the spiritual by the unknown. It is freely granted that the parable extends beyond the occasion of its utterance ; but it was intended in the first place for its first hearers ; and to them the woman could not have set forth the church. The search on earth and the joy in heaven were in progress while Christ was speaking ; but was the church then lighting

The Lost Drachma

the lamp and sweeping the house? Against the opinion that the woman may signify the Holy Spirit, the objection is not so strong. Still it is not clear that Christ's hearers—even the apostles—could have discerned the ministry of the Spirit in the action of the woman. Was the doctrine of the Trinity sufficiently developed to be advanced in an appeal to publicans and sinners? Further, the shepherd and the woman are not types of persons, but illustrations of divine love in its operations. Not the question who the figures are, but what they *do*, chiefly concerns us. The sheep and the drachma are certainly typical of persons. When we come to the lost son we meet parabolic types; the father representing God, the younger son the penitent publicans and sinners, the elder the Pharisees. To find in the woman a reference to the feminine element in the Divine nature, would introduce a speculative subtlety foreign to the parable.

The woman lighting the lamp in the windowless house, seizing the besom and sweeping into every corner, her shadow flung on wall and floor—the obscuring dust darkening the air—is probably a life-picture drawn from some home in Nazareth. The drachma gleaming from the dust, its eager seizure, the finder's delight, the festive scene when friends and neighbours hasten to share her joy, are the scenes upon which heart and mind must fix their eyes. The woman in her joy exclaims, "I have found the drachma which I had lost"; the shepherd, "my sheep which was lost." In the sheep's straying, the shepherd-owner had no part; the woman, on the contrary, as the wearer of the coin, was the unconscious cause of its loss. The use of *the* instead of *my* before drachma cannot mean that the woman never possessed it. The finder was the loser in that sense in which only divine love can lose and find. Perhaps in "the drachma" we may see intensity of feeling, as if forgetting the remaining coins. Here, as in the other two parables of this group, is no accusing word against repenting sinners.

The house filled with women rejoicing in their friend's delight is the picture of the angels of the presence sharing the infinite joy of God. View the little silver coin. Is it for this that the house rings with rejoicing? To appraise the coin you must survey it from its owner's point of view; you

Christ's Vision of the Kingdom of Heaven

must stand in the inner experience of losing and finding that which was lost. There is no reference to "righteous persons which need no repentance"; for the parable fixes attention on penitents in their relation to God. The joyful finder in the midst of her rejoicing friends, the angels in God's presence witnessing His joy over one sinner that repenteth, must have sounded in the ears of the Pharisees as the music and dancing sounded in the ears of the elder son.

We can picture the Saviour turning from the Pharisees to the "sinners." The address is not "which of you women," although that is its meaning; but "which woman having ten drachmas." The coins may have gleamed from many a brow in the audience. Memory would recall instances of loss and search, of merry-making over the found. A new day dawned over the outcast and despised when they discovered that God was not the antitype but the antithesis of the Pharisees; that their human feelings were interpreters of Him who has a place in His heart for the lost and a place in His home for the found.

III

THE LOST SON

“ And he said, A certain man had two sons ; and the younger of them said to his father, Father give me the portion of thy substance that falleth to me. And he divided unto them his living. And not many days after the younger son gathered all together, and took his journey into a far country ; and there he wasted his substance with riotous living. And when he had spent all, there arose a mighty famine in that country ; and he began to be in want. And he went and joined himself to one of the citizens of that country ; and he sent him into his fields to feed swine. And he would fain have been filled with the husks that the swine did eat ; and no man gave unto him. But when he came to himself he said, How many hired servants of my father’s have bread enough and to spare, and I perish here with hunger ! I will arise and go to my father, and will say unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven, and in thy sight ; I am no more worthy to be called thy son ; make me as one of thy hired servants. And he arose and came to his father. But while he was yet afar off, his father saw him, and was moved with compassion, and ran, and fell on his neck, and kissed him. And the son said unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven and in thy sight ; I am no more worthy to be called thy son. But the father said to his servants, Bring forth quickly the best robe, and put it on him ; and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet ; and bring the fatted calf and kill it, and let us eat and make merry ; for this my son was dead, and is alive again ; he was lost, and is found. And they began to be merry. Now his elder son was in the field, and as he came and drew nigh to the house, he heard music and dancing. And he called to him one of the servants, and inquired what these things might be. And he said unto him, Thy brother is come ; and thy father hath killed the fatted calf, because he hath received him safe and sound. But he was angry, and would not go in ; and his father came out and entreated him. But he answered and said to his father, Lo, these many years do I serve thee, and I never transgressed a commandment of thine, and yet thou never gavest me a kid, that I might make merry with my friends ; but when this thy son came, who hath devoured thy living with harlots, thou killedst for him the fatted calf. And he said unto him, Son, thou art ever with me, and all that is mine is thine. But it was meet to make merry and be glad ; for this thy brother was dead, and is alive again ; and was lost, and is found.”—LUKE XV. 11-32.

SOME have found in this great parable a drama of the world, wherein the two sons stand for the two broad divisions of men,

Christ's Vision of the Kingdom of Heaven

Jew and Gentile. But it is a drama of home, and that home is the Jewish nation. The circumstance that drew it forth renders this conclusion abundantly clear: "All the publicans and sinners were drawing near unto him to hear him. And both the Pharisees and the Scribes murmured, saying, This man receiveth sinners and eateth with them." Therefore before the two sons, the Pharisee and the publican, Jesus holds the mirror.

The Jewish mind had been long familiar with the conception of the nation as a family living under the same roof with Jehovah. This conception found expression in the temple—the Father's house, where God gathered round its altar-hearth the spiritual household of Israel. "My Father's house" was the language of Jesus when He described the temple, and "my father's house" is the vision of the lost son's heart when he remembers home.

The holy land was the divine Father's farm, a farm on which the family of Israel were to plough and delve, sow and reap; and the toil and repose, failure and triumph—all the appointments of Jewish life—led up to God, whose presence created home, and whose service was man's supreme reward.

Palestine was temple land; the earliest sheaves of harvest, the first-born amongst the flocks and herds, were claimed for the household of the Father-King. This was the field from which the elder son returned at night, after his long legal day; the field the younger son, the publican, had left to collect the conqueror's tax and squander the resource of his birthright.

Thus, a Jewish family composed of a father and two sons, with a distant background of servants, affords to set forth the home story of Israel, sadly rent in sunder on the human side, but linked by enduring ties to its almighty Head. Thus we enter by an ancient door, long disused, the throne room in the palace of the gospel.

Till the closing scene of the parable, the younger son alone occupies the stage, just as the lamp of history is turned on the sheep and the coin that were lost. The elder son, the folded flock, and the nine silver coins safe in their owner's keeping, set forth the Pharisees, the priests and the scribes, who in the

The Lost Son

public eye and in their own appeared to have kept their exalted rank in the family of God. The downward steps of the spendthrift are traced in living lines; the squanderer is placed in the *hue and cry* for identification with the publican and sinner.

Although the younger son represents the lapsed excommunicated element in Jewish society, and although his return and welcome is our Lord's reception of publicans and sinners, yet by implication he is infinitely more than the type of a class in Jewish life. His course from the father's threshold to the far country is the career and history of universal man. He is Adam bidding farewell to his innocence; he is the last born, the ever new generation of our race, migrating from the high level of childhood, where around our mother's knee God gives us all our morning in paradise. The silent father granting the request that desolates home and breaks his heart, affords a view of God that Christ alone could give; and has its companion scene in heaven when the Father saw His Son go forth to Gethsemane and Calvary.

Under the demand, "Father, give me the portion of thy substance that falleth to me," lies concealed the fountain head of all apostasy. It is the human heart forgetting to include God amongst its treasures. When a son ignores his parents, his brothers and sisters, the endearing memories, the sacred climate of home, when he thinks only of his share of the estate or business, he has fallen from the life of filial religion. When our fortune can be separated from God, can be bought or sold, lost or found, when it is health, income, business, social station, the leisure and the enchantments of life, when we have severed its divine connections and excluded God from its administration, then we also are apostates from the home law and home life of God.

The prodigal lingers on the scene of home after he has emigrated in heart. Between the division of the estate and his departure he is a man of action, gathering together his share of flock and herd in order to convert them into gold or precious gem. Outwardly, his journey has yet to begin; inwardly, he has passed several milestones on the highway of apostasy. To the boy, home was all the world; there, his young heart found its rest. His father's presence was his

Christ's Vision of the Kingdom of Heaven

fortress, his father's love his wealth, his father's wish his law. But home became a prison, the servants spies, the father a brake on his glowing wheels. He bemoaned himself as a prisoner, longed for majority, began to reckon his fortune, and plan ways to possession. His dreams were of escape, of beauty and revelry. Once free he would be lord of himself, he would command his slaves and beam on troops of friends. At length the heart's mutiny clothed itself in speech : " Give me the portion of thy substance that falleth to me." The inward revolt leaped into objective shape.

He would be master of his course ; so he stood to the wheel. And now he has deposed God and vaulted into the throne. A glance down the inventory of his fortune shows a migrant heart, will newly crowned, the stains of his father's tears ; with glorious youth he carries away his gifts and possibilities—steps of the ladder let down from heaven for scaling it. And he has labelled all " for the use of self." This rover, impatient to reach the far land as the Jordan to find the Dead Sea, is not unknown to us. We meet him in the youths who find their father's hearth a prison ; who apologize to their associates if they occasionally appear at the slow outworn Christian church.

When from his father's house the young man plunges into distance, we have reached the point on the moral rail where the publican and sinner broke with the temple, broke with the unwritten social law, and boldly renounced the claims and restraints of religion. Was ever the downward career of a human being, the story of a class, the migration of universal man, written in so few words ? " He took his journey into a far country." The soul's emigration from God finds here its most dramatic and impressive expression. It is, however, a doctrine breaking out everywhere in the Bible. But the infinite desert space between the Father and his lost son gathers fullest voice in the writings of Paul.

No man reaches the far country in a day. The heart migrating from the Divine presence, voice and love, has its stations. When the emigrant settles down in indifference a naturalized citizen of the world, he has landed on the distant shore. All hail the far country ! Here is freedom ; here shines the palace of delight ; here life is bright and fast. No

The Lost Son

thunders from Sinai, no moans from Calvary. In the goblet I drown the fables of religion. I laugh at the world to come.

Whilst still in early life, the squanderer became bankrupt and destitute. His fortune was the world and the side of his nature that lives on the world. But man cannot long retain the possession, the applause, or the glory of the world. Soon or late the banquet is exhausted, and the immortal guest awakes to want. If awaking and dying are one event, who shall dare to sound the depths of the hour when the soul begins the fast and the famine of eternity. In our parable it is grace and not death that invades the soul's slumber. Although the land of the sinner's adoption is a far land measured from the meridian of Calvary, it is not beyond the sway of the cross, nor the voice of the Spirit.

Wasting his substance in riotous living was a line of things in which the youth's higher nature bore no part. It was life on the level of the senses. Comparing man to a firm of two partners, only one of the partners had embarked in trade, offering the estate, the birthright, the hopes of the soul and the soul itself, for the flare of painted beauty, the fevers of the Derby and Newmarket, and the madness of Monte Carlo.

"And when he had spent all, there arose a mighty famine in that country, and he began to be in want." Not the luxuries of life alone, but the necessities were exhausted. And now the sleeping partner arises an uninvited guest in the banquet hall of the senses, to find a ruin, a famine, a desert. It was thus that the tax-gatherers and abandoned sinners who came cowering around the Compassionate had gone out from the Father's house; it was thus they descended from the high level of their birthright—renegades from the commonwealth, hardened to defiance and revolt. When Jesus met them they had reached the stage where the lost son discovers that he is a wreck on a distant shore. Here the portraiture of the parable applies almost literally to the publicans and sinners who, beginning to be in want, had neither works nor reputation on which to draw; and when they looked around, a waste of frozen hearts intervened between them and hope, and religion was up in arms against their salvation.

"And he went and joined himself to one of the citizens of that country; and he sent him into his fields to feed swine."

Christ's Vision of the Kingdom of Heaven

The feeder of the senses became the feeder of swine. There the reveller touched the depth of degradation. The world no less than time can be cruel to its offspring. The citizen of that country commands as a slave the foster child of fortune. It was work without food or wages : " no man gave unto him." The world danced while he flattered and feasted it ; and slammed the door in his face when his purple changed to rags.

With famine around and hunger within, the lost son formed the desperate resolve to be a parasite and a slave. He acted as one who had no alternative. The alternative which he afterwards embraced, he meanwhile rejected with sullen pride. He would not allow himself to think of returning to the scene he had left. Better the foreign shore than his native land, the Gentile slave-owner than an offended father.

Destitute, deserted, wretched, his heart remained unbroken, his will defiant. One of the fiercest conflicts God has to urge in the soul of awakened man is to overcome the pride that refuses to accept salvation without endeavour on the sinner's part to deserve it. When we see our misery as the prodigal saw his, we seek as he sought, to be our own saviours. In our hunger and distress we sell ourselves into the bondage of the law ; become the slaves of penance and outward renunciation of the world ; subject ourselves to rites and empty ceremonies, or make a saviour of some man or institution, or school of doctrine or standard of opinion.

The question before the lost son's mind was how to relieve his distress without an appeal to home. He was prepared to accept salvation, but he was not prepared to accept the Saviour. Could the comfort, the shelter, the abundance of home have been transported to the far country, he would have hailed them with delight. But the thought of return, of repentance, of confession, of appearing in rags, with haggard looks and painful history, was too much for him. We must distinguish between the want that longs for the redress of the soul's needs and the healing of its wounds, and that higher, diviner hunger that laments distance from God.

When the supreme crisis arrived the lost son saw his father on the foreground. In the world there were two beings only. Then it became clear that to seek and find the father's presence was the way of salvation.

The Lost Son

The citizen unconsciously played a part in the spend-thrift's conversion ; he supplied the conditions of disgust and reaction. In the fields other visions and other voices claimed his regard. When the dew fell and the moon and stars fixed their gaze on his exile, he became sober. It was his father's over-spanning sky ; those were the stars of his native land, and on his rags their light fell like a mother's kiss. He could not sleep, for hunger was at his heart ; and ever on the night-wind rose the grumble of the swine. His soul will never sleep again ; his dream is past. But what an awaking. Not in his father's house, but in the open field ; not in God's kingdom, but in a slave state ; not a son, but a serf ; gone the troops of friends, here the herd of swine ; lost the birthright, his the pangs of hunger ; his inn lately filled with revelry exchanged for the cold empty inn of night. Alone with hunger and nakedness, with ruin and shame, with conscience and memory, he came to himself.

The coming of a sinner to himself has been defined as the awakening of conscience, of understanding, of sensibility and will. The wanderer has been absent from or beside himself, his better nature having parted company with the lower, or lain captive in his breast. The change is the work of the Holy Spirit, who is one of the hidden forces of this parable ; the atoning cross is the other. Unnamed, they are implied, as the mention of a steamboat implies her propeller. The Spirit strips the sinner of his apparent self ; reaches, arrests and drags into light the inner, real self. Then comes the revelation of distance, of famine without and within, of dying on the doorstep of the world that allured and abandoned him.

Quickened by the Spirit's touch memory awakes, recalls the hours of innocence, the father's house and the father's face, contrasts home with the swine-field, the bereaved father with the alien citizen. The sinner surveys himself, condemns himself, and grieves through all his being. Just then three great words spring up through his heart ; they are Father Love, Compassion ; and the self that had lived so long in exile and abdication vows, "I will arise and go to my father."

Let us remember that Jesus is painting from life ; that the two sons are giving Him sittings ; the elder in the Phari-

Christ's Vision of the Kingdom of Heaven

sees, the younger in the tax-collectors and sinners. The prodigal's eye rests on the Speaker, his ear drinks in each tone. One by one the divine Artist touches all the stops of the penitent heart. We miss half the force of the parable when we confine its aim to a defence of the scorned and excommunicated. It is indeed a defence of the despised penitents and an apology for receiving them ; but it is also a revelation of the penitents to themselves. In the spendthrift's rupture with father and home, they read their own ; in the distance, the revelry and hunger they recognize their exclusion from temple and synagogue, the surfeit and famine of sin. The swine-herd gave objective expression to their shame as Roman hirelings, driven to company with the dregs of Gentile society. At the words **I WILL ARISE AND GO TO MY FATHER**, it appeared to the penitents that Jesus had heard their thought, had read on the table of their hearts the uprising resolve. In interpreting the broken hearts before Him, Jesus was illustrating the penitent spirit for all time. The Father through the eyes of His Son was looking on the younger born. Here the facts anticipate the parabolic evolution. The publican prodigal is at the point on the road of experience where the lost son and bereaved father meet.

Owing to the limiting conditions attaching to earthly illustration of spiritual things, the father is silent and passive until he discovers his son on the way home. Then and then only he goes forth to meet him. Seeing, however, that the earthly father represents God in Christ, we know that the heavenly Father, unseen and unknown, has been in the citizen's field before the prodigal arose from his seat of despair.

So far the Father remains out of sight ; but all the time He is building the lifeboat for His son's deliverance. The famine and hunger are His ; and the citizen who sends the broken-down reveller into his field to feed swine, promotes His will. Love spreads the sinner's couch with thorns, wrestles with his will throughout the bitter night, gives edge to anguish, and renders him sick unto death of himself and his guilt. The resolve, "I will arise and go to my father," is the soul's response. He crosses the line between vacillation and decision.

"I will say unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven

The Lost Son

and in thy sight," is the fifty-first Psalm condensed into one burning drop of anguish. This is Christ's definition of repentance; this is the broken and the contrite heart, as it bleeds on God's altar. The penitent knows that he must make his confession at the feet of God. No shadow of saint or angel falls on the interspace between him and the Father. Through Jesus Christ every penitent has the right of direct approach to God. "I have sinned against heaven and in thy sight" is the verdict on sin by Him who has seen it under the light of God's face, and has felt its issues gathering round the throne and around His own heart. "We may injure ourselves by our evil; we may wrong our neighbour; but, strictly speaking, we can sin only against God. And the recognition of our evil as first and chiefly an offence against Him is of the essence of all true repentance." "I am no more worthy to be called thy son"; thus the lost son stands at the opposite spiritual pole from the Pharisees. No more worthy: self-abasement how profound: self-reproach how burning! Yet "he shows himself worthy in that he confesses himself unworthy."

In the words "I will arise" we see the lost son prostrate on the ground, for the earth presents itself as the natural throne of the utterly desolate. In the joyous record, "He came," we behold the journey ended and the wanderer at home. The spiritual truth underlying this pilgrimage is what Jesus Christ named "coming unto Me," and has its illustration in the first verse of this chapter, when the publicans and sinners were "drawing near."

When Jesus represents the father gazing down the way of the fall, and when He paints the ragged swine-herd climbing that steep road, He admits us to the sanctuary of His own experience; He carries us to the view-range from which redeeming love surveys a returning soul; "While he was yet afar off his father saw him." We narrow the infinite sweep and range of this sublime parable, if we keep to the level of an earthly home and a human father. Here we must soar with Jesus Christ to the supreme height of His conception, recognizing that the amazing drama has for its scene *earth and heaven*.

The throne has been the centre of great visions. Think of the view when the temple of the universe rose around it;

Christ's Vision of the Kingdom of Heaven

when the suns powdering space took fire at the Creator's breath. Think of the newly-created angels assembling in young joy to chant the morning hymn of being ; and of that view when the throne turns its gaze on far-off earth and awakening man ; and of that later vision when on earth arose the tree of death and life, bearing as its fruit the dying Son of God. Then recall the vision of our parable ; see the Divine face turned toward the desolations of guilt, waiting for man to come to himself and his Father.

" He was moved with compassion and ran and fell on his neck," admits us to an inmost view of heavenly things. It is the descent from the throne ; power and majesty stand aside ; justice is silent ; grace is crowned ; compassion reigns ; the fountain heart of God, hidden from everlasting, over-leaps all boundaries, destroys distance, and makes man the prisoner of salvation. Compassion, infinite compassion, central, triumphant and eternal, is on the throne.

Here home and fortune, servants and state, are forgotten ; a penitent is weeping, a heart is breaking. Thus God pursues the course of our fall, descends to meet the world at the cross ; " He ran and fell on his neck and kissed him." Here we see the outgoing of the Divine heartlove on seraph wing, God's hunger for the love of man. Let us remember that this is God's reception of repentant tax-gatherers and sinners.

What is the significance of the long ardent kiss ? It is speech between heart and heart, communion of being with being, and like the symbols of the Lord's Supper, opens into those infinitudes lying beyond the range of speech. It is God's declaration of sin put away, of separation and estrangement ended. It quickens into a thrilling act Paul's golden declaration, " being justified by faith we have peace with God."

It is after the father's kiss—the declaration of forgiveness and reconciliation—that the penitent makes his confession. The truth is often obscured or ignored, that repentance precedes and follows Divine forgiveness. Indeed repentance deepens with pardon, and is a life-long inmate and experience of the soul. When the penitent sat at the banquet in his father's house, when he recalled his riotous living, mused on his father's exulting love, surveyed the royal dress in which

The Lost Son

royal grace had arrayed him, he would repeat with profounder sorrow, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and in thy sight." Even in the life in glory, the remembrance of sin is the dark background against which the lustre of redemption shines.

The penitent's prayer became shorter as he drew nearer God. When he looked in his father's face he could not say, "Make me as one of thy hired servants"; after the kiss that petition would have been hypocrisy. Restoration to his lost rank appeared at first too much for mercy to achieve or for him to accept; but when his faith grasped the unmeasured love of God, he was ready to accept salvation in all its range of fulness.

It had never entered the prodigal's mind that he should be met by love and fatherhood; he thought of trudging home, barefoot, ragged and alone. Love, however, had surprises in store. The father, accompanied by a glorious retinue, met him far down the road and kissed away the soilure and the tears—met him as he was, the ruin of a man, gaunt with ravening hunger and remorse. Redeeming compassion kisses him in his guilt, loves him in his guilt, and forgives him in his guilt; but so royal is Divine forgiveness that the father seems to forget its necessity. Like the cross, it is there silent and nameless.

Penitence cannot take God by surprise, unprepared; the robe, the first, the best, the *stola*—the upper garment of the higher classes—is there by anticipation, dyed in grain in redeeming blood, and woven in the travail of Gethsemane and Calvary. The ring, the badge of distinction, and the sandals indicating that the wearer is the son of the house, are in readiness; and the servants are ready to array him and thereby own him as their master. At this point, the parable again passes over into literal fact, and anticipates the cry, IT IS FINISHED.

The conception of covering sin is common to both continents of the Bible. Covering is the crowning act of forgiveness. The father had forgiven his son before he came forth to meet him; but after love had clothed him with pardon and oblivion, the penitent remained in rags. Though already beautiful in the eyes of love, requirements arising out of the

Christ's Vision of the Kingdom of Heaven

sinner's nature, and the nature of the new conditions on which he was entering, remained ; these were the effacement of his guilt and the enduement of his being with the derived holiness of God.

In the command, " Let us eat and make merry, for this my son was dead, and is alive again ; he was lost and is found," a carillon of bells rings forth the finding and the resurrection from death of a human soul. " They began to be merry," is the gospel harp first struck in earth and heaven.

The revelation of the love of God to man belongs as exclusively to Jesus Christ as the discovery of gravitation to Newton. Man as a stranger on the earth, beset by ravenous beast and deadly reptile, by frost and fire, drought and flood, by quaking earth and roaring air, came to regard himself as washed by fate on a hostile shore. When he looked into the abyss of night, he sank oppressed and annihilated before the disdainful immensities around him. If the red sun and the white sisterhood of stars were living beings, if it was a god who opened his mouth to thunder and filled his quiver with lightning, this power must be appeased even by man pouring out his own blood.

It is true that the Hebrew prophets had taught the righteousness of Jehovah and His regard to men of pure and contrite heart. Of His elect nation He was owner, shepherd and deliverer. But that man, as man, was dear to God, that man in estrangement and rebellion was the object of Divine compassion and affection, was light that came from the heart of the Father through the ministry and death of Jesus Christ. That God demanded the love of the heart was sternly declared by the Hebrew law-giver ; but human nature could only regard that demand as an indirect condemnation ; as if the Supreme required His subjects to scale the heavens. The declaration that God loved to be loved by hearts that had seethed as a cauldron over the volcanic fires of passion, came upon man as if a new planet had swept into the sky. The cooling of a human heart, its detachment from service and sonship, was shown to be more than if a world went out. The void was symbolized by the vacancy in the fold, caused by the straying sheep, by the lost drachma, by the emptiness in the house when the younger son had vanished.

The Lost Son

The joy irradiating the Saviour's face when "all the publicans and sinners were drawing near unto him to hear him," seemed so inexplicable to Scribe and Pharisee, that Jesus had to explain and defend Himself. And what was His defence? That the joy of finding springs spontaneous from the human heart. The shepherd missing his sheep, tracking and seeking it, is human; more deeply human when he lays it on his shoulders rejoicing; and when he calls his friends and neighbours to share his gladness, he obeys an inmost impulse of the heart. It is human for the cottager who loses one out of ten silver pieces to light the lamp and sweep the house; and it is a rush of pure human emotion that urges her to invite her friends and neighbours to share her joy. It was the uprising of fatherhood in the father's breast, when he ran to meet his son and closed his mouth with kisses, and when he arrayed him in the robe long waiting, long unworn, and ordered feasting, music and dancing. The music was the song of resurrection, of welcome to the kingdom of heaven.

Thus rejoiced Jesus on finding lost men. But His joy was more than human; it was the divine thrill emanating from God, vibrating in the heart of holy beings, and finding in one human breast ineffable response. "I say unto you that even so there shall be joy in heaven over one sinner that repenteth." The emphasis on heaven lets us see Christ's isolation on earth. It would have been exceeding joy, if, when Matthew crept into the fold, or the penitent who in Simon's house washed His feet with tears, some kindred soul had interpreted and shared the Saviour's gladness. Instead, hard looks and hard thoughts were the only response. Nor are we certain that sympathy within the circle of the disciples was deep. Had a profounder view of repentance and of man's worth in God's sight prevailed, Jesus would hardly have confined joy over repenting sinners to the heavenly world.

It may, however, have been Christ's main purpose to bring into prominence the supremacy of repentance, and God's joy over hearts broken and forgiven. The revelation, "there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth," has risen as a constellation over the mind of Christendom; but when heard by men for the first time, especially by Pharisees whose spirit finds embodiment in the

Christ's Vision of the Kingdom of Heaven

elder son, what must have been their amazement. At the unfolding of the picture of grace abounding to the chief of sinners, two groups of faces might have tempted an angel artist to paint them, the Pharisees, rigid, silent, astounded, and the company of publican outcasts, deafened by the beating of their own hearts, and wearing in every feature the awaking of the soul to wonder, hope and repentance.

The house resounding with music and dancing shocked and insulted the elder born, as with closing day he returned morose and weary from the field of law. Religious joy was alien and unknown to the Pharisaic spirit. A new emotion in a sinner's breast had awakened a new rapture in the father's heart and house. The embodied spirit of legalism, stiff in his robes of righteousness, and hot with rage, scorned to go in. Others might receive sinners and eat with them; he never. The roof that had sheltered the unclean should never cover him. It was the door of the kingdom of heaven, and he was near, but would not enter. Whereupon the father came out and entreated him. It is hard to decide whether the father's coming forth to receive his penitent, or to entreat his angry son, surrounds him with the more engaging light. Jesus was God's entreaty to the nation; He came to His own and His own received Him not. The entreaty and the refusal were sealed in the Redeemer's tears over Jerusalem.

Filial so long as the father has an only son, wearing out his plodding day in the high-walled field of restriction and mechanical duty, austere righteous and scornfully proud; thinking the worst of his brother, abjuring the bond of brotherhood and exaggerating the sinner's guilt; a life-long servant who has never broken the least of the commandments and never fulfilled the greatest, building on merit and seeking reward outside of God; too proud or too cold to address his father by that tender name; thrown into rage and isolation by the joy of others, the portrait of the elder son presents or suggests almost every line and feature of the Pharisee. He is Saul of Tarsus; he is the ruler who had observed all these things from his youth; he is the spirit that murmured in the Pharisee's breast, "This man receiveth sinners and eateth with them."

That his brother should find his way home, that he should

The Lost Son

be welcomed with unmeasured joy, was to him an insufferable wrong. And this because of the hidden and unsuspected depths which it disclosed in the father, from whom the old personality fell away, revealing a heart that could enclose the sinner and entomb his sin. Until that day, father and elder son had not known each other. They lived under the same roof, yet were they citizens of distant capitals and opposing kingdoms. And it was the returning son and brother who occasioned the mutual upspringing of the hidden fountains of character; that raised a bereaved man, concealing silent anguish, into the nearest, most endearing symbol of God, next to Jesus Christ, that earth has seen.

"Child, thou art ever with me and all that is mine is thine," is the knock of grace at the door of the Pharisees. They were the guests first invited, and for them, as for the publicans, there is yet room at the marriage feast. Child, beloved for the fathers' sake, heir of a glorious past, heir presumptive to a more glorious future, the Father's house is yet with you, the King's Son is on your streets, and the kingdom of heaven is in your midst.

We must beware not to give the father's words a significance they cannot be intended to convey. They cannot mean the father's satisfaction with the very incarnation of Pharisaism. They cannot mean that the elder son is an heir of God in the spiritual sense. That would involve the impossible conclusion that the Pharisees who act and speak in this man, are the subjects and the only subjects of the kingdom of heaven. Of the two sons, that interpretation would make the elder the chief figure and the better man. But who would affirm that an impenitent Pharisee was preferred by Jesus before a penitent publican? And if the elder son is not the genius of the Pharisaic murmurers, *whom then does he represent?* If he was a holy man who had remained at home with God, then against such a saint, Jesus had no need to vindicate the reception of sinners. As he had set the waste of joy, and the dissipated portion of the prodigal against the reward he had earned but never received, the father reminds him that the remaining two-thirds of the estate are his in prospect. The fatted calf, music and dancing, are earthly symbols of Divine joy; and the unbroken residence with the father and heir-

Christ's Vision of the Kingdom of Heaven

ship of the estate, stand for the birthright, the "advantage" of being "intrusted with the oracles of God."¹

The ground between the assailed and the assailants, between the instincts of the Pharisees and the impulses of Divine compassion, was the ground occupied by Jesus when constrained to vindicate the outgoings of His love to avoided and excommunicated sinners. The offence was new and so was the defence. The day had never before dawned when a holy prophet could find his heaven in receiving and forgiving the outcasts of the community. And when, in course of time, Christianity flung her robe over the fallen and forgotten, paganism joined the elder son, and echoed the surprise and scorn of the Pharisees.

¹ Rom. iii. 1.

IV

THE ROYAL MARRIAGE FEAST

"The kingdom of heaven is likened unto a certain king, which made a marriage feast for his son, and sent forth his servants to call them that were bidden to the marriage feast : and they would not come. Again he sent forth other servants, saying, Tell them that are bidden, Behold, I have made ready my dinner : my oxen and my fatlings are killed, and all things are ready ; come to the marriage feast. But they made light of it, and went their ways, one to his own farm, another to his merchandise ; and the rest laid hold on his servants, and entreated them shamefully, and killed them. But the king was wroth ; and he sent his armies, and destroyed those murderers, and burned their city. Then saith he to his servants, The wedding is ready, but they that were bidden, were not worthy. Go ye therefore unto the partings of the highways, and as many as ye shall find, bid to the marriage feast. And those servants went out into the highways, and gathered together all as many as they found, both bad and good : and the wedding was filled with guests. But when the king came in to behold the guests, he saw there a man which had not on a wedding-garment : and he saith unto him, Friend, how camest thou in hither not having a wedding-garment ? And he was speechless. Then the king said to the servants, Bind him hand and foot, and cast him out into the outer darkness ; there shall be the weeping and gnashing of teeth. For many are called, but few are chosen."—*MATT. xxii. 1-14.*

JERUSALEM was the city of festivals. No aspect of Jewish life was more emphatic or arresting than the unerring recurrence of its great festal assemblies. No characteristic of the holy city aroused the poet's exulting harp like the assembling myriads of Israel streaming from all lands to crowd the gates and hills of the capital. Those vast convocations were warmed and exhilarated by the throb of a festal pulse. Through Passover, feast of tabernacles and Pentecost the nation relived its history, and gave immortality to its deliverances. Whilst transporting itself into the realm of memory and the age of hope, it emphasized the achievement of liberty and unity. A land so often ravaged by famine and foot-marked by the march of hunger, was disposed to recognize in the great national

Christ's Vision of the Kingdom of Heaven

festivals, or in the banquets of leading citizens, the prophecy of better times. And further, the years in Babylon, when the exiles having suffered the loss of fortune and fatherland, experienced a famine of ordinances, would cut their record in the quivering tablet of the nation's heart. So the prophet could conceive no spell so mighty to allure the exiles over the wastes between Babylon and Judah, as the promise of a spiritual banquet spread on Zion for the famished soul of the nation: "In this mountain shall the Lord of hosts make unto all peoples a feast of fat things, a feast of wines on the lees, of fat things full of marrow, of wines on the lees well refined."¹

When the Son of God appeared in the flesh, the Jewish people had come up through the longest famine in their history. Four hundred years—lurid and tempestuous—had come and gone since the last inspired voice had summoned the people to the fountain of living waters in God. The temple indeed held its ground on Zion, synagogues multiplied in village, town, and city; endless throngs of pilgrims swarmed over "this holy mountain," but it was a long-drawn era of spiritual famine. The law had become harder than the stones on which it was inscribed; the writings of the prophets had been as effectually sealed to the masses as the British classics are to-day sealed to the masses of our countrymen. The situation was closely analogous to the long pre-Reformation famine, before Erasmus removed the ice-cap from the fount of living truth, and Luther opened the stores of grace and gospel to Europe.

Could, then, any concrete presentation of the kingdom of heaven, of the spiritual famine on the human side, and the anticipating supplies of grace on the Divine, have more closely conformed to the circumstance, or carried more wealth of suggestion, than the great banquet announced in Luke, and the marriage feast made by the king for his son in our parable.

Under the symbol of a banquet given by a king on the occasion of his son's marriage, our Lord sets forth His salvation in its infinite liberality, joy and glory. He draws its design and fulfilment on such a scale of amplitude and magnificence

¹ Isaiah xxv. 6.

The Royal Marriage Feast

as to prove that it is worthy of the Almighty Father—high as the thought of God, glorious as the love of God, free as the grace of God, costly as the life and soul of the Son of God.

The redemption of man by Jesus Christ is royal in conception and execution. It originates in a kingly mind, is carried into effect by a kingly Redeemer, and reveals a royal breadth and glory of purpose; for its aim is to enthrone God in the heart of universal man.

Some have seen in the marriage of the king's son the union of the Divine and human natures in the person of our Lord. And it is quite certain that without that union the royal marriage feast could never have been spread. The parable may suggest, while it does not teach, the incarnation. Christ's assumption of our humanity is the condition of our salvation; the condition essential to His Saviour-hood; but the marriage feast is concerned with the *results* of incarnation, with the achievements of the Divine heart and mind, with the outcome of infinite cost and sacrifice.

The union of the Divine and human in the person of Christ under the emblem of marriage, had found no place in prophetic fore-look or typical suggestion. If anywhere there had been an intimation of this sublime mystery, it was to be found not amongst the visions of seers, but in the constitution of human nature.

The Hebrew seers delighted to think of the elect nation as the spouse of Jehovah. That conception, however, expired with the prophets, and never entered the ranks of the New Testament ideals. It belonged to the stage of moral and social development when the nation was the unit; before the evolution of individuality had been accomplished. The Old Testament wrought out the great doctrine of Divine personality; the New, disengaging man from man, develops and crowns human individuality. On New Testament grounds, therefore, Jesus could not be represented as the Bridegroom of the Jewish nation; for the ideal Church in its totality, the consenting souls of all lands and times, must be regarded as the bride.

When Christ sets forth His salvation under the figure of a feast in celebration of the marriage of a king's son, His

Christ's Vision of the Kingdom of Heaven

purpose is not to declare that He has assumed our nature, or come to espouse the collective host of consenting souls on earth. The feast is conceived as made by a king to celebrate the marriage of his son and heir, in order to reflect the majesty of the royal host on the festival, and to indicate his profound identification with its fortunes. In the origination and outcome of the royal banquet which marks a momentous event in the life of the heir, about to enter his kingdom through the crimson gate of sacrifice, the king has drawn deeply on his treasury, and more deeply on his heart. A banquet thus conceived and carried into effect under the sanction of the crown, while involving momentous accountability, brings unbounded honour and opportunity to the invited. The king's desire is to draw the nation under his royal roof, and to create a closer kinship between monarch and subject. Nothing less than a royal marriage feast could have sufficed to set forth a banquet to which a nation was called ; and which only *began* with the Jewish nation ; for it was ordained to meet the hunger of humanity, and to remain spread for every generation till the close of time. If the occasion is supreme, the honour and condescension rare, the feast greater than the planet on which it is spread—the indifference, dishonour and rebellion of the subjects become grave in proportion to the majesty of the monarch and the royalty of the festival.

This marriage feast emanating from a monarch's heart and mind, drawn from royal resources, prepared in the royal palace, spread on the king's table by the king's servants, is a fitting symbol of Christ's redemption ; for it recognizes and meets the undermost, deepest wants of man's being, as food constitutes one of the essentials of physical life. When the Prussian army invested Paris, the only commerce of the citizens with the outside world was obtained by balloon or carrier pigeon. Had the siege been drawn out sufficiently long, the citizens must have perished. Why ? Paris was one of the richest cities in the world. Its banks were filled with gold ; its mansions and palaces were furnished with every form of elegance and art ; its warehouses were stored with silk and woollen and linen ; its sons were amongst the foremost in science and genius. But famine had entered the

The Royal Marriage Feast

gates, invaded mansion and cellar. So this broad world had become a besieged city—a city severed from its base of supply ; all that remained to us was our hunger, the memorial of our unfallen greatness, the power to receive the living bread from the hands of grace.

The royal marriage feast proved the king's desire to make his people partners in the wealth of his house and the joy of his heart. He wished to reconcile them to his rule, to convince them of his good feeling, and make them acquainted with him at home ; not as a king, but as a benefactor and friend.

It is the aim of Christ's salvation to bring us under the Father's roof, to reconcile us to His law, to make us loyal subjects and steadfast friends. The Divine heart has longed to make us partners in its blessedness, sharers of its life, health, rest. It is in His house of salvation, as President of the festival of mercy, that God discloses His name and nature. If we truly survey the cross, enter into its spirit and animating genius, we see God at home ; in the sphere of inseparable love and sacrifice.

To see the commander on the battle-field, the judge on the bench, or the man of science in his laboratory, is not to know him. Bismarck, when a soldier at the seat of war, records in his journal his longing to sit by his own hearth and hear his wife play Beethoven's Symphonies. There the future man of blood and iron would have laid the rough warrior aside as he ungirt his sword, and revealed the lover. The judge on the bench is interpreting and applying the law of his country ; the scientist in his laboratory is living in the sphere of mind ; but when judge or man of science sits down by his own fireside, he lives in the sphere of the affections. In Jesus Christ the Father has opened His house, His home life and heart life, has made Himself approachable and knowable. The guests of the parable are invited to a royal home, a home that may become their own, for the banquet of love is never over, and the guests need go out no more.

From the nature of the case, the king provides the marriage feast exclusively from his own resources. No one has shared in the conception or the cost. He has purposed in his own mind and drawn upon himself alone. And monarch though

Christ's Vision of the Kingdom of Heaven

he be, he leaves his subjects to the exercise of their own will. One of the arresting features of this great heart-drama, wherein the human will and passions, natural tastes and affections, aversions and animosities, act over against the unfoldings of eternal grace, is the abeyance of law, the refusal to invoke authority. The invitation was two-fold; the outward summons of the messengers, and the inward persuasion of the Spirit. Yet the call, inward and outward, assumes freedom to refuse.

The servants who carry the king's invitation are part of the royal household. They wear the royal livery, stand in the sovereign's presence, and receive his era-making commission. They belong to the times of grace.

This great drama of grace and judgment has for its stage the world of the cross. The kingdom of heaven and the royal wedding feast that unfolds it are distinctively New Testament conceptions. But although the marriage feast, the banquet of the kingdom, is an event of the Christ era, it existed in the Divine purpose before there was a planet to upbear the redeeming cross; and the Jews through the call, "repeated by each succeeding prophet as he prophesied of the crowning grace that should be one day brought to Israel, and summoned the people to hold themselves in spiritual readiness, to welcome their Lord and King,"¹ held the place of persons on an Oriental guest-list, invited in anticipation of the festival. To this nation, called by servants who have gone out with the ebb of the old economy, but whose summons rang long and loud in the nation's ear, the king sends "forth his servants to call them that were bidden to the marriage feast." The twelve crying to "the lost sheep of the house of Israel, The kingdom of heaven is at hand,"² healing the sick, raising the dead, cleansing the lepers, casting out devils; the seventy whom Jesus sent two and two before His face into every city and place whither He Himself was about to come, proclaiming as they went, "The kingdom of God is come nigh unto you,"³ and Jesus Himself in His personal ministry, crowning and closing the line, are the first company of servants sent forth by the king.

Thus far we are dealing with New Testament history;

¹ Trench.

² Matt. x. 6.

³ Luke x. 9.

The Royal Marriage Feast

but from this point to the close of the parable, we tread prophetic ground. The first campaign of grace Jesus records in a sentence: "and they would not come." This is the report of the first Christian mission; the mission led and inspired by the Son of God. The greatness of Christ is manifested in the calm sorrow with which He accepts His failure. The King's Son from the seat of war reports defeat to His Father in heaven; then we shall see Him as the parable moves onward, undiscouraged and unswerving from His sublime aim, lead His crusade in the Spirit, after the cross and the tomb. He had fought out this question in the wilderness; whether to win His way to dominion by omnipotence, or humiliation, by crushing human will or re-creating it. Had the tempter's Messianic programme been accepted, the invitation to the wedding feast would have been an ultimatum with enforcing arms in the background. We may reverently conceive that the great battle-days of the temptation must have often recurred to the Saviour's memory, when His ministry fell like rain on the ocean. We have clear indication that Jesus stayed His soul with the reflection that the conditions would change when the cross, no longer in the future, rose conquered and conquering behind Him.

Here the parable passes into literal fact; the words, "they would not come," prepare us for the Divine wail on Olivet, "ye would not." To the ear spiritually attuned, they have the sound of falling tears. They constitute a watermark determining the date of the parable. The sound of rising storm, the stern severity of tone, the transition from grace to judgment, would, in the absence of other evidence, assign a late place in Christ's ministry to the Wedding Feast of the king's son. The record, "they would not come," is the review of an enterprise, the history of a ministry that has closed. It breathes the sadness, the solemnity, the concentrated intensity of the passion week. There are heart-refrains that the lips of the soul murmur in sleep; and these are of the number. As the shadows deepened, the disciple nearest the sleeping Saviour may have heard the sigh, "They would not come."

We naturally expect to find Christ's death regarded as the

¹ Matt. xxiii. 37.

Christ's Vision of the Kingdom of Heaven

culmination of the citizens' guilt. Whereas in the structure of the parable it finds no place. In interpretation, however, it is the basis of readiness on which the second invitation is founded.

When the king "sent forth other servants," a new era of preaching began. Hitherto it was the sketch-plan of the banquet hall that the messengers held before the nation's eyes ; now it is fulfilment involving death, the basis of life, and drawing upon the garnered harvests and vintages of time. We are not to understand that members of the first commission are absent from the second. While the new company of heralds was early reinforced by Stephen and Philip, Barnabas and Paul, yet Peter was the preacher of Pentecost. Peter and his comrades who went forth in the second embassy might well be termed "other servants." No two men in Jerusalem stood further apart than Peter of the night of denial and Peter of Pentecost. Between the two invitations had intervened the pivot-events of history. The Man whose personality had during three years dominated Jewry and Galilee was removed. The familiar sight of the young Galilean Rabbi leading His disciples from town to town, preaching by the wayside, on mountain slope or in the temple, had ceased. Like a great sculptor whose creations adorn the cities, but whose shaping hand is in the dust, Christ's monuments of healing were everywhere and He was gone. A great mountain, suddenly disappearing, might illustrate the sense of the infinite gap in the public life. Earth in the interval had brought forth her first-born ; Hades had opened its gates to the King passing through the city of death to His kingdom ; and the crucified and buried Redeemer had come to life in the soul of His disciples. The advent of the Spirit had brought the new call to the apostles and disciples, the call to another upper room whence symbolism had passed away ; and where the risen Saviour drank the cup "in the kingdom of God."¹ For Christ it was no longer the cup of forelook and retrospect ; it no longer accompanied the symbol of a body broken ; it was the bridal cup of the quickening Spirit and the quickened soul of man. For His followers, it was the cup of salvation realized and apprehended. The advent of the Spirit was the spiritual

¹ Mark xiv. 25.

The Royal Marriage Feast

advent of Christ, when the heart of discipleship was His Bethlehem, and the rushing wind the anthem of His nativity. Bodily the disciples saw the Lord *again*, spiritually they saw Him for the first time. Having sat at the wedding feast of the King's Son, where all things were ready, they arose from the sepulchre of themselves, other servants, new men. Now the king had heralds of a spiritual line, to whom he gave the new commission, "Tell them that are bidden, Behold I have made ready my dinner; my oxen and my fatlings are killed, and all things are ready; come to the marriage feast."

The first refusal the king passes over in silence. When we consider that the invitation issues from the monarch who had authority to command the attendance of his subjects, his patience and silence require explanation. The explanation is, that the maker of the feast is God and not man. Neither the parables of Jesus, nor the parable of the universe can conceal God. At some point He burns through the vesture of creation, or the human conditions of the marriage feast. To throw the first act of rebellion into the shade, as though non-compliance arose from misunderstanding, or from lack of urgency or clearness on the part of His servants, He sends forth other servants. The Divine heart, infinite in patience and mercy will not let the despisers go. They must be called again, drawn by fuller revelations, constrained by new incentives. Surely the called will hasten to the marriage feast when its readiness, nearness, freeness are urged by inspired genius, by men who themselves have come to the banquet and been uplifted, transformed by participation. The early messengers had lacked the fire in their eyes, the tone of certainty in their voice, the accent of enthusiasm of men who had been in the royal hall and seen the Prince-Bridegroom arrayed to meet His bride. The heralds of the resurrection came forth from feasting; the sound of marriage bells was in their voice; they stood in the dawn; they summoned men from fore-flung shadows to the verities that feed the soul. Two words, "It is finished,"¹ "He is risen,"² had thrilled the universe, and tongues of fire had been given to expound, to convince, to persuade.

¹ John xix. 30.

² Matt. xxviii. 6.

Christ's Vision of the Kingdom of Heaven

~~They~~ are not made kingly by wearing kingly crowns ; but the illumination of fire gave to Jerusalem a new type of man—a guest who had sat at the table with his Lord, where the sacrament passed into the essential—the anointed, inspired bearer of supreme tidings. The preachers of Pentecost ~~must affirm~~ affirm, "We are witnesses that all things are now ready ; we witnessed His life, we witnessed His death ; we are witnesses of His resurrection. The doors of our hearts were closed by unbelief ; He entered nevertheless ; we have received His spirit, our ears tingle with His resurrection voice. It is Christ Jesus that died, yea, rather, that was raised from the dead, who is at the right hand of God, that sent us forth to call you to salvation."

Christ's death and resurrection had created a new situation. The heralds had risen from the level of expectancy to the Pentecostal life ; their experience of the wedding feast awaiting the loneliness and hunger of the soul, brought new privileges and new peril to the invited ; the times had changed from prophecy to history ; the heralds took their stand on Divine achievement ; on the platform of the accomplished—the living, conquering kingdom of heaven. We have heard of subtle distinctions between the Christ of history and some other Christ. It is the historic Christ who was crucified and who rose from the dead ; and on these two facts the redemption of man eternally rests.

One of the rarest soul-feasts in human history was the preaching of those men whose brows still burned with the fiery diadem of Pentecost. We conceive them as lowly, unlettered peasants ; but we forget in whose college they had spent those wondrous years. Being young men, they must have caught the intonation, forms of thought and speech, and even the distinctive attitudes and manners of their Teacher. Unconsciously, each became a storehouse of impressions, impulses, sayings and scenes from the Divine life-drama. What gallery ever housed pictures like those that illumined one disciple's memory ? Who before, like them, had heard a voice human and Divine alluring the heavy laden, broken with sorrow on Olivet, with anguish in Gethsemane, or rising in intercession in the upper room ? These men, carrying, unabridged, the gospel history in their heart,

The Royal Marriage Feast

felt, on coming into the climate of Pentecost, the invisible story leap into life.

In my native Antrim valley, between Slemish and Skerry, where fourteen hundred years before, St. Patrick had sought and found the Saviour, I witnessed in early youth the Ulster Pentecost of 1859. Whilst the change from heedless sinner to rejoicing convert was like resurrection from the dead, bringing to light unsuspected gifts of mind and heart and voice, the transformation in preaching was equally wonderful. The preacher came forth from the wedding feast, carrying within and around him an atmosphere of living joy and realizing conviction. He persuaded you to come and share with him the banquet of salvation. Like the servants of the parable, he magnified the greatness of the feast, underlined the work of redemption as undertaken and perfected by eternal love, and proclaimed that the first act of the convicted soul was to come where God waits at and in the cross. And men of hoar hair, manhood in its prime, and boyhood at school, under the power of the Holy Spirit, and filled with the love of God and the consciousness of pardon, like the servants in the new era of Christian history, summoned their fellow men, in entreaties mingled with prayer, to put on in faith the wedding robe and sit down at the banquet of salvation.

How then did Jerusalem respond to the new preaching? We expect the king's servants to find open doors and willing hearts. When a rumour spreads that gold has been discovered under Canadian snows or African fires, crowds of gold-seekers rush to the diggings. The path that leads to knighthood or peerage is thronged with agonistic aspirants. How then will Jerusalem, the capital of a race whose distinctive glory is the genius of religion, fill the ways to the palace when redemption is presented in its sublime finality! What is the banquet? It is the realization of what their prophets and seers hailed with closing eye and parting breath. It is God in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself. It supplies the hunger of noble souls for eternal life, for rest, not in change of surroundings, but in newness of heart. It is the nearness, the attainableness of living holiness. But "they made light of it and went their ways, one to his own

Christ's Vision of the Kingdom of Heaven

farm, another to his merchandise ; and the rest laid hold on his servants, and entreated them shamefully and killed them." "Man wants to be happy, happy on earth, happy in heaven, but he does not want to be saved."¹

This record of the fortunes of preaching in Jerusalem, amongst the favoured nation, is one of the darkest pages of human history. A prophet's report, it presents a view of preaching till the end of time ; especially when the seed is cast in soil sick with long cultivation. Richard Baxter, enumerating the causes of his ministerial success at Kidderminster, says, "I came to a people that never had any awakening ministry before, but a few formal, cold sermons of the curate. If they had been hardened under a powerful ministry and been sermon proof, I should have expected less."

It is not implied that preaching the crucified and risen Saviour met universal rejection. The immense draught enclosed in Peter's Pentecostal net, the existence of the church in Jerusalem, prove the contrary. But the parable has chiefly in view the city of priests and doctors and high-placed Pharisees—the men who gave direction to religious thought and social life. The city occupies the frame ; for as Paris is France, so Jerusalem was the Jewish nation. It is probable that a large proportion of the Pentecostal converts came from distant provinces ; and it is obvious that the three thousand included none of the chief priests or rulers of the people. The chronic poverty of the mother church indicates the social class whence it was drawn ; and the large infusion of Hellenistic members points to success amongst settlers from the nations.

The first mission met indifference, unexplained and without apology. Men of ability and ambition, who expected cabinet rank in the approaching Messianic reign, felt indisposed to abandon their theocratic hope for the new views of an open-air preacher whose court, cabinet, and army consisted of a few dozen unarmed peasants. The temple was the banquet house of the nation, and by that they would abide until their warrior countrymen carved from the mighty empire a free fatherland for a Jewish feast.

The second mission approached the Jewish public from a

¹ Vinet.

The Royal Marriage Feast

new point of departure. It came forth from the shadows of Calvary, and carried the broken seals from the Redeemer's tomb. The antagonism aroused by a peasant Rabbi belonging to no great contemporary house, nor priestly line, disdain- ing the throne of their kings, and claiming sovereignty over an invisible kingdom, was swallowed up in the more vehement abhorrence—the offence of the cross. Since the preaching of the twelve and the seventy, Jerusalem had raised the in- vocation—echoing from earth to heaven, from age to age— “His blood be on us and on our children.”¹ Apart from other considerations, the great leading parties stood committed to the murder of Jesus. The acceptance of the resurrection and ascension would have meant the surrender of their contention, the admission of their guilt. But to exchange faith in an invincible hero, for a Messiah tried, convicted, crucified, was not only impossible, but inconceivable. Was Jehovah to share His throne with the crucified Nazarene? Was the detested cross henceforth to be the rallying sign of the chosen nation? The offence of the cross, the harden- ing of heart that followed the shedding of innocent blood, fortified the natural man in his resistance to salvation.

Christ never assumes the triumphant march of His cause. A system like Romanism or Mohammedanism that engages to save men in their sin can win converts by battalions to the banquet of the senses. But the disease of sin has eaten too deeply into our nature, for salvation by separation and deliverance from evil to become popular with the world. The feast, so far as it represents deliverance from punish- ment, would secure universal acceptance, but the stumbling block lies in the fact that the acceptance of salvation is the acceptance of the Saviour.

To illustrate the various strata composing the earth's crust, the geologist presents a section—cuts an imaginary saw line through lime-stone, sand-stone and granite, to the molten core; so Jesus here gives the human heart in section. “They made light of it” is the outer envelope; “and went their ways, one to his own farm, another to his merchandise; and the rest laid hold on his servants and entreated them shamefully and killed them.” Sinking step by step we reach

¹ Matt. xxvii. 25.

Christ's Vision of the Kingdom of Heaven

the seething core of the heart's enmity against God. O the two classes the world holds undisputed monopoly in the first. The land hunger, the country house, the complacent pride of ownership, are the wedded wife of the soul. The man of commerce and speculation, who in his sleep murmurs of stocks, shares, dividends, and follows with feverish eye the game of chance on which he has staked body and soul cannot tarry to hear about Christ and salvation. In the second class, leisure, rank, authority, will rather dye their hands in the blood of the messengers than exchange their own righteousness for the garment of repentance and holiness. The first commission collided with opposing will and fell back upon its base; the new commission, under the inspiration of the Spirit, saps and mines its way to the conscience, and lays bare the world-love and rebellion of the heart. When we reflect that their sovereign invited, that the call was carried and pressed by tongues of fire, it was treason in the subjects who made light of it; and who turned from the golden gate of occasion to give the royal wedding day to the pursuit and the enjoyment of house and land. But sinking deeper through the heart's strata, we find hot animosity; murder leaps out of hearts covered by the high priest's breastplate; and the day of the marriage feast is turned into a day of blood. Surely this is the descent into the soul's inferno.

The successive days of invitation carry weighty meaning. An Alpine tourist falls over a precipice and finds death at the bottom. It is not thus that men rush to moral ruin. The road to doom has its stations, and declines by easy gradients. The call to those who "would not come" was new; and to many amongst them life was also new. They were in the enchanted land of youth, which is a feast unto itself. Youth banquets on its fresh sensations, on its visions of earthly glory and happiness. It has its companions, prospects, ambitions, ideals. The whole world is a palace; the air vibrates with the wings of messengers calling to its rival wedding feasts.

To youth the religion of the cross appears like a hearse crossing a summer landscape. Why, it asks, should I darken my life with thoughts of God? Why should I be called to

The Royal Marriage Feast

self-conquest and preparation for a state of things invisible and remote ?

But whilst youth may disobey, it is not hardened in disobedience. It does not refuse, it simply does not think. It feels the force of God's appeal, and agrees to come some other day. Nor is the royal wedding feast without attraction ; the Saviour's love and sorrow will touch the source of tears.

The men who heard the dawn-notes of the Galilean ministry had lived much between that morning and the day when Peter awakened the echoes of the empty tomb ; or when Stephen defended the crucified Christ in the great Council. To make light of the wedding feast was to neglect the great salvation, to ignore its claims, to refuse it a place in their calculations, to separate it from thought and life by distance and oblivion. They went their ways, each turning his back on salvation.

It is a civilized community that thus passes by the cross. Boundaries are fixed, property is secure, land-holders sit under their own vine and fig tree, have a stake in the country, revel in possession, in management, in the importance that land confers. Hard won gold has purchased seclusion, luxury, independence. The merchant turns on his heel, he is due in warehouse or arcade, he expects the arrival of fabrics from Egyptian and Persian looms ; Tyrian purple and fine linen for Dives' birthday, or for the high priest on the temple festival ; or he is starting on a journey in search of goodly pearls. To such men time is gold, and attendance on a feast that lasts through life cannot be entertained for a moment.

The high priests and doctors are specialists in religion. To them the citiadel of truth has been committed ; and they feel wronged and insulted by the return to life of this buried heresy. Did the prophets ever foresee a day when a rustic provincial in the very shadow of the temple should preach the resurrection and Messiahship of a man who had been crucified ? And, worst of all, the word of the Crucified seemed mightier after than before His death ; it seemed to leap like fire from preacher to hearer, from heart to heart. Christ's miraculous power, hated more than His words by the rulers and elders, disdaining obscurity and defying criticism,

Christ's Vision of the Kingdom of Heaven

found a lame man lying at the gate of the temple, and made him a living witness to the resurrection of Jesus and the resumption of His ministry. The cripple's restoration was not more exasperating than Peter's boldness, when confronting the Council, he declared, "In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom ye crucified, whom God raised from the dead, in Him doth this man stand before you whole."¹ In that Council sat the ring-leaders of Christ's murder, the wire-pullers of anti-Christian intrigue. To be confronted thus in their own council hall by a Galilean fisher poured oil on the fire of revenge. To see the lame man stand elate by the apostle's side—a Christian apology more triumphant than the apologies of Clement and Tertullian—fanned the flame to fiercer heat. Pharisee and Sadducee whispered with bated breath, "That indeed a notable miracle hath been wrought through them, is manifest to all that dwell at Jerusalem; and we cannot deny it."²

The council chamber desecrated but yesterday by the name of the crucified Nazarene and by the feet of the lame man walking, became more explosive still, when Stephen, the arraigned, stepped from the bar to the judgment seat, and empanelling as a jury the prophets of Israel, and summoning the Council to the bar, pronounced the verdict of history: "Which of the prophets did not your fathers persecute? And they killed them which showed before of the coming of the righteous one; of whom ye have now become betrayers and murderers."³ Stephen had cut down to the quick: "they were cut to the heart, and they gnashed on him with their teeth," and they added his blood to the blood of the prophets. Men who had imbrued their hands in the blood of the King's Son would find their rage unslaked by the murder of His herald. By what appeared a happy coincidence, a student of Gamaliel, "breathing threatening and slaughter against the disciples of the Lord, went unto the high priest, and asked of him letters to Damascus."⁴ We can imagine the grim delight of high priest and Council at the discovery of an incarnation of pharisaic fanaticism, who, adding conviction to hatred, would murder Christians on principle. For "it is no strange thing to those who look into

¹ Acts. iv. 10.

² Acts iv. 16.

³ Acts vii. 52.

⁴ Acts ix. 1, 2.

The Royal Marriage Feast

the nature of corrupted man to find a violent persecutor a perfect unbeliever of his own creed." Deep was the sigh of relief heaved by high priests and rulers, when they saw the fiery Cilician rush forth like a blood hound on the trail of the Nazarenes.

Soon James the brother of John followed Stephen; and the wire pullers of the Sanhedrin seem to have pursued Paul around the Roman empire, and till he drew his last breath. Religious fury was free to slay God's servants; imperial Rome blessed the murderers of men who appeared to menace the stability of government; and papal Rome, seizing the dripping sword from Nero's hand, vindicated her imperial succession in the slaughter of the saints. Pope Gregory XIII. could strike his medal in commemoration of Black Bartholomew, with the smirking approbation of Europe. There was no executioner to draw the noose around the arch murderer's neck. Milton alone was found to set to trumpet music the vengeance-prayer of the souls beneath the altar. Now, the murder of the messenger by papal Rome, or by the congregations who boast of freedom, must be accomplished underhand and indirectly; for murder direct and literal carries the judge's black cap in its train. Jonathan Edwards, foremost saint in the American calendar, is murdered effectually by his office bearers and members, without knife or faggot, and without punishment for the malefactors.

The contempt cast on the wedding feast, on the prince and the crown, the sight of the dead heralds—martyrs to fidelity—aroused the king's anger; "the king was wroth, and he sent his armies, and destroyed those murderers and burned their city." "Behold your house is left unto you desolate," forsaken temple, forsaken Jerusalem. Those who see in God love only, and who reduce the sublime virility of Christ to mildness, should pause over His words, "the king was wroth." John Milton amongst the poets stands for the sublime; and Jesus, the Milton amongst the Hebrew prophets, reveals in His words and cross the majesty of God's resentment against sin.

During thirty-seven years Christ's prediction belonged to prophecy; since then it lives amongst our human annals—

¹ Burke: *Letters on a Regicide Peace*.

Christ's Vision of the Kingdom of Heaven

a nation's epitaph. By refusing or forgetting at this point to summon history to the witness chair, the interpretation and the message of this parable have suffered in proportion and power. Josephus must be numbered amongst its foremost expositors.

Turning from the last records of the gospels to secular history, one is struck with the suddenness and depth of the plunge taken by Jerusalem after the crucifixion. The gospels close on the sullen but generally peaceful capital of a Roman province. Robbery, for example, was repressed by an iron hand, as the crosses right and left of the dying Saviour testified. But fifteen years had not elapsed before the city, despite Roman sceptre and Antonia garrison, was overrun by robbers and murderers, who, drawing concealed daggers, stabbed men in the light of day, and slew the high priest before the altar.¹ And the generation that had been baptized by John, and had heard the inspired messengers call sinners to the feast of salvation in Christ, followed impostors into the wilderness, expecting there to greet the unfurling banners of liberty. The nearest historic parallel to Jerusalem in the year 48 was Dublin under the "invincibles" of 1882, with this difference that the high priests of Jerusalem openly headed riot and tumult in the streets.

The year 70 A.D. opened on a city rent asunder by internal strife. Between the home rulers who spurned compromise with Rome, and the moderate section who sought first the preservation of their nationality and their city, Jerusalem became a sepulchre for the slain. "The noise of those that were fighting was incessant by day and night; and the blood of all sorts of dead bodies lay in lakes in the holy courts themselves."² What we may call the home rulers crushed the nationalists, and split into two factions, which, under furious and desperate leaders, composed an army of 23,000 men. Divided in policy, they agreed as murderers to spare neither age nor innocence, sacred person nor holy place.

Such was Jerusalem when Titus the son of the Emperor Vespasian, a gifted general in the thirtieth year of his age, crowned Scopus, Olivet and other strategic heights with four

¹ Josephus, *Wars of the Jews*, II., chapter XIII., Sect. 3.

² Josephus, *Wars of the Jews*, V., chapter I., Sect. 3.

The Royal Marriage Feast

Roman legions. When we lift our eyes we can discern the Roman ensigns gleam on the very hill from which the Redeemer beheld the city and wept over it. "The king was wroth and sent his armies"; behind Vespasian was Jehovah, behind Titus the king who made the wedding feast for his son. God has many armies. His hail and lightning overthrew Sennacherib's cohorts; His tempest overwhelmed the Armada of Spain; with the arms of North America He abolished negro slavery; and with Titus and his legions He avenges the murder of His messengers. It was the beginning of the year 70 when Titus pitched his camp on Scopus and Olivet; in August the triumphant eagles flew over the most holy place.

The city Titus surveyed from Scopus or the tower of Antonia seethed from wall to wall with mad, despairing, dying humanity. Besides the wretched citizens, multitudes of pilgrims who had come up to the Passover were imprisoned within those walls of doom. Whilst robbery and bloodshed held carnival on congested street and temple hill, famine and pestilence slew more than Roman arms.

Wheresoever Jerusalem turned, her frenzied eye beheld her ramparts crumble before the Roman battering ram; she saw the enclosing wall of the besiegers winding its deadly coil around her. And on the surrounding height beyond the Roman lines, she descried the forest of crosses widening and thickening until room was wanting for the crosses and crosses for the victims.

A soldier impelled by "divine fury" applied a torch to the inner temple, the "holy house," the heart of the late majestic pile of snow and gold. Titus, rushing from his tent to the temple, ordered the extinction of the fire. For once Roman soldiers forgot their discipline. None obeyed; all pressed forward to feed the flame.

The roaring of the flames mingled with the cries of the dying; and from the height of the temple hill and the magnitude of the conflagration, the whole city appeared wrapt in flame. Titus gave command to burn the city; and now from wall to wall, from East to West, from North to South, roared a sea of fire.

When temple and fortress, castle and hovel lie wrapped in

Christ's Vision of the Kingdom of Heaven

fiery shroud, let us hear the voice of time reading over Jerusalem's grave : " He sent his armies and destroyed those murderers, and burned their city." The city has perished. Walls, streets, markets, palace and temple have sunk in overwhelming ruin. The city of God's favour, the city of His house, the city of the Last Supper, the city of the cross, is now the sepulchre of a race, of an economy that required to pass away.

Individual men are judged in eternity, kingdoms and races of men in time. Assyria had her day of doom ; so had Rome. When Nineveh and Babylon return to dust and Egypt wraps her face in Libyan sand, the Judge of all the earth hath spoken. Over Jerusalem's grave He has written in flame, " They that were bidden were not worthy." The spiritual element in history is not accidental, but central and essential. The fate of races and empires has turned in the past, and will turn in the future, on the place assigned to God. The old, indeed, dies in the birth of the new ; the kingdom of heaven comes as earthly Jerusalem goes ; the city of God arises over the ashes of Zion. The fall of the temple and city taught Christianity the spirituality and universality of her genius. Yet Jerusalem perished not in the throes of maternity, but through the absence of hunger after God. She chose to feast in the flesh and fast in the spirit. A city that made light of repentance, salvation, holiness, could not be the metropolis of the kingdom of heaven. Had David been alive to feed the fires of song in the temple, had the company of prophets been awake to hear the good news, " all things are now ready," the shepherds of the sheep would have led with joy their flock to the feast of life.

History teaches that in spiritual things there is survival of the fittest. Civilization wipes out the lower races. Races who refuse to build and live in houses, to accept instituted laws, go down before an imperative decree, as unworthy of supreme privilege.

The city fell from its glory, fell in its guilt ; but the king's palace withstood the conflagration. The banquet hall remained inviolate. Surveying the desert that had been the city, the king said to his servants, " The wedding is ready, but they that were bidden were not worthy. Go ye therefore

The Royal Marriage Feast

into the partings of the highways, and as many as ye shall find, bid to the marriage feast."

Cities rise and fall, grace reigns for ever. The cross is immortal. The Saviour-cry in the Divine heart sounds unsilenced and changeless. Jesus Christ's heroic soul surmounts defeat. Rejected and slain by His countrymen, He neither loses hope nor swerves from His purpose. Though the Jews pass the gate of His kingdom, He sees the Gentile lands welcome the heralds of His cross. "Go ye therefore to the cross roads," is the world's charter of salvation; the Gentile commission, demanding all ages for its fulfilment. It is a command from the view point of prophecy. It was uttered when the city sat strong amongst her hills, behind her bulwarks. It is Christ's pledge to His servants that they should survive the destruction of Jerusalem. Going to the heart of the situation, it connects the expansion of Christianity with the destruction of the Jewish capital and nation. The ways leading to the Gentile nations begin at the fallen city. In the glare of the burning town we see the Divine Commander marshalling His little army of soldier heralds, and going forth before them on the highways that run through Greece and Rome, through Germany and Britain, through Africa and America.

The language of the Gentile charter clearly indicates a new departure. The first servants called "them that were bidden"; the second cried, "Behold, I have made ready my dinner." On both missions the call was confined to those previously "bidden." The very existence of the wedding feast is news to the Gentile world; the call to attend it surprise and wonder. The new commission reads, "as many as ye shall find bid to the marriage feast." The king assumes acceptance of his salvation. He arms his heralds with no arguments drawn from the readiness and magnitude of the banquet.

Jesus foresaw that His cross would have its knights, silent, obedient, heroic; "and those servants went out into the highways." Such was the sublime procession of missionary chivalry as it moved before the eye of Jesus in the week of His passion: a procession of unarmed men, leaving home and country behind, going forth to learn the languages of the

Christ's Vision of the Kingdom of Heaven

world, to perish in Roman jails, to sleep in African forest and Indian jungle. This unending line of silent heroes streaming forth in the commission of the cross, in the hunger of human salvation, deserves to be sung by seraph genius. Next to Christ's word and work it is the noblest asset of man. They "gathered together all as many as they found," breathes the universality we expect to meet in Luke or Paul. Ignoring race distinctions, social standing, mental endowment and moral character, the Gentile apostles invited all. Explorers, shepherds and finders of men, they ranged universal man around sin and salvation. The vision of all faces turned to one centre, the hall of mercy wider than the human race, filling with the ages, is one of Christ's sublime visions. It is the coming of the kingdom of heaven; the predominating passion of His life, the passion that throbs and bounds in the parables, the pulse of the New Testament. For the coming of the kingdom, He prays in the heart of His church; He sees from the cross the wedding hall filling with guests; and for the glorious consummation He pours forth the prayer of prayers in syllables of blood.

"Both bad and good" does not express the king's estimate of the guests, but the moral distinctions of heathen society previous to the gospel call. Christianity, as the redeeming religion, asked what in each man was left to be redeemed. It would distinguish Cornelius from the class that fed the Roman jails. Peter and Paul recognize the distinction; regard Gentile "goodness" as obedience to the law of conscience. In the spiritual sense—the sense of the parable—none are good until they accept the call, put on the wedding robe and eat the bread of life. Jesus anticipates and ignores the pagan scorn aimed at Christianity for its reception of the profligate and vile.

The wedding "filled with guests" intimates the close of the dispensation of preaching. Grace issues no new commission; the herald's voice is silent henceforth. The marriage hall filled with guests represents the total sum of visible Christianity before the κληροί are separated from the ἐκλεκτοί.

The parable in its wide sweep of vision exhibits the history of Christianity. The entrance of the king to inspect the

The Royal Marriage Feast

guests is the last scene in the drama of time. The crowded marriage hall rounds and closes God's design of human redemption ; voices of seer, prophet and apostle are silent for ever. Unransomed human nature feels the pull of the redeeming cross no more.

The king who made the feast has hitherto remained out of sight, revealed only in his work and word. Now he appears. To God there is no crowd. To the guests and to the servants who called them, the vast human throng appeared countless and infinite. There was no individuality ; but the King "saw there a man who had not on a wedding garment." His eye decomposed and analyzed the assembly. It was said of a renowned general that when reviewing his army, he could detect the absence of a button from a soldier's uniform. But his review was confined to the troops of a single state ; whereas the King inspects an infinite throng from all lands and times. Yet men appear before Him as units ; each separate and apart from all others ; each judged as if he alone stood before the judgment seat.

The detection and expulsion of the guest without the wedding robe does not introduce the question of the proportion between the true and the false in the ranks of avowed Christian discipleship. Christ's salvation, passing by no human being and no human sin, offered freely for acceptance by faith, and securing for the sinner immediate access to the mercy-seat, might be mistaken for a banquet of the emotions, demanding neither self-conquest nor heroic obedience. The fervent enthusiasm of the servants to fill the banquet hall with guests, might appear the end and not the means of salvation. Christ foresaw that the "church" would in course of time be confounded with the kingdom of heaven ; that to be within its pale and recipients of its "rites" would bring to the half-awakened conscience satisfaction and assurance. He therefore sounds the stern note of warning, that although many are called into the visible church, of these few are chosen to enter the invisible kingdom of heaven ; that from the hall of assembly a door communicates with the judgment seat, and another with outer darkness. As often as death enters, the King comes in to see the guests, and

Christ's Vision of the Kingdom of Heaven

one by one removes the unbelieving and the unholy from the kingdom.

Two influences working together powerfully tended to preserve Christianity in the first century from the open or concealed intrusion of the world. The Christ-conception of the *ecclesia* remained as yet with the apostles and their immediate successors. While men thought of the *ecclesia* as the holy building composed of living stones, set in their places by the hands of the risen Lord ; whilst rising higher, they conceived it to be the body of Christ—the body of which He was the life-diffusing soul—they were bound to exercise unsleeping vigilance and unceasing prayer in maintenance of its purity. The Roman sword, ever streaming with Christian blood, was the other safeguard of the *ecclesia's* spirituality. Between the Christian camp, where faith lived in armour, and paganism wearing the imperial crown, and bearing in its hands fire and sword, there was no halting place. He who named the name of Christ must form one of the bleeding cross-bearers whose very name aroused the fury of the Roman world. And if his zeal had exceeded his faith, or his courage proved inferior to his sincerity, he chose apostasy before the martyr's crown. By the door of apostasy the man without the wedding garment often went forth from the marriage feast during the first three centuries. The fires which imperial Rome kindled to extinguish the religion of Christ, God employed in its purification. The sifting influence of persecution survived by two centuries the Christ-conception of the *ecclesia*. But when peace and patronage came in with Constantine, the marriage hall filled fast with bad and good. The religion hitherto reproached for the "lowliness of its origin, the poverty of its apostles and the simplicity of its worship," wore on her brow the sign of imperial adoption. Since then the *ecclesia* of Christ has been as deeply buried from the sight of men as Herculaneum or Pompeii. The kings and chieftains of Ireland having embraced the faith preached by Patrick, carried their subjects and tribesmen within the ecclesiastical pale. King Brude, accepting Christianity from the lips of Columba, drew his Pictish clansmen from their Druid altars to the cross. Under these circumstances, although Patrick

The Royal Marriage Feast

and Columba had held the Christ-conception of the *ecclesia*, it would have been difficult to prevent the marriage hall filling with unworthy guests. But when Vladimir, having received baptism, " issued orders for a great baptism of his people and the whole people of Kieff were immersed in the same river," the walls around the marriage feast had absolutely vanished.

When it is affirmed that the man without a wedding robe illustrates the unavoidable intrusion of unworthy members into the church, we withhold assent until we see what the proposition covers. If it is meant that sin invades the cleanest heart, and that men unchanged steal into the most spiritual fellowship, we yield whole-hearted assent. But if it is implied that the admission of men *openly evil* in walk and conversation into the fellowship of the church is, under our human limitations, unavoidable, we most firmly dissent. It seems indeed uncertain whether the man without a wedding robe, is not as much an admonition to the apostles and their successors to guard against the admission of the unworthy into the *ecclesia*, as a warning that they might expect to find them in it. Whilst we do not say that the servants might have detected the absence of the wedding robe, it seems certain that they must have expected each guest to wear it.

We are on perilous ground when we regard the presence in the church of members destitute of Christian character as inevitable. Such a position finds no support in the New Testament. To the church at Jerusalem the " Lord added day by day those that were being saved."² Paul's letters assume no moral duality ; they are addressed to the " saints," to the " sanctified in Christ Jesus." The apostle recalls their former life, reminds them of the spiritual quickening they have experienced, speaks of the instrumentality, glorifies the Author, appeals to them as having begun in the Spirit, calls each member of the *ecclesia* to holiness, never to *conversion*.

The wedding robe has received various interpretations. To some it signifies love, to some faith, to others holiness. The true interpretation is determined for us by the consideration that it stands for that which is inward, fundamental and essential in spiritual life. Its nature and im-

¹ Stanley : *Eastern Church*, p. 302.

² Acts ii. 47.

Christ's Vision of the Kingdom of Heaven

portance are such that the want of it disqualifies for the communion of saints, for the marriage supper. Under the figure of raiment inspiration often presents spiritual qualities. The wedding robe is the soul's raiment ; not its covering, but the outward expression of its inward state and life. It is neither separate nor separable from the soul. It is not the imputation of holiness, but the transfusion of holiness through the moral being. I do not take it as implying one Christian grace ; it is neither faith, nor love, nor righteousness taken separately. These attributes of the new life are inseparable. Faith admits man into Christ and Christ into man, but faith never enters the heart alone ; it dwells with love and holiness. The wedding robe has a visible and an invisible side ; its invisible side is faith, hope and love ; its visible side righteousness of life. It is *one*, for Christ is one ; it is put on, for Christ is put on.

Was the wedding robe the gift of the king ? We have no conclusive evidence that on the occasion of Oriental banquets guests were supplied with a festal garment at the host's expense. But the argument from custom should not be pressed too far. It is not a general custom for mourning families in Ireland to supply each person invited to the funeral with a linen scarf. Yet the practice obtains in certain districts amongst the wealthier class. It is questionable, however, whether the practice has found a place in Irish art or history. Every state appoints the uniform of its army ; every sovereign determines the dress of his court ; and it requires no stretch of imagination to conceive an Oriental monarch, on the occasion of his son's marriage, providing a distinctive robe for every invited guest. In the absence of such an arrangement, the speechlessness of the robeless guest is difficult to explain. Why should he be "muzzled," as the Greek word has it, if, as beggar, wayfarer, labourer, or man of business, he received the unexpected summons, and had neither means, time, nor available market in which to procure the festal garment ? The highways leading into the homeless, famished, toiling throngs, were not the places to furnish robes for a royal marriage banquet. Considering the suddenness of the summons and the conditions from which the guests were drawn, the indication that all but one

The Royal Marriage Feast

wore the marriage robe, points to a common, free, and ready supply. Moreover, the king's surprise and the severity of his sentence, cannot have been provoked by the omission of a robe which, because it had not been offered, could not have been declined. The gravity of the offence seems to centre in the fact that the guest defied the royal order explained by the servants, and, refusing the proffered robe, chose to appear in his own attire. A stubborn incomppliance with the king's command, a perverse intrusion into the robed assembly, may be the explanation of the command to bind the intruder "hand and foot."

With the king's entrance, the servants, the ministers of grace, disappear. Five times they have come into view, always under the same appellation. They are the *δοῦλοι*, the slaves of the king, in the sense in which Paul confessed himself to be the "slave of Christ." Now that the banquet hall has filled with guests, the servants' glorious line—the apostles, the missionary host, the message-burdened preachers of all time, not excluding those who by the pen have called their generation to the marriage feast—has come to an end with the economy of the cross. It is one of the supreme moments of time, when the voices of the [heralds that have sounded down the centuries and round the world, since the cross was uplifted on Calvary, die away amidst the echoes of the universe; when the Spirit and the bride say no more, "Come." Before the marriage supper begins, the king issues his last command to an order of ministry entirely new: "Then the king said to the servants, Bind him hand and foot, and cast him out into the outer darkness; there shall be the weeping and gnashing of teeth." These servants (*διάκονοι*) are summoned not from the herald company, not from the human family, but from the ranks of angel ministry. Our English versions, translating *δοῦλοι* and *διάκονοι* "servants," have obscured the transition from the times of grace to the day of separation. Luther has preserved the distinction, rendering *δοῦλος* by *knecht*, and *διάκονος* by *diener*. By the use of *servi* and *ministri* the Vulgate indicates the change of terms in the Greek, and the different orders of ministry.

The separation of the intruder from the presence of the king

Christ's Vision of the Kingdom of Heaven

and the communion of the "called and chosen,"¹ and his expulsion into outer darkness, determine the infinite value set by Christ on the *wedding robe*, and explain the feeling that has led some interpreters to see in it the parable's message and name. The door opening out of the banquet hall that needs no light of the sun, into the darkness, recalls the scene, the saddest ever painted, of him who from the upper room "went out straightway, and it was night."²

¹ Rev. xvii. 14.

² John xiii. 30.

V

THE GREAT SUPPER

“And when one of them that sat at meat with him heard these things, he said unto him, Blessed is he that shall eat bread in the kingdom of God. But he said unto him, A certain man made a great supper; and he bade many; and he sent forth his servant at supper time to say to them that were bidden, Come; for all things are now ready. And they all with one consent began to make excuse. The first said unto him, I have bought a field, and I must needs go out and see it: I pray thee have me excused. And another said, I have bought five yoke of oxen, and I go to prove them; I pray thee have me excused. And another said, I have married a wife, and therefore I cannot come. And the servant came, and told his lord these things. Then the master of the house being angry said to his servant, Go out quickly into the streets and lanes of the city, and bring in hither the poor and maimed and blind and lame. And the servant said, Lord, what thou didst command is done, and yet there is room. And the lord said unto the servant, Go out into the highways and hedges, and constrain them to come in, that my house may be filled. For I say unto you, that none of those men who were bidden shall taste of my supper.”

LUKE xiv.15-24.

I

It was the Sabbath when Jesus bent His steps towards the mansion of a ruling Pharisee. The living movement and colour of the scene still arrest the inward eye—the affluent entertainer issuing his invitation to the social circle of which he was the centre, the stir of preparation, the hum of greeting kinsmen and neighbours, the unbidden and unfortunate following with faded eyes the muster of the local world's rank, family and character. Speculative groups met around the door of many a clay-built cabin to consider why their neighbour with the dropsy had been invited to meet the district gentry and the famous Rabbi from Galilee. Their thought and conversation received a new direction when a form recalling the sufferer's early manhood strode with elastic step up the road to his native hamlet. Around this human

Christ's Vision of the Kingdom of Heaven

poem newly written, newly published, the neighbourhood would suddenly gather to read what it could.

We may ask, as we survey the host surrounded by the brilliant company, why Jesus was invited and why He accepted the invitation. The evangelist's significant remark that "they were watching him," explains the invitation to "eat bread" as a situation planned to study the great Teacher at close quarters. "They were watching him," reveals the icy eye of concerted espionage analyzing Jesus, setting Him in the light, while from the shade it sought a joint in His armour for the thrust of hatred's dart or envy's arrow. Would He dare to accept the seat reserved where the dropsical sufferer lay in front of Him? Would He ignore the sick man's presence, or essay the cure of invincible dropsy? "He has walked into our trap," their glances said to each other when Jesus sat down in front of the pallid sufferer.

The assembled guests supplied the Saviour with a congregation. Here was the meal and He must hide in its heart the leaven of the kingdom. He foresaw an occasion for carrying the warfare into the enemy's camp. When He had silenced His adversaries by His power He would spread on the Pharisee's table the feast of the great supper. His rejection by the heads of the nation whom this select company represented, would soon be sealed openly in His blood. His mind was filled with the decline and fall of His country; with the heightening and hardening of barriers to His kingdom. As poetry is the voice of the depths, springs from the elemental currents of emotion, the overflowing sorrow in the Redeemer's heart sought expression in this symbol-poem, half history, half prophecy, half on earth and half in heaven: beginning as the birth hymn of a new humanity and ending as a nation's dirge. The redeeming heart would issue its summons and ease its sorrow in the parable of the great supper, which by the week of the cross, and in the final light of events, would expand into the marriage of the king's son.

The parable of the wedding feast for the king's son was delivered in the Temple in the hearing of a miscellaneous throng. It looks like two parables; ends with the vision of the burning city and begins again with a new era and a new

The Great Supper

mission field. It was fitting that the fall of the theocracy should be proclaimed in the temple and that the burning city should light the steps of Christianity into the widening harvest of the nations. The parable of the Great Supper was spoken in the country to an audience of high-placed Pharisees. If tax collectors and sinners stole in to see and hear the Galilean Rabbi there is no hint of their presence. We may indeed infer that the man who had the dropsy was not the only representative of his class, inasmuch as his solitary presence might arouse suspicion of a sinister plot. His presence argues against the absence of uninvited spectators. Unless indeed we conceive the situation thus: the Saviour was confronted with the sufferer by the wily plot of the host; dropsy on account of its incurable nature would demand transcendent miraculous power or invoke inglorious defeat. And since the victim of dropsy was placed before Jesus as a crucial case, his presence would involve the absence of other sufferers whose maladies presented more hope of healing.

The manner in which the situation is introduced, the position of the sufferer *ἐμπροσθεν αὐτοῦ* "before him," wear the appearance of a challenge to Jesus. The woman who in another Pharisee's house "began to wet his feet with her tears" stood behind the Saviour's couch. When Jesus looked straight before Him His eyes met the swollen form of the sufferer. He accepted the challenge: the Pharisee's challenge to His power, the dying man's challenge to His sympathy. "Jesus answering spake unto the lawyers and Pharisees, saying, Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath or not?"¹ His question was an answer to their reasoning, which seems to have taken this course: If He fails to heal, His reputation is gone; if He succeeds, He breaks the Sabbath.

The sufferer presented a two-fold challenge to the Saviour-Son of Man: in him the Lord will show the place thinking, sinning, suffering man holds in God's esteem; him, the poorest and saddest man beneath that roof, the Son of the Highest will gird Himself to serve. Suffering amidst the calm of the Sabbath, and the scene of health and luxury around, appeals to the Healer, the Saviour in Jesus; and in a moment for ever sublime, He seizes with Divine energy the

¹ Luke xiv. 3.

Christ's Vision of the Kingdom of Heaven

sunken human mass and sets him on his feet. The peril and the manner of rescue seem to find an echo in the grappling and uplifting of the ox or ass from the cistern. The sufferer rescued from drowning in his own flesh, his lost self restored, stepped forth whole, exultant, free. When the place in front of Jesus was empty and the healed man had vanished into the silence and the shadows of the sabbath evening, the Lord, turning to the company, said, "Which of you shall have an ox or an ass fallen into a cistern, and will not straightway draw him up on a sabbath day?"¹

A silence deep as death fell upon the confounded audience. The Pharisee, although stiff with the mail of formula, was still a Jew at heart, and stood more in awe of miracle than of holiness. Hence the silence; while Jesus, who had been summoned to the bar, began to deliver the laws of the kingdom of heaven from the spiritual elevation so triumphantly vindicated. The unseemly scramble for the central seat in the *triclinium* must give way to self-effacing humility; the proud host who, arrayed in purple and fine linen, may have supplied the original of Dives, was advised, as he sat amongst kinsmen, local rank and fortune, to make his future feasts on the principle of the kingdom of heaven, to "invite the poor, the maimed, the lame, the blind," and he should "be recompensed in the resurrection of the just."

For one guest, blessedness on the arrival of "that far off divine event" seemed too remote. The banquet with which Jewish imagination associated the inauguration of Messiah's reign, spread as hoped on this side the grave, offered a more tangible blessedness. "Blessed is he that shall eat bread in the kingdom of God," exclaimed carnal hope with religious accent. The interruption of the Divine voice when a man had just been re-created, conveyed a revelation of the guest's inner being. It disclosed a heart packed in ice; impervious to and unconscious of the divine season for which he seemed to long. It had never occurred to him that the voice they heard pleading the cause of the poor, the maimed, the lame, the blind, was the sure indication that God was with men; or that the healed man was a diviner vision than the festal installation of a Jewish prince. Yet this Pharisee

¹ Luke xiv. 5.

The Great Supper

is our kinsman ; for often we too are under the same roof with the divine births of time and know it not ; the banquet which fed the giant saints of old is spread before our eyes while we knock for bread at the doorless future.

The interjected exclamation was hailed by the baffled host and guests as a welcome relief from the tension of feeling while the Divine Physician's lance cut deeper and deeper into the ulcer of Pharisaic pride. Some men are the safety valves of society ; and generally they are found between the social base and summit : belonging to the order of commonplace, they represent the predominant quality in those below and those above them. Such a man was he who broke the silence of the sabbath feast. He uttered what every silent guest felt ; he represented the high water mark of Jewish hope. It was as though Pharisaism slept in its formulas and phylacteries while its heart spoke. As a compendium of the Pharisees and lawyers present the irresponsible guest was regarded by Jesus ; nay, in him the inner self of universal Pharisaism became audible. The unctuous tone, the assumption that the speaker holds the card of Divine election ; the eye averted from the challenge of present duty ; the materializing social instinct, beginning and ending with the kingdom of heaven for the body ; the fundamental mistake that that kingdom comes to feast men and not to empty them by the fast of repentance and sorrow, are all present.

" But he said unto him, A certain man made a great supper ; and he invited many : and he sent forth his servant at supper time to say to them that were invited, Come ; for all things are now ready. And they all, with one consent, began to make excuse."

The Great Supper—Luther's *abendmahl*—is spread amongst the evening shadows of a nation's day. Not to dinner, *ἀριστον*, but to supper, *δειπνον*, are the invited guests called. In the parable of the Royal Wedding Feast (Matt. xxii.), the king says, " I have prepared my dinner " ; for, the purpose of the parable, being twofold—to foreshadow the passing of the theocracy in the burning city ; and the dawn of a new era in the calling of humanity around the table of grace—required time for the invitation and refusal, time for the vision of the perishing nation, and of the Christian

Christ's Vision of the Kingdom of Heaven

heralds going forth on their first missionary journey. Here, the Great Supper, the meal of grace, closing the nation's long day, by its very name suggesting evening bell and down-rushing night, confines the main application of the parable to the chosen, rejected people. We are warned against "pressing a word (*δείπνον*) too far, which is of very wide and fluctuating use." The caution would have more weight if the word "supper" stood alone; but the phrase "at supper time" (*ώρα τοῦ δείπνου*) serves to fix and define its application to the time of day known to Christ's hearers as supper time.

Literally considered, this is the scene that meets the eye. The sun rushes to his plunge in the Western Sea; Kedron valley and Jordan gorge are filling fast with gloom; the temple throws gigantic shadows up the slopes of Olivet; its burnished towers and door overgrown with the golden vine, glow responsive to the burning West. The mansion of the householder, half plunged in shade, fills with cooling air wafted upward from the sea. The majestic hall where the Great Supper is spread, receives the sun's farewell rays on table and *triclinia* and service of burning gold. The servant is seen passing with hurried step from mansion to villa, amidst the seats of leaders, doctors and lawyers. We see him retrace with slower pace and shaded brow his solitary way to his lord's abode. Then amidst shadows deeper and heavier, he dives into the streets, the Salt Market of Glasgow, or the Seven Dials of London, and leads towards the mansion of the Great Supper, a train of poor and maimed and blind and lame. Such was the population of Christ's parish; such is the mass of mis-shapen humanity which the Divine Sculptor hopes to carve into men. The servant, with the vision of the poor man's feast and the vast hungry spaces before his eyes, and with his Lord's words of grace and judgment knelling in his ears, urges his way beyond the city gates, into the highways and hedges, bringing up from the deeper and darker death-waters the submerged tribes of the commonwealth.

By the manner in which Luke introduces our parable, he prepares us for the summary dissolution of the guest's house of dreams. How far this or many others of Christ's parables

* Trench.

The Great Supper

conveyed their message to unspiritual ears it is hard to say ; but if the company apprehended its general drift, they must have learned that the banquet of the kingdom was already spread ; and that their freezing rejection of the call presented a vivid contrast to their eager acceptance of their rich neighbour's invitation.

The parable, like Christ's great deliverance at Sychar, is addressed to one person. The Divine Speaker's eyes rest on the self-complacent Pharisee, who sees turned full upon himself the face through which the living glory of God streams. Jesus draws the soul apart from the crowd, and speaks as if He were alone in the world. A general cannot address every soldier in the ranks, nor a sovereign every subject in his realm ; but Jesus stands still if a beggar appeals to Him and speaks a parable to a single guest.

The scene before our Lord presented an unspoken parable of grace and redemption. The host suggested the Divine Banquet-maker for the prodigal race ; the rich and stately hall was the kingdom of heaven ; the costly feast the banquet for the soul ; the crowding guests the people who hear and know the Spirit's call ; the servants standing round, or hurrying to and fro, the prophets, apostles and heralds of grace. But, as we have seen, the conception of a banquet conferring honour, convertible into life, welding units into community, ministering joy, and affording a common platform for the meeting of Divine Host and human guest, seemed greatly present to the Saviour's mind in those closing days.

As Jesus surveyed the hall everything spoke of wealth : the house, the tables, the plate, the viands, the attendants, were possible only to a rich man. There were men in the community who had the heart to make such a banquet but could not bear the expense. The entertainer on a great scale requires to be a man of fortune. A history attaches to some great English mansions of ruinous entertainments given to itinerant majesty. Ireland is studded with the ruins of country seats and castles which the Roman Catholic peasant ascribes to the guns of Cromwell, but which history traces to the princely hospitality of their ancient owners.

When Christ sets forth redemption as a great supper, there is always a world of renunciation, humiliation and

Christ's Vision of the Kingdom of Heaven

tragedy in the background. When the guests at the great supper of salvation look down, their feet are on Gethsemane ; when they look up they behold the extending arms of the cross. The redemption of man may have cost more thought than the creation of the universe. Humanly speaking, whatever draws upon the heart, saps the frame, blanches the hair, is dearly bought. The drain upon the Divine feeling when " God spared not His own Son " no created mind can estimate. Many commodities of luxury and common use are bought with human life. Our coal is crimsoned with the miner's blood. Every keel that rips the ocean and every bale of merchandise is sodden with bloody sweat ; and the banquet of redeeming love is spread in sorrow and blood. The making of the Great Supper is the greatest of all epics ; the co-ordination of mercy and holiness, of law and grace, the co-operation, the toils, the sacrifice of love and wisdom ; the balance of humiliation and majesty, of humanity and Divinity, of the limited and the infinite, of death and life, of burial and resurrection. It engaged the eternal Mind from morn to eventide of one of heaven's long days. It demanded the long soul-fast and the slow evolution of a humanity that the Son of God could wear. Its condition of success was the selection and training of a tribe which in its elect spirits might become conscious of sin as the midnight of the heart and the discord of the universe. Only hearts wherein this spiritual sensorium was created or restored could be entrusted with the cabinet ministry of the Great Supper. When the last crimson line of the Divine epic was written, when the cry " It is finished " was heard in hades and in heaven, man became the probationer of eternal life.

The banquet of the vultures is spread by Napoleon, of harmony by Beethoven, of the dramatic instinct by Shakespeare, of sublime conception and word-music as the sound of many waters, by Milton ; the feast of conscience, of the spiritual in man, the supper at which faith, hope and love are guests, where repentance puts on the wedding robe of forgiveness, and reconciliation and peace sit between the royal Host and His joyful guests, is God's achievement—he offered person, the life and work of His Son.

If man spread a table that could appease human hunger,

The Great Supper

restore health, heal the deformed, the maimed, the lame, recall lost youth and arrest the steps of death, the world would crowd to the banquet. Could any man summon his fellows to a banquet that strained the gall from the cup of life, dulled the edge of pain, robbed sorrow of darkness and death of its sting, he would rank as the greatest benefactor of mankind. These and greater powers belong to the Great Supper. It arrests and heals our plague. It gives life and *it makes men*. On this fare fed Paul, Origen, Cromwell and Luther. In the Great Supper satisfaction and rest are found. From this table Augustine never rises as he rose from table after table in the banquet of passion. Justin, having drained the cup of philosophy, here rests beside the head waters: "Whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst."

Few things on earth can wear the epithet "great." But as applied to the supper of human salvation, this term simply records the facts. "Calling many" is based on the unsearchable provision of the feast. And here is the greatness of Christ's love. The love-supper has infinite resource. Other hosts must limit their hospitality; the Divine feast-maker has bread of life and water of life for the world. Who can estimate the millions of sinners covered by the word *many*? The hall of the Great Supper is the kingdom of God; the call, the voice of the Spirit breathing through the universal heart of man; the banquet, Calvary, open on all sides to all sinners.

In the parable of the Royal Marriage Feast there are several servants and two distinct orders of ministry, *δοῦλοι* and *διάκονοι*; here are one servant and one order of service. Three several calls at three separate times are addressed to three different classes. It is, however, the same servant who carries these successive appeals. And thus Christ appears as the one unchanging Messenger. Men are His instruments; He is their inspiration, the voice that in all ambassadors says "Come; for all things are now ready."

Following the custom of the country, there was the prospective invitation, apprising and engaging desired guests. This explains the words, "he invited many." The prophets,

¹ John iv. 14.

Christ's Vision of the Kingdom of Heaven

who themselves had foretasted the Great Supper, invited their generations. Nor perhaps should we overlook the voice of the Spirit in the heart of paganism. The servant sums up in himself the mission of the twelve and the seventy and the personal ministry of Jesus. There is nothing strained in this interpretation, which finds its verification in the householder's address, "I say unto you." Great captains in war, in politics or discovery, so saturate their troops and followers with their inspiration and enthusiasm that there is only one predominant personality. But no human genius can approach Christ in His power to command in His commanders and prophesy in His prophets.

The same servant experiences varying success in different missions; and his failure belongs to the dawn of his enterprise. The first mission miscarried; the second drew forth responses; the third was attended with more success. In the Royal Marriage Feast the "wedding was filled with guests." Here the master of the house expresses the desire that "my house may be filled"; but such a consummation was not attained. After the third appeal, constraining the outcasts from the theocracy, as after the second, there was still room. *Yet there is room* is the word that shines on the banners of salvation as they pass over the frontiers of Palestine—along the highway of time.

"My house," of which the house-master speaks, has three distinct periods in its history. In the first it stands empty, in strong contrast with the seething city. In this stage it is the kingdom of heaven before it receives its first subjects; the dragnet before it has been cast into the sea. It is the royal city, built for wandering man, but without one citizen. The occupation begins. Andrew and Peter, John and James, cross the holy threshold; the poor and maimed and blind and lame come in to occupy a corner of its infinite space. From the highways and fields a footsore and heart-weary company creep into its shelter. This is the harvest reaped by Jesus from the Jewish field—the vineyard of which Isaiah sang. How small the space occupied! How striking the contrast between the number of guests and the myriads of the great world! To fill this infinite emptiness is the mission of Christianity.

The Great Supper

The prophets, including the Baptist, who announced the approaching feast, received a ready response : " Then went out to him Jerusalem and all Judæa, and all the region round about Jordan." Now, when the servant at the hour of supper calls from old to new, from outward to inward, he finds closing doors and hearts preoccupied. The people who accepted the invitation to the Great Supper of the future, and declined the same feast when it claimed their presence, themselves, their hunger and their yearning, were modern, were human as ourselves. Human nature loves to be considered " invited " ; to have the power of refusal ; of coming to the Great Supper or sitting at the banquet of the world. It flatters the heart to think it has two lovers—God and Mammon.

Few reject the feast of salvation from sin, provided it remains in the distant future. Let it be spread between tottering age and the grave, between time and eternity ; let it be spread by the dying bed, on the shore of Jordan, on the last day of life ; spread on the withered bloom of youth, on the ashes of enjoyment and glory—to be eaten in haste under the setting sun, and then there will be crowds of accepting guests. But let not the preacher speak of to-day ; let him not underline that imperious word *Now* ; let him not deepen into urgent exhortation, or say, All things are now ready. When bereavement, misfortune, tragedy unite their voices with the pulpit is not this the response ?—" We will believe, we will come, we will repent, we will seek refuge before the end. Regard us as called, invited guests ; as pledged to a change of heart and life ; as booked for a train that will run some other day ; as passengers to heaven in the ship ' To-morrow,' or in the ship of ' Some Day.' "

We are not to understand that the excuses had their origin in a conference of the invited ; that the favoured people met to frame an apology for non-compliance with the heavenly call. Men need only to let their hearts speak and the result will be unanimity. From the window of each soul-house the strong man in possession bids Christ to go His ways. The call was not a general proclamation from the battlements, or on the city square. It was personal. Instead of flinging his invitation on the air, the herald found the door,

Christ's Vision of the Kingdom of Heaven

and urged his way to the inner door of the conscience. Heaven's plan of preaching, far from issuing a circular letter to a city or a province, finds Zacchæus, names him, looks him in the face, and declares, "To-day I must abide at thy house." God's preaching puts the sinner on his mettle; constrains him to answer Yes or No; gives a tongue to conscience as the sure aimed bullet evokes the response of the target. George Whitefield used to say that his sermon had not missed the mark when it made men angry. The fortress has been struck when it throws off smoke and fire. The silence of the modern congregation throws the preacher off his guard; and the dissenting or self-excusing make their standpoint clear by absenting themselves. The newspaper and the novel supply a medium through which the voice of the multitude makes itself heard.

II

THE VOICES

A stranger to human nature would expect instant and glad acceptance of an invitation proceeding from a throne, prompted by love, to a feast of joy and honour, especially if he knew that its aim was the conveyance of eternal life, re-birth, sonship in God. Had such a being stood near the festal hall when the servant, returning, told his lord "that all with one consent began to make excuse," he would have exclaimed, "Impossible!" In the three self-excusers are we to find three types of worldliness? Are these types partial or inclusive, local or universal? The millionaire, the devotee of art and literature, the scientific temper, the philosophic doubter, the agnostic, the Sadducee, seem to have no place in the list. If indeed these are absent, we should be forced to the conclusion that the parable confines its view to provincial life in the time of Herod and Tiberius. Doubtless our parable sketched contemporary types, and drew excuses from modes of preoccupation then existing. No one begs to be excused because he denies the need of the Great Supper, doubts its existence, or the existence of its Maker; or because he regards the existence of the soul and the reality of religion as exploded fallacies.

The Great Supper

Yet it would betray absence of mental penetration to infer from hence that the excuses are confined to a narrow province of an obsolete world. We have but to remind our selves that we here survey the approach and contact of two unchangeable quantities—the human heart and the everlasting Gospel—to see that the heart uttered its inmost self, that the Gospel evoked all the elements it still evokes from its despisers. It is not here contended that the three refusals exemplify or exhaust all the subterfuges of the natural heart. They are the refusals of an old nation often overswept by the floods of Divine favour; they are also the refusals of the world when it has become long familiar with the voices of the heralds. But the point of universal and everlasting application lies here; the Gospel has tapped the depths of unrenewed humanity and shown the strong undercurrent hurrying away from God. At three openings, so to speak, that current becomes audible; and the three voices have the same cause and the same significance. If all the stops of the heart had been touched—scientific materialism, Epicureanism, aesthetic unbelief, nature mysticism, gambling and sport-worship, socialistic exclusion of the soul and futurity—they would have uttered the same note, "Will not."

- 1.—The three voices belong to the flesh, not to the Spirit.
- 2.—They all betray the absence of soul-hunger.
- 3.—The pursuits and pre-occupation centre in self.
- 4.—They lie within the sphere of the senses.
- 5.—In themselves they are innocent.
- 6.—Their guilt lies in this, that while they are of secondary rank they usurp a primary place and enter into rivalry with God.

To conceive the situation justly, we must hear with the inward ear call and counter-call. The servant's voice is the voice of the Incarnate Lord; the voice of the ambassadors sent forth in His name; the voice of the Holy Spirit in the reconciling word. Then on the other side we hear, 1. The call of the land; 2. The call of business; 3. The call of pleasure.

First the voice of the land. Not to all, but to most branches

Christ's Vision of the Kingdom of Heaven

of the human family, the call of the land is overwhelming. The writer of Genesis with the insight of profound genius makes the first man "till the ground from whence he was taken." Nature to the first man is mother, sister, wife. By a divine inspiration Adam turns to the soil to fence in a spot of earth he may call his own; for our heart will lavish its affection only on what is particular, limited, definite. Love chooses one human partner from all the earth, and one God from all the gods. The land hunger was as necessary to man as roots to the tree or foundations to the building. It called forth his powers as a secondary creator, anchored his nomadic instincts, created neighbourhood and the sense of property, and supplied the warp and woof of civilized society. It expands into patriotism and creates fleets and armies for the defence of fatherland. The hunger that proved the ruin of the first invited guest has died out of the heart of the Jewish race. The restoration of this hunger is the first revival Judaism must experience in order to national consolidation in Palestine or elsewhere. The cry of the land within due limits is legitimate and necessary. The response it awakens in our hearts is ruinous only when it drowns the voices of the Spirit and the bride. "I have bought a piece of ground" may be a psalm of life, fit for chanting with devout heart at eventide. For the piece of ground may be the nursery of sons and daughters for the commonwealth; there may rise the homestead, a home because it is a church. When the invited guest adds, "I must needs go out and see it," he strikes the note of treason to himself and God. By misusing "I" he shifts the crown of personality from the spirit to the flesh. Was he composed of nerve and muscle only, that he says, "I must go out and see it"? Was the soul a consenting party? Had it given its vote? Could the real man within see the field? Unconsciously a momentous choice is made; an irreparable wrong committed by the lower partner in being, against the higher.

This landowner throws the blame on life; on the inexorable strain of circumstance. He seems to regret that the Great Supper and the survey of his property should have been fixed for the same day; as if an austere fate imposed the duty of making choice. And here the man speaks from within

The Great Supper

our own hearts. At some time we have all resented as a personal injury the arrangement that this life, ordained to decide the life hereafter, should be crowded with care and sorrow, labour and suffering. Youth asks, Why should I be required at one and the same time to prepare for citizenship in two diverse worlds? And furrowed manhood urges the impossibility of obeying two imperative voices. The one voice men may, the other they must obey. The refusal wears an air of civility, but conceals a two-fold affront: first to that side of his being for which the Great Supper was made; then to the Divine Host, from whom a piece of ground can alienate the human heart.

Had the parable belonged to our own time, the landowner going to see his ground might have been a nursling of nature, a student of Wordsworth and Thoreau. But to the old civilizations, Jewish, Greek, Roman, the malaria of the Campagna, the fiery sink of the Dead Sea, the earthquake and thunder storm of Syria, aroused emotions of aversion and terror. Man's affectionate idealization of nature had its rise in a temperate clime, where the wild beast had vanished from the forests and the forest no more concealed the features of the landscape; where settled land, peaceful times and skies revealed to British poet and artist a queenly sainthood in the features, in the vales and hills of these Islands, sufficient in dimensions to engage but not to oppress the imagination.

Some think the purchase was conditional, subject to the master's approval. But the land appears to be as truly purchased as the oxen whose owner went, not to ratify their purchase, but to prove their fitness for the plough. Going to see the new possession brings into visible play a deep law of human being—that the heart to be near the object of affection sits in the window of the eye. The lover must feast his eyes on his affianced, the mother bend over her slumbering child, the divine hunger in the breast of man must see God, here in human flesh and hereafter must see Him as He is. And this land-lover must make the land his own by touch of hand and foot, but chiefly by receiving its image through the inlet of the eye. His eye takes inventory of every tree and stone and blade of grass, and he says fondly, All these are my very own. Not because it is the field whereon the future

Christ's Vision of the Kingdom of Heaven

of nations was decided—Clontarf, Bannockburn, Waterloo—not because it is laved by Kishon or overhung by Tabor or Carmel does the owner's heart gravitate in that direction ; but because it is an extension of self, a child born unto him by purchase, a bride, a constituent part of being.

Second, the call of business. The man who says, " I have bought five yoke of oxen and I go to prove them," takes bolder ground. He is not in the grasp of necessity, he is simply otherwise engaged. A man of method, he has sketched a programme for the day, and it must not be infringed by messengers from the invisible. He is the man of movement, of action, restless as a river. The servant found him on foot, girt for the journey : " I am going to prove them." He flings his words of engagement from the window of an express train. The oxen were bought for the plough, and the bustling dealer is impatient till he sees them draw the light wooden plough without the application of the plough-goad. He has come through a night of broken sleep and nightmare. He saw in his dream his gold develop wings and fly away ; the oxen kick the goad and gore the ploughman. He had no time to bless his wife or kiss his child, to read a sentence from law or psalmist, to bend the knee in invocation or adoration.

Neither the landowner nor the man of business is a seller. In selling, money is realized. The changeable and the perishable are exchanged for what bears the stamp of permanence. Also selling may mean taking in sail ; severing the ties that bind on earth. But the landowner and the man of business are engaged in multiplying their points of contact with the world. The first may be some young provincial Dives ; the second the rich fool in the morning of his career. It is not by accident that two refusers were recent buyers and the third newly married. They were all engaged with beginnings. If they withdraw their gaze from the absorbing present, they see nothing but the illimitable field of time ; and the voices of the invisible are unheard or heard and drowned. Yet in such hours the Divine knocks at our door.

In the first two the moral sense still survives. Their refusal betrays consciousness of a violated pledge ; and is in fact an apology. Far back in the mind lingers a shadowy

The Great Supper

fear lest friendship of the inviting host should turn into displeasure ; and both are eager to carry a quiet conscience into the pursuit and enjoyment of the world. " I pray thee have me excused " means, " Let me alone. Do not follow me to the piece of ground, nor *me* to the farm where I test my oxen. Do not like a death's head look in at my window ; nor as a voice in my heart pronounce the word *eternity*. Speak softly, or you may arouse the sleeping partners in my breast." The cry of the land has long muzzled the pulpit where land owners congregate ; the call of commercial Britain for lullaby instead of thunder-peals has exercised disastrous influence on the successors of Owen and Baxter. Romanism engages to let man go after his land, his oxen, or his vices, provided he puts his will and his earnings in the hands of the priest, and pays a heavy insurance premium against hell fire.

Third, the call of pleasure. When the servant knocks at the door of the newly-wedded pair, where the inmates are fresh from the bridal feast, where life enters on a new beginning, watching angels follow his steps with hope. The bridegroom breathing the air of human love will respond to the calling of heavenly love ; and should he lack the spiritual ear, his wife will be the divine echo in his breast. How the ear of heaven waits for the response to the servant's call ; and how the faces of heralds and angels sadden at the reply shot forth between the door post and the closing door, " I have married a wife, and therefore I cannot come." No apology, no excuse, no consciousness of insult, defiance, treason. The three men are selected from the class of masters. If they are slaves their own passions are their only masters. Perhaps indeed the profound thought here comes to the surface, that no man is so great a slave that he is not free to accept freedom ; that in concerns of the soul God treats all men as masters. The bridegroom, free from absorbing engagement, represents leisure and the pursuit of self-indulgence. His fatal decision is not traced to his marriage ; but he is censured for his perversion of wedlock. Assuming that he married young, and married a true woman, the holy union supplied a new incentive and smoothed the path of obedience. If indeed he had wed beauty of form and face without that

Christ's Vision of the Kingdom of Heaven

religious instinct which is woman's crown, his religious indifference would deepen into irreligious decision. It is quite possible that in his "I cannot" we have the energy of two united wills. Whether from innate or abetted love of enjoyment, the bridegroom turns a deaf ear to the eternal voice. He raises self-indulgence to a fine art, a calling, a life-pursuit. He is modern, he is immortal. He leads the pilgrims of pleasure, massed million deep in fat Britain, and nerve-worn Europe. He leads coronets and leisured sloth, the pink and white legions of gaming beauty, the forces of pompous expenditure, the sodden worshippers of Bacchus, the delirious millions who have their being in sport, the myriads of human beings who would turn all the hours of life into a bridal bower and an endless honeymoon.

"And the servant came and told his lord these things." Remembering who the servant is, these words afford a glimpse of Christ's inner life. The way in which the Son came to the Father was in prayer. And often as we see Christ ascending the mountain or devoting the night to supplication, we may feel assured that part of the burden He bears to the Father's feet consists of "these things," the joy of bringing good tidings; the sorrow of repulse and refusal. And was it not through the Divine response to His prayer that Christ felt the fire of God's indignation against the despisers? If disappointment can be an experience of the Divine nature, the rejection of the kingdom of heaven by the people ordained and trained to be its premier colony, must have engendered that feeling. The call came to the chiefs and rulers who should have led the nation to the Great Supper. But their seats are empty; and they glory in their absence: "Hath any of the rulers believed on him, or of the Pharisees? But this multitude which knoweth not the law are accursed."¹

With his servant, though unsuccessful, the house-lord was well pleased; with the despisers he was angry. The want of hunger clearly showed that while the supper was being made there was no corresponding preparation in the invited guests. Nor was there ground of hope on which to found a new call. The rejection was final on both sides. "Then the

¹ John vii. 48, 49.

The Great Supper

master of the house being angry, said to his servant, Go out quickly into the streets and lanes of the city, and bring in hither the poor and maimed and blind and lame," the class whom Jesus had enjoined His host to call. At the ruling Pharisee's table Jesus was the only poor man present ; and we are left to infer that maimed and blind and lame were absent. These three branches, having poverty as their common root, were found in the streets and lanes of the city. Jesus doubtless spoke the words " poor and maimed and blind and lame " as they had never been uttered before. Looking through sinless eyes and from faultless physical manhood, He felt as no other felt how far those distorted and halting creatures fell short of the lost ideal in Himself restored. And the consciousness of this separation drew Him nearer to their deformity ; Himself maimed and halt and blind in them. These physical misfortunes are not merely the penalty of sin ; much more are they the symbol of its nature and the declaration of its presence. In the streets congregated, and huddling in the suffocating alleys that opened on the temple hill, were souls destitute of hope and health, maimed by heredity and partial suicide ; who had lost the vision of God through the action of sin, and lost the use of the feet that had never found the path of life. As the bodily deformities were visible to every eye, so the maimed, blind and lame souls were painfully manifest to their owners. These were not simply to be called ; they were to be brought in—as sheep which had strayed into the jungle where the tiger springs, would be brought into the fold by the true shepherd.

"Go out quickly," ran the new commission ; quickly, for the shadows are falling. And in the spirit of the command the servant goes forth. His field is located and defined. The maimed, the blind and the lame are named in his marching orders ; and to these he addresses his glad tidings. In the broad ways, in the narrow alleys—the latter a feature of Jerusalem—he finds them begging from the worshippers going to or returning from the temple, or lying at the rich man's gate, covered with sores. He returns glad, showing the way to the palace of the great householder. He sees with joy the motley company sit down in the banquet hall ; and as before, " he came and told his lord." This time he hauls

Christ's Vision of the Kingdom of Heaven

not an empty net : " Lord," he reports, " what thou didst command is done, and yet there is room."

None knew, like the servant, the accommodation, the capacity of the house of the Great Supper. And it is characteristic that the wide unoccupied spaces are by the messenger pointed out to his lord. The redeeming heart has room, and the salvation it bled to bring in, has room for all the Jews and all the Gentiles. Undiscouraged by refusal from the rulers and unwearied by labours amongst the wretched, the servant suggests new crusades, endless missions till the house of salvation is filled—filled as the ocean is filled with waters and the firmament with stars. Yet there is room for all the weary and crushed and suffering ; for all the sects, nations and generations who realize the poverty and plague of the soul. The filling of the house is the cardinal event of history. The lord and his servant are of the same heart and mind. By both the unoccupied space is felt like a wound. " And the lord said unto the servant, Go out into the highways and hedges, and constrain them to come in, that my house may be filled." The Divine urgency gains momentum and vehemence with time. There is an ascending climax in the manner of the three commissions : " Come ; bring in hither the poor ; constrain them to come in." The deepening intensity and dispatch go to prove that the scene is laid on Jewish soil, and the time limited by the closing in of night—the night of the cross. It is natural here to expect an indication, a fore-flung shadow of the Gentile world as we see its emergence in the original and independent parable of the Royal Wedding Feast. But in Christ's own work—including the missions of the twelve and the seventy—we find all the conditions and features of the Great Supper. The servant's last charge to " constrain them to come in," refers not to the ministry of the Spirit after Pentecost, but to the increasing constraint laid by Christ on the conscience of His country as He felt the chilling shadows of Calvary. It was a constraint which in calling the Gentiles would have been out of place ; but which in the case of the lost sheep of the house of Israel was necessary to success. It was the Divine Shepherd laying the lost sheep on His shoulders. People with no memory of height and abyss in their experience, come to the

The Great Supper

Great Supper with less doubt and hesitation than those who have been branded by their fellow men, convicted by their conscience as the chief of sinners. Can the Divine Householder, from whom we have torn ourselves, have invited us ?

The highways and hedges "represent the drear zone of human hopelessness, where men accustomed to misery and hard treatment from their fellows, or so profoundly sensible of their own demerit that they can hardly believe" in love or compassion, human or Divine ; who, convinced that they have sinned so heinously as to be beyond the reach of mercy, ever sink in deeper guilt. Such men cannot easily accept the invitation to the Great Supper ; for it is out of harmony with their experience, seems to mock their wretchedness by bringing news too good to be true. And such hopelessness the heavenly messenger must constrain.

The five hundred disciples cited by Paul as witnesses of the resurrection,² may in whole or part come under the category of the dwellers by the highways and hedges. The generic word *poor*, implied or expressed, covers both consenting classes ; and the church at Jerusalem as early as the time of Stephen was distinctly poor. The householder's words, "that my house may be filled," have led interpreters to find the Gentile nations in the "highways and hedges." But there is no indication that the house was filled. The house was built that it might be filled. And while the church in successive missionary campaigns prays by immolated life and martyr grave, "Thy kingdom come," heaven responds, "That my house may be filled."

The three successive calls deepening in imperative urgency are parts of one design. There is no more room for a break between the second and third than between the first and second. Our parable is the last scene in the Jewish drama ; and at its close the curtain falls. The marriage of the king's son, which opens into the nations, has two beginnings, and between them lies the grave of the theocracy. Our parable, as we have seen, finds its counterpart in Christ's public ministry, which in its early days manifests a majestic serenity of tone and movement prophetic of a much longer term than three years for the training of the nation ; and I think

¹ Dr. A. B. Bruce.

² 1 Cor. xv. 6.

Christ's Vision of the Kingdom of Heaven

the profounder student of the ministry will feel that Jesus anticipated a wider interval between baptism and His cross. The time of public favour, before the open rupture with the Pharisees, may find its echo in the call, "Come; for all things are now ready"; the mission to the poor and maimed and blind and lame, synchronises with the time when discerning the receding diadem and the semblance of a cross in the background, many disciples walked no more with Him. The last constraining call, sounded in the depths of homeless sorrow and sin, answers to the period when Jesus wrought the cross into the centre of His banner. The parable reflects the elation and depression of the Redeemer's soul while passing through all these zones of public sentiment on His way to His goal on Calvary.

The servant, issuing again and again with new entreaties and more compelling persuasions, evinces the depths of the Divine sincerity and patience. The anger kindled by repulse is less than the burning passion for the lost. But the reiterated calls have still other lessons and warnings for Christendom to-day. Calling, bringing in, constraining, while the house remains empty, or receives a few tardy guests, reminds us that we are following the fortunes of the sower and the seasons on long cultivated soil; soil which, sick of tillage, calls upon the Divine Husbandman to lay it out in prairie, to be reddened by war and covered by the overgrowth of Mohammedanism. We in this wider Palestine of Europe are fast approaching the stage answering to the last days of Judaism. We have burdened the earth with ecclesiastical machinery; popes, patriarchs, bishops, churches, sacraments, dogma. Rome calls men within an enclosure feignedly holy, to famish on bead-counting and virgin worship; others, drawing wages from a Protestant state, beguile the people with priestly magic, and run sleeping cars to Babylon. These unite in calling aloud from press and altar perishing men to a painted supper; and the "servants" who constrain, sit on thrones and masquerade in tiara and mitre. But who amongst the millions hears the Spirit and the bride calling to the Great Supper of salvation from sin? In communions where the Evangelic form and name still linger, ten thousand pulpits call every Sabbath day; but the response is feeble. The

The Great Supper

landowner begs to be left with his acres, hounds and wine ; trade and industry are, they tell us, putting first things first ; scientific materialism will attend the great feast for the soul when it has proved that there is a soul for the feast. Amusement, sense-worship, pleasure, gambling, triumphant drunkenness, require all the days of the week for their cultivation and indulgence. The race course is thronged with men and women ; the theatre and football field, public house and Sunday train, are crowded ; but the churches enclose great desert places.

Unlike Jerusalem, the nations and their capitals survive, commerce crowds their wharves ; their armies and fleets increase with their jealousies and fears ; but the kingdom of heaven is passing away from them, and leaving to the secular genius of Europe the kingdoms of the world and the glory of them. The European door leading to the Great Supper receives no longer the crowding guests of salvation. The guests called by the apostles of the nations—called in four hundred and twelve languages, printed and spoken—come from East and West and North and South, and sit down in the kingdom of heaven.

While Sadduceeism relegates the resurrection from Joseph's tomb to the realm of pious invention, and Teutonic professors burrow in prophet and evangelist for shreds of authenticity which their verifying instinct may stamp with approbation, Teutonic vision is too short or too pre-engaged to perceive that the Christ of the Gospels is abroad in the power of His cross and resurrection, doing in the missionary nations what the evangelists say He did in Palestine ; that the Pauline epistles and the Acts of the Apostles may be read, not from our Bible, but from the hearts of converts and apostles under Indian stars, on Chinese plain, and blood-soaked islands of the sea.

VI

THE UNMERCIFUL SERVANT

“Therefore is the kingdom of heaven likened unto a certain king, who would make a reckoning with his servants. And when he had begun to reckon, one was brought unto him, who owed him ten thousand talents. But forasmuch as he had not wherewith to pay, his lord commanded him to be sold, and his wife, and children, and all that he had, and payment to be made. The servant therefore fell down and worshipped him, saying, Lord, have patience with me, and I will pay thee all. And the lord of that servant, being moved with compassion, released him, and forgave him the debt. But that servant went out, and found one of his fellow-servants who owed him a hundred pence; and he laid hold on him, and took him by the throat, saying, Pay what thou owest. So his fellow-servant fell down and besought him, saying, Have patience with me, and I will pay thee. And he would not; but went and cast him into prison, till he should pay that which was due. So when his fellow-servants saw what was done, they were exceeding sorry, and came and told unto their lord all that was done. Then his lord called him unto him, and saith unto him, Thou wicked servant, I forgave thee all that debt, because thou besoughtest me; shouldest not thou also have had mercy on thy fellow-servant, even as I had mercy on thee? And his lord was wroth, and delivered him to the tormentors, till he should pay all that was due. So shall also my heavenly Father do unto you, if ye forgive not every one his brother from your hearts.”

MATT. xviii. 23-35.

I

IN the whole gallery of Christ's parables, the unforgiving servant stands out unique and alone. This individuality arises not from its background of Oriental life, nor from the stupendous magnitude of the servant's debt, but from the view which by anticipation it affords into the inner life of the *ecclesia*, or the congregation. A majority of the parables were spoken in the hearing of mixed audiences; this was uttered within the bosom of the society of disciples—the germ of the future *ecclesia*. The conversation which begins with the eighteenth chapter, and draws forth our parable, turns upon the spiritual economy or house-law of the heavenly

The Unmerciful Servant

brotherhood. The disciple-circle, having drawn closer around their Lord, apparently in his own house at Capernaum, raised the question "Who then is greatest in the kingdom of heaven?" Jesus found an unspoken parable of the kingdom ready at hand. Setting a little child in the midst of them, He said, "Except ye turn and become as little children, ye shall in no wise enter into the kingdom of heaven."

Ambition asks, Who stands highest in the kingdom, nearest the throne? From which throne do you measure—the dream-throne of Israel, or the throne of your Father in heaven? The answer is near. Fix your eyes on this little child: his angel is near the throne, and He who sat on the throne is sinking into the shadows of the grave to find the despised and the lost; for it is against the will of your Father in heaven that one of these little ones should perish.

In founding and upbuilding earthly states, physical strength and mental supremacy count for everything; one to kill, the other to command. In the kingdom of which Jesus is founder, sovereign and prime minister, the cross and the cradle are its centre. Since the cradle rocks between cross and throne, and infancy is the ward of the angels of the presence, disciples, teachers, apostles must return to childhood of heart before they can carry the lambs in their bosom. Vaulting ambition—the active principle of worldliness—having fixed its gaze on human glory, ignores or despises confiding infancy, whether born *in* the kingdom of heaven or born *into* it by the return of the soul in sorrow and submission. How can the broken heart or the nursling of angels have a chance of knowing and loving Jesus, if His servants and ambassadors cannot renounce the hungers of sense and mind that cause them to stumble, cannot be lowly without stooping, and breathe native air when they have tears to dry, feet to wash, and wounds to heal?

In the outbreak of ambition and vain glory amongst His disciples, Jesus foresees the tokens of bitter dispute and vindictive passion threatening the home life of the yet unfounded *ecclesia*. And for the conduct of the *ecclesia's* home life, He proceeds in our parable to deliver the *ecclesia's* home laws. By the *ecclesia*, or the congregation of believers, is here meant the visible shell of which the kingdom of heaven

Christ's Vision of the Kingdom of Heaven

is the invisible kernel; which for its centre has the real presence of the living Christ, and meets in the merit and security of His name. Our conception of the *ecclesia*, or our failure to recognize its presence, must determine our interpretation of the parable. At this point interpretation has too frequently lost its way. By general consent the parable of the unfor- giving servant is our Lord's reply to Peter's question, "How oft shall my brother sin against me and I forgive him; until seven times?" But it is forgotten that Jesus answers Peter's question before He utters the parable: "I say not unto thee, until seven times, but until seventy times seven." Peter's difficulty had reference to a personal application of Christ's teaching on the treatment of offences between members of the *ecclesia*. And whilst in Christ's answer Peter's perplexity receives unsymbolic and unexpected solution, the whole question of forgiveness, both on the Divine and the human side, is carried into the more complex life of the coming *ecclesia* whose Lord and Head, though present, would be silent and invisible.

As the discourse introducing our parable has a prophetic outlook, so has the parable itself. The *ecclesia* awaited the Divine Builder to found its edifice on the rock newly revealed to Peter's inspired eye—the Christ the Son of the living God. The Lord in the midst of two or three met in His name, could have fulfilment after the resurrection only, when had come the era of the *ecclesia's* life in its invisible Head. In that era the parable finds its allusions and its interpretation. Whilst the law of forgiveness between disciples was quite as binding when Jesus spoke as after His resurrection, the situations are essentially different; and the parable anticipates a time when the Speaker would, as a visible Presence, have vanished from the scene.

Under the common method of treatment, the "fellow servants" (ver. 31) are left unaccounted for and uninter- preted. They indeed receive an oblique glance as "the praying people of God, who plead with Him against the oppression and tyranny in the world"²; as "introduced for the sake of pictorialness"³; as "the common conscience and moral sense."³ "Such a monstrous disregard of equity

¹ Alford. ² Edersheim. ³ Professor W. F. Slater, *The Century Bible*.

The Unmerciful Servant

and compassion cannot remain secret; other Christians will see it.”² “There will be as many witnesses against us before God as there are men now living with us.”² “Even those who might themselves be guilty of such conduct would readily condemn it in others, and hence the fellow-servants of the two who stand in the relation of debtor and creditor, are fitly represented as interesting themselves in the case, and reporting it to the common lord, in a spirit of compassion towards the sufferer. Their sympathies are aroused simply by the spectacle of excessive severity, without reference to the glaring inconsistency of the wrongdoer, of which they are not supposed to be aware.”³

These opinions—a few of many on similar lines—where their meaning is definite, suggest the world as the scene of action. From their indication no one would infer that the “fellow servants” might be the *ecclesia* before which the offence was brought, and that their sorrow or anger, or both combined, expressed the pulse-throb of the infinite and invisible heart in their midst; and that when they carried the case before the king, it was the united *ecclesia* prostrate in prayer. The fellow-servants constitute the core of our parable, inasmuch as the glorified Christ is in their midst; and in them are fulfilled the Saviour’s will and ideal. Their living unity, their sorrow over an unforgiving member, their agreement to bring in prayer the offender and the offended before the mercy seat, carry the disciples forward into the inner life, and show the laws of the heavenly household in operation during the golden age of the *ecclesia*.

The golden age was the spiritual age, while the promise, “Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst,” was the *ecclesia*’s definition and charter. To assemble in the name of Christ, referred to that name after it had been nailed to the cross and uttered from heaven over Saul on the way to Damascus; the name on which Peter drew for the healing of the lame man at the gate of the temple. To be in Christ’s name was to live within Him, having for horizon all that He had revealed of Himself; to live in His faith, His Spirit and His life. Communion, a fundamental attribute of the *ecclesia*, could not find realization

¹ Luther.

² Calvin.

³ Professor A. B. Bruce.

Christ's Vision of the Kingdom of Heaven

with fewer than two. Therefore, two or three are named as the smallest number which through the presence of Christ can constitute an *ecclesia*. But wherever and whenever even these meet in Christ's name, with Christ in their midst and in their hearts, there is an *ecclesia*—a congregation of believers. The real presence of the living Saviour is wholly unconnected with sacred places, sacred times and sacred orders. Jesus would be in the midst when apostles were still members of the *ecclesia* and when they had ceased to be members; but He could not be in the midst of the congregation, great or small, that no longer met in His name. The words, "Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them," are "a generalization of the term *ecclesia*, and the powers conferred on it, which renders it independent of particular forms of government or ceremonies, and establishes at once a canon against pseudo-catholicism in all its forms."¹

What then were the powers conferred by Christ on the *ecclesia*? These: "Verily I say unto you, what things soever ye shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven; and what things soever ye shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven. Again I say unto you, that if two of you shall agree on earth as touching anything that they shall ask, it shall be done for them of my Father who is in heaven."²

Thus the powers promised to Peter (xvi. 19) are to be conferred upon the *ecclesia* which will temporarily number the apostles amongst its members; the building of which was yet in the future. The rock on which the edifice should rise has been laid bare in Peter's confession, in the revelation of Christ as the Son of the living God; in the revelation that came not through flesh and blood, but from the Father in heaven; which blessed Peter in the apprehension of the Son of God behind the veil of flesh; blessed him not because the church would or could be built on one of its members, but because he had been enabled to explore and discover the Rock of Ages whereon its foundation stones were ordained to rest. This was the congregation, the *ecclesia*, that the gates of hades should not prevail against. Jesus foresaw the foundation stones laid on the blood-stained Rock of Ages, the

¹ Alford.

² Matt. xviii. 18, 19.

The Unmerciful Servant

edifice slowly and sublimely rising throughout all generations and under all stars ; saw it after the siege of death, the living, immortal temple-city of God.

It was the *ecclesia* or congregation of the forgiven, which the obdurate offender in cases of discipline was to hear. To it was entrusted the keys of the kingdom of heaven. I have termed the *ecclesia* a "congregation of the forgiven" ; this was its Divine ideal, an ideal that Paul grasped with masculine tenacity, notwithstanding his experience of Galatia and Corinth. And if the *ecclesia* was ideally holy, it was also ideally inspired. Pentecost gave nothing to the apostles that it withheld from the disciples. And further, whilst the believing congregation was the temple of the Holy Ghost, it was the body of Christ, in which He entered on a life of wider incarnation and self-revelation. We can understand, then, why such a body, or why Peter a member of such a body, should be entrusted with the keys of the kingdom of heaven, for the kingdom of heaven, as here conceived by Jesus, has its location on earth, the ideal congregation being its announcement to the eye and ear of history.

The power of admission to or exclusion from the kingdom of heaven on earth, set forth under the symbol of the keys, was admission to or exclusion from the *ecclesia*, the visible expression of that kingdom. The signification of the key is obvious. A key is used for opening and shutting ; and for opening and shutting the equivalent terms are binding and loosing. With the ideas of opening and shutting the Rabbinic teaching had imbued the Jewish mind. When Jesus therefore withdrew the terms from their old connections and applied them to the kingdom of heaven, He raised no misapprehension in the disciple mind. The disciples had heard Him utter, " Woe unto you lawyers, for ye took away the key of knowledge ; ye entered not in yourselves, and them that were entering in ye hindered."¹ " Woe unto you scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites ! because ye shut the kingdom of heaven against men : for ye enter not in yourselves, neither suffer ye them that are entering in to enter."²

It was thus in the old economy's decline ; and when the new order came, Scribe and Pharisee blocked the door by

¹ Luke xi. 52.

² Matt. xxiii. 13.

Christ's Vision of the Kingdom of Heaven

social influence and official antagonism. The key-bearers having abused their trust, the kingdom and the keys were taken from them, and the apostles, nay, the whole *ecclesia* invested with the powers of opening and shutting.

This office was two-fold :

1. Authority to preach the gospel ;
2. Authority to administer discipline in the congregation.

First, the key-power of preaching. On the day of Pentecost the door of faith was opened through Peter's preaching ; and in the house of Cornelius was the door of salvation opened by the same apostle proclaiming Christ as the Saviour of the world. When Paul and Barnabas, having accomplished their mission, returned to Antioch and met the church there, they rehearsed all that God had done by them, and " how he had opened the door of faith to the Gentiles."¹

Second, the key-power of discipline in the congregation. Here is the law of discipline in the kingdom of heaven as laid down by Jesus Christ : " If thy brother sin against thee, go, show him his fault between thee and him alone : if he hear thee thou hast gained thy brother. But if he hear thee not, take with thee one or two more, that at the mouth of two witnesses or three every word may be established. And if he refuse to hear them, tell it unto the *ecclesia* (the congregation) : and if he refuse to hear the *ecclesia* (the congregation) also, let him be unto thee as the Gentile and the publican."² " The *ecclesia* here is the assemblage of the whole believers in one place, to which assembly the separated person belonged as a member."³

It is in immediate connection with the congregation's exercise of discipline that Christ declares, " Verily I say unto you, what things soever ye shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven : and what things soever ye shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven "⁴ ; and as offences between brethren are the subject, binding and loosing can refer only to forgiving or refusing to forgive the offending brother. It is sin between man and man that is here meant, and not sin between man and God. If the offender heard, if he opened his soul's ear to the overture of love and grief, if conscience

¹ Acts xiv. 27.

² Matt. xviii. 15, 16, 17.

³ Olshausen.

⁴ Matt. xviii. 18.

The Unmerciful Servant

in robes of mourning took the judge's seat, love in the offended breast put his transgression behind its back ; but God, who had given the contrite heart on which the offended brother or the congregation based forgiveness, had been beforehand with pardon. Pardon lies at the foot of the cross, awaiting acceptance. But as Divine pardon flows through a channel of sacrifice, and as its acceptance carries justification in its train, it belongs, and can belong, to God alone. Since all sin ultimately wrongs the holiness of the eternal nature, treatment of unremitted sin, remedial or punitive, remains with God ; and with Him remains expulsion of sin from the sinner's being. When, therefore, the risen Saviour declares, " whose soever sins ye forgive, they are forgiven unto them ; whose soever sins ye retain, they are retained," He cannot mean that the apostles had power either to separate between sin and the sinner, or to fix the sin permanent and indelible in the soul. In forgiving or retaining, they had no share in the Divine prerogative ; but, being gifted with the power of discerning spirits, they could declare when the conditions of forgiveness were present or absent.

Our parable, as we have seen, contemplates the time when the Speaker would have disappeared from the head of His followers, when the *ecclesia* would carry in prayer its sorrows and perplexities before the Father in heaven. Whilst the vessel of the heavenly state would not have dropped her Pilot, her star would henceforth be in heaven. Jesus, opening a window on futurity, reveals the inmost life of the kingdom of heaven under the guise of a royal household, composed of the king and his servants. The manner in which the kingdom expands, the king at work, creating subjects and administering law ; the results of the Holy Spirit's work, calling sinners to reckon with God through the ministry of the *ecclesia* and the agency of events ; the triumph of grace over law ; the infinite depths of Divine compassion ; the possibility and the necessity of the Christian's conformity to God as lover and forgiver ; the *ecclesia* pouring out its wounded heart before the mercy-seat because a fellow-member, who like each and all had entered by the door of forgiveness, refused to forgive his brother ; the *ecclesia* leaving the offender to God, when the law that had ebbed out, making way for the

Christ's Vision of the Kingdom of Heaven

inflow of grace, sets in again—these constitute the inner economy of the kingdom of heaven.

Jesus had said, "On this rock will I build my *ecclesia*"¹ (congregation); and now looking through the parabolic window into the approaching era of the Spirit, we obtain a view of the building in process. The king is the earthly semblance of the Heavenly Father; the servants, as we saw, compose the *ecclesia* in its visible totality, and therefore in each of its sections. Perhaps, indeed, we are looking into the mother congregation of Jerusalem. This interpretation would fix and determine the application of the Saviour's previous words, "Whoso shall receive one such little child in my name receiveth me," when the burning question of the reception of the Gentiles arose. The little ones were of two classes, Gentiles or excommunicated Jews "which believe in me," and infants which the Divine Builder sets in the fabric of the *ecclesia*. If the full significance of this parable dawned on the minds of Jesus' apostles that day in Capernaum, they might well have asked themselves, "Is our despised peasant company to be the household of this invisible king?"

The king's reckoning with his servants began with Pentecost and will continue as long as the gospel is preached and believed. At this point the parabolic detail does not follow the essential facts; the king's servants are represented as having been servants previous to the reckoning; whereas in the doctrinal and spiritual application, sinners become servants of God only when they appear before Him for settlement. Had the parable adhered to the order of the facts, it would have assumed a form like this: A certain king whose subjects were all deep in debt to the crown, on appointing servants to his household and government, held a reckoning with each in order to discover the amount of indebtedness, and, on the proof and admission of insolvency, forgave the debt. While reckoning, a debtor was brought to him who owed £2,000,000. But as human affairs afford no parallel, and as reckoning between monarch and servant is essential to the parabolic design, the king is represented as calling to account those *already in his service*.

¹ Matt. xvi. 18.

The Unmerciful Servant

II

1. The debtor arraigned before his kingly creditor: "When he had begun to reckon, one was brought unto him which owed him ten thousand talents." The debtor arraigned, examined and condemned singly, powerfully displays the Divine method of dealing individually with sinners. This man came into the royal presence alone. Not one of a group, but in the isolation of individuality, he stands before his Creator. He and not another passes under the searchlight; he is the book, opened and read, page by page; his service as satrap or provincial governor unrolls before his eyes; that debt, rising endless, immense, ruinous, between his king and him, is all his own. Wherever he goes throughout his sovereign's realm, it flings the blackness of doom around him. Does the interpreter remind us that the words, "One was brought unto him," imply reluctance to meet the king? Assuredly. Since the beginning, has not the debtor dreaded and shunned his creditor as death? What prodigal ever left the far country till compelled by the exigence of famine?

But the agents of the throne run us to earth and bring us to reckoning. The agents in the parable as in life elude our sight. They are amongst the anonymous servants of God, who bequeath their poem or their pyramid unsigned. They may be mother, sister, wife; they may be God's detectives, members of His secret service, wearing the livery of sickness, plague and fever; of bereavement, suffering and betrayal by relative or friend. This secret service would be aimless and heartless in the absence of man; and even in his presence, if man were an animal nature only; but when beneath its disguise he is discovered to be soul and spirit and conscience—a fugitive, a debtor to the eternal crown, then the detective forces pursuing and arresting man have a profound significance. The laws may indeed be "natural," their purpose is *moral*. To Dives, surprised in his carousals, they may appear an aimless clash of lawless energy; Lazarus at his gate knows better. The unraised siege investing man, remains the riddle of history until we discern man's existence stretching into a future state, and his nature—a moral nature—under an economy of reclaiming and uplifting grace.

Christ's Vision of the Kingdom of Heaven

All that was intended by bringing the debtor before his august Creditor, the apostles who heard the parable spoken could not have fully realized. Their own experience could not have supplied illustration and confirmation. The explanation came with Pentecost, when the Holy Spirit became leader of the arraiguing service. That day supplied the interpretation on a great scale ; hosts of debtors summoned and convicted in conscience met the Divine Creditor.

2. The stupendous debt : " One was brought unto him which owed ten thousand talents," computed at over £2,000,000. Some great servant of the state, combining exalted rank and boundless trust—some imperial chancellor supplied the original of this great debtor. Viewed on the secular side, we must assume a wide field of time on which to rear such an edifice of debt ; viceroy or governor, he was no longer young, and from the spiritual point of view, it was a grey head that bent convicted and penitent upon his royal master's feet. Peculation, gambling, speculation like incessant snow on Alpine summits, added layer upon layer to the high-poised avalanche.

The immeasurable debt, stretching as far towards infinity as the human mind can follow, renders into earthly numbers the magnitude of a single soul's sin. Whilst in human affairs it required a servant highly placed to fall into an abyss of debt so deep, when we regard the debt as another name for sin, any man may be the debtor. The servant is not selected as an exception to other bankrupts whose creditor is God, but as an example of his class. It is not indicated that as a sinner he was original and exceptional in his sinning. Supposing that in bad eminence he excelled others, yet from his sin we can argue to the sin of the world that lay upon the Lamb of God. We are here asked to survey a sinner's guilt from the Divine point of view. The record inscribed on the soul, or on the eternal mind, or on both, is traced by an unerring hand ; computed by Divine arithmetic. The values of separate sins, the aggregate of evil, are set down without exaggeration and without extenuation. When the sin of man against his brother, however heinous, is placed beside his guilt against God, it is less than a hillock in the shadow of the Andes.

The Unmerciful Servant

Were this a subjective view—were it the convicted conscience estimating its own guilt, we might allow margin for exaggeration arising from self-accusation ; when the black guilt-cloud is seen against the white field of Divine holiness. But since the account is drawn by the hand of eternal law, our age, that has made sin a harmless quantity, too insignificant to empty a throne in heaven, had better ponder the teaching of Jesus on this momentous subject. This man's affairs, in the language of the exchange, would find expression thus : Debt, £2,000,000 ; Assets, nothing : "he had not wherewith to pay." To this posture must the sinner come, before he will submit to the intervention of Divine mercy. The admission of the debt is clearly implied, and hence, " according to the Law of Moses, and the universal code of antiquity, that servant, with his family and all his property, was ordered to be sold." This feature of our parable appears to some as scaffolding, and not part of the fabric. But in its absence we may ask, Where could we find the parabolic equivalent of the law, which in the crisis when the convicted sinner faces God, plays a part second only to mercy ?

3. The decree of justice : " Forasmuch as he had not wherewith to pay, his lord commanded him to be sold, and his wife and children." Guilt has been brought home to the criminal. Paul, relating this moment of experience, declares, " When the commandment came, sin revived and I died." The sale of wife and children and payment of the price into the royal treasury should not be pursued into detail. Nothing more and nothing less should be seen in the allusion to a well-known custom, than violated law arising in vindication of its justice.

4. The appeal from justice to mercy. Whatever may have been the depth or sincerity of the debtor's repentance, the finding of the law drives him over to the ground of mercy : " The servant therefore fell down and worshipped him saying, Lord, have patience with me, and I will pay thee all." The word " therefore," inasmuch as it introduces an appeal to compassion, is meaningless unless the sentence of sale and payment signifies justice without mercy. Let the heart that has been summoned to spread its pages in the light of God's

† Edersheim.

Christ's Vision of the Kingdom of Heaven

face consult its records ; it will find the amazing debt, the sentence, the deep sink of the undone sinner, the appeal to Divine mercy, inscribed there.

The debtor's plea for time and his promise of full payment have been understood (1) as words framed to fit human circumstance, and having as their spiritual equivalent the invocation of mercy. The extent and direction of their meaning are modified and fixed by the second debtor's supplication, expressed in almost identical terms. Here, as man addresses man, and brother brother, the entreaty, "Have patience with me and I will pay thee," can only mean forgiveness. With this interpretation agrees the meaning affixed by the king to the great debtor's prayer : who, "being moved with compassion, released him, and forgave him the debt . . . I forgave thee all that debt because thou besoughtest me." The king saw in the debtor's prayer an appeal to mercy.

(2) The great debtor's plea and promise have been taken to indicate an imperfectly enlightened sinner, who has neither sounded his own helplessness nor the mercy of God ; who dreams of innate resources and possibilities of payment. Amongst its advocates this view numbers the great name of Luther. And doubtless it unmaskes the unconscious legalism, the imaginary reserve fund on which awakened souls rely. At a certain stage all convicted sinners in substance pray the debtor's prayer ; after which comes the publican's cry, "God be merciful to me the sinner" ; and although not recorded here, to this latter prayer must the debtor have been brought as the prelude and condition of forgiveness. In that case, the king refers not to the debtor's first, but to his second and unrecorded supplication. The human setting of the petition lends itself to Luther's view which has its disproof in the consideration that, in secular circumstances, debtors may promise repayment, but cannot crave remission.

4. The triumph of mercy : "The lord of that servant being moved with compassion, released him and forgave him the debt." Compassion began to move the human king when he saw the bankrupt prostrate and ruined at his feet. Before the eye of memory rose the servant of the past, great in station, in wealth and authority. How is the mighty fallen !

The Unmerciful Servant

As if in upper air dislocation had seized the eagle's pinion, hurling him headlong on the great waters.

In the breast of the heavenly King, whom the earthly symbolizes, compassion has been moving eternally; and I think forgiveness has been as old as compassion: "God was in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself, not reckoning unto them their trespasses." But as God was in Christ forgiving, so the sinner is in Christ forgiven.

Here two points require clear and unhesitating statement: (1) The reality of the king's forgiveness, and therefore the reality of Divine pardon of which it is the type. This thought receives the emphasis of iteration: "being moved with compassion, he released him and forgave him the debt." Then when the king upbraids the unforgiving debtor he reverts to the act of forgiveness as to a fact within their mutual knowledge; "I forgave thee all that debt because thou besoughtest me." (2) The Divine aim of the parable requires us to recognize the genuineness of the debtor's penitence and supplication; "I forgave thee all that debt because thou besoughtest me." The imploring debtor prevails as effectually as the imploring publican. One went down to his house justified; the other left the mercy-seat disburthened of "all that debt."

We have reached a point on which interpreters with almost one consent have followed a groundless exegesis. Their mistake consists in connecting in immediate sequence verses 27 and 28. Because they lie side by side, and seem to report events of the same hour, no interval is allowed in exposition, between the debtor's pardon by the king, and his meeting with his offending brother. The two acts are thus jostled out of perspective; like two peaks that owing to the spectator's standpoint appear as one, whilst an estuary flows between. The gravity of the error is proved by its inevitable consequences. In the first place, it leads the interpreter to reduce the action of the king in forgiving, and the debtor in receiving forgiveness, to a conspiracy of delusion. The king's pardon, which the Divine Speaker not only affirms, but traces to its source in the depths of compassion, is denied. In the second place, it contradicts experience. No man who had seen that

¹ 2 Cor. v. 19.

Christ's Vision of the Kingdom of Heaven

immense debt spread in the light of God's face, and then seen the expunging crimson of Calvary overflow it, could have gone out from the terror and the gladness of the mercy seat with unforgiving rancour in his breast.

When we adjust the perspective, it becomes obvious that the two events, although seemingly near in point of time, are set side by side for the sake of contrast, and must be wide apart in actual life. The debtor had gone out from that awful interview with the king. The vast debt and the vaster mercy that cancelled it had, like a mountain lessening by distance, ceased to dominate his life. The emotions of terror and gratitude sank from flood to neap tide. He went out, but still more, he went down from the presence of his Lord; went down into the arena of commerce and government; tasted the cup of popularity; lived on his spiritual capital; and fixed ambition's gaze on the goal of spoils and honour; and the frozen globe of the world swung in between him and his better self. Religion, once essential, became ornamental, a concession to his earlier self and Christian opinion, and worn as lightly as his crest.

A fellow member of the *ecclesia* had wronged him in the proportion of a hundred pence to his own debt of ten thousand talents. The offence was real, single, not composed of many acts, like the unforgiving debtor's own. It touched him on the quick; left a wound that rankled and festered in the dark. It might have been scandal or slander; and perhaps it stung the debtor's pride by wounding him through his wife or child; or raised suspicion among the members of the *ecclesia* regarding his veracity or honesty. Its sting was likely in its publicity, having been uttered before the assembled *ecclesia*, or published from the house-top of the community. There are sins between man and man that wound not because of their greatness but because of their *poison*. Like the prick of an unclean needle or the scratch of the weasel's tooth, they produce blood-poisoning of the entire moral system. What honest man has not experienced resurrection of the old resentment, the old stab of pain in the old wound, on meeting him who caused it? Of the various causes contributory to the forgiven servant's declension, a nursed and cherished bitterness may have outweighed them all. It would alienate his heart

The Unmerciful Servant

from the community, the comradeship and life of the household of faith; it would sap the foundations of trust; and still more if the offender was held in honour by the local *ecclesia*.

"But that servant went out and found one of his fellow servants, which owed him a hundred pence: and he laid hold on him, and took him by the throat, saying, Pay what thou owest. So his fellow servant fell down and besought him, saying, Have patience with me and I will pay thee. And he would not; but went and cast him into prison, till he should pay that which was due" (28, 29, 30). These and verses 25, 34, we must strip down to the residuum of spiritual truth which they conceal. The parable is simply nature abbreviated; and proceeds on the principle that all things in heaven have their duplication on earth; and that all attributes of God have equivalents in man. The forgiven debtor seizing his brother by the throat, and thrusting him into prison, changed from earthly coinage into the currency of the kingdom of heaven, signifies the plunge from the high level of mercy to the low level of law. It is the refusal to forgive; the denial and defiance of the law of forgiveness. It means that the offended held the offence before his eyes, between him and his fellow member; that it sank into memory and settled down in the depths of his heart. Then the offence shifted its place, and from a wrong against *him*, became his sin against God. The cherished wrong darkened into an evil possession, and cursed the host that gave it entertainment. His rage seethed, his tongue defamed, and his brain continued in the night watches to plan the offender's ruin. The darkest deep in his fall was sounded when his hate rushed forth in a policy of revenge. The parable warrants, and perhaps requires us to say, that if he did not actually do what is metaphorically ascribed to him, he enacted it in his heart and only wished that he were God.

In the words "His fellow servant fell down and besought him, saying, Have patience with me and I will pay thee," we must read beneath the figurative presentation, the man's acknowledgment of his fault and his appeal to compassion. The offending brother heard the charge of the offended; expressed contrition, sorrow, repentance. This according

Christ's Vision of the Kingdom of Heaven

to Christ's teaching (v. 15) obviated the necessity of calling in witnesses or of carrying the case before the *ecclesia*. Here the offence might have received decent burial; none knowing its grave but God and the two Church members. "And he would not, but went and cast him into prison, till he should pay that which was due." He is the true Shylock, and must have his pound of flesh: a Shylock in the Christian *ecclesia*.

Here we gain the key to two vital points of our parable: (1) The impression produced upon the *ecclesia*, and the step it took. (2) The wrath of the king and the severity of the sentence imposed.

First, the effect on the *ecclesia*. "When his fellow-servants saw what was done, they were exceeding sorry, and came and told unto their lord all that was done." Owing to the repentance and confession of the offending servant the wrong could not have been brought before the *ecclesia* in its deliberative capacity. Yet the *ecclesia* knew and felt what was done. As a living organism it felt the paralysis of any one of its members. The unforgiving servant had made his wrath and resentment felt. If the offender had been in his employment, he would dismiss him. If a master wanting clerk or butler appeared, the circulation and exaggeration of the offence would close the door.

We have here a meeting of the *ecclesia* as it disclosed itself to the prophetic eye of our Lord. The spirit of discipline is assumed. The offence between the two members, confession of wrong on one side and the refusal of forgiveness on the other, had come before the *ecclesia* in its family capacity. We know the heart of the *ecclesia*, how it bleeds and grieves: for that heart is Christ: "There am I in the midst." The *ecclesia* gathers in the name, in the spirit, in the presence of its invisible Lord. The great sorrow is the refusal of a forgiven sinner to forgive one who has trespassed against him. They look up to the glorious height of Christ's seventy times seven, to Peter's low level of seven times, to the Rabbis' three times; but having failed to reach the lowest standard, having refused even *once* to forgive his brother, this forgiven man has stepped out of the fellowship, out of the kingdom of heaven; for in his breast he has slain love, the law of that kingdom. In sorrowing agreement, as if each member had left in his home

The Unmerciful Servant

one dead, "They came and told unto their lord all that was done." The whole *ecclesia*, with Jesus in the midst, fell in sorrowing supplication around the feet of their heavenly King, with Whom they left His unforgiving servant.

2. The sentence, "And his lord was wroth and delivered him to the tormentors, till he should pay all that was due." The first and the last meeting between the forgiving monarch and his unforgiving servant present a striking contrast. The first enters into reckoning, the second drops the figure, and grounds conviction on want of mercy: "Shouldest not thou also have mercy on thy fellow-servant, even as I had mercy on thee?" In the first, wife and children are commanded to be sold; in the second the criminal is delivered to the torturing jailers. In the first there was supplication, followed by pardon; here there is entreaty, but compassion is replaced by wrath and the upbraiding name, "wicked servant." In both instances that servant is summoned into the royal presence; and here perhaps deepens the contrast between the two interviews. The first messengers were ministers of grace; but if we are to understand not expulsion from the *ecclesia* only, but the awful hint of punishment beyond this life, the last messenger was—death: "His lord called him unto him."

The *ecclesia* would sever the unforgiving member from its fellowship, but the thirty-fourth verse seems too dark and stern for the shadow of temporal punishment. A scabbard, it conceals a sword; whether to separate between the soul and sin, or between the sinner and his God might have remained doubtful, but for the Divine Speaker's words of interpretation and application: "So shall also my heavenly Father do unto you, if ye forgive not every one his brother from your hearts." We must see in the warning a menace of punishment surpassing in duration and severity all penal discipline in this life.

In conclusion, we must not overlook two points: First, that the king who condemned the merciless servant to the tormentors for failing to forgive his brother a debt of one hundred pence, had forgiven the colossal debt of ten thousand talents against himself. Some indeed affirm that the servant "has not been forgiven; he has only been respited. He has

Christ's Vision of the Kingdom of Heaven

not been converted, he has only been frightened."¹ This opinion sets at nought the three-fold assertion of the royal pardon, not simply affirmed, but traced up to its source in compassion. "The lord of that servant, being moved with compassion, released him and forgave him the debt. . . . Thou wicked servant, *I forgave thee all that debt*, because thou besoughtest me ; shouldst not thou also have had mercy on thy fellow-servant, even as *I had mercy on thee ?*" Indeed, the fact of the king's forgiveness is the parable's centre of gravity ; and the lack of forgiveness in the forgiven is the cause and the only cause of Divine anger. Who would expect an unforgiven sinner to forgive sin committed against himself ? There is no hint in the New Testament that unforgiven men will or can be forgivers. Jesus never demands the impossible. Our parable assumes that the *ideal ecclesia was composed of the forgiven* ; that the door by which they entered was the door of forgiveness. What warning or example for the apostles, who were pardoned sinners, could the conduct of an unconverted, unforgiven man have possessed ? As there could have been no analogy in circumstance and character, the words, "So shall also my heavenly Father do unto you," could have no application. How could the punishment inflicted on an unforgiven man, measure the penalty or the guilt of an apostle who refused to forgive his brother apostle ? The parable points to the conclusion that an unforgiving spirit may return and take possession of the forgiven heart ; and that the unforgiving spirit cannot enter the kingdom of heaven here, or the kingdom of glory hereafter.

Secondly, eager to safeguard "final perseverance," some writers have felt compelled to empty of their meaning all the words affirming forgiveness by the king. "That word of the king, 'I forgave thee,' was not a discharge," they contend. They remind us that a "specific dogma," such as a forgiven servant, punished for not forgiving, could only be entertained by those who fail to interpret parables in general, and this parable in particular, by what is, "elsewhere clearly taught." Here, "elsewhere" can only mean Divine, unparabolic teaching, lying outside the parable under consideration. Let us then listen to what is "elsewhere clearly

¹ Arnot.

The Unmerciful Servant

taught," regarding the sternly awful significance of the present parable. The words are naked as a drawn sword ; no more a part of the parable than the lighthouse is a part of the sea. While the apostles held their breath, while the clang of the closing prison doors shot along each fibre of their frame, Jesus, fixing His eyes upon the twelve, said, "*So shall also my heavenly Father do unto you, if ye forgive not every one his brother from your hearts.*"

(1) These momentous, doom-laden words imply that there is a close and real analogy between the condition of the forgiven debtor and the apostles. But wherein lies the analogy, if not in the fact that they are alike the recipients of Divine pardon ?

(2) The warning distinctly declares that what the king had done to his servant should be done to them, if like him they failed to forgive their brother.

(3) Jesus holds before the apostles the possibility of the unforgiving heart becoming theirs ; and bringing down even upon them the anger and judgment of God.

VII

THE TWO DEBTORS

"A certain lender had two debtors : the one owed five hundred pence, and the other fifty. When they had not wherewith to pay, he forgave them both. Which of them therefore will love him most?"

LUKE vii. 41, 42.

THIS parable and the circumstances that called it forth belong to the Galilean period of the Saviour's ministry, when the flowing tide of public favour was yet with him. Nain stood awe-struck round an empty bier, exclaiming, "A great prophet is risen among us; God hath visited his people." Nain or an adjacent town appears to have been the scene of the anointing by a nameless woman. Simon the Pharisee and the woman with the alabaster cruse of ointment were, it seems, citizens of the same city. They also breathed the air of the place and the season when the blind received their sight, the lame walked, the lepers were cleansed, and the deaf heard, the dead were raised up, and the poor had good tidings preached to them. The signs that a great prophet had arisen in Israel would act diversely on Simon the Pharisee, and on the notorious sinner. He, as one who scanned the horizon for the appearing of the theocratic Messiah to restore the kingdom and to assemble in their fatherland the dispersed thousands of Israel, would desire to study the far-famed wonder-worker at close quarters, remote from the exaggeration and credulity of the common people. In her, the revelation of holiness, of compassion and power, caused a profound reaction of soul, and awakened the hope and faith of salvation. A hunger to be near infinite mercy and humanity and to pour forth the gratitude and sorrow of her soul on the feet of the Messenger who published good tidings, whose call to the feast of hope and forgiveness had found even her, constrained the "sinner" to seek the Pharisee's house.

¹ Luke vii. 16.

The Two Debtors

Owing to the ease with which persons might enter a house where a banquet was held, there may have been more than one uninvited visitor ; and even the woman of the city might, as a spectator, have come and gone unchallenged. It was what she did that drew upon the intruder the eye of criticism and of history. Simon's austere righteousness she knew ; the icy atmosphere enclosing a company of Pharisees she felt and ignored. Her eyes were too dim with weeping to read surprise or frown. Hers was a soul diseased and smitten ; and Simon's roof covered the Prophet who had wrought the resurrection of her soul, long dead, to deep repentance and great love. But He had done more. The assurance of forgiveness may not already have been hers ; but the evidences of pardon were all present : " Her sins, which were many, have been forgiven." Her deeds of love and grief which found a historian in Christ himself—" She hath wetted my feet with her tears, and wiped them with her hair ; she, since the time I came in, hath not ceased to kiss my feet ; she hath anointed my feet with ointment "—were transacted in heart and will before she entered Simon's house.

An hour of reality when God and the human soul come into unveiled contact, confounds and offends the world ; and so Simon, a son of the conventional and the traditional, took offence when the sinner, newly come to herself, wept upon and anointed the feet of the Friend of sinners. The time had not yet arrived when Pharisaism could openly proclaim its hostility to Jesus Christ. Simon's attitude was that of a man awaiting events. He could invite the Galilean Rabbi to his table without the least compromise of orthodoxy. Between host and disciple there was a wide difference. Swayed perhaps by complex motives, he withheld all honour and even courtesy from his Guest : " Thou gavest me no water for my feet ; thou gavest me no kiss ; my head with oil thou didst not anoint." Christ's rebuke would have lost its point if other guests had had room to make a similar complaint. From which we may safely infer that the discovery of what appeared to destroy Christ's claim to prophetic rank, caused to Simon more satisfaction than disappointment. In his exclusive righteousness he might resent the woman's intrusion ; but then she had solved a burning question ; the moment Jesus

Christ's Vision of the Kingdom of Heaven

permitted her touch and accepted her devotion, the mantle of the prophet fell from His shoulders. The scene that conferred immortality on Simon's feast, transforming it into a banquet in the kingdom of heaven, has all the throb and colour of a picture painted by an eye-witness. "A woman which was in the city, a sinner," having probably entered the hall with the assembling guests, "brought an alabaster flask of ointment, and standing behind at his feet, weeping, she began to wet his feet with her tears, and wiped them with the hair of her head, and kissed his feet, and anointed them with the ointment."¹

There are moments in history which only at the touch of imagination live again; and the scene in Simon's house is one of them. How helpful to divine truth might art have been, if, instead of multiplying anæmic saints and impossible Madonnas, the artist had aspired to embody the interior of vital situations and circumstances. Even genius cannot restore the forms and faces of vanished men; but listening to the human voice within, it may say what human nature would do in given circumstances. We do not ask that art should hold its lamp over the reclining Saviour and the sobbing penitent only; we desire to see Simon's darkening brow betraying his unuttered thought, the cold glitter of the eye turned to Jesus and the sinner, the expression of self-adulation that seemed to say, My denial of prophetic honours to this man is fully justified; Nain and the region round about ring with the cry, "A great prophet is arisen among us"; but a prophet would have perceived who and what manner of woman this is which toucheth him.

If to read unspoken thought and the state of heart whence it sprang was the sign of a prophet, Simon had not long to wait for proof that to Jesus the heart had no secrets. And he himself was the first to give up his secret to the heart-reading eye. How suddenly his aspect must have changed when he found Jesus' eye fixed upon him and heard his name. Remembering his place as host, Simon had refrained from giving utterance to his mental estimate of his tear-bedewed and anointed Guest; not perhaps that he was much concerned to hide from Christ the conclusion at which he had

¹ Luke vii. 37, 38.

The Two Debtors

arrived concerning Him. But it was something widely different to discover that the secret chambers of his being stood open, and to hear what Christ saw in, and thought of him. Doubtless look and tone, as well as words, announced that his unspoken heart was known: "Simon, I have somewhat to say unto thee." It was a moment of straining ears and quickened pulses; a moment when the couch of the Galilean Prophet became the mercy seat; when the silent Guest, the centre of interest, the theme of speculation, held up the mirror before Simon's inmost self. "Teacher, speak," was Simon's response. In the designation "teacher" he assigns to Jesus what he regards as his proper place. A prophet to His followers He indeed might be, but not to Simon the Pharisee. Nor to him was Jesus "Master," for that elastic term might imply the recognition of His claim.

"A certain lender had two debtors; the one owed five hundred pence, and the other fifty. When they had not wherewith to pay, he forgave them both. Which of them therefore will love him most? Simon answered and said, He, I suppose, to whom he forgave the most." Simon could discern that the question had a direct reference to himself; the words, "I have somewhat to say to thee," prepared him for that. To the question, however, there was only one answer, and his hesitating admission committed him to the principle that a debtor greatly forgiven will greatly love. "And he said unto him, Thou hast rightly judged."

The history of the two debtors on account of its brevity and simplicity is rather an illustration than a parable. And this fact must be borne in mind in the interpretation. So transparent is its application, that Simon is expected to grasp its point without further consideration. The very transparency of the instance points to the light in which Jesus viewed the Pharisee. The picture is set in the clear, dry light of daily life, leaving no room for the issue, "that seeing they may not see, and hearing they may not understand." There are only three persons in the picture; the lender and the two debtors. It is generally taken for granted that these three had their antitypes in Christ, the woman who anointed Him, and Simon; and doubtless this at first sight

Christ's Vision of the Kingdom of Heaven

seems the natural and only inference. The money-lender's merciful act reflects Divine forgiveness ; in the debtor forgiven five hundred pence, the weeping penitent would easily recognize herself. Was Simon then the debtor who owed fifty pence ? The construction and aim of the parable seem to require an affirmative answer. But this course is not without its difficulty. The debtors in the parable are only distinguished by the amount of their debt and the depth of their gratitude ; both are debtors ; both acknowledge their inability to pay ; both are forgiven ; and both love in accordance with the amount remitted.

The sin of one man may doubtless be as fifty to five hundred ; but do these numbers apply to Simon the Pharisee and the woman whose faith has saved her ? Out of what book is Christ quoting the amount of indebtedness ? Is it from the book of the Divine Creditor, or from the debtor's own calculation ? Is it the aim of the parable to account for the woman's lavish affection by weighing her sin and forgiveness against Simon's sin and forgiveness ? If so, these two points follow : First, the numbers five hundred and fifty must be taken as expressing the relative debts viewed from the Divine standpoint. Second, Simon and the woman must be regarded as both forgiven ; and the forgiver can be no other than Jesus Christ. But forgiveness in the parable, as in its application, implies that the debtor has been reduced to the extremity of having nothing wherewith to pay. We are not free, however, to assume that Simon has owned or felt his spiritual bankruptcy. The thought of his heart proves that his confidence and righteousness are legal ; he expects Christ to shrink from the woman's touch because she is a sinner. In his judgment he and she belong to two infinitely different categories. He might perhaps in a chorus in which the purest earthly saints must join, confess himself a miserable sinner. But if a debtor, his assets were great ; moral bankruptcy in his case was a situation inconceivable. Has he approached the creditor, or heard the law's iron hand smite the door and demand payment ? It is obvious that little forgiveness and little love cannot apply to Simon in the same sense that much forgiveness and much love apply to the "sinner." The woman's debt is great in heaven's sight and in her own. It is

The Two Debtors

forgiven, and she greatly loves. Simon, on the other hand, being a Pharisee, is a righteous man, needing no repentance ; he would have said amen to the Pharisee's prayer in the temple. Christ's words, " thy faith hath saved thee," addressed to the penitent, clearly imply that he himself was the object of that faith ; could it be said of Simon, who doubted even Christ's prophetic rank, that his faith in Christ had saved him ? Simon, then, may be regarded, (1) as, taken on his own ground, having little to forgive, and therefore under little obligation ; (2) as unforgiven and consequently destitute of love ; or, (3) the lesser debtor, instead of representing Simon, may be introduced to illustrate the proposition that great love follows great forgiveness. In that case, Simon, though not one of the supposed debtors, would all the same receive the lesson the parable conveys. He could see why the forgiven sinner poured forth tears, kisses and perfume on the feet of the Forgiver ; and that Jesus thus received the homage of a penitent saved by faith.

It must not, however, be forgotten that the detailed contrast drawn by Christ between the sinner and the Pharisee seems to support the assumption that Simon is the debtor owing fifty pence ; although the conduct of the one suggests a sense of infinite indebtedness ; whilst the conduct of the other betrays no consciousness at all of obligation to Christ. Even here lies the want of agreement between the debtor who owed fifty pence and Simon the Pharisee. The former, although loving little, *actually* loved ; the latter's attitude towards Christ was wholly negative. If love speaks in deeds corresponding to its nature, then he loved not at all.

In the case of two men borrowing respectively five hundred pence and fifty pence, and on proof of inability to pay, having their debt cancelled, there is no difficulty. Both are in debt ; both are insolvent ; and both are released from obligation. The difference between them lies in the sums forgiven and the degrees of gratitude evoked. If we identify Simon with the lesser debtor we must accept his forgiveness in the same sense in which we accept the forgiveness of the woman—the greater debtor. But this course would confound those who enter the kingdom of heaven through Christ with those who abide without on the foundation of legal righteous-

Christ's Vision of the Kingdom of Heaven

ness. We adhere to the conditions and spirit of our parable when we take the two debtors as supposed instances advanced in illustration of the law that sinners greatly forgiven greatly love the forgiver.

This, indeed, is the answer to Simon's unspoken thought. The woman's spiritual standing and acts of homage are the points to be explained and vindicated. Her vindication, however, need not involve Simon's condemnation. "Seest thou this woman?" said Jesus to Simon; "Seest thou this woman?" is the appeal of the parable to the reader; history and time throw the Pharisee into the shade, and prolong the query, "Seest thou this woman?" Jesus indeed holds up Simon's conduct as a foil to that of the sinner: "Turning to the woman, he said unto Simon, Seest thou this woman? I entered into thine house, thou gavest me no water for my feet; but she hath wetted my feet with her tears, and wiped them with her hair. Thou gavest me no kiss; but she, since the time I came in, hath not ceased to kiss my feet. My head with oil thou didst not anoint; but she hath anointed my feet with ointment. Wherefore, I say unto thee, Her sins, which are many, are forgiven; for she loved much; but to whom little is forgiven, the same loveth little."¹

It is best therefore to consider the debtors as both borrowing, as both confessedly unable to pay, and as both forgiven.

The circumstance which affords the types for this parable must have become familiar before it could be thus employed. No more than the tax-gatherer could the money-lender have been held in esteem by the Jewish community. Remission of debt on his part and love on the side of the debtor must have been of rare occurrence. Such an instance, however, was within the range of probability. As heaven, so often the symbol of corruption, physical and spiritual, represents in one of Christ's parables the redemptive energies of the kingdom of heaven, so here, the money-lender, more feared than loved, uplifted from his mercenary level to the sphere of compassion, represents the merciful Saviour of sinners.

Our parable suggests vastly more than it expresses. In thought we follow the debtors to cheerless abodes; the fire

¹ Luke vii. 44-47.

The Two Debtors

has died on the hearth, the table is bare ; their brows are dark and seamed with care. The times have gone against them ; business or farming has not prospered ; and they live in the shadow of the hastening day when they must meet their creditor.

Sin in the Bible appears in various lights ; it is a great distance intervening between the Divine Father and the human child ; an offence ; a breach of Divine law ; a disease ; a crushing load ; here it is a debt. The relation between debtor and creditor, more perhaps than any other human situation, expresses guilty man's position before God. And when the debtor, as in the parable, has not wherewith to pay, the analogy is complete. He is the sinner on whom has flashed God's revealing light ; who awakes confronted with himself, stripped of every disguise. He awakes a blank, a failure, a ruin ; he discovers his real relation to justice, to judgment, to God. Formerly his guilt sat lightly upon him ; he drowned it in the cup or the dance ; in the madness of gambling or the fever of business. He refused to take spiritual stock, to let the light shine through eternal affairs. Now in company with divine law and light he reads the newly-opened records.

The two debtors are types of persons whose eyes have been divinely opened and turned upon themselves ; they have been constrained to face and weigh the question of guilt ; and they have discovered two facts : (1) That they are deep in the debt of sin ; (2) That they are wholly unable to free themselves from its load and doom. We must assume that they have made every effort to earn or borrow ; and that their last thought was to meet their creditor and confess themselves undone. At last meet God they must ; appear in His presence as debtors ; approach Him as Creditor ; fall into His hands ; open their books in the light of His court ; confess their debts and their inability to pay. In what spirit and with what plea can the debtor in his extremity come before God ? Is not he the publican, crying, God be merciful to me the sinner ? Arrested, convicted, emptied, sorrowing, he comes before the Divine Creditor, where he sits in the shadow and glory of the cross.

“ He forgave them both ” ; they came to the lender and

Christ's Vision of the Kingdom of Heaven

found the mercy-seat. Mercy came to the front ; raised the penitents to their feet, and behold they stood on foundations of eternal grace ; she opened the pages of the soul, and across the black record wrote in blood the word FORGIVEN.

The woman's pardon was declared once to Simon and twice to herself ; and that Jesus claimed to be the forgiver was the only interpretation His fellow guests could put upon His words : " Who is this that even forgiveth sins ? " Was Simon included in those that " sat at meat with him " ? He who had denied prophetic insight must have heard with amazement the claim to Divine power. That claim was renewed when Jesus " said unto the woman, Thy faith hath saved thee " ; for the object of her faith, as of her love, was Christ Himself. The declaration to Simon of the woman's forgiveness might have seemed sufficient ; bending over the Saviour's feet she had heard the joyful announcement. What, however, had been done and said in the soul, Jesus would publish to the ear. In silence he had received her acts of faith, penitence and love ; His first words must be " Thy sins have been forgiven." When the company asked within themselves, " Who is this that even forgiveth sins ? " His answer was, " Thy faith hath saved thee ; go into peace."¹ 1. From the use of the perfect tense and from the woman's love-inspired deeds, it seems evident that she *came to the feast forgiven*. 2. That her tears and anointing of the Saviour's feet sprang from forgiveness. 3. That pardon and the state of peace into which it led, were conditioned in *faith* and not in love or penitential good works : " Thy faith hath saved thee ; go into peace."¹

As this penitent in having her pardon twice declared by the Saviour stands alone, we must seek the reason mainly in herself. With Jesus near, with the crown of public favour on His brow, but chiefly with inward calm after the storm, she would go into peace ; but in days to come, with the Forgiver on the cross, the fact of pardon would need to be engraven on her soul. She might yet doubt the outer ear and the inward voice. When society continued to shun her as a leper, she would ask, Has God indeed forgiven all this world of sin ? But the words, " Go into peace," would point

¹ Luke vii. 50.

The Two Debtors

her eyes to the kingdom of heaven ; they were for the march and the battle. "Thy faith hath saved thee" would stir the depths of being, for she knew she had confided in the Saviour ; and to trust Him is eternal life.

The Roman Catholic contention that love as cause preceded forgiveness, could not have been advanced in a connection more unfortunate for its advocates. In the first place, the parable itself is against it : the statement that the debtors had nothing wherewith to pay expresses the condition under which forgiveness was granted. Their utter inability to pay was indeed the reason for their forgiveness. Having not wherewith to pay, in its moral application can only mean the absence in the sinner of every ground of justification. Second, Christ's question, "Which of them, therefore, will love him most ?" condenses into a point the argument of the parable ; the debtors love much or little, in accordance with the amount forgiven. Even Simon saw that forgiveness and love were related as cause and effect : "Simon answered and said, He, I suppose, to whom he forgave the most." In both question and answer the amount remitted determines the strength of the debtor's love. Had both debtors owed equally and been equally forgiven, they would have equally loved. Third, the words, "Thy faith hath saved thee ; go into peace," as adopted by Paul and re-discovered by Luther, supplied the watchword of the Reformation. They absolutely strip the sinner of all qualifying merit in his justification and salvation. In the question, "Which of them therefore will love him most ?" Christ has fixed love immovably in its place as the *effect* of pardon. Since then love in the parable is the consequence of pardon, how in the application can pardon be the consequence of love ? The order of cause and effect in the type must not be reversed in the antitype. The declaration, "Wherefore I say unto thee, Her sins which are many, are forgiven ; for she loved much," should be read beside and interpreted by, the question, "Which of them *therefore* will love him most ?"

Christ admits the magnitude of the woman's sin : "Her sins which are many" ; and by the instance of the debtors emphasizes the absolute hopelessness of payment ; but over against the magnitude of guilt he places the sovereignty of

Christ's Vision of the Kingdom of Heaven

mercy; the greatness of forgiveness has transcended the enormity of her guilt. The fact that she had much forgiven is attested by the greatness of her love: *Wherefore* I say unto thee, Her sins, which are many, have been forgiven, *for* she loved much."¹

¹ Luke vii. 47.

VIII

THE GOOD SAMARITAN

"A certain man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho : and he fell among robbers, who both stripped him and beat him, and departed, leaving him half dead. And by chance a certain priest was going down that way ; and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side. And in like manner a Levite also, when he came to the place, and saw him, passed by on the other side. But a certain Samaritan as he journeyed came where he was : and when he saw him, he was moved with compassion, and came to him, and bound up his wounds, pouring on them oil and wine ; and he set him on his own beast, and brought him to an inn, and took care of him. And on the morrow he took out two pence and gave them to the host, and said, Take care of him : and whatsoever thou spendest more, I, when I come back again, will repay thee. Which of these three, thinkest thou, proved neighbour unto him that fell among the robbers ? And he said, He that shewed mercy on him, And Jesus said unto him, Go, and do thou likewise."—LUKE x. 30-37.

I

It was a supreme hour in the Redeemer's life. His seventy missionaries had just returned flushed with spiritual victory. Before His inward eye had passed the prophetic vision of Satan falling from heaven. In this uplifting hour of victorious news and sublime foretastes, the Saviour uttered the parable which perhaps more than any other has found its way to the heart of humanity.

It was a lawyer who evoked this poem on man's love to man. Surrounded by the forces and fruits of revival, by souls exorcised and Satan dethroned, he could hardly fail to be mentally moved. Of the two men within him, one came to tempt, the other to be taught. Aroused by the widening fame of Christ, through the preaching and miracles of His missionaries, he felt challenged as a teacher of the law to approach and test the renowned prophet of Galilee. His question, "What must I do to inherit eternal life ?" is only excelled by the Philipian jailer's "What must I do to be saved ?"

Christ's Vision of the Kingdom of Heaven

Considered in itself, no greater inquiry had been addressed to Christ. On the surface at least, it seems worthy of that hour when Jesus "rejoiced in the Holy Spirit," and said, "All things have been delivered unto me of my Father."

That this lawyer was not a mere broker in formula and platitude is attested by his choice of ground. Whatever his underlying motive, he strikes sheer through the outworks of Jewish belief, and standing in the citadel desires to test Christ on things fundamental. If the new prophet proved a stranger to the inmost shrine of truth all else would fall to the ground. The man's spiritual standing can only be inferred from his own words and the Saviour's signal answer. His inquiry in the absence of the modifying context, might be the cry of a sick soul to a healer of souls. If, however, as seems required by the terms "tempted him," and the desire to "justify himself," we dismiss this view, we must still regard him as one who could mentally assume the place of a soul in sickness and distress. If we cannot accept the conclusion that the question was asked out of personal concern for personal guidance, we must beware of emptying it of all personal application. A man to whom Christ would address a parable so Divine, so human, so direct in its bearings on the lawyer's religious position, must have presented to the Saviour a heart worthy of the tillage of the kingdom.

We are not free to assume that the lawyer in order to deceive feigned a perplexity he did not feel. If his question was not soul-born, viewed from his professional standpoint it was honest. A member of a famous school of interpretation, he feels challenged by the new voice. He regards Christ as a rival Rabbi using the same guide-book, conducting to the same terminus. His horizon is bounded by the law; beyond that he is blind. He wishes to know whether the new prophet issues new law or merely expounds the old. Accepting eternal life as the goal, does Christ hold by the ancient highway or follow a new path? His question may or may not mean that from his point of view he had fulfilled the conditions of eternal life. He was not thinking of that life as a present experience. Like the rabbis of his time, he confined its inheritance to eternity. The remembrance of this fact clears the legalist of having assumed the place of an evangelical penitent. I believe

The Good Samaritan

the lawyer honestly regarded himself as doing in the present what would secure eternal life in the world to come. It is to this aspect of the question that Christ's words "this do and thou shalt live," and the lawyer's eagerness to justify himself must be referred. "This do," implying that doing the law had yet to begin, led the lawyer to assign any failure in his dealing with men to the difficulty of ascertaining who had claims upon him.

Between this legalist and Saul of Tarsus there seems no practical difference. Both dwelt on the law as on the highest terrace of Judaism. If Saul had issued from Gamaliel's classroom to put the new prophet to the proof, he would have chosen the same ground and advanced the same test.

The lawyer took for granted that he must work his passage to life. It is probable that Christ's doctrine of life everlasting had led to serious thoughts of its attainment. His was not a moral sense that could live in Christ's neighbourhood without experiencing vibrations from such a centre. Whatever our explanation of his coming to interrogate Christ, his confidence in the efficacy of works is beyond dispute; and it is equally evident that Christ's reply is so framed as to render that position untenable.

In the question, "What is written in the law?" the Saviour for the moment comes over to the scribe's legal standpoint. The questioner being a confessed subject of the law, a citizen of that province, the law only is allowed to speak; for here grace and mercy must hold their peace. When a man carries his cause to the court where Moses sits in the judgment seat, he must abide by the decision of that court. Hence Christ's question, "What is written in the law?" The Saviour's inquiry assumes that the law has uttered its decision on the point at issue. The lawyer is thus thrown back upon his own charter. But the examination ends not there. The legalist might be able to recite without understanding the statute; or he might comprehend the letter and miss its spirit. "How readest thou?" You have taken your stand behind the pale of the law. The water-springs lie within that pale. Have you discovered the spot and known that the water of life belongs to him who sinks his way to it? "How readest thou?" A *man*, for example, may be read variously.

Christ's Vision of the Kingdom of Heaven

The public eye sees his stature, manners, dress ; science reads down through his flesh and marrow. But the man may begin where this kind of scrutiny ends. The spiritual eye opening the fleshly cover reads into the soul. So with the law : the inquirer may end his search with the letter, or he may penetrate its spirit. David pleading, " Open thou mine eyes that I may behold wondrous things out of thy law," and standing amazed before the exceeding breadth of the commandment, is infinitely removed from the legal slave. The question, " How readest thou ? " is in meaning identical with Philip's inquiry, " Understandest thou what thou readest ? "

The lawyer's answer, " Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart," fixed as we have seen upon the soul and substance of the law. The statute he recited vindicated his moral apprehension, while it swept the legal ground from beneath his feet. He failed, perhaps, to see that as he drew near the heart of the law he passed into a province where doing gives way to loving. The moment he crossed that line all the legal gold he carried became dross. Christ's reply, " Thou hast answered right : this do and thou shalt live ; " must be understood as an answer within the law to a question within the law. The Saviour assures the lawyer that he has rightly pointed out the way to life through the law. But it must be distinctly borne in mind that in saying " This do, and thou shalt live," He is infinitely far from stating or even suggesting the Gospel conditions of eternal life. The law and grace start for eternal life from two different worlds. Law must engineer its way from the far country ; grace carries the way outward from the Father's house to the distant field where men feed swine. Here Christ, who is the way, holds Himself and His own view point out of sight. If we understand Him to say that the deeds of the law secure eternal life, then we stand on the same legal platform with the lawyer. Such a view would empty the cross of its contents. Does Christ then mock the inquirer ? No more than the law mocks Him. The law says, " Do this and thou shalt live," and Christ teaches that the commandment can be at peace with man only when he fulfils it. It was not a measure of human possibility ; it condemned by declaring what should be ; and prophesied to faith what would be.

The Good Samaritan

The sequel justifies Christ's method. Every indication serves to prove that the lawyer was not prepared to accept the work and righteousness of another. This man had no consciousness of having fallen among robbers. He needed not the pity, the mercy, the oil and wine of the good Samaritan. In his own view he was able to reach the new Jerusalem in his own strength. His concern related to the *way*.

Had the commandment come home to him as it came home to Saul of Tarsus, he would not have asked, "Who is my neighbour?" He would have said, "You have commanded me to soar without wings, to live without life. To love God with every faculty of my being, and with all the power of every faculty, is the work of God in man."

"On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets," said Christ to another lawyer who inquired, "Which is the great commandment in the law?"¹ These commandments prophesy and promise the Gospel with its dynamics—the divine Samaritan offering his blood for the traveller; and the divine Spirit pouring it into his wounds. An orange tree planted in Lapland snows contains the intention and potentiality of a fruitful orange tree, but its intention and prophecy are only realised when it is transferred to its native clime. So the heart must enter another zone—the kingdom of heaven—before it can love God with all its strength, and its neighbour as itself.

"This do and thou shalt live," was a challenge to all that was deepest in the scribe's moral nature; but instead of evoking confessions of inability it merely calls forth the icy question, "Who is my neighbour?" That question reveals the man. Like a millionaire, he asks where he may draw the line bounding his philanthropy, while he is under arrest for debt. He has never travelled into the far country of his own heart.

To us, surveying from the rising ground of history the two adjoining states—the dominion of law and the kingdom of heaven—it appears strange that the lawyer was blind to the barrenness of law, its inability to produce the fruit of love. It also at first sight appears strange that Christ did not tell him that the commandments, on which hang all the law and the

¹ Matt. xxii. 36.

Christ's Vision of the Kingdom of Heaven

prophets, awaited the coming of God in man, that the Son of man, loving God and man more than life, might set the example and supply the inspiration of love. Pharisaism was the logical outcome of law. Law like polar ice could preserve the lifeless body of religion ; but had no power to infuse a vitalizing soul.

A glance suffices to show that our parable is not an answer to the question, "What must I do to inherit eternal life?" but to the lawyer's second inquiry, "Who is my neighbour?" Yet the first receives its answer in the words, "This do and thou shalt live." Christ emphasizes "this," the lawyer laid the stress on "do." The parable neither undertakes to illustrate the nature nor the conditions of eternal life. If its Samaritan hero is inferentially an heir of life it is not because of his service to the wounded traveller ; not even if he had filled every day of the week with such deeds of self-sacrifice. The love from which sprang those deeds of brotherhood was the condition of eternal life. From his love of man we may infer his love of God. Here arises an interesting question : Was this man a product of the Samaritan faith? He is not set forth by the Saviour as an embodiment of natural generosity. On the contrary, we are led to infer that in him dwells the love which is the fulfilling of the law. It is not an instance of love on the part of the wounded man evoking compassion. Compassion rises spontaneously in the Samaritan's heart. But a Samaritan who could thus trample upon the fierceness of his religion, or the still intenser ferocity of race hatred must have been divinely beside or above himself. If, however, such spiritual depth and elevation, such law-fulfilling love, could be found outside Judaism and outside the Christian kingdom of heaven, where was the need of Christ and His cross? Does, then, this spiritual hero derive his love and compassion from citizenship in the kingdom of heaven? Has he heard Jesus Christ proclaim the love and fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of man? Is it the treasure of the new faith that fills and ennoble this vessel of Samaritan earth? The more deeply this parable is sounded the more is it found to breathe the spirit of Christian chivalry. So pronounced is its Christian spirit that many interpreters—ancient and modern—have identified the Good Samaritan

The Good Samaritan

with the Saviour of the world. We shall afterwards see that if Christ portrays love, the servant of God and man, the result will be a reflex of Himself. From the mind of Christ alone could have issued the creation known to the world as the Good Samaritan. It was not in any or all of the great teachers to conceive or the great religions to produce him. But if it required Christ to give him parabolic existence, it required Christianity to make him the exemplar of mortal compassion. And since Christianity could nurse such a man, it is probable that it *had* nursed him. Samaria had men who could say, "We have heard him ourselves and know that this is indeed the Christ, the Saviour of the world."¹

When the lawyer asked, "Who is my neighbour?" he, as a Pharisee, narrowed the ground by drawing the line between Jew and heathen. It was therefore with infinite surprise that he heard the name Samaritan adduced, not as the recipient but as the dispenser of compassion. As it is natural to assume that the wounded man was a Jew, and known to his benefactor as a Jew, it would appear that Christ desired by contrast to expose the insuperable barrier presented to the love of man by Jewish particularism. Had the wounded traveller been a Samaritan, priest and Levite would have left him to his fate by authority of the rabbis and doctors.

Seen in one light, the parable is a single picture, with the hero in the foreground: seen in another, it is a gallery of pictures. Its subject matter falls into two parts: man at his worst, reeking with his brother's blood; and man at his best, healer and saviour. The other man, silent and passive, uttering no word of complaint or gratitude, remains unclassified. He may have been Job or Dives. In him meet the inseparable traits of his original—suffering and silence. Man crushed, mauled by the human tiger, bleeding in silence under the feet of tyrant king or mob, is surely earth's saddest sight.

Here the inhumanity of man presents to the divine in man a field for its exercise. In a better world love might have slumbered in the Samaritan's breast. The extremity of a fellow being roused the angel.

It is almost certain that the man going down from Jerusalem

¹ John iv. 42.

Christ's Vision of the Kingdom of Heaven

to Jericho, and falling among robbers, lived in local story before he lived in parable. Before the road connecting those cities could have acquired the designation of the "Way of blood," it must have witnessed many similar tragedies. Parable, like great poetry, is the history of what has passed, in the mind of God, in the soul of man, and in the events of daily life. The materials of the parable may all have been historic. The steep gradient of twenty miles connecting Jerusalem and Jericho, crossing the wilderness, flanked by shelving crags and hidden caves; hordes of robbers lying in ambush, descending the dizzy clefts, like wild goats, falling upon the defenceless traveller, filling their hands with booty or dyeing them with blood; priests and Levites hurrying to and fro between the temple and their homes in Jericho, these supply the material from which the parable is drawn. Given robbery and murder as incidents of common occurrence, priests hardened through the shedding of blood in the temple; given a stranger dominated by Christly compassion for suffering, the parable might be evolved any day.

The requirements of the parable demanded that the traveller should be alone. We follow his solitary steps, see him surrounded with swords and daggers, stripped, beaten, deserted,—the towering crags and soaring vulture figured on his fading eye. At the point of loneliness the tragedy attains its greatest depth. See many overpowering one, leaving him to despair and death; the Samaritan lonely in his humanity, hastening to the sufferer's side. Combination against helpless isolation is the dominant note of history. Civilization has perfected the conspiracy of the many against the one. The union of labour against capital, the capitalists' "combine," the speculators' ring, the party caucus, the ministerial junto, think more of the spoils than the traveller.

The robbers are at all points in violent contrast with the Samaritan. They strip their victim of his clothes and possessions. Because he resists or because they would place the seal of death on their deeds, they stun and mangle him. Had he offered no resistance and possessed neither gold nor jewels, they would have stripped and beaten him all the same. Disappointed of booty, they would have their pound of flesh in the infliction of anguish. They abandon their victim half

The Good Samaritan

dead, and leave the rest to bleeding wounds and night. If we look into ocean, earth, or air, we meet strength preying upon weakness. But the human vulture devouring his fellow leaves all other beasts of prey behind. They "departed, leaving him half dead." So men and causes half dead cover the field of history. But men and causes left half dead often live, attain even to immortality. This bruised, bleeding wayfarer lies by the highway of time; all passing generations touch him with the hand of sympathy, and pouring scorn on priest and Levite, keep vigil by the sick bed in the inn.

The priest, like the traveller, was "going down that way." His temple service was over; so was his religion. "When he saw him he passed by on the other side." He said to himself, The man is at the point of death, night is falling, the robbers are near. And he put the whole breadth of the road between the priest and the sufferer. Throughout Jewish history the priest passes by bleeding Israel. The prophet bears the burden of his message and his country. The priest's province was to shed the blood of bulls and goats. He had one merit; he left robbery to the robbers. His successor in Italy, Spain and France, Portugal and Ireland, bleeds his country, and passes with his spoils to his palace or his monastery.

The priest as the embodiment of the ceremonial law passes first. He, having offered the blood of animals, might be expected to read the symbol, to seize the conception of one suffering in another's stead. It was his to raise in the temple of robbery an altar of vicarious sacrifice. But the priesthood, whatever the promise of its morning, had taken a plunge into Sadducean night. A dying traveller, without a future, made a faint appeal to a well-fed priest whose highest ideal was enjoyment and his final horizon the grave. The priest passed, forgetting that he left his footprints behind. If the Levite saw his superior hasten past, he would feel inclined to do the same. But in one particular the Levite departed from example. The priest "saw him," the Levite "came and looked on him." Whether moved by curiosity or sympathy we cannot say. Both men seem to have passed in silence. Fear in such a place was natural; want of remedies or money, the utter helplessness of the wounded man, would present

Christ's Vision of the Kingdom of Heaven

themselves. But a word of sympathy might have been spoken. In our distress the sympathetic voice has healing power. We are helped by the helpless; and the touch of soul with soul makes suffering brave. Had the wounded traveller left a diary, we could have read therein that he missed the human voice as much as the human hand.

One wonders if, when priest and Levite retired that night to rest, they were haunted by the sight of the dying man; if conscience asked, "Is he dead? Are our hands free from his blood?" Or fell they asleep murmuring, "We must not be sentimental"?

On the "way of blood," between the cradle and the grave, the bleeding wayfarer for ever lies, and priest and Levite for ever pass on the other side.

II

The inhuman monotony is broken at last. "But" announces a contrast; and places a bar across the way. We feel instinctively that a new scene awaits the inner eye; but who is prepared for the boldness, the universality, the grandeur of soul, thrown on such a background? It is like alighting on a garden of Eden in the Arctic circle. As the lawyer had seen the priest and Levite acting their own condemnation, he might expect to witness a scribe appearing to uphold the law. The temple had failed, the synagogue would vindicate its claims. We can yet see his surprise when Christ, passing temple and synagogue, added, "A certain Samaritan, as he journeyed, came where he was." The Levite is introduced as a mere echo of the priest. "In like manner a Levite also." Worldliness runs to echoes. Love creates events and situations. The Samaritan made a sudden breach of precedent. If he saw the churchmen passing by extremity and opportunity, he refused to be swayed by their example. So Paul and Luther, sons of the supernatural, run counter to the human flood. Above all, Jesus Christ supplies a new tap-root out of which the new tree of history springs. With sinking heart the unhappy man saw religion hold to the other side. He would reason with himself, "If priest and Levite leave me to freeze in my blood, the approach-

The Good Samaritan

ing stranger is not likely to alight from his beast." But the Samaritan "came where he was; and when he saw him, he was moved with compassion and came to him."

Each of the three men saw the victim lying in his blood; but with how different eyes. The first two saw with the eyes of calculating selfishness; within his human limitations, the third saw as God sees.

The spectacle moved him; moved the depths of his heart; moved the angel in his breast. This moving was effect; the hidden cause was compassion. But what is compassion? It is one nature suffering in another, with another, for another. The Samaritan became the wounded, bleeding man. He it was who lay on the wayside; the bruises, the gashes, the oozing blood were all his. Before he could alight from his beast, he was uplifting, bearing, healing the sufferer. By invincible attraction the two men drew together, became one. Compassion was blind to precedent, to the robbers watching from crag and cave; deaf to voices of policy and caution; the Samaritan forgot his mission, forgot his promise to return at the time appointed; faced the difficulty of setting the helpless man on his beast, the distance of the inn, the obvious necessity of a period of support and nursing. In the moral sphere love is genius. Rich in initiative, its own inspiration, it changes a traveller into a physician, transforms oil and wine into remedies for the dying; makes the plain man of the morning a hero at eventide.

"He was moved with compassion" is the translation of a single word; one of the royal words of Scripture. It paints the merciful pity of God; it records the movement of the human heart in its divinest moments. Thus the sacred writers recognize divine and human compassion as having a common origin. Luke has painted two great pictures in which the heart of the chief actor is the heart of the parable: the father of the lost son "saw him and was moved with compassion"; the Samaritan saw the mass of wounds and gore and "was moved with compassion." The healer in Christ and in the Samaritan captivates and fires the healer in Luke. As a Gentile it delights him to see what is most endearing in Christ rise divine and strong in the heart of a despised Samaritan.

Christ's Vision of the Kingdom of Heaven

So intense is the historian's interest, so closely is he identified with the Samaritan, that he seems to sink his personality in the healer. The actions crowd upon each other; picture after picture flashes on the eye. The mounted traveller approaches, swiftly seizes the situation, quickly dismounts, in an instant bends over the sufferer: "He came to him." The last act is set against "passing by on the other side." These steps are full of beauty and as full of prophecy. They foretell the mission of Paul to Paganism, sick unto death; of Morrison, Moffat, Livingstone, Martyn, and Carey; they are the steps of Fry, Howard and Nightingale. "Coming to him" is one of the divine moments in history. The heart utters itself in deeds. He "bound up his wounds," stanching the flow of blood, drawing with gentle touch the edges together, opening his wallet and "pouring on them oil and wine." The wounded man was still too faint to pursue his journey or to be left alone. "He set him on his own beast, and brought him to an inn and took care of him." Thus the two men exchanged places. The spot where the Samaritan raised his brother deserved to be marked by an enduring memorial. That memorial Christ has placed over it.

The Samaritan binding wounds, pouring in oil and wine, the journey to the unfurnished inn, the injured man laid on lowly couch under the protecting roof, have sunk into the heart of the world. But the night at the inn; the sufferer's fever and moans; the Samaritan smoothing his pillow; sitting in the lamp's dim light; slaking the burning lips; watching the ebb-tide hours of life, compose a scene wherein human nature attains its divine ideal. The remark, he "took care of him," is distinctive of both men. It implies the patient's need of nursing, and proves that the brave man who, under the eye of the robbers, could act as if he had no life to lose, could also be the patient nurse. The morning brings separation. The inn must be for some time the wounded traveller's hospital. The Samaritan hears and obeys the voice of duty. They part, never perhaps on earth to meet again. But they have acted and reacted upon each other. One has had a vision of God in disguise; the other, by drawing upon his heart, has come into enlarged possessions. "On the morrow he took out two *denarii* and gave them to the host,

The Good Samaritan

and said, Take care of him ; and whatsoever thou spendest more, I, when I come back again, will repay thee." From the two *denarii* we should perhaps infer the Samaritan's humble circumstances, or his precaution against robbery. The sum was all the good man possessed or all he could spare. His heart was fuller than his purse. In feeling he was a millionaire ; in finance a poor man. The act of payment emphasizes the wounded man's utter indigence. It sets in a strong light the power of compassion to bring the whole man into the service of man.

The promise, "I, when I come back again, will repay thee," warrants the inference that the Samaritan was also going down to Jericho. The charge, "Take care of him," might in itself have proved unavailing ; but accompanied by part payment and the promise of full recompense on the traveller's return it had better chance of fulfilment. A man left "half dead," under the care of the stranger would feel the sting that homelessness adds to suffering. If his hard fate tended to sour his heart against human nature, the memory of the noble Samaritan would restore faith in man, perhaps in God. The host was doubtless familiar with instances of robbed and wounded travellers taking refuge in his inn. He would understand the secret of nursing. One of the questions he was sure to put to his sick guest, was "Are you brothers ?" And when the sufferer replied, "We never met before ; we belong to hostile races, and hostile religions," he would exclaim, "I, who am accustomed to see man flay and kill his fellow, have lived to witness a stranger draw a stranger to his heart, linger in the lion's den dressing your wounds, mount you on his beast, bear your charges, guard your couch through the watches of the night."

The injunction, "Take care of him," sounds the key-note of Christianity. The robbers too closely represent the Pharaohs, the Cæsars, the Napoleons. Nay, the religions of the world, the world itself—its ideals and its dominating passion—find in the robbers their own image. Throughout history the cry of priest and tyrant has been, Trample man under foot, lay the foundations of power, of empire, of wealth and pleasure in his blood. "Take care of him" is the word of redemption, beginning to rebuild where the destroyers have

Christ's Vision of the Kingdom of Heaven

ceased to demolish. It announces the new value attached to man. It ordains man his brother's keeper; it speaks of invisible eyes in whose sight his blood is dear. It registers its pledge that God will yet visit the inns where mercy has housed and fed the bleeding; will examine the records and recompense the expenders of blood and brain and treasure: "Whatsoever thou spendest more, I, when I come back again, will repay thee." Meanwhile the host must spend in trust: not expecting reward from his patient, but from his absent employer. The Samaritan assures the host, "I will repay thee," and a voice from heaven whispers in the Samaritan's heart, "Whatsoever thou spendest I, when I come back again, will repay thee."

In asking "Who is my neighbour?" the lawyer doubtless thought that Christ would at the utmost need to draw a line between the Jews and the nations; closer still between Pharisee and Sadducee, or between the sinner and the righteous. The renowned Teacher might even feel compelled by the facts of life to confine neighbourhood within the bounds of blood, acquaintance, or nearness of abode. Jesus, ignoring racial, national, and religious lines of separation, raises the question from the level of casuistry to the plane of love. The man loving God with all the heart and all the mind, has one neighbour only—humanity.

As the parable developed the lawyer must have seen that the question no longer was, "Who is my neighbour?" but "Am I brother to my brother man?" He no longer sought to justify himself. He could see too clearly that his heart and life assigned him a place with the priest and Levite and not with the Samaritan. He would say within himself, "I am caught; I feel the net closing round me." In the question, "Which of these three, thinkest thou, proved neighbour unto him that fell among the robbers?" the lawyer "must have felt that not merely was his question false, but so also was the whole state of mind from which it could have proceeded."

His reply, "He that shewed mercy on him," for some reason avoids naming the Samaritan. The omission is generally traced to his Jewish hatred and scorn of the alien race; and is in strict accordance with what might be expected from a

¹ Olshausen.

The Good Samaritan

narrow, proud spirit. It is always hard to praise great deeds achieved in the enemy's camp. Such an explanation, however, assumes that Christ's words, while carrying illumination to the lawyer's mind, failed to modify his prejudice. But although refusal to defile a legalist's lips with the hated name Samaritan, was in accordance with the lawyer's position and principles, we may find another explanation of his reply, "He that shewed mercy on him." The Saviour's question, "Which of these three," sinks race and religion, and presents three men in their relation to a fourth: "Which of these three, thinkest thou, proved neighbour unto him that fell among the robbers?" Had the lawyer replied, "the Samaritan," he would have imported into the answer an element absent from the question. The men were differentiated not by belief or race, but by their conduct on "the way of blood;" and the words, "he that shewed mercy on him," give expression to that distinction. The manifestation of a race hatred so bitter, and still more of unconcealed contempt for one whom the Saviour had exalted as an example, would be inconsistent with what little we know of the lawyer, and with Christ's bearing towards him.

"And Jesus said unto him, Go and do thou likewise," and thus threw the legalist back on his own question, "What shall I do to inherit eternal life?" and recalled his admission, "He that shewed mercy." How should the Saviour's injunction be construed? There are three ways in which it might be understood. 1. As urging the lawyer to test his own principle in attempting the impossible, with the hope that through the constraint of defeat he would turn to the way that leadeth unto life. On the surface the command appears to enjoin work within the lawyer's power. But this is true only when we forget the magnitude of the task assigned. To efface self, to forget race and religion, to spend time and substance on others, to see a brother in every victim whom men have robbed and wounded, are fruits that do not grow on the tree of legalism. The tree of the law must indeed be removed from the sterile sands and planted beside the rivers of life. 2. As the lawyer's ruling passion, loving self first, finds expression in the conduct of the priest and Levite, he is required in his own terms to "show mercy," after the

Christ's Vision of the Kingdom of Heaven

example of the Samaritan. All then depends on the ground covered by "likewise." If that term is connected with "showing mercy," the standard of duty is not identical with "loving thy neighbour as thyself." Dives might have shown mercy to Lazarus without loving the friendless sufferer himself. Showing mercy might signify no higher moral quality than the generous impulse that plunges into fire or water to rescue a fellow creature. From his answer it is obvious that the lawyer failed to penetrate the core of the parable. It was not the bare act of showing mercy, but the conditions under which it was shown, that raised the Samaritan's deed to the rank of unconscious worship. Jesus allows the lawyer to fathom the parable with his own line, and asks him to follow his light by yielding at the point of most resistance; as he required the rich aspirant after eternal life first to crucify his covetousness: "Go and sell what thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven." 3. The injunction, "Go thou, and do likewise," is similar in sense to the charge, "Go and sin no more." Each enjoins a new beginning on a new line; each demand conceals a promise of Divine aid; in each the beginner goes forth under command, not from the seat of law, but from the throne of grace. Grace offers her arm for the wayfarers to lean upon.

This great parable, enforcing love as the vital substance of religion, directly teaches one thing only, indirectly it contains all things. It assigns to the love that loves God and man first and self last the place of the brain, but that organ includes the nervous system. For example, although it is silent on slavery and monastic religion, by implication it condemns them. Of the unity of the human race and Christian missions to the world it says nothing, yet are these its logical sequence. On the passion of salvation inseparable from love, it is silent; but that truth underlies every tint and line of the picture. The reason is obvious. The great commandment of love to God and man lies like an unbeating heart in the law; that heart, caused by Christ to beat in Christianity, sends its vital pulse through all provinces of human life. Yet must we keep the main view-range clear; not burying what is taught beneath what is implied.

The Good Samaritan

Our parable is "one of those peculiar to Luke, in which the vehicle of instruction is not a type taken from the natural sphere, to teach a truth in the spiritual, but an example of the very action recommended. In connection with such a parable, it is legitimate exegesis to say that Jesus was the supreme example of the virtue inculcated." Luther, according to the grand directness of his manner, says, "This Samaritan here is certainly our Lord Jesus Christ Himself, who has manifested His love towards God and His neighbour; He came unbidden and fulfilled the law with all His heart. The man who lies here half dead, wounded, bruised and plundered, is Adam and all mankind. The robbers are the devil. We make some efforts at resistance, but cannot extricate ourselves; here the similitude is strongly verified, and strikingly represents what we are and what we can do with our high reason and free will. The priest is the representative of the holy fathers who lived before Moses; the Levite, of the priesthood of the Old Testament. The Samaritan, Christ, pours oil into the wounds, which He does when grace is preached; for as oil softens, so does the sweet, gentle preaching of the gospel act upon me so as to beget a soft and gentle heart toward God and my neighbours. But wine is pungent and represents the blessed cross."^a

Although Luther here inclines to allegory, he affirms no more than the parable implies. Within the Samaritan, Jesus, the supreme Exemplar, lives and moves. He is and does in infinite measure what the Samaritan is and does in finite measure. Luther has simply reversed the perspective. Jesus places in front of His picture a human example of self-forgetting compassion; in Luther's view all finite instances fall behind the supreme Exemplar, Jesus Christ Himself. In the parable a subject of the kingdom of heaven is placed in the midst of men for their imitation, on the principle that he resembles the King. For the same reason Jesus sets a little child in the midst of His apostles and disciples, because more than all members of the human family a child is the reflection of Himself. When the disciples saw their Lord take the little child out of his mother's arms and place him in the midst, they could not fail to perceive a symbol of Him

^a Dr. A. B. Bruce.

^b *Church Postils.*

Christ's Vision of the Kingdom of Heaven

who in Divine confidence abode in the bosom of the Father ; so when the lawyer looked on the good Samaritan as presented by the Saviour, he must have felt that Jesus with or without design had drawn His own likeness. We cannot adequately speak or think of light without suggesting the sun. Jesus setting forth the highest ascents of human love assumes its Divine source. As the Saviour in His own presence presents a little child to symbolize imperfectly graces found in a perfect measure in His own nature, so here He shows love burning in a mortal breast, while He might have pointed to Himself as the supreme manifestation of love. But then He would have missed the lesson He desired to teach, namely, when and how in the common conditions of life a man loves his neighbour as himself. The lawyer required to see self-effacement, compassion, love, living and working in ordinary human nature.

If Jesus showed disregard of fierce prejudice when He placed a publican amongst His apostles, and chose a robber as His companion in paradise, He ascends to a height more daring still when He selects a member of a race alien in blood and religion, hated and accursed in the eyes of His countrymen, to serve as the human symbol of Himself descending into the depths of sacrifice and death to heal and uplift mankind.

Small tribes and obscure nooks of earth give history its great figures. Galilee gives the world its Redeemer, Samaria the typical hero in the kingdom of heaven. The crowns worn by the heroes of that kingdom drip not with tears and blood, unless with the tears and blood the wearers' own eyes and veins have shed. The kings and conquerors, the builders of pyramids, the captains of war shed blood in rivers, and trample peoples as forest leaves. Earth urns the oppressors' dust and history embalms their fame. But such have no place amongst the nobles of the kingdom of heaven. Neither have the priests and Levites who, passing the bleeding masses, pat their sleek skin and chant, " All's right with the world."

This parable becomes more and more a vision of the world. The way of blood winding like a crimson thread down the wilderness, the robber-haunted cave, sacerdotalism hurrying past, the bleeding wayfarer in the attitude of death, the Samaritan as human brother going out in tender sympathy

The Good Samaritan

and succour, unseen of men, regardless of praise or blame, sharing his substance, endangering his life—while overhead are God and the silent angels. But the Samaritan, no longer a solitary figure, must, if he would heal the dying wayfarer in body and soul, ever go forth from the cross, for the death of the cross is not example but life and power. Had the priest and Levite returned, united with the robbers and slain the Samaritan, while the half-dead traveller revived, then we should have had a full view of Christ crucified.

II

**The Kingdom of Heaven Hindered by
Conditions in Man and by Counterfeit
Christianity**

I

THE SOWER

"Behold, the sower went forth to sow; and as he sowed, some seeds fell by the way side, and the birds came and devoured them; and others fell upon the rocky places, where they had not much earth: and straightway they sprang up, because they had no deepness of earth: and when the sun was risen they were scorched; and because they had no root, they withered away. And others fell upon the thorns; and the thorns grew up, and choked them: and others fell upon the good ground, and yielded fruit, some a hundred fold, some sixty, some thirty. He that hath ears, let him hear.

"Hear then ye the parable of the sower. When any one heareth the word of the kingdom, and understandeth it not, then cometh the evil one, and snatcheth away that which hath been sown in his heart. This is he that was sown by the way side. And he that was sown upon the rocky places, this is he that heareth the word, and straightway with joy receiveth it; yet hath he not root in himself, but endureth for a while; and when tribulation or persecution ariseth because of the word, straightway he stumbleth. And he that was sown among the thorns, this is he that heareth the word; and the care of the world, and the deceitfulness of riches, choke the word, and he becometh unfruitful. And he that was sown upon the good ground, this is he that heareth the word, and understandeth it; who verily beareth fruit, and bringeth forth, some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty."—**MATT. xiii. 3-9 and 18-23.**

THE Sower, the first of Christ's parables, is inseparably linked with Galilee. It is spoken from a Galilean boat; the field supplying the imagery is a Galilean field; the excited multitude pressing its forward line into the water is a Galilean throng. The fact that the parabolic form of teaching had its rise in Galilee, when Christ's popularity was at its zenith, and the Galilean revival at the flood, reveals the force of circumstance that led to the new departure. For about a year Jesus had been a public teacher. From the cry of the forerunner, "The kingdom of heaven is at hand," He had evolved the Sermon on the Mount, the laws, the constitution, the citizenship of a heavenly state; yet during this space of time He had never once, it seems, employed the parable to

Christ's Vision of the Kingdom of Heaven

veil or reveal the mysteries of the kingdom. But now, to the surprise of His apostles, His message to the multitude undergoes a change in form and method which we might illustrate by Milton arresting his labours as Latin secretary, to sound the first strains of "Paradise Lost."

The reason assigned by Christ for adopting the parabolic method of teaching is beset with difficulty. By applying to Himself the commission delivered to young Isaiah, He gives a judicial aspect to the new departure. Since Isaiah's commission carried a judicial signification, no sound exegesis will seek to empty Christ's words of their penal bearing: "Therefore speak I to them in parables; because seeing they see not, and hearing they hear not, neither do they understand." Thus according to Matthew those without were incapable of seeing, hearing or understanding the revealed mysteries of the kingdom of heaven. And it was the recognition of this existing condition of spiritual incapacity that induced Christ to speak in parables. Luke's version, "that seeing they may not see, and hearing they may not understand,"² represents the parable as adopted in order to conceal the mysteries of the kingdom from those without. Whether concealment had a merciful or penal purpose, Luke's language leaves undecided. Veiling a suffering Messiah and a spiritual kingdom from hearts elate with carnal aspirations, might evince mercy rather than judgment. Mark, however, strikes a note decisively judicial: "that seeing they may see and not perceive, and hearing they may hear and not understand; lest haply they should turn again, and it should be forgiven them."³

If we affirm that Christ introduced the parable in order to harden the heart of the Galilean multitude, we lose Matthew's support; if we affirm that speaking in parables was an accommodation to a state of heart already unprepared to receive spiritual truth, we seem to lose Mark's authority. Here we must decide as to which of the evangelists abides more closely by the facts of the situation; and I have no hesitation in assigning that position to Matthew. I doubt not there exists a point of contact between them; or that Matthew speaks of a law of spiritual deprivation at a certain stage, whilst

¹ Matt. xiii. 13.

² Luke viii. 10.

³ Mark iv. 12.

The Sower

Mark sees the same law carried forward into result. For the just presentation of the case we must refer to the terms of the parable before us. It will be admitted that although this parable may foreshadow futurity, it is in the first place a picture of human Galilee on the day when Jesus delivered His first parable. It is significant, then, that the seed did not create conditions; it accepted them. The characteristics of the soil fore-ran the sower and the seed. The beaten way ran beside or through the field, the rock underlay the shallow soil, the thorns were sleeping in darkness before a seed fell from the sower's hand. With this state of things Matthew's words entirely agree. The hard wayside, the rocky ground, the thorn-infested land were the field on which the sower sowed the parabolic word. Now it required no penal purpose to secure the fruitlessness of these grounds. It needed only, as Christ explains, sufficient time and the action of established laws. The failure of the seed revealed the quality of the soils; and if Mark cast his eye over Galilee when the great revival had subsided into indifference or antagonism, when the wayside seemed not to know that it had been sown, when plants that had added greenness to the spring crackled between rock and sun, and earless wheat accepted the supremacy of thorns—he might see the Divine purpose in the sad result.

It cannot for a moment be accepted that our Lord's parables in themselves exercised a judicial influence over the hearer's mind. The parable has found its sphere more within than without the Christian church. Still, it has worked its way into the thought and speech of nations beyond Christendom. The world owes its knowledge of Christ's teaching on human brotherhood more to the Good Samaritan than to John's Gospel. The merciful God nowhere in human speech comes so near guilty man as in the father of the Lost Son. In this parable and its satellites, the Lost Sheep and the Lost Coin, God's joy in finding lost sinners receives unapproached expression. Only in the cross has Divine forgiveness found sublimer expression than in the remission of ten thousand talents to the unforgiving servant. To the parables we turn for the spirit, for the laws and the future of the kingdom of heaven. At times they were the medium of revelation to the apostles. They woo, they warn, they prophesy. The

Christ's Vision of the Kingdom of Heaven

parable of the Ten Virgins is the shortest and the sublimest apocalypse in the world.

We are shut up to the conclusion that Christ addressed the multitude in parables because they were unable to receive the unveiled light. The direct revelation of Himself and His kingdom only confused and darkened the carnal mind. Of necessity the new course had a penal bearing. It pronounced sentence of spiritual incapacity, the result of perverted opportunity ; it withheld the direct rays of eternal light from the diseased eye, which it might extinguish, but could not illuminate. Regarded from the human point of view, it withheld what was the Jewish birthright—a place in the kingdom of Messiah. It left the multitude without. When we consider the brevity of Christ's sojourn, and His object as the Seed-word to enter receptive hearts, we gain a glimpse of the infinite loss, arising from whatever cause, of allowing the Healer to pass through the Galilean hospital misconceived and unknown. Christ's position amidst the Galilean multitude was like that of a son who went afar to make a fortune for his father's house, and who, returning laden with gold and gems, found that through disease every member of his family had lost sight and hearing and the sense of touch. They knew him not. He filled their hands with jewels which they listlessly cast away. Light slowly returning to the stricken circle, revealed a casket which, when opened, disclosed great treasure ; but the son and brother who brought and bequeathed the wealth was dead.

If Jesus regarded His parables as carrying judicial consequences to the multitude, is it not singular that He carried the penal principle into operation so early in His ministry ? We should have expected to hear the explosion of Isaian sorrow in the last year of the great ministry, and in Judæa, where the thorns matured for sorrow's crown, and the mortal tree grew strong for Calvary. Of Matthew's group of seven parables, four were addressed to the multitude. These are undarkened by shadow of judgment. Two, if not three, present a sanguine view of the kingdom's expansion and final triumph. Reading the heart of the Galilean multitude in our present parable, Jesus reads the heart of humanity. And the picture of the field of Galilee under the tillage of Jesus Christ has its historic

The Sower

aspect. The Galilean parables have a missionary aim. The light of truth shines through a painted lantern. Jesus had gained the ear and eye of Galilee ; the flowing tide of hope and enthusiasm knew no bounds. The master spell was in His message of a coming kingdom. To a small band of constant followers Jesus could explain the kingdom and the King ; but to the crowds arriving to-day and gone to-morrow, untaught and unled as sheep without a shepherd—patriotic, visionary, seeing the future aflame with swords and diadems—Jesus could only unfold the gospel of the kingdom in parables. There are times and conditions when men cannot bear the divine directness of great preaching ; when the burning rays of naked truth madden the brain and harden the heart.

He then who had stirred the pulse of Galilee was no monarch feeling his way to the throne. He was far less and far more. He was the Sower. After the long winter of humanity spring had come, and He had come with it. Let others reap harvests and garner consequences, He was the Sower, the man of the germinating, resurrection year, whose ministry was origination. Promotion in the temple, high seats in government, the marshal's baton in the expected army of emancipation, were not His to give. He was the Sower of seed that had never ripened on this planet ; had never before been sown upon it. The seed He brought was an arrival, an accession of life. The sower has access to a granary of causes. Strange that a nation expecting an emancipator, a dictator, should find their greatest countryman assuming the part of a sower. Stranger still, O Galileans, when you reflect that what He sows is an invisible quantity, and that that whereon He sows is also invisible. The seed is a word, a message, but it is the germ of a kingdom, covers life-forces, laws, eternity ; and the seed-land is the heart of man.

From the nature of his calling the sower deals with incipient unrevealed things ; makes his appeal to time, throws himself upon laws which he can trust but not control ; and whether he sows the field of the world or the field of the heart, he is the fittest embodiment of faith.

He who sits in the boat is the Sower ; and this address, of which His uninitiated hearers do not even know the name, is the seed of the kingdom in disguise ; so hidden and protected

Christ's Vision of the Kingdom of Heaven

by its shell, that it may fall on the wayside, on the thin soil, or on the thorn-beds, with less risk of being swallowed by birds, scorched by sun, or choked by thorn. It will live in the memory, sink into the heart when the heart's beaten paths are delved, its shallowness deepened, and its pre-occupying roots eradicated.

If the Speaker by look or gesture directed the eye of the multitude to nature's map of the human heart—the beaten path, the artificial soil on the limestone slope or ledge, the thorny path or the fertile loam—He meant to say, This is My parish; this is Galilee. Spring after spring, the seed falling from the sower's hand has bounded over on the footpath, fierce sunfire has burnt the veneering soil, thorns have striven for supremacy, and the deep wheat-land has filled the farmer's heart with joy. This is an eternal parable; not a field, a country, but a people, a nation, a race. When the sower on these slopes sustains no loss, experiences no disappointment, reaps where and when he sows, then and not till then shall the Son of Man win the undivided heart of His countrymen.

What impression the first parable left on the multitude we are not told. Yet it was *their* parable. According to Matthew, "the disciples came and said unto him, Why speakest thou unto them in parables?" In Luke, "his disciples asked him what this parable might be." In Mark's version, "When he was alone, they that were about him with the twelve, asked of him the parables." Like Mangan, the Irish poet, gazing entranced on Maclise's landscape, unconscious that he surveyed his native glens and hills, they looked on field and sower without recognizing their own Teacher and their own Galilee. Not without surprise, probably not without grief, that explanation was necessary, Jesus interpreted to His disciples the things of which they themselves were a part. "He saith unto them, Know ye not this parable? and how shall ye know all the parables? Hear then ye the parable of the sower." They followed the sower while he whitened with grain the four-soiled field; they saw him vanish, futurity flashed before their eyes, revealing the withered field of Galilee after the revival had spent itself. We must suppose a profound impression and a sudden inrush of light to account for the fulness with which three evangelists

The Sower

report the Sower and its interpretation. I do not forget that the Sower is precursor and type, and its exposition an example to interpreters. Its opening note, "Behold," and its adjuring close, "He that hath ears to hear, let him hear," attest its place as the morning star of the kingdom of God.

"Behold the sower went forth to sow," might introduce a farmer's story to his child; whereas it is the first chapter in the founding of the kingdom. It is the strangest going forth of empire the earth has ever seen. The sower is nameless; light falls on the seed—the word of God—and on the piece of land, Galilee of the nations. The very going forth of the Sower confutes the fallacy of the incipient angel, of the dormant Christ in every man. The Sower comes not as resurrectionist to awaken God in man, but to give the life of God a place in the human heart. He comes not from the granaries of Greece and Asia with brain-wheat for brain-fields. The seed He sows requires to sink through the mental soil into the furrows of the heart. Spiritual seed from a spiritual clime, it seeks the spiritual in man. Soil and seed imply each other; in the soil of the heart the seed comes to birth.

I

Standing beside the sower, this is the scene that meets our eye. At the side of the field, hemmed by a foot-worn path, the sower begins his work. Outwardly the field presents no dividing lines, no hint of underlying rock or aggressive thorn. The brown expanse presents the aspect of an excellent seed-bed. Over the path the air is alive with wings; otherwise the sower is alone. The sower follows the values of the soils from beaten wayside to deep ground. As he sowed first the ground bordering the path, the seed would fall from the farmer's hand on the wayside by accident; but from the hand of the Divine Sower by choice. The seed-rejecting wayside is known to every sower in every age; but on that spring day when the Sower first sowed the word, it had a special significance. John the forerunner might outwardly prepare the way for Messiah, but he failed to prepare the soil of the national heart. Jesus was sowing before the Spirit had started His plough; and therefore the field here depicted is not

Christ's Vision of the Kingdom of Heaven

the world after Pentecost. Had the parable dated after that event the Divine plough would have accompanied the Divine Sower.

It may be objected that no sower would waste seed on the trodden way ; but the objection should include the rocky bottom and the thorny ground. On those also the sower sowed in vain. The parable in admitting waste only proves itself a province of nature, for in God's world there is great waste ; water covers the main part of our globe ; and of the land a vast proportion is sand or jungle. The frozen regions are sterile as the burning sand. The sun, as far as our earth is concerned, pours three-fourths of his light and heat on wilderness and ocean. The rain falls on seas and jungles ; and where sun, soil and rain unite, there in deadly undergrowths serpents coil and tigers lair.

Now so close is the agreement between earth and man that it would be hard to decide whether man is a miniature world or the world a magnified man. It is only to the mind unused to sound the deeps of life, a wonder that the waste in our parable should have fallen out under the husbandry of Christ.

In Matthew the seed falling on the wayside is plural ; in Mark and Luke singular. Matthew and Mark see the birds only ; Luke hears also the crushing fall of wayfaring feet ; "it was trodden under foot and the birds of the heaven devoured it." But in his version of the interpretation, Luke omits the trampling feet and mentions the birds only.

By introducing the crushing feet, coming and going while the sower is at his work, Luke proves himself the realist as well as the historian of the hardened way, where the seed has least chance and the birds most. The smooth, hard foot-way has a history. Much has been trampled under foot before the wheat. Like every other road, it is so much land devoted to sterility. Once it was soft and felt the ploughshare : but lying between two hamlets, footprints began to appear. They stamped the snow and marked the dew. The anemone fires ceased to burn ; a narrow path was formed. Slowly it hardened and widened from a footpath to a public way. Now it is impervious to footprints as the stony street, and sterile as the sea. Should the plough turn it up, it is trodden down again ; a right of way has been established. It is thus

The Sower

that human hearts lose their receptivity. The world's highway through the heart is not the work of a day. Tenderness, fear reverence, recede ; unbelief, self-pleasing, pride, coldness, indifference, presumption, leave their indurating footprints.

The figure of the path outwardly hardened must not be pressed too far ; for that of which it is the emblem is inward. The analogy between the beaten path and grossness of heart lies in the fact that they cannot surround and cover the seed and the word. For the seed and the word there is no entrance, no chance of sinking beneath the surface. Neither path nor heart spreads like the mother bird its wings over incipient life. It is true the evangelists describe the word as sown in the heart and stolen from the heart. So the seed was sown in the field and stolen from the field, but it was never in the soil.

We must look to Matthew for an interior view of the heart, whose emblem is the beaten way. His words, " and understandeth it not," afford a subjective insight into the moral condition. In employing the word " understand," Matthew has his eye on Isaiah's commission ; and the word should be interpreted in accordance with its place and signification in that context :

" For this people's heart is waxed gross,
And their ears are dull of hearing,
And their eyes they have closed "1

is the moral equivalent of the hardened way ; and the consequent inability to " understand with their hearts," expresses the condition of heart which, according to Matthew, " understood not." The defect, the incapacity, was spiritual, not mental. The translation of *μη συνιέντος* by " understandeth it not," in so far as it suggests a mental operation, fails to convey the active, spiritual apprehension to which the context confines the word. A reprieve read in the condemned cell penetrates far deeper than the criminal's understanding ; it finds free, welcome access to his inmost being ; his heart closes round it as a word of life. So the apprehending heart meets the message, grasps and appropriates it by the energy of trust. The hard wayside, and the heart it symbolizes, allow the seed to fall as hail upon a tombstone.

1 Matt. xiii. 15.

Christ's Vision of the Kingdom of Heaven

Isaiah's commission pointed not to the errors of youth, but to the vices of maturity ; neither is this inability to apprehend with the heart the portrait of youth. Indeed, the feet of the messengers and the frequent falling of the word may have been amongst the deadening causes. The resisting glaze on the heart was not necessarily the result of irreligious conduct. Nothing dries up the susceptibilities of the soul like a false religion ardently embraced, or the true religion consciously repelled. Jesus amongst the Pharisees, or Stephen in the Sanhedrim, is precisely in the place of the sower on the wayside.

In the absence of Christ's explanation the boldest interpreter would have hesitated to see Satan in the birds of heaven—"when anyone heareth the word of the kingdom, and understandeth it not, then cometh the evil one and snatcheth away that which has been sown in his heart." "The genitive indicates that the catching away takes place almost during the act of hearing." Mark's "straightway" is decisive on the point. Luke connects the Satanic act with the Satanic purpose ; "then cometh the devil and taketh away the word from their heart, that they may not believe and be saved." Luke traces the loss of the opportunity neither to the grossness of the heart, nor to the Divine purpose, but to the interposition of Satan. It is implied that faith was possible, had the word remained in contact with the heart. The great phrase "believe and be saved" is Pauline.

To Jesus Christ, Satan was a strong and haunting reality. The battle in the wilderness was but a year behind. From that day to the end, there are indications of the baleful presence shadowing the Redeemer's steps. The parable succeeding the Sower in Matthew's group of seven, reveals Satan as casting broadcast over the kingdom of heaven the seed of a hostile kingdom. The disciples are taught unceasing prayer for deliverance from the evil one ; and in the very upper room the tempter of the wilderness awaits occasion to enter one of the twelve. In the wilderness Satan offered the kingdoms of the world ; in Galilee he makes war upon the kingdom of heaven. Let us look with eyes of mind and heart on this heart-field where two persons, not two principles, are at work, where Redeemer and destroyer labour within the

The Sower

same human heart. How those who have emptied the universe of satanic personality, and left behind a bad tendency only, must pity simple men like Luke who saw in the winged word-snatcher a designing mind, removing the cause in order to prevent the hated consequence. Satan might follow the modern sower a whole year without hearing his name mentioned. The doctrine of a personal devil is held or rejected according as it is high or low water in spiritual experience. Of the powers opposing Christ's newly founded kingdom, the prince of the power of the air is chief. One of the features of the Apocalypse is the place assigned to Satan in the majestic drama of nations. More than the Pope or Tetzl he invaded the life of Luther. In the Puritan revival, in the souls of John Bunyan and John Owen—the latter the foremost of English theologians—Satan was not an intellectual abstraction, but a grim verity in the conflicts of experience. The evil one snatching away the word of the kingdom is the feature of the parable that has faded out of the picture. Not for want of an object lesson has the seed-snatcher vanished from our belief. Rome abides for ever on the wing to snatch away the gospel from the hands and hearts of men, lest they should believe and be saved.

The word of the kingdom is snatched away when its authority is undermined or its light hidden ; when withheld from the heart, the sphere of its power, it is placed in the witness-chair in order to satisfy a jury of dry-as-dusts. The bushel that hides it may be a dead language or a dead church. Wherever priesthood prevents God from speaking directly to the soul, Satan may fold his wing, for his work is done by subordinates. The word is snatched away when the world in its myriad forms commands ear and eye ; when its fingers control all the stops of the heart, and drown heavenly voices in the chorus of adoration or derision, excitement in counter excitement, sensation in fresher sensation. From the volatile or the sodden disposition, devoid of attention, thought or concern ; from the heart undelved, unmoved and unsoftened, the seed-word of the kingdom is ever filched away. Secular conversation beginning at the church door is the flap of Satan's wing.

Christ's Vision of the Kingdom of Heaven

II

Palestine abounds in rocky ground. Like the parable, it has its deep soil—the low country of Philistia, the corn-plain of the Hauran, and the teeming lowlands of Gennesaret. These, however, form a striking contrast to the gaunt ridges and rocky spurs of the hill country. In Palestine, as elsewhere, scanty soil accompanied elevation; insomuch that transporting soil from the alluvial plain to the slopes and hillsides, swept bare by the winter torrents, was one of the toils of Jewish farming and vine culture.

Wheat is a deep-rooting plant demanding loam and clay. The clay conserves moisture, and the overlying loam supplies root expansion and nourishment. The thin-soiled portion of the field in the parable may have been often deepened and as often swept away. Still, depth enough remained for the ineffectual Eastern plough to score the soil without scraping the underlying rock. As the best side of the rocky soil was its outside, it may have appeared as hopeful a seed-bed as any part of the field; and with a temperate clime and rainy sky the result might have been different; but beneath a glaring sky and burning sun, "straightway they sprang up because they had no deepness of earth; and when the sun was risen they were scorched; and because they had no root they withered away." Luke says, "as soon as it grew it withered away, because it had no moisture."

Matthew's version of the interpretation drops the plural employed in the parable and changes the relation of the seed and soil. In the parable the ground is the human heart, and the seed the word of the kingdom; "not in general what God has spoken, but pre-eminently His gospel, His gracious message by Christ, His gift of grace and glory," whereas in the explanation the seed becomes the hearer, and the soil the condition of his probation. It was the hearer who was sown by the wayside, on rocky places, amongst thorns, and on deep ground. The thought is as profound as it is striking. Man is a soil only so far as he receives the heavenly germ; thereafter the word of the kingdom ceases to be a seed, when from it springs the new man, who like the stalk of corn has his place in the natural; and the natural, according to its character,

The Sower

determines the spiritual. Here the soils, and the several capacities in the parable of the Talents, agree ; and here the words " to him that hath shall be given " find illustration. " He that was sown upon rocky places, this is he that heareth the word, and straightway with joy receiveth it ; yet hath he not root in himself, but endureth for a while ; and when tribulation or persecution ariseth because of the word, straightway he stumbleth." Luke omits " in himself," or " in themselves," after the words " no root." Where Matthew and Mark give " tribulation or temptation," Luke has " temptation "; instead of " endure for a while," Luke gives " for a while believe "; in Matthew, the end is stumbling, in Luke, falling away.

Here, the seed, repelled neither by rock nor hardened earth, appears to meet a better fate than that which fell on the wayside. In one case the cause of disaster lay exposed, in the other concealed.

It is a fatal mistake to read the type of character before us from the *stony* point of view. We are not asked to consider an unmoved, stony heart, but an emotional, excitable temperament. The good ground is not commended because there is no underlying rock ; and this is not condemned because there is rock beneath. All soil, thin or deep, rests on a rocky bed ; and is, so to speak, the flesh of which the rock is the bone. Had one digged he would soon have struck rock in any part of the field from which the parable was drawn. The rock is the Creator's, the soil is the farmer's ; especially in a country where the winter torrents wash from the slopes and elevations the soil which the farmer must replace. No fault is found with the soil that covers the rocky bed. It receives, covers and retains the seed ; it evokes life, nurses germination and plant infancy ; it fails, not because it is on the rock, but because there is too little of it ; there is neither room for the roots nor supplies for the life of the plant. It is not noticed in Isaiah's commission ; the gross heart, the heavy ears and closed eyes find in the rocky places no analogy. The people they represent heard so as to receive, and received so as to believe for a time ; and in opposition to the sense-sodden disposition, hailed the message with joy.

¹ Matt. xiii. 20, 21.

Christ's Vision of the Kingdom of Heaven

This feeble, excitable temperament, the stuff of which fanatics and zealots are made, had its place in the Galilean throngs, and may have animated the "men of violence" who would take the kingdom of heaven by force. It is found amongst men of gregarious instincts, such as fishermen and miners, who live under conditions of risk and terror—conditions in which the emotions are often and easily stirred, and where successive waves of excitement diminish religious capacity. And here we arrive at the leading characteristic of the heart typified by the shallow ground; that is, the waste or undevelopment of the natural basis of the spiritual.

"Straightway they sprang up because they had no deepness of earth." Between sun-heat above and rock-heat beneath, the seed rushed into precocious development. Under natural circumstances seed lies hidden, dormant for a time. Here, want of depth arrests invisible expansion and urges life into publicity. Hence the rocky places would out-distance the deep ground; would boast their flash of green whilst the other remained red. So a youth for want of constitution outstrips his comrades in growth; so the nature religiously shallow outruns the good and honest heart. Jerusalem and all Judæa swarmed round John in the wilderness; they heard, they confessed their sins, they were baptized, they fell away when the temptation of supreme opportunity arrived. When Paul preached in Galatia the province was moved; churches sprang up right and left; the land was swept as by a tidal wave. No mission field received the gospel with equal enthusiasm, so exulted in its light and freedom, or abandoned it so soon.

Returning to the history of the seed. It received welcome and covering; the birds failed to snatch it away; it obtained the nursing conditions of early plant life; it made a hopeful beginning. Fed with nightly dew and clothed with tender green, it feasted the farmer's eye. But when the sun rose fiery, merciless, heating the underlying rock, and converting the soil into brick or powder, and the glare of overhanging rocks added burning to heat, it withered away. The plants on the deep soil would also flag under the scorching heat, but drawing upon their sustaining resources—hidden moisture and nightly dew—they would revive.

The Sower

"They withered away," is the epitaph invisibly written over many living men ; the explanation of gaps in the spiritual regiment ; an account of many who entered the fellowship of the church. A withered human soul ! That is what the withered wheat emblemizes. Owing to the same causes the withering process is around and may be within us. Where are all the anxious, inquiring minds ? Where are all who with joy received the message of salvation ?

Matthew attributes withering to want of root ; Luke to lack of moisture. The one image involves and complements the other. There could be no root where there was no depth of earth ; and because there was no depth of earth there was no supply of moisture. Luke's expression, "no root," if it stood alone would signify no rooting'conditions ; but Mark's "no root in themselves," sheds inward light on the type before us. Want of root in themselves describes creatures of circumstance ; devoid of personal conviction, of private judgment, of individuality and energy of will. It is the gregarious type, heating with the hot, freezing with the frozen, heroic in majorities, traitor to minorities. Since the living soul has its springs in the Eternal, the best of life must ever remain unseen. The plant rushing into visibility, impatient of nature's slow steps, might warn and rebuke the practice of forcing persons under contagious excitement to instant decision and profession.

The soul's wants, like roots in search of moisture, grope Godwards ; faith, however, is the heart's feeding root. An infinitude of resources may lie around, but if we lack this root to draw up life and fulness from God, we wither away : "When the sun was risen they were scorched." In Matthew the scorching means tribulation or persecution arising because of the word ; in Luke the "time of temptation." The words have an obvious outlook on the three martyr-centuries ; on Carthage, Alexandria and Rome. But whilst prophetically ringing in the ages of fire and sword, they apply to all times ; for only a heroic faith will conquer a world in revolt from God. He who lives on feeling and excitement, who depends on the presence of others for incitement and strength, will give way when his supplies are exhausted or removed. As long as poverty is their companion, some hold on their

Christ's Vision of the Kingdom of Heaven

way ; others flourish while health and the family circle remain unbroken. Misfortune, foiled ambition, the fall of the religious thermometer, bring down their thousands. Persecution, the social and political boycott, cause sudden stumbling. Though the knives of the Inquisition lie idle, smeared with oil for future use, the tyranny of crazes, mobs, companies and churches is with us. Conscience wears the crown of thorns, and sincere weakness withers in our secular atmosphere. Many who withstand persecution shrivel under the breath of ridicule and scorn. Shields proof against fiery arrows are pierced by icicles from the bow of derision. The immediacy of defection has special reference to times of persecution. In peaceful days falling away obeys a gradual law.

In every age there are those who hear the gospel and receive it with joy, gladden the sower, appear the richest, deepest portion of the spiritual field. They excel in feeling, emotion, enthusiasm ; they "for a while believe." Is their faith unreal ? At first creatures and at last victims of circumstance, yet the seed sown within them and the plant that withers are divine.

III

The soil that produced thorns could have borne a nobler harvest. The lusty vigour of the thorns proves that the ground essentially differs from the two preceding classes of soil. These thorns bespeak depth and moisture ; they are the sign of perverted power, of life drawn into wrong channels. Some natures cannot produce even thorns. The nature that here sits for its portrait is capable of two great alternatives ; it can mature or choke the seed of the kingdom. The wheat amongst the thorns is growth arrested by counter-growth, life blighted by rival life.

"Others fell upon the thorns ; and the thorns grew up and choked them." With Matthew the seed fell "upon" the thorns, "among" them in Mark, and "amidst" in Luke. In the interpretation Matthew has "among the thorns." The three interpretations of the thorny ground present essential agreement and suggestive individuality ; as if each had absorbed part of a fuller exposition. "These are they

The Sower

that have heard the word, and the cares of the world, and the deceitfulness of riches, and the lusts of other things entering in, choke the word and it becometh unfruitful"—Mark. "This is he that heareth the word; and the care of the world, and the deceitfulness of riches, choke the word, and he becometh unfruitful"—Matthew. "These are they that have heard, and as they go on their way they are choked with cares and riches and pleasures of this life, and bring no fruit to perfection"—Luke. In each evangelist true hearing and true reception are implied; each carries "choking" of the seed over into the interpretation: "they are choked," the word is "choked." In Mark and Luke the world throws three strangling coils around the new-born man; in Matthew two. In Mark the spiritual facts do not follow the physical emblems; the entering in of care, riches and the lusts of other things, seems subsequent to the entrance of the word. Luke confirms our inference, and probably with Paul's conception of the spiritual stadium in his mind, sees this class of hearers and receivers choked "as they go on their way." In affirming this opinion there is no thought of denying the fact that the seeds and roots of worldliness and pleasure were latent in the mind before the word was received or heard. Mark and Luke recognize the law according to which care, world-worship and the multiplication of wants come with increasing years.

Of the numerous spiny plants that overrun Palestine, the *nebk* of the Arabs, a thorny shrub sometimes attaining the proportions of a tree, is the commonest. On marsh or downs, it is equally at home. Like the prevailing rest-harrow, it contests the ground with the farmer, who burns it down before beginning to plough. To Christ's hearers, the burning brake succeeded by the ploughman and the sower were associated sights. The fire could only burn the thorns down to the ground. It left the roots alive. It is probably to ground thus cleared by fire that Jesus refers. How expressive an emblem of the human heart when its evil growths have been burned down by fires of suffering and remorse. The plough-share of law and sorrow has rasped amongst the ashes and thorn-roots. And the Divine seed appears to have found a soil where it may expand unimpeded. The ground, however, is alive with roots. While the seed prepares to die into life,

Christ's Vision of the Kingdom of Heaven

the hidden roots are working upwards. The thorns have an immense advantage over the seed ; they are in possession ; they are native to the soil. The wheat on the other hand is a stranger. Hence if both are allowed to grow the issue is easily foreseen. The husbandry here is incomplete ; there should be a weeder as well as a sower. Since Jesus is the Sower the lesson is that the seeding is Divine, the weeding human. Here, indeed, we touch the heart of the implied truth : man alone, with the thorns and wheat, the good and evil in his heart, can say whether both shall strive, or one possess the field.

The thorns drew off the moisture and fatness of the earth ; and, being plants of sturdier growth and demanding all the forces and juices for their development, they robbed the plant of its support. Thus the rocky ground and the thorny ground agree on one point ; on the former the seed dies for want of moisture, on the latter through exhaustion of its resources. The productive power of the soil is limited. It can produce thorns or wheat, but not both together. Equally fixed are the limitations of the human heart. The kingdom of heaven demands the undivided heart—all its depth, all its warmth, all its strength, all of faith, all of love, all of worship. No man can serve two masters. When, therefore, we see God's seed-field turning sere, the cause may be neither rocky ground nor mildew, but starvation through adverse growth ; the heart giving its blood and life to feed ravening care or pleasure.

Care, riches, pleasure, these are the thorns. Apart from Christ's explanation, who would have discerned in care the deadly foe of spiritual life ? the masked pioneer of those forces that invade and enslave the soul ? We speak of " care-worn faces," of " men of care," as the output of the grinding world-machine, unconscious of the moral element ; we even think of care as a part of our birthright. Matthew and Mark define this sapping anxiety as " the care of the world." It may be asked, are not the anxieties of the farmer, the merchant, the captain on the bridge, the statesman, the leader of his country's arms, cares of the world ? They are concerns of office and duty, and may or may not enter into the catalogue of " cares of the world." (1) Cares of the world have their horizon bounded by this life. This means insulation from the sublime

The Sower

invisibilities crowding around our being. It banks the horizon with clouds that hide and exclude God. The goal is shifted from heaven to earth ; treasures are withdrawn from heavenly security and placed in the bank of the world. Faith may linger as a mental assent, but it dies as the pioneer of the heart. The soul in consequence ceases to go forth in prayer, ceases to take up residence in God. (2) The cares of the world have their centre and circumference in the interests of man's lower nature. Innumerable cares essential to the well-being of the individual, the family, the commonwealth, are cares of the present life. Rent and taxes, food and raiment, sour toil in field or office, in mine or cabinet, the education and placing of children, preparation for sickness and age, belong to this life, and accordingly as they are animated by a secular or religious spirit, may or may not antagonize the new life. The burden of country, adding wings to the soul, uplifted Cromwell, Lincoln and Mazzini to a holier level. If, however, Napoleon is named, conditions are changed. He is his country ; and care of the state is lust of glory.

The religious man should be called the man of care, inasmuch as the care of two worlds meet in his breast. As truly as the man of one world he cares for to-day and to-morrow. His sense of honour and independence is keener ; his principle, his uprightness, his conscience, are the cause of cares unknown to the secular mind. In thinking of his household he loses more sleep than his worldly neighbour. It is, however, a distinctive feature of his concern that it relates to time and eternity. Whether his outlook ends with this life or stretches into the world to come, he bears his burden to God.

The cares of the world may at first assume a lowly guise. A secular spirit steals into religious things. Earthly concerns, urged by the fervours of the new life into the background, revenge themselves by reaction. Having fasted from the world, the heart returns to feast on the world. The son of adversity, bruised in that relentless mill, the poor man's world, saddens and then sours under the oppressive, burdensome side of this earthly life. Often too jaded for watching and prayer, stumbling over the prosperity of the wicked, discouraged by the strife without and within, the recent guest—the new life within him—fasts and faints, whilst the thorns

Christ's Vision of the Kingdom of Heaven

draw all the nourishing juices to themselves, penetrate the whole soil, and choke the word of the kingdom. The heart, embittered by the fierce rivalries of life, surrenders all to the conqueror.

The difficulty of earning money, the impossibility of living without it, make wealth desired as an escape from toil and worry. Thus riches seen through sweat and tears present an enchanting aspect. Even the deeply religious man may desire and labour after financial independence and rest at eventide. Just here risk comes in, owing to the change in the mental ideal. At first a struggle for existence, it is now a fight for affluence; with the result that the mill-race of life flows twice as fast. The visionary fields, house, or estate, absorb the toiler's waking thought and dream. The mind sunk in sordid prose lights its promised land with a halo of romance. The deceitfulness consists in the illusiveness of the desired possession, which by receding sharpens hunger and hastens pursuit. The heart nurses thorns first as neighbours, next as rivals, then as conquerors of the wheat. If you look into the eyes you meet, you will discern a second sight, a gaze over and beyond the arena of straining nerves and sighing hearts, to the golden grove and home of desire. Here the heart readily falls into discord; whilst one chord feebly sounds the song of pilgrimage, the other wails aloud for ease and place and rest. Should success crown the migrant from poverty to affluence, disillusion follows; but far from tearing the thorns from his heart, he seeks to heal the disease by adding to its causes.

The care of the world ends in riches as an ambition or a possession, and riches create a new craving of the heart, which Mark names "the lust of other things," Luke, "the pleasures of life." Wealth narrows the soul and multiplies its wants. Dives, whether born to purple and fine linen, or the creation of his own endeavour, implies expensive tastes, luxurious living, voluptuous art, hired minstrels and dancers, level rails beneath the wheels of life. Thus the walls of pleasure become sound-proof against the moan of the soul or the groan of humanity. Amongst the "other things" are place, rank, adulation, popularity, influence, power. With these agree Luke's "pleasures of life." In *βίος* we have the life

The Sower

symbolized by the thorns—life secular, mortal, the death of life, existence, man without the soul.

The thorny ground points to a life more complex than the life of Christ's hearers. At any rate "the deceitfulness of riches" and "the pleasures of life" could not be applied to many disciples of the apostolic age. At Jerusalem, at Rome, at Carthage, at Alexandria, wealth was the exception. But Christ more than any prophet had His audience in the future. No two nations since the parable was first spoken have been so directly addressed through the thorny ground as Britain and America. Care, wealth, pleasure, constitute the three broad divisions of our social frame; those who are ground in the mill, those who run the mill, and those who regard life as a fine art. The pleasures of life are not confined to purple and fine linen, to the ravished palate, eye and ear. They are aggressive, cruel, brutal; they urge rank, fortune and leisure to war like wild beasts on everything helpless, harmless and lovely. The pleasures of life yearly convert our land, hill and plain, into a field of blood; the civilized Briton turns butcher, and the pulpit maintains inglorious silence.

IV

The sower made not the various soils; he found them. Men differ no more in mental power or physical strength than in preparedness and capacity for religion. The various diversities of nature, however, may be reduced to two: those in whom the gospel brings forth fruit, and those in whom it brings not forth fruit. On the good ground alone the Divine seed attains perfection. What then is the good ground, and what is its history? The good ground is rich, fertile ploughland, stirred, awakened, broken up and awaiting the sower. The rocky soil seems as good as any part of the farm. There lies its dishonesty. The thorny ground is not condemned for want of receptive power or generous depth. It is condemned because it harbours that which is hostile to the seed-word of the kingdom; and allows wheat and thorns, good and evil, to grow beside each other. The good soil is ready for the seed, ready to give itself wholly and undividedly to the nurture of the Divine corn. It receives the seed, holds it fast, and

Christ's Vision of the Kingdom of Heaven

nourishes its life. "He that was sown upon the good ground, this is he that heareth the word, and understandeth it; who verily beareth fruit"; or, as Luke reports, "that in the good ground, these are such as in an honest and good heart, having heard the word, hold it fast, and bring forth fruit with patience." With hearing, Matthew connects "understanding," Mark "acceptance," Luke, "holding fast."

The equivalent of the good ground is "an honest and good heart," in which fruit is brought forth with patience. Although the prevailing sense of *καλός* is rather "fair," "excellent," than "honest," yet that rendering fits into the context better than Luther's *fein*. In contrast to the preceding varieties of ground, *καλή* must have a relative signification. It is this contrast that "honest" expresses. The rocky soil wore its good qualities on the surface; the thorny land concealed a hostile life; the good ground was all that it appeared to be.

Can the unrenewed heart be called honest and good? All depends on what is meant by these terms. If Christ is here supposed to teach that some hearts, apart from the reception of the gospel, are morally and spiritually good, we need only put the supposition to the test of Scripture. In what sense then is the heart good before it accepts the gospel? In the sense in which the ground was good before it was sown. Had the good ground seed, a potential harvest, within itself? Had it not been sown, what would have been the result? Christ is the seed-corn that falls into the heart as cause and condition of fruit. But Christ is a new power and quantity in the world and in the heart. He needs to be sown. A heart is good when it is good at hearing Christ, receiving Christ, holding Christ fast, and living Christ. But even the prepared disposition is of God. On a farm there are more labourers than the sower; and the soul-farm has other tillers besides the preacher. The Spirit ever works, deepening the sense of sin, and cutting into conscience with the keen share of the word.

The first sign of an honest and good heart is good hearing; when the mind, the conscience and the feelings hear; when Christ is heard solemnly, humbly, earnestly, honestly, undividedly. The second sign is the opening of the door and the reception of Christ; when we hold Him fast with an under-

The Sower

standing heart. Then are we of the fourth class, if having heard and accepted Jesus Christ to live in us, we yield up to Him our being as the sphere of His new-creating energy, and like the soil assimilated to the Divine seed, we become patient in the exercise of faith and the sufferance of tribulation, till the harvest of righteousness, peace and joy ripens unto eternal life.

In Matthew we find the descending scale of fruitfulness, a hundred fold, sixty, and thirty; in Mark the ascending, thirty, sixty, a hundred. Luke gives a hundredfold in the parable, but omits it in the explanation. The varying degrees of fruitfulness signify the several attainments of different persons in the Christian life; and since in every case an honest and good heart is understood, the result is conditioned on faculty and opportunity.

II

THE TARES OF THE FIELD

"The kingdom of heaven is likened unto a man that sowed good seed in his field ; but while men slept, his enemy came and sowed tares also among the wheat, and went away. But when the blade sprang up, and brought forth fruit, then appeared the tares also. And the servants of the householder came and said unto him, Sir, didst thou not sow good seed in thy field ? whence then hath it tares ? And he said unto them, An enemy hath done this. And the servants say unto him, Wilt thou then that we go and gather them up ? But he saith, Nay ; lest haply while ye gather up the tares, ye root up the wheat with them. Let both grow together until the harvest ; and in the time of the harvest I will say to the reapers, Gather up first the tares, and bind them in bundles to burn them ; but gather the wheat into my barn.

His disciples came unto him, saying, Explain unto us the parable of the tares of the field. And he answered and said, He that soweth the good seed is the Son of man ; and the field is the world ; and the good seed, these are the sons of the kingdom ; and the tares are the sons of the evil one ; and the enemy that sowed them is the devil ; and the harvest is the end of the world ; and the reapers are angels. As therefore the tares are gathered up and burned with fire ; so shall it be in the end of the world. The Son of man shall send forth his angels, and they shall gather out of his kingdom all things that cause stumbling, and them that do iniquity, and shall cast them into the furnace of fire ; there shall be the weeping and gnashing of teeth. Then shall the righteous shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father."

MATT. xiii. 24-30, and 36-43.

I

THIS is the parable of the two sowers. In the previous parable Christ is the only sower ; His field is the human heart ; and in that field the hindrances of His kingdom have their seat. Here, the Son of Man, who sows in the day, is followed by His enemy, who sows in the night ; and the world is the seed-field. The kingdom of heaven is surveyed in its fortunes from its planting to the end of the world. Taking " the kingdom of heaven " as equivalent to the Christianity of Christ,

The Tares of the Field

the parable unfolds the beginning and expansion of *anti-Christianity*. The sowing of good seed is not the introduction of good into the world ; and the sowing of tares has no reference to the first incoming of evil. The entrance of evil into our world is not even hinted at here. The Redeemer's cradle was rocked on a world grey in sin ; and righteousness as a principle, spoke in Divine law and human conscience before His birth. But the kingdom comes in Christ ; and silent, unevolved, becomes vocal in His gospel, as a new seed-word enters the heart of man, and wherever it enters makes subjects, heirs, sons. The human drama presents a new scene ; the King as man has come to reign in man ; and His enemy would overthrow the kingdom, not as in Milton's epic by open war, but by concealing the heart of the traitor beneath the guise of a subject, by baptizing a compendium of paganism with all the holy names of the Christian faith.

We are asked to survey the evolution of the kingdom of heaven from the word which was a work and the work which was a word. The word of the kingdom fell from the Saviour's creative lips and from the tree of His cross. The parable is a forecast of Christian history ; of the great days when the Son of Man visibly sowed the field of Palestine, the invisible sower following over the ploughland quickened by the tillage of the prophets—by John and Jesus Himself ; of the greater days when the Divine Sower steps over the limits of Palestine to sow the world, the sower of shams, lies, death, still in His footsteps.

Our parable confines its view to one aspect of the kingdom of heaven ; not the kingdom drawn up in battle array against the deep-massed world ; not two camps flying the colours of their respective crowns ; not the kingdom under the axe and fires of pagan and papal Rome ; but the kingdom confounded with its counterfeit, discredited by base imitation, aped, embraced and subverted by the world, the flesh and the devil. The fires of Nero burn down ; the papal fires are extinguished in the revolt of human nature. But the conflict of Christianity with its counterfeits begins with the beginning of the kingdom and continues to the end of the world. The time covered by the parable is a season ; the interval between seed-time and harvest. Christ thus holds the scroll of time by the two ends ; bringing the beginning and the close together.

Christ's Vision of the Kingdom of Heaven

From the same boat the parable of The Tares is set before the same multitude that listened to The Sower. "Setting before" has no reference to placing food before guests; here it signifies holding an enigma or problem before the mind for solution. The reason Jesus assigns for speaking in parables shows that the multitude had not yet arrived at the stage of spiritual hunger. The opening words strike the keynote: "The kingdom of heaven is likened unto a man that sowed good seed in his field; but while men slept his enemy came and sowed tares also among the wheat, and went his way." "Good" (*καλός*) is the word rendered "honest" in Luke's version of The Sower. Here it is used in contrast to the seed sown by the enemy. The wheat is to the tares what a good sovereign is to its counterfeit. "Lord," ask the servants, "didst not thou sow good seed in thy field, whence then hath it tares?" In both instances the genuine is contrasted with the spurious, the real with its imitation.

Like The Sower, the parable before us is accompanied by its explanation. Jesus, withdrawing from the throng, "went into the house, and his disciples came unto him, saying, Explain unto us the parable of the tares of the field." Their prayer made the disciples kin with all inquirers; made futurity their debtor. Doubtless the Saviour rejoiced to find good ground waiting to be sown with the seed of the kingdom; He answered, "He that soweth the good seed is the Son of man." With these words day broke on the disciples. The householder was their Teacher and Lord, the Son of man. The canvas on which the scenes were drawn was not the grey past; the sowing was contemporary, "he that soweth." It revealed the day labourer and the night labourer farming the ever-widening field of time.

When the Saviour added, "the field is the world," an enlarged sense of space must have been realized by the disciples. To those peasants, Galilee, Judæa, Palestine, had hitherto formed the further horizon.

But Jesus, human as themselves, one with them by provincial birth, speaking their dialect, arrayed as a Galilean, proposes to sow the world. While He spoke His inner eye turned to futurity; and probably at the mention of "the world," its kingdoms in their woe and glory arose before His view.

The Tares of the Field

It is one of the moments when Jesus, in a remote nook of earth, is a citizen in all lands, the contemporary of all centuries, when He unrolls the map of time, and sees Himself the Divine Householder sowing the human field, renewed with every new generation. A conception so sublime, the disciples could not be expected to follow; for it implied either an immortal life on earth, or a life resumed after death. When came the command, "Go ye into all the world and preach the gospel to the whole creation,"¹ those who first heard the words, "The field is the world," beside the lapping waves of Galilee, must have felt that it required the cross and the Spirit to open the parable of The Tares.

The field on which the householder sowed good seed and the enemy tares, is the world. This is not the interpretation of disciple or apostle, but of the divine Author of the parable; an interpretation granted to the disciples in answer to their request, in the absence of the multitude, and in the privacy of the Saviour's own circle. Although "the world" here has one only, inevitable meaning, and that meaning stamped upon it by Christ Himself, in a context intended to explain figurative language by language without figure, in a context where all the other terms are taken in their literal sense—*incredible as it may appear, interpreters with almost one consent have changed "the world" into a metaphor meaning "the church."* Calvin, who follows Augustine of Hippo, and leads on this point interpretation in Germany and Great Britain, says, "Although Christ afterwards explains that the field is the world, it is yet not to be doubted but that properly He wished to apply the name to the church. But since He was going to draw the plough of His gospel through every region of the globe, that He might cultivate fields for Himself throughout the whole world, and disperse abroad the seed of life, by *synecdoche* He transfers to the world what properly applied only to a part of it." If "the world" here can by skilful manipulation be made to mean not the world but only a part of it, the great text, "God so loved the world," can with greater ease be made to signify God so loved a part of the world. (1) Calvin admits that Christ explains the field to be the world, but contends that while Christ said the field is the world, He

¹ Mark xvi. 15.

Christ's Vision of the Kingdom of Heaven

meant that the field is the church. (2) He concedes that the church could only be called the world in virtue of Christ's intention "to draw the plough of His gospel through every region of the globe." But what is true of the world is true of the field. Was it the householder's sowing, then, that made a field of what had not previously been a field? or was not the ground as truly a field before it was sown as after? So the world of which the field is type is the world before the plough of the gospel is drawn over it. (3) Forgetting that at the request of His disciples Jesus had translated the parable into plain literal speech, Calvin makes the Saviour change the symbol of the field into another symbol much harder to understand. "By synecdoche he transfers to the world what properly applied only to a part of it." And according to Calvin the "part of it" is the church. "Properly He (Jesus) wished to apply the name to the church." Synecdoche is a figure of speech by which the whole is put for a part, or a part for the whole. So we are asked to believe that this recondite trope explains the familiar term "field," that it is the obvious meaning of the equally plain term "the world." And all this to men who had never yet heard of the church. No man knew better than Calvin the value of exact dry words; none excelled him in reducing poetic speech to unsymbolic prose. A strong dogmatic necessity was upon him.

The position that "the world" is the church, Archbishop Trench espouses and defends. "It must be evident to everyone not warped by a previous dogmatic interest," he says, "that the parable is, as the Lord announces, concerning 'the kingdom of heaven,' or the church. It required no special teaching to acquaint the disciples that in *the world* there would ever be a mixture of good and bad; while they could have so little expected the same in the church, that it behoved to warn them beforehand. . . . Nor need the term '*world*' here used perplex us in the least. No narrower word would have sufficed for Him, in whose prophetic eye the word of the Gospel was contemplated as going forth into all lands." When Dr. Trench writes "the parable is, as the Lord announces, concerning 'the kingdom of heaven,' or the church," he assumes the identity of the church with the kingdom of heaven. The word "or," like a railway point,

The Tares of the Field

serves to throw the car of the kingdom of heaven on the rails of the church. The term "church" Christ is reported to have used only twice; the "kingdom of heaven" was frequently on His lips. Even at the early stage when this and the other Galilean parables were spoken, the disciples were familiar with "the kingdom of heaven"; it was one of the great phrases of the Sermon on the Mount. The term "church" it seems they had never yet heard. If then Christ had wished in this parable to speak of the church He would have required to explain its meaning; and He would surely have said, The church is likened unto a man that sowed good seed in his field.

In the course of time the word "church" has become freighted with meanings foreign to the *ecclesia* of the New Testament which it is supposed to render and represent. *Ecclesia* in the New Testament signifies the assembly; but this assembly is viewed under three aspects. (1) It is the local family of Christian believers; (2) It is the whole family of Christian believers on earth; (3) It is the whole family of God in heaven. Remembering then that the *ecclesia* is the assembly, and that Dr. Trench holds the *ecclesia* and the kingdom of heaven to signify one and the same thing, let us ask what gospel Christ's opening call, The assembly is at hand, would have brought to sinful man? What truth, what idea would the announcement, The assembly is within you, have conveyed to Christ's audience, or to any audience? Could Christ have said, The assembly cometh not with observation? Could He have said, From the days of John the Baptist until now the assembly suffereth violence and men of violence take it by force? Would Paul have written, The assembly is righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Ghost? Except a man be born again he cannot see the assembly, would hardly fit into the context of the third chapter of John. It is easier for a camel to go through a needle's eye than for a rich man to enter into the assembly, could not have produced the profound astonishment of the disciples, nor provoked the question, "Who then can be saved?"

The *ecclesia* and the kingdom of the heavens—the unvarying form of designation—are not once in the New Testament used as commensurate quantities or interchangeable terms.

Christ's Vision of the Kingdom of Heaven

The kingdom of heaven is all the light, life, spirit, salvation, holiness, power and glory that emanates from Christ on His cross and from Christ on His throne, that fills all receptive souls as the atmosphere fills all receptive lungs, and like the atmosphere surrounds universal man with an unexhausted infinite element and opportunity of life. The kingdom of heaven is inspirational, the *ecclesia* or assembly institutional; the kingdom, being the life of God in men, builds them into a holy temple for the indwelling Spirit. The building, the organization, is the *ecclesia*. The kingdom creates the assembly, which on earth is instrumental. The kingdom of heaven comprehends whatever in the assembly is Divine; but the assembly comprehends not the kingdom. The very use of parables to elucidate the kingdom of heaven proves that unexpressed, in itself, it is a state universal, invisible and spiritual.

Dr. Trench says, "Nor need the term 'world' here used perplex us in the least," adding, "no narrower word would have sufficed for Him in whose prophetic eye the word of the gospel was contemplated as going forth into all lands." Here the term "world" is first accepted in its literal sense; for as the unsown field it could not possibly be regarded as the church; then the "world" becomes the church because of the Divine purpose to disseminate the gospel over it. That is to say that Athens becomes the church in virtue of Paul's preaching on Mars Hill; or that as the gospel has been preached over Europe, therefore Europe as far as it extends is the church. Undoubtedly the disciples already knew "that in the world there would ever be a mixture of good and bad"; that point the parable passes over, or only touches by implication. What it teaches is that Christ sows the good seed, preaches His gospel, founds and extends His kingdom in the world, and that that kingdom will be opposed and thwarted by the devil's kingdom disguised as the kingdom of God; that the deadly enemy of Christ's religion will be *religion without Christianity*, that the anti-Christian tares will grow up undiscovered amongst the wheat until their fruit appears.

The conclusions of Calvin and Trench are inevitable if the cardinal view-points of the parable are mistaken or ignored. These I conceive to be: (1) That it predicts the corruption of

The Tares of the Field

Christianity, opposition to the kingdom of heaven by the simulation of its qualities. (2) It presents an apology for the Divine permission of anti-Christian antagonism acting under Christian forms and pass-words. (3) It forbids the removal of Satan's parody of Christianity from the field of the world by persecution. Keeping these points in mind, let us proceed with the exposition.

"While men slept his enemy came and sowed tares also among the wheat and went away. The tares are the sons of the evil one, and the enemy that sowed them is the devil." The act of cowardly revenge which serves to set forth the undying enmity of Satan to the Son of Man was obviously not uncommon in Palestine, and not unknown to Jesus and His myriad hearers. The wretch nursing revenge—Satan under human limitations—belongs to all times and nations. He fires his neighbour's house or stackyard; he mutilates his rival's herds, or lies in ambush to shoot his victim. He will wreck the train by which his enemy travels; he will mingle poison with the very communion cup. He is found in the churches: member, office-bearer, popelet. He sows in the dark, stabs in the garb of duty, spreads distrust as a faithful watchman, distils his poison in the interest of the church.

"While men slept," refers less to the sleepers than the sower. Crossing the ice-cap of Greenland, Nansen discovered crevasses in the eternal ice, rift-like and narrow at the mouth, but blue in their unfathomed depth. This slight touch of Christ's reveals a crevasse in the Satanic nature. The picture of Satan treading through the silence and the darkness in the footprints of the Son of Man, his heart darker than the night, sowing the soul of man with all that constitutes the antithesis of the kingdom of heaven—his revenge all the fiercer that in the wilderness he failed to sow his tares in the soul of the Son of Man—may mean little, or have hell for background, according as it meets the closed or the clarified eye. In The Sower, Satan snatched the seed from the trodden way; the innocent birds were his emblem. Here, his type is man, and his policy is not to steal but to accept, embrace; to infect by contagion; to obstruct by assistance; to make Christianity infamous by making it his own; to become the nurse of the new-born cause that he may poison the springs of life. He is not sowing

Christ's Vision of the Kingdom of Heaven

thorns but tares. The point of contact between the wheat and the tares (zizania) is, that the latter in their early stages of development closely resemble wheat. As they ripen side by side their essential difference is revealed : " when the blade sprang up and brought forth fruit, then appeared the tares also." The farmer who watched day by day the mystery of growth saw nothing but wheat. He and his servants might wonder at the closeness of the plants. But no alien, hostile life was visible or suspected. Casting their eyes over the field on a later day, they saw here and there wheat ears emerging from their sheath, and here and there unfolding fruit that was not wheat. What is this ? they say to each other. Tares ! Without delay we must pull them up.

The unsuspected presence of the tares until earing time, is a point of supreme importance in the interpretation ; for it proves that the parable is not dealing with the problem of two intermingling kingdoms of good and evil. Although the world is the theatre of the two sowers' operations, the good seed and the tares do not represent the introduction of good and evil. Sowing the good seed signifies making men for the kingdom of heaven ; sowing tares means making subjects for the reign of Antichrist. " The good seed, these are the sons of the kingdom ; and the tares are the sons of the evil one." The adversary is always the same ; his scheme to overwhelm good with evil is the same ; but the kingdom of heaven, like a newly-launched planet, invading and disturbing the black void, arouses Satanic revenge to new measures of warfare. At first the prince of evil donned imperial purple ; as the baleful genius of Nero and Diocletian, he would make young Christianity pass through the fire ; to change the figure he would rake the newly-sown field with fire to burn the good seed out of the world. When the tactics of tyranny failed to subdue invincible faith, he would be a penitent, a convert, a disciple ; he would clothe himself with night and as Christ's after-runner, sow the tares of paganism under the name of wheat ; he " would stifle the new religion by embracing it." The phrase " and went away," is deeply significant. He came with the night and went with the night. He had sown the heart of man with seed hitherto unknown ; he had borrowed the laws of human nature, as the sower of the good

The Tares of the Field

seed had borrowed them, to receive, vitalize, nurse, and mature his sowing. No human eye saw the sower; no human discernment distinguished the sowing of the night from the seed sown in the day; no eye marked the footprints of the prince of night on the newly-awakened receptive soil. The awakened and quickened conscience, it must be remembered, is a striking feature of the world when Jesus begins to scatter broadcast the seed of His kingdom. He "went away"; had he not covered all the ground sown by the Son of Man? Had he not had the field all to himself? Had not he emptied his granary of tares on the soil of the kingdom? He had opposed beginnings with beginnings; filled the hours of darkness, trampling down and over-sowing the seed of salvation.

Christ's silence leaves undecided whether sleep was blamable or blameless. In His explanation He is equally silent regarding the wheat and tares growing together until the harvest. According to the general interpretation, "while men slept" can have little or no significance. Starting with the assumption that the church is the scene of both sowings, and that the parable teaches the inevitable mixture of good and evil in the church's communion, there is no place for watch-tower or watchman in the field. If, however, we conceive the parable as teaching the poisoning and paralysis of Christianity by false religion, the question will arise, how far its leaders were able to oppose the sowing of tares, as this must have been accomplished by human agency. The tares as untruth, lying dogma, mean one thing; the tares as developed into their human issues, "the sons of the evil one," another.

"But when the blade sprang up and brought forth fruit, then appeared the tares also." An interval elapsed between the sowing and the self-revelation of the tares. In nature this interval is the space of time between spring and coming into ear; in the moral sphere it is the space between innovation, suppression, inoculation with the fleshly, worldly virus, and their results. In this period the flowing tide of ceremonial drowns the cross. The simplicity that is in Christ disappears. The tares come as an addition to the wheat; they introduce complexity with contradiction. They foreshadow division, rivalry, clerical domination. "Primitive Christianity made

Christ's Vision of the Kingdom of Heaven

every man a priest and every home a sanctuary.”¹ Now the universal priesthood of believers disappears and the pagan priest in Jewish vestments steps into the Christian assembly. The second century sows the priest ; the sixth reaps the Pope. The seed of night ripens into the midnight of the middle ages ; when the kingdom of heaven has become the kingdom of rottenness and the unclean ghost of the Roman empire takes his seat of half a thousand years on the grave of Christianity. Opinions become men ; and men by their prayers or their sins create climate, season, harvest.

The wheat and the tares were known by their fruit. From this fact we are not to infer that we see good and evil as opposing principles ripening into their issues. We must steadfastly bear in mind that the Son of Man sows the gospel—*not a doctrine of goodness relative or absolute, but a revelation, a salvation from sin* ; and the enemy sows tares, bastard wheat, the simulation and the negation of the gospel. It is the gospel frustrated by a false gospel ; and the character of both is seen in the men they make. Jesus sows in the *hearts* of men ; there He and Satan, though seeding the same human field, stand apart ; for Satan's tares, as opinion, dogma, error, untruth, are sown in the mind. But anon they seed the heart with their fruitage.

“ The servants of the householder came and said unto him, Sir, didst thou not sow good seed in thy field ? Whence then hath it tares ? And he said unto them, an enemy hath done this.” Concerning the goodness of the seed sown by their master the servants entertain no doubt. That assurance, however, only makes it harder to account for the presence of tares. The reply, “ an enemy hath done this,” explains the situation. Their perplexity removed, they forthwith proposed a campaign of extermination ; “ wilt thou then that we go and gather them up ? ” When we come to those represented by the householder's servants—to the disciples of that day and this—the amazement deepens. The ingenuous optimistic hearts who saw a new heaven and earth mirrored in the face of Christ, would view with amazement an enemy in the very kingdom of heaven. They knew that good had maintained a feeble existence amongst the giant forces of

¹ Dr. Ed. de Pressensé.

The Tares of the Field

evil in the past, but they believed that the new kingdom would present triumphant holiness. Yet to these men the Saviour explained the words "an enemy hath done this," by "the enemy that sowed them is the devil."

The householder drew his inference from the occurrence of similar acts of revenge; for he also had been asleep. Between him and the Son of Man there is this difference; the latter knows the enemy, knows that Satan sows and will sow, knows the kind of seed with which he will over-sow the kingdom. "An enemy hath done this" carries a profounder suggestion than it seems to bear. Keeping to our interpretation of the adversary stifling the true religion by embracing it; the entrance of Judaism and paganism, preserving and parading the mummy of Christianity, is not an unaided invention of the human mind; a device so masterly, human ignorance has not hit by accident; it is not in human malignity to sink so deep, nor in the human mind to frame a time-defying scheme.

II

The servants bring to their master the perplexity which, arising in the mind of apostolic Christianity, has never ceased to baffle spectator and inquirer; not the origin of evil or its presence in the world which upbore the redeeming cross; but why the wheat-like tares should mingle with the wheat; why corruption should work along side religion, and what is more, work its way into it; and why on fields tilled and sown by Christ and His apostles, where the good seed bore glorious harvests, Christianity is a tradition, a name. Europe, in the main a vast tare-field, the wheat crossed with tares, the good seed overgrown or extinct, Asia grey with Christian ruins, holy with illustrious names and graves, in the absence of this parable would drive the thinking mind to despair. For if the harvest, the end of the world, arrived in our generation, over wide areas of the ancient field separation would be superseded, as the wheat has vanished.

"Wilt thou then that we go and gather them up? But he saith, Nay; lest haply while ye gather up the tares, ye root up the wheat with them. Let both grow together until

Christ's Vision of the Kingdom of Heaven

the harvest." Seems it not strange that this is the first appearance of the servants? Seeing that a farm is the scene of action we expect to meet servants on the red spring field. Did they not sow as well as reap? When we consider that the Sower is the Son of Man, the loneliness of the husbandman is explained. It is a morning view of the kingdom of heaven; and the hearts of future fellow labourers are *part of the field*.

To Augustine who read the "church" into the "the world," the servants raised the question of church discipline; occupied the position of purists who held the unalloyed holiness of the Christian assembly; and the right of men to weed out the human tares. They were the Donatists who broke away from the fold of which Augustine was an advocate and ornament. The householder's "Nay" could only mean to him the Divine disapproval of man's attempt to separate the sons of the evil one from the sons of the kingdom. "Let both grow together until the harvest" was the charter for the *mixture of good and bad in the church*. But the Donatists, gravely erring on other points, stood on the impregnable rock when they replied, "The parable deals not with the church but with the kingdom of heaven in the world. Hence it says nothing of mixed or unmixed membership." Augustine, Calvin, and those who have drawn from the parable the Divine permission of wheat and tares in the *ecclesia*, while asserting the principle, have recoiled from its application. They say, Here is the Divine warrant for the continuance of good and bad in the church; yet they all admit the necessity of ecclesiastical discipline. But if the wheat and tares are sown in the church, the householder's "let both grow together until the harvest" excludes discipline in any shape or form. Even a modified discipline must sometimes go as far as the removal of offending members from the church. If, however, the world is the church, and the church is the scene where wheat and tares grow side by side, then the removal of a single tare, that is of a single offender from the church, is absolutely for bidden.

Our parable lifts the question far above the level of church discipline. For discipline at most can only remove the offender from the fellowship of the church. But the proposal

The Tares of the Field

of the servants was not simply the removal of the tares from intermingling with the wheat ; it was to gather them up as weeds are gathered, for burning. They would discriminate ; would play the part of judge and executioner. They would remove from the field of the world. Instead of discipline, we are confronted with the question of religious persecution. And persecution Christ absolutely forbids. The tares must not be removed from the world ; men must not be put to death for the welfare of the kingdom of heaven. On earth there is no infallible tribunal, and the holiest men would not remove the unholy from the world, where the sons of the evil one to-day may be sons of the kingdom to-morrow. The tares, indeed, may arrogate the place of the sons of the kingdom, and remove the wheat. This arrogance underlies all religious persecution. The persecutor having lost or never possessed sonship in the kingdom, satanic inspiration achieves by dungeon and gibbet what Satan proposed by seeming to embrace the truth. Thus perish Huss and the Waldenses, Latimer, Ridley and Wishart. The sons of the evil one empty earth of its saints and fill heaven with their victims.

“ Let both grow together until the harvest ; and in the time of harvest I will say to the reapers, Gather up first the tares, and bind them in bundles to burn them ; but gather the wheat into my barn.” The parable then forbids apostles and disciples vaulting into the apparently vacant seat of government in the kingdom of heaven. That seat belongs to the King and Judge ; and His hand is on the levers that control the outgoing and incoming events of time. The field is the Householder's own ; His are the reapers ; the time and mode of separation are His. How sublime becomes this agricultural picture in the light of Jesus' exposition : “ The harvest is the end of the world (time, age) ; and the reapers are angels. As therefore the tares are gathered up and burned with fire ; so shall it be in the end of the world. The Son of man shall send forth his angels, and they shall gather out of his kingdom all things that cause stumbling, and them that do iniquity, and shall cast them into the furnace of fire.”

Verily this fishing boat carries a king. Was ever contrast so wide as that between the Saviour's outward surroundings

Christ's Vision of the Kingdom of Heaven

and His inward range of vision? Outwardly a peasant prophet, followed by a few peasant disciples, in Him centres the kingdom of heaven; His servants are angels, the reapers of His world-wide field where crowding generations of men ripen in holiness or sin. From the fishing boat He sees advance and recession, contraction and expansion, ebb and flood: the season wherein days are ages; the endurance of wrong that distracts thinker and saint; the harvest day of separation and vindication when the righteous shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father. The eye that surveys the mighty throng sees forward to the end of the world; already the fishing boat becomes a universal throne amidst ranks of crowding angels.

Here we are in the heart of the parable. The Son of Man goes forth from age to age on the widening field; the barriers between race and race are falling down; Jesus adds to His store language after language; the gods recede before triumphant light; inquiry, investigation turn up the mental soil; above all, the Holy Spirit draws His plough through the dust of dead faiths; ploughs down to the moral quick, awaking the consciousness of sin; and the Divine Sower, living and labouring in His increasing army of apostles, sows the good seed—the word that becomes heart and soul and mind; while the prince of the fallen world, following as His shadow, scatters his tares. The labourers experience the same surprise as the servants of the householder; ask the same question, "Wilt thou that we go and gather them up?" The same "Nay," rings forth from the throne of the kingdom. *In the fishing boat and on the throne Jesus declines the aid of His disciples in the government of His kingdom.*

Had the householder foreseen that the field he had sown in the day, his enemy would oversow in the night, he would not have slept. The Son of Man sees Satan at his work and lets him alone; the Divine Sower, knowing that His enemy is in the field, while He no more restrains the sower of tares than He resisted His conveyance to a high mountain, is one of the mysteries of the kingdom. The head and representative of evil is free to invade the kingdom of heaven; to strike his blow when most fatal; to mingle the beginnings of death with the beginnings of life. Nor this only: the soil

The Tares of the Field

bestows its fatness, the dew its benediction, the sun its vital warmth, as generously on tares as wheat. The difficulty deepens on the moral side of the analogy ; if in the Divine arrangement the religious lie finds fostering conditions answering to the soil, dew, and sun.

These nineteen centuries have bequeathed to mankind two mournful volumes ; one the history of the Christian church, the other the nations that have witnessed the rise and decline of Christianity. Constantinople, Philippi, Ephesus, Carthage, Alexandria, and Antioch embraced by the antichristian parasite were slowly and effectually strangled. Palestine, the land of the Divine Sower's nativity, of His cross and grave, only yields its harvest of undying memories. Italy that supplied "Romans" to whom Paul could address his great epistle, martyrs to face the lions, multitudes to throng the Catacombs with their prayer-watches and their ashes, urns the dust of Paul and the Christianity that he preached. In France the tares gathered up the wheat and burnt it in the fire. Spain long since ceased to preserve the semblance of good seed ; long since proscribed the Son of Man from sowing the seed of the kingdom. In these lands the tares have come to fruit. In Italy the fruit is death, corruption ; utter gangrene of the moral sense ; and but for the genius of Mazzini and the sword of Garibaldi, the living nations must in the interests of moral sanity have gathered to bury the putrifying carcass. Spain, once a nation, the mother of colonies, the wielder of armies and fleets, having been for centuries sown and re-sown with tares only, has, like the victim of black leprosy, rotted from the extremities inward, till nothing but a torso deformed and leprous remains. France, sown with the tares of the papacy and rotting in mass as far as papal influence penetrated, has had sufficient salt left to thwart the priestly subversion of the state ; to expel the plotting hordes of Jesuit monks and nuns who preyed on the nation's vitals ; to exclude the sowers of sedition and family division from school and hearth. Ireland in happier ages was sown with the seed of the kingdom. Her sons carried the news of salvation from sin amongst the snows of Iceland, to the Picts of Caledonia ; to Switzerland, Italy, Gaul and Spain. The feet of the Irish messengers left their print on

Christ's Vision of the Kingdom of Heaven

almost every country of Europe. Then appeared on the Irish field the sower of tares. The bull of Pope Adrian, granted to Henry II. in 1155, gave over Ireland to that prince "to extend the borders of the church, teach the truths of the Christian faith to a rude and unlettered people, *and root out the weeds of wickedness from the field of the Lord.*" Since that period, three provinces of Ireland have been under undivided, uninterrupted obedience to Rome. And what are the fruits? In answer to this question I quote the following passages from "Priests and People in Ireland."¹ "Picture to yourself the condition of the poor Catholic men, women and children of Ireland—the tens of thousands of them in the Catholic quarters of Dublin, in the swamps of Connaught, in the morasses of Munster—into whose minds the light of truth may never enter.

"Upon the rich priests with their sham crosses, and upon them alone, therefore, rests all responsibility for the condition of the Irish Roman Catholic poor, whose helpless and contentious misery in the midst of peace and plenty is discussed and wondered at all over the world.

"Catholic Ireland, instead of having been saved by the sublime sacrifice of Calvary, is writhing in misery and involved in as much religious doubt and perplexity as if Jesus had never died for humanity. The many grand pictorial representations of His death, instead of testifying that He died FOR US, and thereby lightening our mental burdens, only seem to increase our trouble.

"How frequently, when gazing upon some noble conception of Christ's agony at Gethsemane, have I not asked myself, thinking of Catholic Ireland, whether the chalice of His trouble consisted, not, as we are taught, in the physical torture of His approaching crucifixion, but in a prevision of the dreadful wrongs which should be afterwards inflicted upon humanity under cover of His authority.

"Our priests preach anything and everything rather than Christ crucified; and while they are prepared to ascribe the most extraordinary powers to people like Antony of Padua, Peter of Alcantara, Expedit, Blaise, Blessed Gerard of Clonard Gardens, Belfast, and to themselves, and even to the Holy

¹ By Michael J. F. McCarthy.

The Tares of the Field

Souls, they deny *in practice* all efficacy and saving grace to the sacrifice of the incarnate God the Son in whom they *verbally* profess to believe.”¹

Rome “is at its worst where it has had entire liberty and long monopoly. In every such country the educated classes are as a rule alienated from the church; unbelief is widespread, rancorous and increasing. While the weapon of excommunication is freely employed to punish anything which seems to involve lack of submission to the hierarchy, it is scarcely ever wielded against adultery, brigandage, murder, or other great crimes against God and Society.”² In Rome, then, the centre of the tare-field, we may justly expect to find Romanism unrestrained and unredeemed.

ROME IN THE TENTH CENTURY

“As in the case of unity, so in that of holiness, *it is precisely Rome which has sunk lowest, longest and oftenest*; which has been the foulest cesspool of wickedness, profligacy, depravity of all kinds; which has had the greatest number of abandoned criminals amongst its bishops. Cardinal Baronius says of the Roman church in the tenth century, ‘What was then the semblance of the holy Roman church? As foul as it could be; when harlots, superior in power as in profligacy, governed at Rome, at whose will sees were transferred, bishops were appointed, and what is horrible and awful to say, their paramours were intruded into the see of Peter.’ In the fourteenth century, the great [Roman] Catholic poet, Petrarch, describing the papal court then at Avignon, speaks of it as the Babylon of the Apocalypse, ‘which had filled the sack of God’s anger with impious vices, following as its own gods not even Jupiter or Pallas, but Bacchus and Venus.’ He calls it ‘school of errors, temple of heresy, formerly Rome, now false and guilty Babylon, forge of lies, horrible prison, hell upon earth.’”³

On the eve of the Reformation, the German princes in their “Hundred Grievances,” complain that, by the exemption of ecclesiastics from the jurisdiction of temporal courts, they are

¹ In the introduction to his crushing exposure of Romanism in Ireland, Mr. McCarthy says, “I am a Catholic; I am an Irishman; I have a right to speak.”

² Dr. Littledale.

³ Dr. Littledale.

Christ's Vision of the Kingdom of Heaven

enabled to commit all kinds of crimes with impunity. Amongst the specified crimes alleged as widely common, are coining, theft, abduction, adultery, rape, arson, and murder.

ROME IN 1870

“ Any one was liable to be arrested at the nod of a priest, without warrant and without warning, and to be thrown into prison.” The prisons “ were full of sewage, rats and vermin. The people called them ‘ gulfs of hell,’ and into them prisoners were huddled together without regard to age or sex or social status. Many died in them of hardship, starvation, and jail-fever, and many were put to death secretly.” “ Condemnation was invariably the outcome of a trial, when many were executed, many sent to the galleys, and many were doomed to imprisonment, with their bodies weighted with iron, their legs chained together, or they themselves chained up to the walls of their cells, for life. Gavazzi, who was the first to enter the Inquisition in the Castle of St. Angelo in 1870, after the taking of Rome, and many others who entered afterwards, such as Pianciani, Gaiani and Spada, have left their testimony that they saw there all kinds of instruments of torture and of death—irons, hooks, chafing-pans, ropes, quicklime, trap-doors over caverns and shafts (one described by Gavazzi being seventy feet deep) ; whilst the remains of the human victims themselves, of all ages and both sexes, consisting of hair, bones, skulls, and skeletons, were seen in dungeon, cellar and shaft.” “ Rome was a dust-heap and worse. Epidemics swept thousands to their graves. In the Foundling Hospitals in Rome (and there were more of them in that city of celibates than in any three cities of Europe put together) ‘ nine infants out of ten died of starvation.’ Monasteries and nunneries were reeking with infection, for monks and nuns were incorrigibly dirty.” “ There was not one acre of ground in the papal states properly cultivated.” “ That part of the Agro-Romano, or of the Roman Campagna, as it is commonly called, which encircles Rome, was purposely retained by the Popes in a state as pestilential and malaria-breeding as possible, that it might thus be a defence for them against the approach of an enemy.” “ All travellers relate how Rome literally swarmed with beggars. . . . In

The Tares of the Field

Naples there were between forty and fifty thousand *lazzaroni* ; that is to say, one sixth of the entire population were paupers."

" Pope and priest were united in an unholy alliance with the brigands. The monasteries even afforded them shelter, and were their depots for arms and ammunition. A hunted brigand has been known to rush into a church, and when the police entered a few minutes afterwards he was nowhere to be seen. The priest had hastily thrown over him his saintly garments, and yielded to him his place at the altar, so that his pursuers failed to recognize him as he stood there saying mass." " It sometimes happened that brigands were priests and priests were brigands. At the beginning of last century the head and leader of the brigands in the country south of Naples was Cardinal Fabrizio Ruffo." " These brigands were all eminently religious. . . . Some years ago there died a famous brigand, called Giovanni Tolu, who has left an account of the pious way in which he as a ' good Catholic,' went about the murder of his victims. . . . ' Although a bandit I have never neglected my religious offices. I read always the office of the blessed Virgin, I recited the prayers for morning and evening, I prayed for the dead, and I frequented the church and the confessional.' " " All these brigands strove to make a pilgrimage to St. Peter's, Rome, once a year, at Easter, when they confessed, and shared their spoils of robbery and murder with the church. For what ? For the Pope's absolution, patronage, protection and fatherly blessing."

" There is a remarkable unanimity amongst Italian public men in declaring the Papal church to be not a Christian church at all, because incapable of bringing holiness into character and life ; and to be a compromise with and surrender to evil, because offering *salvation in sin* ; to be indeed the very antithesis of Christianity."

" The day is coming," said Crispi, the Italian statesman, " when Christianity will kill Roman Catholicism." These words recognize the eternal antagonism between Romanism

¹ *The Roman Catholic Church in Italy* : By Alexander Robertson, D.D. The extracts under the heading " Rome in 1870," are quoted verbatim, although not in the order in which they occur in Dr. Robertson's book. I have therefore put each extract in quotation marks.

Christ's Vision of the Kingdom of Heaven

and Christianity. Rome is the negation of the Christian atonement, of Christian doctrine, of Christian holiness, of Christian salvation, of the very Founder of Christianity. In all ages and in all lands where long established and long triumphant, *it has killed Christianity*. In the minority it has been a conspiracy; in the majority a tyranny. From the innumerable heresies arising in the course of Christian history, Romanism stands out distinct and alone. They were departures from, it is the subversion of, the teaching of Jesus Christ. (1) The Pope alone aspires to be "the spiritual and secular monarch of the globe." (2) He alone sits in the seat of God. (3) Makes merchandise of sin. (4) And extends the traffic in souls and sin beyond the grave. The Eastern church was never a conspiracy against civil government. Its patriarchs have never wanted in the lust of empire. Having grown up around the knees of Roman power it had no room in Constantinople for a sham Cæsar. As the same century brought the Pope and Mohammed, both of whom pretend to be in the succession of Christ; both aspiring to world-wide sovereignty; both wielding the sword; both implacable enemies of the Christian faith, Islam might appear to share with Rome the sowing of the field with tares. Doubtless Mohammed, like the Pope, has cleared with the sword great spaces of the field; like the papacy, he has wielded the weapon of conversion or extermination. But he has never attempted to extinguish the religion of Christ by *espousing it*. In the light of history, the tares amongst the wheat find their only adequate interpretation in the over-sowing of the field with Roman Catholicism.

It may be said in extenuation that Rome has produced some good men and women. Granted. It would have been strange if in the course of thirteen centuries the monotony of a "universal" system had never been broken by exceptions. But these exceptions no more prove Romanism to be Christian than his incidental cures prove a quack to be a skilled physician. Rome's show rooms are indeed crowded with "saints;" not, however, on account of their holiness, of their conformity to Christ, are these preferred for adoration, but because in life they wrought wonders and in death effect cures by the virtue of their bones. In the flesh they are never seen.

The Tares of the Field

They are far more indebted for their honours to antiquity than to holiness. Who in our generation has met man or woman saint, a living example of Christian holiness, in Roman Catholic Italy, or Spain, or France, or papal South America, or Ireland. From the wide cemetery of the past Rome rakes Christian or pagan bones which it manufactures into "saints," the demand for which is determined by the number of parishes. Rome claims to have owned Ireland when it was named the island of saints; if those "saints" were honest, clean, truthful, upright persons in daily life, the papacy must have lost the recipe for making such men; for in the three papal provinces of Ireland they have neither been heard of nor seen within living memory.

It remains to consider in the light of the foregoing facts the application of the words, "Let both grow together," to Satan's broad cast of Roman tares amongst the wheat. We have seen that the parable nowise concerns itself with church discipline; that it sets forth the intermixture of the forged and spurious with the Divine gospel; the anti-Christian in the semblance of the Christian kingdom. It forbids removal of the tares by human power from *the world*. It throws away the sheath and sword of persecution. This prohibition rests on the assurance that the Son of Man is in power; that He reserves to His own crown the time and the power to purify His kingdom; "as therefore the tares are gathered up and burned with fire; so shall it be in the end of the world. The Son of man shall send forth his angels, and they shall gather out of his kingdom all things that cause stumbling, and them that do iniquity, and shall cast them into the furnace of fire: there shall be the weeping and gnashing of teeth." Here *skandala* appears to occupy the relation to "them that do iniquity," that the tares sustain to "the sons of the evil one"; one is the seed-form, the other the fruit-form of corruption; the seed tares conceal causes; the sons of the evil one—those that do iniquity—reveal issues.

The injunction "Let both grow together until the harvest" leaves untouched a question of vital significance to the kingdom of heaven and the civil commonwealth. And that question is, Should the anti-Christian tares, in their permission to remain amongst the good seed, have freedom to exter-

Christ's Vision of the Kingdom of Heaven

minate the wheat? Can Romanism in Protestant lands, won from papal tyranny by the blood of martyrs and patriots, be accorded the same civil privileges as Protestant subjects? Seeing that the Papacy is not a Christian system; that it seeks to perpetuate the tyranny and glory of a vanished pagan throne; that it arrogates universal sovereignty over the kings and princes of the earth; that its ambitions are wholly political and worldly; that from its very nature it must conspire against civil authority; that in every land it clamours for freedom when it is in the minority, and refuses to extend freedom when in the majority; that it asserts its right, nay, holds it as an imperative duty, to persecute murder, exterminate all who deny or resist its assumptions, should it be left free to work its will? This question every European state with the exception of Britain has answered by the expulsion of the Jesuits who sow their tares in the dark. Italy, to rescue the state from utter destruction, was compelled to rein in the priesthood with an iron hand. French statesmanship has saved the commonwealth by the disestablishment of the Roman Catholic church and the suppression of the monasteries and nunneries. Britain fondles in her bosom the convicted enemy of civil government, of civil and religious freedom; the enemy of human progress, of man's physical, mental and moral well-being; the enemy whose hand affixes its leaden seal on the Bible and on the lips that would herald its doctrines of salvation. Britain throws wide her gates to the Jesuit and monastic hordes from the Continent. In 1829 she "emancipated" Roman Catholics in Ireland, and from that day onward, Romanism has been free to conspire against law and order, against the safety and life of the Protestant minority in Ireland; against the stability and peace of the empire.

If we cannot prevent Romanism crowding our jails and poor houses; if we cannot make it clean, honest, truthful or industrious, we can forbid intimidation, persecution, conspiracy to murder; freedom to sow sedition, to preach treason from the housetops; we can forbid the priest—who sometimes knows of murder before the fact and always after the fact—from taking refuge of silence in "canon law"; and we can see that the king's writ is not arrested by monastic

The Tares of the Field

doors. We need not in our homage to freedom provide a lever wherewith to overturn the foundations of liberty. We should not endow schools and universities in order that Jesuits may sing the praise of murder or unlock the rancid abominations of Liguori. The cry of the French Jesuit, "a free church in a free state," "Italy found was a delusion," says Dr. Robertson, "when the church to be dealt with was a Roman Catholic one. It soon learned that a free Roman Catholic church in a free state meant a church free to damage and destroy the state. Hence the church in Italy has had to be tied down by penal statutes, by 'Disabilities Acts,' such as England with foolish magnanimity has erased from its statute books."

The profound sleep into which British statesmanship has sunk while the enemy, not merely allowed but encouraged, sows these Islands with anti-Reformation tares is, to thinking men, amazing.

"Then shall the righteous shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father." "This sublime announcement is over and above the interpretation of the parable," says Alford. This is true if we conceive the parable as confined to the working out of opposite principles in the present life. But the parable is apologetic; and the vindication of the Divine permission requires the inclusion of two worlds within our horizon. Here indeed the apology attains its culmination; for the view of things in their final issues justifies the Divine ways. Reasons hidden in time are revealed in eternity. Christ has done from His throne what the servants would have done on the field. He has gloriously relieved the sons of the kingdom from the contagion and oppression of wickedness. His repressed aversion to the tares having found expression in casting them "into the furnace of fire," the mind required to see the righteous separated, revealed, triumphant. In passing from the field of the world to the scene of separation and glory, the figure changes from the relation between tares and wheat to the contrast between darkness and light. Now the righteous have emerged from the obscuration of false religion, from the long eclipse of goodness by the glory of the world; they have passed from the kingdom of heaven into the kingdom of their Father.

III

**The Kingdom Advances Gradually,
Mysteriously, Triumphantly**

I

THE MUSTARD SEED

“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 than the herbs, and becometh a tree, so that the birds of the heaven come and lodge in the branches thereof.”

MATT. xiii. 31, 32.

No empire earth has seen equalled the Roman power in the appeal of its majesty to the imagination. Nor was the majesty that filled the outward and inner eye confined to the imperial city. The Roman genius possessed the power of provincialising the pomp and glory of the empire-capital. In Jerusalem or Cæsarea the mighty fabric of human sovereignty seemed almost as dominant as in Rome. We must keep the historic sense awake in order to comprehend the surroundings of Christ and His countrymen—to interpret the shadow of the Roman world that awed and darkened Palestine. We must remember that everywhere the eye of Jesus met the signs of imperial ascendancy ; and that behind the Pharisees and the hierarchy, the temple and the theocracy, arose the vast consolidation of Roman sovereignty. In the background of every Jewish mind loomed the mighty shadow ; and all the more hauntingly that it awakened memories of subjugation and supremacy.

To name king or kingdom did far more than recall the memories of David and Solomon. It recalled the mighty ramifying tree overshadowing all lands, under whose shadow the vine from Egypt and the native fig tree were withering away. Had Jesus been a sage like Socrates, or a prophet like Jeremiah, He might have delivered His message without bringing Himself or His purpose into contact with the Roman Empire. But conscious of kingship and of His mission to found a kingdom of heaven, He was bound to provoke unfounded expectations or unfounded scorn. The parables spoken from the Galilean boat, of which this is one, reveal

Christ's Vision of the Kingdom of Heaven

a consciousness in the Divine Speaker of an all-pervading empire possessing the mind of His audience. To speak of a kingdom in that assemblage was bound to institute a contrast between Cæsar in imperial purple and Jesus in Galilean homespun ; between the Roman legions as the striking arm of empire, and the group of peasants standing over against the fishing boat.

To such an assembly the kingdom of heaven, if introduced at all, required to be presented apologetically. Even to remove the stumbling block from the path of loyal disciples demanded this treatment. If this kingdom were to be founded on earth it must excel in power the mightiest empires, or how could it stand ? Whence then could a leader whose following might have found room in the fishing boat, derive power and sovereignty to overthrow or withstand the Roman dominion ? The legions and cohorts must indeed come from heaven, for no man had seen their camp on earth. The appeal of magnitude and majesty has in all ages held ascendancy over the human mind ; but especially was this true before the evolution of spiritual ideals. Before Jesus affected the ideals of the world, the great man was the embodiment of brute force ; Samson or Achilles. The monarch was mighty whose armies could carry desolation through the nations. To minds thus dominated by physical mass and momentum the invisible is another name for impotence. Nor can the human mind in general conceive the invisible acting through despised or unimposing instrumentality. Jesus here, as in all His parables, summons nature to His aid ; not for illustration, but for analogy. He could not but have known that in its heart the multitude asked, Where is the material out of which to build this kingdom of heaven, the might of hosts, the power of gold ? This Rabbi who dwells upon phantom monarchies has been a full year on the platform of Palestine, and what cities or provinces have become subject to his sceptre ?

The fatal error lay in reasoning from the kingdoms of the world to the kingdom of heaven. Contrasted, these kingdoms could and should be, but not compared. The monarchies of the world are as much man's creation as the house in which he dwells. Some man arises from the dead human level, expresses

The Mustard Seed

the sufferings, the ambitions or the fears of his fellows, stoops to conquer, welds a city, a tribe or a nation into an army; the sword of the hero becomes a sceptre, his chair a kingly throne. To preserve peace at home, the hero king makes wars abroad. The enlargements of his dominion are carved with the sword and glued with blood. There is another kingdom, which man has not established and man cannot overthrow. In this kingdom, bulk, magnitude, force are nothing. Life is everything. Between this kingdom and the kingdom of heaven the link is not analogy, but unity of operation. What then is this empire that lies so near the kingdom of heaven? It is the reign of life in the dominion of nature, whether the vital fluid be sap or blood. There is, however, one distinction between the kingdoms: the time necessary for nature to complete its cycle is short compared with the time necessary to complete the spiritual cycle from the seed-word falling in the heart to the saint; from the uplifting of the cross to the ascension of the throne. The child may witness a mustard seed fall into the ground and become a tree, and still be a child. The law of the kingdom of heaven demands wider sweeps of duration for its fulfilment. The contemporaries of its planting in the world could not be the contemporaries of its final triumph. They required to see and accept by faith the power in the mustard seed to become a tree. The generation that knew the brown-red field of spring, required miracles in nature and human nature not only as evidences but as prophecies of the infinite miracle wrapped in the little seed falling into the world, and destined to be known as Christianity. As the seed sought and found the light, as it sprang from a tomb and drank blood-dew at every pore, as ages fell like rain drops around it and evoked its latent life, it made less and less demand on faith in its divinity, and more and more on the accountability of generations sheltered by its living, widening branches.

Jesus' audience stood at a point of time and outlook which made heavy demands on faith. The human craving for the outward, for the pomp that dominates and deceives the mind, for the immediate embodiment of ideals, for the quick march of time, required to be met with firm denial. None of that

Christ's Vision of the Kingdom of Heaven

generation could outlive the spring days of the kingdom of God. Simeon, who came in the Spirit into the temple, could take the infant Saviour in his arms and crave permission to depart, having seen the salvation of the Lord. With the infant in his arms, but without the inspiration, his point of vision would have been that of the age when Jesus sat in the boat on Galilee. It was what the prophet would have named "the day of small things."

The mustard seed was sown when Jesus' human feet had imprinted A.D. on the world. The "field" with Matthew, the "earth" according to Mark, "his garden" in Luke, was the grave of preceding ages. Seen without figure, the field, the earth, the garden, was the human mind, the heir of the memories and the desolations of time. Where the seed met the soil it was a word, a message, a revelation; seen more deeply it was a deed, a work of consummation on the wide theatre of heaven and earth; deeper still, it was the Worker. Christ's voice seemed unimportant amidst the voices of the Sanhedrin and the city. His sufferings were unworthy of record, His cross a blur on the sky-line. In that day of beginnings, one Man and one only saw the new heaven and the new earth hidden, latent, in the mustard seed sown in Galilee. "Before the eye of his spirit, the future has become to-day, and the history of the development of many centuries is concentrated into a moment of time." Christ's confidence in His triumph, His clear vision of the throne beyond the cross, His conscious lordship of futurity, His assured reign in a kingdom permeating, withstanding and outlasting all kingdoms, is far more than the light that burns in a prophet's eye; it is the view of One to whom there is nothing past and nothing future. It is an outlook sublimer still than that of the morning when He launched the worlds in the dark, foreseeing their birth of light. It is here that Jesus stands in the line, yet far in front, of all heroes; they believe themselves to be invincible and immortal; He knows it.

The mustard seed knows no haste; it is heir of all ages. Although miracle surrounds its sowing and its springing, it, like a child of nature, like a citizen of the wood, adheres persistently to the law of its own life. The eye of God rests on its earth-bed, legions of angels guard its infancy; its leaves

The Mustard Seed

shall be stained with blood and drenched with tears ; war shall wound it with the sword, and eras of luxurious peace retard its growth ; but its roots drink the river of life ; at the breath of God its wounds are healed ; and as cities, thrones and empires subside beneath the green sward, and the long filing years fall by thousands silent beneath its shade, it goes on expanding, upbuilding, and at last in Divine loneliness over-spreads and monopolizes the field of humanity. Its roots suck whatever was Divine in all the past ; its stem and branches the consolidation of highest human interests, the brotherhood of men, unified in life without death, and holiness without sin. The kingdom of heaven is organized because it lives. It is one ; in one germ it has its rise ; one sap runs through all its veins ; one life sustains and expands it. At first it seems a miracle, it scatters miracles along its path. Afterwards it falls into line with nature ; takes " possession of the natural order, penetrating and transfiguring it." But although the supernatural may be concealed, it never deserts God's planting. This mustard tree lifting its branches aloft and holding them high against gravity, causing its sap to flow upwards in defiance of fixed laws, proves that the kingdom of heaven will work supernaturally within the sphere of the natural. The tears of oppression, the sighing of the prisoners and the broken-hearted, will vitalize its branches.

Probably the mustard tree attained its maturity in the course of a single season. This may be inferred from its having been sown according to Luke in the " garden," and placed by Mark amongst herbs. The similitude would thus best reflect the kingdom of heaven, which covers the interval between two winters : the winter forerunning the advent of the Divine Sower, and the winter succeeding the universal harvest. Christianity may indeed appear to have experienced many winters and many springs. But on deeper thought we perceive that a spring like that which accompanied its advent has not been repeated ; and winter, like the long season preceding that event, has never returned. Jesus throughout His ministry sowed the seed of the cross. His preaching and His sacrifice must be regarded as different stages in the working out of redemption. At Pentecost the mustard seed broke the seal of earth, and before the close of the century of Christ's

Christ's Vision of the Kingdom of Heaven

birth it had extended branches to Antioch, Ephesus, Philippi, Galatia, Thessalonica, Corinth, Rome. Nor has it yet become bark-bound. From age to age new waves of life have swept up the sacred tree. The sap flow of the nineteenth century has sent out branches to the nations ; and God's universal field promises to come under its shadow.

The birds lodging in the branches, or " under the shadow thereof," according to Mark, serve to emphasize the tree's proportions. The seed that a sparrow could swallow, a breath carry away, a pinch of dust conceal, stands forth in the face of the fierce Syrian sun, creating shade and shelter from the heat. The sheltering power of Christianity is one of its essential characteristics. In an Eastern land shade and water are associated ideas. Deliverance from thirst and intolerable heat have supplied the prophets and psalmists of the Old Testament with their most impressive images of God and His salvation ; " as rivers of water in a dry place, as the shadow of a great rock in a weary land." God in Christ is the refuge of the fainting soul. But Christianity as an incidence of its Divinity brings shade and shelter to the homeless. It has proved a refuge to woman and childhood, to the oppressed, the helpless and the slave. Civil freedom, freedom of thought and conscience, have found lodging under its shadow.

The out branching power of Christianity is peculiar to its genius. The only cloistered life it knows is the life in the mustard seed before it breaks its prison walls. It creates the church, the home, the orphanage, the hospital. It forms channels for the outflow of sympathy, charity, brotherhood, humanity, peace. Generations and nations ignorant of its spirit, as the birds of the sap flowing in the mustard tree, experience the blessings of its shadow.

Without any undue strain the parable may bear an individual application ; may be understood as setting forth the small beginnings of Divine grace in the heart. " A word, a thought, a passing sentence may prove to be the little seed which eventually fills and shadows the whole heart and being, and calls all thoughts, all passions, all delights to come and shelter under it."¹ I am convinced, however, that this aspect unduly pressed weakens the force of the parable. The

¹ Alford.

The Mustard Seed

mustard seed and the human world are the associated ideas. The stages from seed to tree, the elevation, the expansion, the assertion of place through the enforcing law of life, and last of all, shade and refuge in an almost treeless land, are the master thoughts and must not be obscured. Besides, the allusion to the roosting birds scarcely harmonizes with the individual application.

A stranger alighting on our planet meets a sage who remembers the events of two thousand years, and who at will can cause those events to pass before the stranger's eyes. As the world revolves beneath the stranger's view, it presents two classes of men : those who turn for help to things they can touch and see, and those who close their eyes on the visible in order to find God. "Are these adorers of the invisible," he inquires, "these citizens of a commonwealth unseen, good citizens of earth, lovers and benefactors of their kind? Build they temples to God or is their only temple the firmament?" While he spake all the Christian temples of the world arose upon his view; and a Diviner light overspread the face of earth and sky. "It is the Lord's day," whispered the reverend guide. The stranger gazed in silent wonder, for over Europe, America, Australia, New Zealand, in dark Africa, in Madagascar, in the islands of the sea, in China and in India, streets and highways filled with men and women, youths and children, on their way to the house of God. "Hearken!" exclaimed the ancient guide: and there arose a sound as of many waters; and after a pause, a cry, sad, tender, unfathomed, arose from earth, and passed beyond the stars. "This," said the guide to the stranger, who was weeping, "is the prodigal arising and returning to his father." "What mean those lights powdered thick as stars around the globe?" asked the stranger. "Those in the firmament of life are Christian homes," replied the guide; "and those softened lights are houses of healing, called hospitals in the language of earth; and those kindred stars are the homes where these worshippers of the Invisible gather, feed and clothe the maimed, the orphan, the forsaken of earth. Those dark spots," he continued, "are prisons immuring those who wrong their fellows; but to their gloom you perceive a radiant human form carrying light; while yonder under the arching

Christ's Vision of the Kingdom of Heaven

wings of angels lies Howard dying of jail fever caught while bringing hope to those dark abodes." "What may yon shining temple be?" asked the stranger. "It is the temple of Art, of Letters, of Science," answered his guide; "and the angel presiding over the busy workmen is the genius of Christianity." "What mean those winged abodes, speeding into the shadows, with a star aloft?" "That is the fleet of freed men going forth to rescue the bondmen of the world," replied the guide. "Amazing!" exclaimed the stranger. "From whence is the light, the inspiring, the compelling power derived? Is it earth-born, or comes it from the invisible?" A clearer light fell upon the scene, and lo stranger and guide stood beneath a world-wide tree whose branches shot across all seas and oceans, over all empires, islands and lands of earth; and all the radiant homes and sanctuaries, all the hospitals and orphanages, all the schools and temples of light, all the armies who live to serve, and the infinite emanations of human compassion, branched forth from a common centre. "Wonderful!" exclaimed the stranger. "Look up," cried the guide. Whereupon the stranger, lifting up his eyes, beheld the branches, white with radiant beings in endless planes of glory, a multitude which no man could number, extending into heaven. "You ask for the source, the root of all this," said the guide; "stand here." Twenty centuries ebbed out in a moment of time; and between stranger and guide arose "a root out of a dry ground." It was the cross.

II

THE LEAVEN IN THE MEAL

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

MATT. xiii. 33.

This parable is an apology for the offence of the cross and a prophecy of its triumph. The vision of the expanding kingdom of heaven the disciples may have vaguely understood when first they heard the parable delivered; the contempt poured upon its Founder they could not have conceived until they had lived through the day of Calvary. Then the vision of humanity, penetrated throughout its mass by the silent energy of the gospel, vanished before the obloquy of Golgotha; and even to faith the cross became a stone of stumbling. So overwhelming indeed was the horror and amazement evoked by what seemed the inglorious passivity and disaster of Calvary, that in the death of their Lord the disciples saw the collapse of His cause. It was only after the tomb had rent its seals that they began to forgive death for having robbed affection of so dear a Master and aspiration of so glorious a dream. The tragedy of Calvary supplied the best of reasons for placing over against its ignominy a prophecy of its triumph. Here, the kingdom of heaven is considered as opposed and assailed in its Founder and doctrine before it had time to vindicate its claims. It is between the kingdom of heaven, in Christ's day, and the leaven newly hidden, its properties unevoked and unrevealed, that the analogy lies.

When we remember the motto of imperial Rome—*ubi castra ibi respublica*—and remember that Jesus a Roman subject was speaking to Roman subjects, about a kingdom of heaven, we can see how His hearers would look around for the kingdom-making camp. They would naturally ask, Where is the sword that shall carve from the Roman world anything answering to the name of kingdom? Between the opening of Jesus'

Christ's Vision of the Kingdom of Heaven

public ministry and His death, where was the evidence of what the world would name His base of power? Of political power He had none. He advocated no political campaign; no plan for removing the boundaries, or shifting the centre of empire. He originated no patriotic watchword, such as, "Israel a nation." Had a parliament composed of nationalists and imperialists sat in Jerusalem, Jesus' political influence would not have weighed a pennyweight in either scale. As a public teacher, He was supported by no consolidated caste; He had no massive body of public opinion behind Him. Humanly speaking, His isolation was absolute. Besides, His teaching, coming with the shock of innovation, was wormwood and gall to Jewish nature, and an offence to human nature. Standing alone against the torrent of the world, He laid Himself open to abuse and scorn when He spoke of founding the kingdom of heaven. Hence even while proclaiming the advent of an unworldly reign, for the sake of the multitude and for the sake of His disciples, there was urgent need for apology and prophecy.

When the day of preaching and healing darkened into Calvary, the cause for which Jesus had stood became still more forlorn; then a cross was the only asset of the new faith. If the kingdom of heaven was to come, it seemed that it must be ruled from the grave. Dead hands have indeed held strongest sceptres; but Jesus filled the grave of one who had hung upon a tree.

Where was the kingdom of heaven on the night of the crucifixion? One of the cabinet ministers lay in a suicide's grave. The rest had vanished before the glare of derision. Jesus, lowered from a cross standing between two crucified outlaws, was laid in a grave of unfathomed obloquy and detestation. On Jesus' part had closed three years of preaching and healing, of defence and aggression; on the part of the common people, three years of camp meetings, of mingled fear, wonder and disappointment; on the part of the Jewish religionists and rulers, three years of shadowing and intrigue, of conspiracy and hate. In the course of three days, Pilate, the Roman garrison, and Jerusalem, become aware that even the dead body of Jesus had vanished. Temple and hierarchy have at last cast out the Galilean leaven.

It demanded an invincible faith to discern in the Crucified

The Leaven in the Meal

the Divine asset of empire. As yet the leaven lay outside the meal ; and legal holiness had cleansed the house of the Jewish nation from its odium and defilement. The three measures of meal, the symbol of humanity, had not yet closed over it. In a profound sense the leaven was in the meal when the Word became flesh ; but the leaven in the sense of the doctrines springing from the cross, had yet to be hidden in the mass.

When arose the function of preaching at Pentecost, the position of the preachers seemed that of mourners following the bier of their hopes. No company of men had ever appeared so surely doomed to failure and disappointment. If they turned to the temple and the hierarchy, they met elation and triumph ; if they looked to Calvary and the tomb, shame and ruin had settled there. It was not the contempt of insignificance only, as expressed by the mustard seed, that hung over their cause. History preserves amongst her treasures revolutions age-long and world-wide in their sweep, whose cradle was the bosom of some obscure hero or solitary patriot. But the cause, bequeathed by the crucified Prophet who had familiarized the ears of peasant Galilee with "the kingdom of heaven," had become an abomination to priesthood and a pollution to pharisaic holiness. The Galilean star had set in execration. The tide of public opinion, of religious opinion, of ruling opinion, that sullenly surged around the death and name of Jesus, His followers must withstand and divert. But the facts, the name, the death—these are the leaven. In justifying Jesus, the preachers of the eclipsed faith accuse the lawyers, the Sanhedrin, the leaders, the nation. To proclaim His resurrection was to range God and the nation on opposing sides. A new thing had come to pass. Before Jesus, martyrs had sealed their faith with their blood ; now for the first time a man who had died on a gibbet, in the view of temple and city, had become the centre of a creed ; not in spite of His crucifixion, but *because* of it. His wounds had become articles of faith ; His blood a doctrine ; His death an expiation ; His suffering a substitution ; His person and His cross the lever of God to uplift the world of men to the plane of salvation.

The new heralds, instead of burying their dead Leader in oblivion, preached Him ; instead of apologizing for having

Christ's Vision of the Kingdom of Heaven

been His followers, charge the nation with His murder. Here meet the shame of the cross and the power of the cross. I am speaking of the cross and its related shame and glory before it had opportunity to prove Christ, the wisdom of God, and the power of God. This was the detested message Jerusalem heard at Pentecost; this was the leaven Peter hid in the festal human mass, when he proclaimed Christ crucified as the risen and ascended Lord.

When the gospel crossed the Gentile frontier, it aroused aversion on account of its Jewish origin. For the Jews had drawn upon themselves the suspicion and hatred of the pagan world. That a Jew, and still more, that a crucified Jew should be preached as Divine, as the Son of God, as the Saviour of the world, aroused the mirth and derision of Stoic and Epicurean, of sophist and philosopher.¹

Human nature, not even excepting Jewish human nature, demanded gods that it could see. It demanded that they should be the monopoly of the tribe, city, or province. A great part of the religious asset of human nature was the right and the power to fashion its own gods. A religion without idols, whose God was invisible, a religion that could be hidden like leaven, that must be hidden to find the conditions of its power, appeared to the pagan mind absolute foolishness. The doctrines that constitute the distinctive life and originality of the gospel of the kingdom: faith, repentance, love, humility, long-suffering, self-renunciation, forgiveness, had no place in the religious systems of paganism. Considering then the Jewish and pagan elements that composed the mass of men, in their religious prejudices and antagonisms; considering human nature itself, is it wonderful that Jesus chose a piece of leaven, suggestive of defilement, corruption, death, as emblematic of His kingdom in the opinion of mankind; and as symbolizing its inherent might and ultimate triumph?

Christ's apology for the repellent aspect of a religion which must unfold a cross, must dwell on the power of blood, and

¹ "Sprung out of Judæa, born of a haughty and detested people who met the scorn of the world with a yet more bitter scorn, Christianity, while it was rejected and reviled by the Jews, shared nevertheless in the odium attached to Judaism. It was thus in the anomalous position of bearing the reproach of the synagogue, as if identified with it, while at the same time it found in the synagogue its most malignant and implacable foe."—Dr. Ed. de Pressensac.

The Leaven in the Meal

on the reconciling efficacy of a human sacrifice, is this : Leaven in itself has neither form nor beauty. It stands for effervescence and corruption, and in religious connections it has acquired an evil name. As leaven is, considered by itself, so is the cross when viewed apart from its place and connections. Let, however, the word of the cross be received as the meal receives the leaven, and what seemed the ignominious will prove the mighty. Through the agency of leaven the family is furnished with life-sustaining bread. It enables the fire to penetrate to the heart of the loaf ; and the loaf to impart its nourishment. The leaven is corruption ; yet in combination with the meal its influence is wholly on the side of health and life. Without its ministry, daily bread would be the sign of fast and humiliation.

When the interpreter identifies the woman who hid the leaven in the meal with the church, we may rest assured that he has not grasped the parable. Nor is the case improved when the woman is taken to symbolize the Holy Spirit. There can be no church till part of the meal is leavened. And while the Spirit works in and with the Crucified, no one contends that He sows the mustard seed. But the sowing of the mustard seed and the insertion of the leaven represent one and the same thing ; that is, bringing Christ crucified into redeeming relation with humanity. Man sows, woman bakes. The two parables, drawn from male and female spheres of occupation, are consistent with fact. The woman is the peasant wife and mother. We may reverently think that Christ's own mother furnished for Him the earliest example of household baking ; and that the memory of home and infancy supplied the Divine Teacher with an image to illustrate the spirit and future of His kingdom ; with an apology to arrest judgment on the gospel of the cross until it had time to vindicate the expansiveness of its genius. The mother of the family knew as well as any other the effervescent, corrupt nature of leaven. Was it not she who had torn a piece from the fermented mass and laid it aside that it might become corrupt ? It was she who judged when it was sufficiently " old " to impart its leavening properties to her household baking. Then would she hide this piece of stale dough in the measured quantity of meal ; not to deteriorate or corrupt the meal

Christ's Vision of the Kingdom of Heaven

intended for the family's daily bread ; but to transform its nature that it might impart strength to Joseph and Jesus at the carpenter's bench.

The three measures of meal neither imply the three fold nature of man, nor the three sons of Noah ; they simply point to the quantity employed in a family baking. If *one* measure had been a common quantity for a baking, it would doubtless have been employed in the parable. The large amount, sufficient for the family's requirements, serves two suggestive ends. 1. It shows the penetrating power of the little piece of leaven. 2. It implies that one Christ, one cross, are triumphantly sufficient for the human family, in one generation and throughout all generations.

By some it is held that since leaven always represents effervescent corruption, the leavening process mentioned in the parable can only mean a work of deterioration. But, (1) this opinion wrenches the parable from its context. The parable of the mustard seed, by general consent, signifies the rise and progress of the kingdom of heaven on earth. How, then, could its twin parable, addressed on the same occasion, to the same audience, set forth the effacement of that kingdom and the universal spread of Satan's empire ? The parables in Matthew xiii., portraying the kingdom of heaven in its collective aspect, foreshadow and pledge its expansion and ascendancy. (2) The subject proposed by Christ is not the reign of evil, but *the kingdom of heaven* ; and its expansion is compared to the diffusive energy of leaven in meal. The action implied by the leaven, whether good or bad, must have begun with Christ's ministry. If the kingdom even then was the vanishing quantity, one is tempted to ask, How much there was to vanish ? Andrew and Peter vanished indeed into the five hundred witnesses of the resurrection. We must ask for an explanation of the fact that the kingdom of heaven has *not* vanished ; how it is that " Christ exercises a more various dominion, and attracts more love than any monarch of history ; has more subjects that are willing to signalize their loyalty, if need be, by dying for Him ? " ¹ According to the opinion I am reviewing the unleavened meal must represent the kingdom of God. Therefore God's kingdom

¹ Henry Rogers.

The Leaven in the Meal

before the insertion of the leaven must have been devoid of corruption and universal ; and its penetration by the leaven must signify the gradual waning of Christianity and the ultimate triumph of evil ; for the " whole was leavened." If the parable had really predicted the decrease of the kingdom of heaven and the increase of Satan's sway, it could have been spoken only by a false prophet. The New Testament itself is witness that the penetration of human society by Christianity is its greatest miracle.

(3) The opinion under review subserves the interest of a theory that Satan, not Christ, is the reigning monarch of our cross-crowned world ; that the gospel resources are insufficient, and intentionally insufficient, for the salvation of the world, which awaits for its redemption the visible appearing and the visible reign of Jesus Christ. It is obvious that if the kingdom of heaven went forth in waves of widening conquest, the theory would not hold. Either theory or parable must give way. It is not the theory that has been sacrificed. (4) What appears to be the only foundation for this opinion is the place and character assigned to leaven in the Bible. The mistake, however, lies in considering the leaven *by itself* ; by what it is, and not by what it does. They say, It is *zume*, fermentation, corruption. Yes : but that is not the point of view. The parable regards it in combination with the meal. If in itself it stands for corruption, physical or moral, yet is its operation beneficent and good ; exclusively on the side of human well-being. The advocates of the theory that since leaven symbolizes evil, its operative influence must be evil also, disprove their theory every time they eat leavened bread. But if leaven on account of its evil name must work evil, what of the cross ?

Christ's profound insight into the oneness and the want of humanity is a striking feature of this parable. Its symbol for humanity is a mass of unleavened meal. The demarcations of age and race and clime vanish ; and mass unites with mass. The human world is one in the absence of the transforming, uplifting power of salvation ; but it is penetrable, pervious to grace, from centre to circumference. Humanity was created for Christianity. Christianity requires no bridge-builder between age and age, or race and race. The meal asks leaven

Christ's Vision of the Kingdom of Heaven

and the leaven asks meal as the sphere of its operation. But the leaven stipulates for a central place. Christianity makes the heart of man its point of departure. And in that centre it seeks an inner centre—the human will. But although the figure of the leaven holds good in its personal as in its general application, still the gospel is here viewed in relation to humanity, as the leaven is placed over against the heap of meal.

The religion that penetrated and conquered the Roman world, relied on an invisible base of supply. The Divine Leader of the redeeming campaign, was unseen. The leaven hidden that it may exert its energies, is in close analogy with the gospel's disdain of pompous rite and ceremonial. She who hides the leaven is nameless. In itself the act has no virtue. Leaven and meal, the two silent units, must come together. Between Christ and the soul nothing must intervene.

The leaven wears an inglorious aspect. Yet it possesses aggressive and transforming virtue. It asks for time to travel from centre to circumference. But it strikes out on its march as soon as it is wrapped in the meal. From contact it moves to conquest. Its goings are without noise and without haste. Between starting-point and goal it has far to travel, both in the individual and humanity. Neither a bad nor a good man is the work of a day. Jesus may die in a day ; but sin after sin, man after man, generation after generation, must ascend the cross and be crucified. The operation of the leaven reflects human unconsciousness in new creation. In physical growth others are more conscious of the fact than we ourselves. Yet every day works change in outline, voice and feature. And the leaven of salvation once received shapes and transforms our mental and moral nature in concealment and disguise. Life and growth are elusive realities. Let a man in whom the divine ferment is at work analyze his moral nature. Let him ask, When came these constituent elements together? When did faith, honesty, truthfulness, love of the good, the thirst for God, begin? Can he always tell? He can no more enumerate the influences and factors that fashioned his inner life than the meal can analyze the leaven that has changed its nature. God, faith, worship, truth, self-

The Leaven in the Meal

abasement, prayer, work like leaven. The leaven is God in disguise; for who but God can generate such attributes as we find in Paul and Luther?

The meal once leavened, never again becomes unleavened. The conquering and the conquered elements are henceforth inseparable. The good influences, entering our being, do not live a life separate from us. The Spirit, life, righteousness, patience, the kingdom of heaven, entwine themselves with the soul; and like the leaven, sink into and add themselves to our nature. We can be leavened; the new, Divine quality can give itself entirely away to us. And when a single heart has been leavened with faith, love, truth, holiness, a work for eternity has been accomplished. We possess for a day; we shall *be* forever.

The centrality of the fermenting leaven history confirms. "It is characteristic of the advance of Christianity," says Dr. Orr, "that all through it struck at the great centres and followed the great lines of inter-communication in the Roman world; that its chief victories were won where Greek and Roman culture had prepared the way for it; and that its posts of strength and influence were chiefly in the wealthy and populous cities, Rome, Corinth, Antioch, Alexandria, Carthage, Lyons."¹ The same writer has fixed attention on the amazing and insufficiently recognized expansion of the Christian faith in these and other great centres. He calculates that in ten generations nearly 4,000,000 Christians found graves in the Roman Catacombs. Gibbon estimates "the population of Rome at about 1,000,000, and the number of Christians at the beginning of the fourth century at about 50,000, or one-twentieth part of the whole. In reality, unless the testimony of the Catacombs has been totally misread, they might have been anything between one-third and one-half."² According to Schultze, the Christians in Asia Minor in the time of Constantine may have numbered a million in a total population of 19,000,000. Dr. Orr, however, advances reasons for believing that the Christians of Asia Minor in that age numbered nearer four millions than one. "There is not," says Justin Martyr in the second century, "a single race of

¹ *Neglected Factors in the Early Progress of Christianity*, p. 31.

² *Neglected Factors*, p. 40.

Christ's Vision of the Kingdom of Heaven

men, barbarians, Greeks, or by whatever name they may be called, warlike or nomadic, homeless or dwelling in tents, or leading a pastoral life, among whom prayers and thanksgivings are not offered in the name of Jesus the crucified, to the Father and Creator of all things." Tertullian, who died in the first half of the third century, says, "We have filled your cities, islands, fortresses, towns, assemblies, your very camps, your tribes, companies, palace, senate, forum."

Against Gibbon's estimate of 6,000,000 Christians for the whole Roman empire in the time of Constantine, Dr. Orr places the opinion of Schultze, who says, "The investigator assuredly gains from the testing of the sources in detail the clear impression that, in the beginning of the fourth century, the church on the great world-theatre of over 103,000 geographical square miles, numbered more than 10,000,000."

Gibbon represents early Christianity as "almost entirely composed of the dregs of the populace, of peasants and mechanics, of boys and women, of beggars and slaves." In this verdict, the echo of angry paganism, church historians have too often acquiesced. It is true that the religion of Jesus joyfully invaded and leavened the oppressed and friendless, the peasant and the slave, the bleeding and forgotten. On the infinite levels of human prose it breathed the inspiration of heavenly citizenship, the living hope of immortality. But it called their masters and tyrants to the abasement of the cross; and around the table of their invisible Lord slave and master met as brethren. A religion that fails to enlist and upraise the poor, the crushed, the forsaken, cannot be Divine. The middle class composed a thin stratum of the Roman world, but Christianity diffused its Divine ferment even more triumphantly through that class than through the class beneath it. Evidence accumulates that in proportion to its numbers, the middle stratum yielded more converts than the lower.¹ Coming to the higher levels of Roman society, we know that, "even in the time of the apostles, the palace of the emperor was one of the chief seats of the growing Christian church in Rome."² By the close of the first century, "an

¹ Harnack: *Constitution and Law of the Church in the First Two Centuries.*

² Harnack.

The Leaven in the Meal

entire branch of the Flavian family had embraced the Christian faith."¹ Before sixty years had passed since the introduction of Christianity into imperial Rome, a daughter of the emperor Vespasian became a convert to the faith.

The new religion early distinguished itself from the religions of the ancient world by ignoring geographical and racial, intellectual and social distinctions. Entering the sphere of the heart, it caused a holy ferment amongst the emotions, arousing conscience, quickening feeling, awakening shame and repentance, faith and love. The love and anguish of the Saviour, the nails and spear of sin that pierced Him, when pressed home by the Spirit, broke the heart. The Divine leaven, however, did not stop at the heart. It entered the mind, producing ferment of thought. In the second century, the innumerable shades of intellectual heresy, grouped under the name of Gnosticism, prove that the new faith as powerfully moved the human mind as the human heart. The best minds of paganism girt on their armour to assail it. "Under the leadership of its invisible Head, it went forth without trembling to meet adversaries at once skilful and strong, and as numerous as formidable—to encounter in fact all the recognized lords of the world, its princes and priests, its philosophers and artists. Every conflict became a victory."² And the leaven, as it moves outward and forward with time, claims ascendancy over the individual and the race. It follows the miner descending into night, the soldier on the field, the hungry, sorrowing millions; it penetrates trade and merchandise; it leavens the depths and heights of Bacon and Pascal, of Milton and Burke, of Newton and Kelvin.

Christ's sublime vision of the sure aggressive leaven glows with the optimism of youth. The parable of the triumphant leaven is a tonic for heart and brain, ordained for days of despondency and defeat, when victory rests with the world. It passes over the rocky ground and infesting thorn-brake; it sees no enemy sowing tares; no bad fish in the draw net. It rivets attention on the vast human continent, and surveys the energies of God's salvation soaking through the immeasurable mass, till they reach the confines of human nature and human time. No sublimer vision ever fired the heart of

¹ Harnack.

² Dr. Ed. de Pressensé.

Christ's Vision of the Kingdom of Heaven

missionary hero whose sphere is man, or spiritual patriot whose country is the world.

For a moment the Divine Saviour carries the spectator on high, and allows him to stand where He Himself stands, and see what He sees ; and looking down to measure the march of the kingdom by millenniums, till reverse, recession, conflict, fade in the vast onward sweep of God's design.

III

THE EARTH BEARING FRUIT OF ITSELF

“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 putteth forth the sickle, because the harvest is come.”—MARK iv. 26-29.

THIS parable, peculiar to Mark and placed by him between the Sower and the Mustard Seed, brings the kingdom of heaven under the eye of history. While the rise and progress of religion in the individual soul find here fitting illustration, they are not the *subject* of the parable. The kingdom of heaven is considered in its universal aspect. Looking forward from the seed-field to the harvest is the kingdom of prophecy ; looking backward from the harvest to the sowing is the kingdom in history. Not the difference in human receptivity, nor the contrast between the feeble beginnings of the kingdom and its consummated life, but the sure mysterious evolution of that kingdom's hidden energies, between the two points of its coming to earth and its realized ideal, forms the subject of our parable.

Of its three periods, the first points to the age when it was spoken and the audience to whom it was addressed. Not indeed that casting seed upon the earth is an isolated act ; for in the kingdom of heaven sowing is continuous. But the first coming of the seed of the kingdom to our world is never repeated ; and the days when the mysterious seed is first sown are separate from all other days. Neither the disciples nor the crowd occupied the point of view from which the parable unfolds its ampler meaning. The rise of a stupendous realm under the homely symbol of growing corn, could have been but imperfectly apprehended by the

Christ's Vision of the Kingdom of Heaven

Galilean audience. Even the apostles, in after years, would discover with surprise that they began to perceive the signification of the earth bearing fruit of itself.

In the present parable, as in the Sower and the Mustard Seed, the kingdom of heaven begins at the lowest point. But we are not asked to consider the insignificance of the germ, but the evolution and expansion of its life in a continuous process. The mustard seed comes under the same law of growth; the result, however, and not the process, the tree and not its history, is the theme of that parable. The present range of view knows neither rocky soil nor thorny ground; the soil is good; it possesses all the quickening, fostering qualities essential to growth and harvest. He who casts seed upon it sleeps and wakes, assured that the conditions to which the seed is committed, are certain to draw forth and mature its latent contents. The seed of the kingdom, itself the result of the heavenly harvest, is sown on ground prepared.

Not yet, while Jesus in glorious manhood was seen and heard, could the future of His kingdom, when He had disappeared, become a burning question; but the time was near when men would ask, What will become of the kingdom when the king is gone? Can it live and expand in the absence of a visible head? When friend and foe could point to the tree on which He expired, and the tomb wherein He lay, and the feeble group of subjects who had owned His authority, they might well ask, Can this cause live? To the disciples, bereaved and stunned by overwhelming sorrow on account of their Lord's death, the calm wide horizons of this parable were doubtless blurred or blotted out; and yet it was a word for that season of despair and for all similar seasons till the end.

During the apostolic age, when the profound yearning of believing hearts incessantly cried, Come, Lord Jesus, Come quickly, our parable with its vision of mysterious expansion and days of golden harvest must have fallen into the background. Even the message of the Talents and the Ten Virgins, with their manifest emphasis on Christ's long absence, made no impression. The straining eye fixed on the future, overlooked the fact that the kingdom of heaven had come

The Earth Bearing Fruit of Itself

to stay in the world until what began as seed sown should end in ripened harvest.

Whether a Divine or human agent casts the seed upon the ground, while a matter of legitimate interest, has almost no bearing on the interpretation. The sower, indeed, is purposely left in the shade, that the light may fall on the seed and its expansion. Informally introduced, he casts seed upon the ground, sleeps and rises night and day, while without his co-operation and beyond his comprehension, the seed unfolds its life. In the season of harvest, apparently the same agent who sowed, who slept and rose, puts forth the sickle. Christ might be represented by the sower and the reaper, but of Him it could not be said, "he knoweth not how"; unless indeed reference is here made to the human limitations which for example, excluded the Son from the knowledge of "that day."¹ To man the mystery of growth is quite as profound as the evolution of events.

The harvest of heaven is the seed time of earth; the seed cast by the man upon the earth falls ripe from the tree of eternity. It enshrines ages of history and futurity; its contents are Christ and His cross, and the Spirit who relates Christ crucified to the soul.

The brief glimpse of the man casting seed upon the earth covers in its primary application the earthly ministry of the Saviour; in its secondary sense, it represents the perpetual repetition of the Lord's act by His servants; for sowing, germination and reaping are found side by side. But the latter sowing is the proclamation of the good news of the kingdom, not its advent, and the reaping is the ingathering of those who are being saved. "Casting seed upon the earth," is the advent of the kingdom of heaven in the life and death of Christ—the time of the visible presence. The kingdom is conceived as consisting of three seasons: (1) Its coming to earth. (2) Its period of expansion. (3) The consummation. The first is the ministry of the Son; the second, the dispensation of the Spirit; the last, the time of recompense. The parable mainly confines our view to the second season, the dispensation of the Spirit.

The parable of the Sower having spread with startling

¹ Matt. xxiv. 36.

Christ's Vision of the Kingdom of Heaven

realism the missionary map of the future—hardened wayside, rocky ground and thorns—the disciples as pioneers of the kingdom would naturally feel perplexed at what appeared the dependence of the gospel's success or failure on human conditions and satanic hostility. A view excluding unfitness of soil and satanic opposition, was necessary to re-assure the future missionaries of the vitality and triumph of their cause. The kingdom of heaven had come to stay. It is on good ground, deep and clean, that the man casts seed ; and in the air hovers no ravenous bird. In order to confine the view to the seed and its future, the sower is dismissed from the scene ; he " sleeps and rises night and day," and " knowth not how " the seed " springs up and grows." He wakes but toils not, and when he sleeps earth is busy at her mysterious task. He cannot even comprehend growth, much less cause it.

The expanding kingdom is " first the blade, then the ear, then the full corn in the ear." If this advance referred to individual progress in spiritual life, its several stages would answer to " growing in grace," to " forgetting the things which are behind, and stretching forward to the things which are before " ; but the corn field, first brown, then green, then yellow, sets forth the whole movement of human salvation from beginning to consummation. The steps indicated by blade, ear, and full corn in the ear, applied to a kingdom comprehending myriads of human beings, widely differ in signification from personal growth in grace. In the latter case the soul is the field where the seed expands ; in the former, the world. In the latter the kingdom is intensive ; in the former expansive. The growth of the kingdom is considered objectively. At first it is invisible as seed in the ground ; it makes subjects, that is the blade ; they increase, and the corn is in ear ; they form Christian society and create a Christian atmosphere, that is harvest. All this was potentially in the seed ; the multitudes which no man can number were present by prophecy and purpose in the incarnation.

The enunciation of the law, " the earth beareth fruit of herself," limits and defines the place of Christ's labourers in the salvation of the world. What the farmer is to the laws of nature, that are they to the kingdom of heaven. " Earth," here stands for soil and sun, for rain and air. No one of these

The Earth Bearing Fruit of Itself

separated from the others produces fruit ; all of them separated from the first Cause are unable to give or develop life. But these causes primary, and secondary, are so related that seed entrusted to the earth is carried onward to harvest. The conditions which enable the earth to bring forth fruit of itself have their analogies in the dispensation of the Spirit. In the spiritual sphere the soil is the human heart ; sunshine, rain and atmosphere are the operations of the Spirit, without which man has not power even to receive eternal life.

With the incarnation humanity came into its new asset—God in Christ and Christ in man. Here begins the kingdom of heaven ; the human field is sown with the thoughts of Him whose words are life. Great were His words addressed to men, and greater still His words addressed to God ; for His life was a prayer of which Calvary was the Amen. His dwelling, speaking, suffering in our nature, are the conditions of the kingdom ; His triumph over flesh, His sacrifice, effecting the death of sin, make Him king ; His resurrection and ascension annex the world to the heavenly throne ; from His cross and tomb extends the heavenly colony. The economy of the Spirit began at Pentecost ; when the world, having been potentially sown, plunged into a new atmosphere.

Pentecost supplied the first interpretation of the earth bringing forth fruit of itself. The Divine Sower had disappeared, ascended ; a few Galilean peasants seemed the last vestige of the kingdom Jesus had come to establish. In the morning, cross and sepulchre alone remained to tell that Jesus had ever been ; at evening the kingdom He left in seed form had undergone amazing expansion. It was the day of the blade—the resurrection day of a buried name, a buried cause, a buried leader. It was the first field fought and won by the ascended King. And never before had kingdom so come ; no visible monarch, no army, neither uplifted sword nor sceptre. The King proclaimed had suffered crucifixion a few weeks before ; known to all was the grave that had closed over Him and His cause ; His hopeless, leaderless followers were scattered to the winds. Yet the first unveiling of the cross, the first finger pointing from earth to heaven, brought conviction and submission. Before the bar of conscience, a Galilean peasant arraigned the multitude, Jerusalem, the

Christ's Vision of the Kingdom of Heaven

nation ; charged home against priests and leaders the murder of Messiah. The tide turned ; the routed delivered the attack ; the flying had become pursuers. It was an attack in the name of a dead captain—a Roman cross for ensign—by men who had run away.

In the missionary labours of Paul, of Patrick and Columba, the earth bearing fruit of itself has fresh illustration. Inadequacy of the agency to produce the results, is manifest ; the unknown quantity is everything. The rush of green leaves at the Reformation, from the deeply buried seed out of which Britain, America and Germany have sprung, affords a striking example of the self-evolving power of the kingdom of heaven. The figure of the growing corn seems to imply continuous development ; but this is the kingdom as seen by Christ's fore-reading eyes, to which far-divided ages appear as succeeding moments. So far as the kingdom of heaven owns an outward history, decline succeeds growth.

The kingdom spreads from land to land, placing deliverance from sin in the front of its aims. In process of expansion it secures woman her place in the family, dooms slavery, unites the human race in brotherhood and peace ; last of all, it will make man human towards his dumb fellow creatures, the good Samaritan of the bleeding creation. In this direction lies the progress indicated by blade, ear and full corn in the ear. It requires time to evolve the innate genius of Christianity.

The parable calls attention (1) to the spirituality of the dispensation between Pentecost and the final judgment. 'The Spirit who anointed Christ to serve by living and dying, now speaks His word, interprets and applies His death, and the word spoken by the Spirit is Christ crucified, immortal, glorious. The cross to which He leads is a spiritual cross ; the sacrifice a spiritual oblation ; the soul of which Calvary was the embodiment and expression. (2) Our parable stipulates for absolute confidence in God to keep His covenant as chief partner in personal salvation and the salvation of the world. Under the simple figure of the earth bearing fruit of herself, Christ gives a disclosure of God's sufficiency and constancy in the work of man's salvation, which we can only call sublime. Speak of the laws of nature ! God Himself is the law of the kingdom of heaven. Thus every returning spring

The Earth Bearing Fruit of Itself

proclaims God as engaged to quicken and ripen the Divine seed in the heart and in the world. (3) The parable bespeaks patience with God in His ministry of the Spirit, which working for spiritual ends by spiritual means, requires to be scanned by spiritual eyes and understandings. By the analogy of growing corn, Christ has forewarned us that His kingdom will be subject to the slowness and the mystery of growth. The knowledge of His person, the meaning of His sacrifice, the nature of His kingdom, slowly enter the mind of man. When, therefore, good men become impatient with the slow expansion of the kingdom, they must not forget the ends at which that kingdom aims. Its first aim is the salvation of the soul ; but that signifies beginning the salvation of the world at the only point where it could begin. The kingdom of heaven must storm the world by entering individual hearts. The atmosphere of the upper room must enter politics, merchandise and science, must saturate family, civic and national life.

This implies a wide field of time. The sower would never have cast seed upon the earth, had he expected winter to set in while the corn was in the blade. He sowed in the conviction that the earth would retain power to bear fruit, that the seed would have all the seasons essential to its perfect development.

In the interval between seed time and harvest the sower "sleeps and rises night and day"; having found that "except the Lord build the house, they labour in vain that build it." Since man, imitating nature, first dropped a seed into the earth, he must have been impressed with his inability to accelerate its growth. In its own time the green blade appeared ; when he invoked harvest, the answer was the slowly lengthening stalk and empty ear. His first plot of wheat revealed what seemed an invisible worker behind the forces of nature. Harvest brought his opportunity ; he could reap and gather into the barn.

The harvest is the end of the age which began with the kingdom of heaven. The words, "he putteth forth the sickle," imply the universality of the harvest and the judgment which it signifies. The only other place in the New Testament in which this figure is employed is in an apocalyptic scene,

Christ's Vision of the Kingdom of Heaven

where "the earth was reaped."¹ Man reaps what he sows; "one soweth" in word and life, "another reapeth" the results of his labour. But putting forth the sickle has a judicial signification distinct from gathering men into the kingdom; for the seed-field and the field harvest-white are the kingdom itself in successive stages, of which harvest is the last.

¹ Rev. xiv. 16.

IV

A Kingdom of Seekers and Suppliants

I

THE HIDDEN TREASURE

"The kingdom of heaven is like unto a treasure hidden in the field ; which a man found, and hid ; and in his joy he goeth and selleth all that he hath, and buyeth that field."—MATT. xiii. 44.

Christ has left the fishing boat and entered the house ; and having delivered His message to the multitude, He now addresses the circle of disciples. Even in the absence of the evangelist's information that He "left the multitudes, and went into the house," internal evidence would have indicated a change of audience. The parables of the Hidden Treasure and the Pearl Merchant approach the kingdom of heaven from the inner, personal point of view. The universal heart of man is no longer under review ; neither is the field of the world the scene of rivalry between wheat and tares. The kingdom, considered as a living, expanding tree, or as hidden leaven carrying its transforming triumphs to the furthest confines of humanity, gives way to the consideration of that kingdom in its relation to the individual soul. "The kingdom of heaven is like unto a treasure hidden in the field ; which a man found, and hid ; and in his joy he goeth and selleth all that he hath, and buyeth that field."

The field of privilege and service to which the disciples had been called, was a treasure-field, where all that was precious and made man rich, remained as yet concealed ; but a great surprise was in store for those who looked forward to a Jewish-Messianic harvest. The Saviour's followers were so much concerned with the wrappings of the treasure, with the outwardness of the kingdom, that it behoved Christ to point out the thick crust of worldliness intervening between them and the joyful discovery of the Divine wealth.

Since the parable was addressed to the disciples, we may expect it to bear on their present and future positions. Manifestly its lessons have a direct personal application. This

Christ's Vision of the Kingdom of Heaven

consideration determines our interpretation of its terms; serves to explain the conditions under which the treasure was found, and the purchase of the field. Through the apostles and disciples, it, of course, appeals to all men in a similar state of spiritual development, to the end of the world. If, however, we fail to discern the local and personal appeal, and apply the parable to treasure finders in general, we overlook the obvious fact that to the disciples in the first year of their training, and even in their last, the treasure remained hidden.

Interpreters generally agree to represent the treasure as found without seeking; and as thus presenting a contrast to the parable of the Pearl Merchant. The finder, we are reminded, had his type in Nathanael, the found rather than the finder. But why should Nathanael be cited as an instance of finding without seeking? That Philip regarded him as a seeker is clearly proved by his finding and calling him to the Saviour's presence. One in whom Christ saw the ideal Israelite, and who in their first interview discerned Jesus the Son of God, the King of Israel, was not a stranger to all the yearnings of a devout Jew. While in this parable light is concentrated upon finding, it must be remembered, that seeking hidden treasure may have engaged and fascinated the Oriental mind more than the pursuit of merchandise in pearls. A labourer in another man's field, the treasure-finder was not like the oxen that drew his plough. The penny a day for sweaty brow and aching limbs, would recall by contrast the tales of poor men enriched by the discovery of priceless treasure. Hugh Miller, shaping and laying the sandstone of Cromarty, is greatly misconceived by the spectator who discerns in him a mason only. A mason he is, but the very sight and touch of the sandstone awaken within him visions of the ancient ocean's floor and of the uplifting forces that poised it high on crest or flank of hill. In like manner the treasure-finder of the parable, familiar since infancy with tales and visions of hidden gems, while ploughing in a time and country where the ground was the bank of the rich, the strong room of treasure, watched by the near, remembered by the distant, forgotten by the dead, would find his imagination exercised with possible jewels and crowns in that very field. His hand might be on

The Hidden Treasure

the plough and his heart on the visionary treasure. And when at length his share strikes ringing metal or hollow stone, it is the realization of his dream.

What was the spiritual standing of the disciples at the time of the Galilean ministry? They were employed on the richest of all fields; for within it lay all the treasures of the kingdom of heaven. In that field of grace, of gospel, of privilege, they were servants, apprentice ploughmen. The field was as truly the creation of Jesus Christ as the world of continents and islands. It embraced incarnation, humiliation, patience, suffering, death. And while it contained it concealed the treasure.

The name "apostle" may in the early days of its application deceive the unwary mind. We may forget that Christ brings ideals like empty vessels to be filled at the slow fount of time. We may forget that during the period of our Lord's earthly life the name apostle was rather a prophetic than an exact appellation. We cannot think that the first mission of the twelve did more than suggest the divine equipment and the august embassy of the apostles in post-ascension days. No one can follow the apostles in the synoptic Gospels from the time of their calling to the day of the cross, without feeling that even in their society Christ was profoundly alone. It was not that He was an enigma to priest and scribe, but that He remained hidden from those who heard His word and followed His steps. Jesus led His apostles and disciples away from dead formula and petrifying self-righteousness, but up to the hour when He ascended the cross they retained their Jewish outlook. The very deepening of their religious nature caused them to grasp with new energy the undying ideals of their race. Never for a moment saw they themselves as mourners following the bier of their nation. On the contrary, Israel was about to be redeemed; the national Redeemer was forming His cabinet; clearing the ground for the capital and throne of the ideal theocracy. Peter in illuminated moments might indeed discern in Jesus the Son of God; but perhaps the general level of apostolic faith found expression in Nathanael's confession, "Thou art the King of Israel." Yet although misconceived, Christ's hold

¹ John i. 49.

Christ's Vision of the Kingdom of Heaven

upon His disciples was amazing. It was dominion over the heart and therefore came in disguise.

When their Master sank in death, the disciples sounded the depths of loss in a sense unknown to other men. The heart bereaved of wife or son, the rich man of fortune, the monarch of his crown, may find a refuge in the invisible. But the loss of the disciples in the death of their Lord was peculiar, inasmuch as darkening all below, it emptied their forward and upward outlook of hope and light. However deeply those confiding peasants may have erred in their estimate of Jesus, their earthly ambitions and religious hopes had come to centre in Him. Far more than the fascination of a great personality must be accounted for. Perhaps unconsciously on their part, yet really, Jesus localized and expressed for them the Divine nature and the Divine world. There may have been moments in their experience when, listening to their Lord's discourse or prayer, His human form and surroundings became little more than a veil between Him and them. But it was His mysterious manhood, so near, so human, suggesting father and mother, brother and sister, as if all the stops in all endearing human hearts sounded from His, that made Him the enchanted world in which they lived and had their being.

When, therefore, Christ's ministry closed in betrayal, arrest and crucifixion, His disciples experienced a bankruptcy of heart peculiar to themselves. No emptiness like theirs had ever entered the human soul. No such desolation outside the Divine sorrow had yet overtaken men. The enviroing field of their own and their Master's life, now appeared a wilderness. Against the disappointment of their Messianic hopes the Jew within them had often rebelled; but the heart, mightier than the Jew, had forgiven all for the sake of that wonderful Presence. When, however, Jesus was lost, not in the common lot of death, but in a death from which no single element of tragedy was absent, the field of His word and His wonders, of the three radiant years in which they had begun to turn their eyes to an emergent state of national re-birth and glory, could only appear a field of desolation and defeat.

Christ's resurrection and the chain of events succeeding it, brought to light the hidden treasure. To the bereaved

The Hidden Treasure

disciples His resurrection restored all that His death had removed. That, however, would be a wholly inadequate statement of the case ; for the same might be said of Martha and Mary on the restoration of their brother. Christ's disciples on the other hand not only found what they had lost, but discovered what they had neither sought nor conceived. Theirs was a discovery to which the history of man presented no parallel. In the records of exploration and discovery, mind has sought and mind has found. In the findings of science, in the discoveries of the explorer, in the surprises of the antiquary, the heart can only feel a sympathetic interest. On the other hand the hidden treasure revealed in the field of wintry desolation by the resurrection of Christ was an event for the heart, for therein the quest of the heart found its goal in suffering love vindicated, triumphant. The disciples found might in weakness, triumph in defeat, glory in scorn, life in death. They proved the force and truth of their Lord's words, "Ye shall be sorrowful, but your sorrow shall be turned into joy."¹

To these men the hidden treasure came not unwished but unsought. The resurrection morning broke unhailed and unawaited. No disciple-watch had sat over against the door of the tomb to witness the rupture of the priestly seal. Bereaved affection had abandoned itself to hopelessness. Though they had lived in the same field with the treasure, its discovery came with surprise. Heart-ebb and heart-flood crowded into the same moment. Last night a dead Master and an empty world, this morning an empty sepulchre. Last night without a cause and without a future ; this morning under the captaincy of One who had trampled the world and death beneath His feet. The meeting of the outgoing wave of life with the inrush of the unexpected produces the trembling equipoise—half joy, half desolation—which marks the morning that revealed the treasure. The magnitude of the discovery confounded hearts with joy already confounded with distress. But joy is strong ; joy triumphed. Amazement, wonder, baffled reason, memory's golden haze and dead of night, softened and tempered its sudden invasion of the soul. The words, "In his joy he goeth and selleth all

¹ John xvi. 20.

Christ's Vision of the Kingdom of Heaven

that he hath and buyeth that field," sound the new, triumphant note of apostolic life. The moved heart moves the world. Here Christ's religion stands alone. Other systems arise from the spectres or the speculations of the mind; Christianity fires the heart with living joy. Joy is more than the outcome of faith; it is the incoming and the indwelling of the Divine.

Christ in His forelook saw His beloved followers cowed, disheartened, disconsolate; saw them view with tearful eyes the field of promise when the Divine sowing seemed blasted and withered—a field of disappointment, the grave of a nation's hope. Against this dark background, the scene of finding stands forth in strong relief. The sad-eyed labourer, whose bones and muscles ache, has almost closed the toiler's day, when one of his oxen sinks knee-deep in earth. With his ox-goad the agitated ploughman probes and stabs the ground. How the goad sinks! In frenzy he tears the soil aside; when, lo, the lid of a chest appears. Raising the lid he feasts his eyes and fills his hands with gems. His heart beats wildly, his eyes grow dim, he almost faints with joy. He would shout and leap if he dared. Looking eagerly around, he fills in the soil, sets his mark, unyokes his oxen. With the joy of wealth come its visions. His wife henceforth will walk in silk and gems; his children will rank with the foremost in the gate. Before him rises a proud mansion where he will spend his joyous years. Sweat and toil are past; he is rich, he is free. That night he collects his slender possessions; to-morrow they are sold, and the field is bought. Men wonder at the change in mien, in voice, in spirit. "He is beside himself," they say; and so he is.

Alford's remark that the purchase of the field was in compliance with Jewish law, is unsupported. The purchase might be accounted for on prudential grounds. The field in his own possession, the finder could choose his own time and means for securing the treasure. Purchase would remove his fellow servants from the scene. But whilst prudential counsels may have been present, the motive to sell had its origin in the fount of joy that filled his heart. The scene where heart meets heart, where love discovers love, remains henceforth enchanted ground. On the spot where good news

The Hidden Treasure

hailed us, where fortune or victory crowned us, the heart erects its memorial. To the treasure-finder every clod of the field is a benefactor ; every furrow his friend. The field is a mother who has concealed in her bosom the precious treasure for him the elect son of fortune. The impulse of obligation becomes overwhelming. The casket must go with the treasure. No other shall possess a field that has yielded such a golden harvest. Perhaps its soil may yet conceal wealth untold. Within its bounds the joyful finder will build his house and spend his days.

Some find in the conditions of purchase an element of underhand dishonesty. But clearly the treasure never belonged to the present owner. He never lost it, and he never possessed it. The servant was free to tell his master of his discovery, and he was free to keep his secret. If the field had become precious it was not because of increased fertility, but because of what it concealed. And it was not the owner, but the workman who had added the new value. If, however, any difficulty arises from the labourer's purchase, none attaches to the deed which it is intended to illustrate. The field, in the spiritual signification, belongs to the King whose treasure it covers. It is the visible side of the kingdom of heaven ; its contact with earth and time.

The resurrection of Jesus Christ brought the hidden treasure to light, but not into the immediate possession of the apostles and disciples. During the forty days between the opening tomb and the opening heaven, the disciples remained unfilled and undominated by the access of Divine joy. Their frame of mind, as far as we can gather from the scanty record, wavered between belief and doubt, wonder and uncertainty. Sometimes they might feel that they were being trained in the school of evidence, familiarized for some high ends with the spiritual sphere. But whether the brief visits of their Lord were to take the place of permanent presence, or finally to cease, they could not decide. Those forty days narrowed the field, fixed heart and eye on the triumphant person of their Lord. But their hearts continued invested rather than captured. Then came Pentecost, when heart and eye were opened ; when the heavenly beam fell burning on the cross, which gave up its contents so far as to reveal an infinite background of

Christ's Vision of the Kingdom of Heaven

love, and an eternal design in what had seemed a revel of human passion. From the symbol of ignominy it was transformed into the centre of wisdom, power and glory. From its height Christ came down upon bereaved hearts in kingly power. In Galilee He had besieged these hearts; from Calvary He took them by storm. What had appeared to the disciples the glow of human affection, deepened and broadened under the Spirit's ministry into the infinite love of God. And for even poor deserters the Prince of Glory had died. Orphanhood was past; the clouds drifted away; the kingdom came by the way of the cross; the Lord was restored not only to life, but to love; and in ways they could not comprehend, clinging hearts were born through death to life. The surprise of love and redemption journeying along unexpected ways, of their Lord given back in measures infinitely nearer and fuller, of the cup of salvation received from the hands of death, filled the disciples' hearts with the joy of discovery, of possession, of victory. No longer Jews, provincials, they became the patriots and citizens of a new holy land. The treasure of Christ and His salvation gave a new interpretation, a new value to the field of humanity which they would purchase with the price of absolute renunciation of self. Having received the spirit of life, they would accept the body of death for Christ's sake—that body composed of humiliation, suffering, mystery, scorn, reviling, death. The field of the treasure would be the field of the cross; in the dust where the treasure lay, would they bury self.

Those who take the field to signify the church include too little; they overlook the singular situation of the first disciples; and the emphasis the parable places on absolute renunciation; unless indeed they confine their outlook to the church of the first three centuries, when the profession of Christ might mean the offering up of life. The evident outwardness of the sale of the finder's effects and of his purchase, connects the actions with open confession and renunciation, the significance of which largely ceased with the martyr centuries, and never received illustration so emphatic as in the example of the apostles. This feature so prominent in the spiritual requirement, determines what place should be assigned to the act of hiding the discovered treasure. As the treasure can signify

The Hidden Treasure

no more and no less than Christ and His salvation, it is imperative that it should find its place in the secrecy of the heart. But the idea of hiding should not be pressed into the interpretation. In the finder's situation hiding was not a choice but a necessity. With daylight in the sky and probably fellow workmen in the field, he could not have borne away the treasure, however much inclined. Hiding was the only means of securing the prize. He may also have wished to let the treasure remain until he had made the field his own ; but it is the sale of his all and the purchase of the land that express his joy and establish an example.

Whilst the parable is in the first place addressed by Christ to His apostles and early followers, it doubtless includes in its survey all men who find the treasure of salvation. All that precedes finding, it throws into the shade, or leaves to the imagination, in order to bring into strong light what succeeded finding. Beneath all lies the thought, of universal application, that the scene of our life on this redeemed world is a field where treasure lies awaiting discovery and appropriation ; not hidden deep in the mine by the Creator, but placed near the surface by the Redeemer who makes all men potential heirs of salvation. Herein lies the appeal to the seeker after earthly treasure ; the challenge to seek and find. In a narrower sense the field of revelation is treasure land. Those who like Jerome and Augustine regard the Scriptures as the field are right as far as they go. They must, however, to the Old Testament add the New, which when the parable was uttered was partly unspoken and all unwritten ; they must, in a sense real and profound, crown God's revelation with the incarnate Person and life of Jesus Christ. The heavenly treasure is hidden only because we are blind.

The order in which are placed finding, selling and buying, has deep significance. The finder had his possessions before the great discovery. While these were his he did not and could not appropriate the treasure. The treasure goes to the treasureless. The field and its contents constitute a unit like body and soul. When all was sold and the finder thus reduced to poverty, and when the price of all was paid down for the field, he could claim, appropriate, possess. In the wedlock of the soul and the divine treasures, the law is

Christ's Vision of the Kingdom of Heaven

inexorable ; on either side it must be all for one. We must surrender our works, our righteousness, self, the world. In the light of the fact that the field could be held with the treasure, we can best estimate the meaning and place of the field. As carrying his cross is the condition of the disciple's fellowship with Christ, so making the field our own is the condition of owning the kingdom of heaven. That kingdom is inseparable from the cross ; from the descents that end there, and from the ascents that there begin. The treasure cannot be divorced from the field of revelation, from the great body of truth in which redemption finds eternal incarnation. The Christ who receives sinners must ever come forth from the lowliness of Bethlehem, from the humiliation of one who has been made sin for us ; from the agony Divine and human of Gethsemane ; from the atoning cross, from the open tomb, and the Mediator's throne. The treasure of redemption remains for ever dyed with blood, and he who would possess those gems and wear that crown, must lay down will for will, heart for heart, life for life.

II

THE PEARL MERCHANT

¹ The kingdom of heaven is like unto a man that is a merchant seeking goodly pearls; and having found one pearl of great price, he went and sold all that he had, and bought it.—**MATT. xiii. 45, 46.**

BEHIND this parable, implied but unexpressed, lies the supreme event of time—God's advent in search of lost man. Apart from this event the pearl merchant could have had no analogue in the spiritual world. It was the Divine Seeker after lost man who created by His own sacrifice and painted out of His own heart the wayfaring soul on pilgrimage to God. To overlook therefore the necessary connection between God seeking man and man seeking God, would be like accounting for a river while ignoring its fountains. History could not record, "The soul of man has become traveller, pilgrim, merchant man," until it had first written down from the lips of Christ, "The Son of man has come to seek and to save that which was lost."²

When human nature had been apprehended and worn by Jesus Christ, a new agitation ran through the universal soul. Should Christ's Divine nature or historic appearing be denied, unbelief would find its task in accounting for the perturbation of the human mind at the time when the wise men "saw His star in the East." The unrest of heart peculiar to the first and second Christian centuries, the desertion of the pagan temples, the new imperious voice in the human breast, can only be accounted for by the nearer approach and stronger pull of the spiritual universe.

Taken in its widest sweep, our parable presents Christianity over against the religions of the world. All the goodly pearls secured and treasured by the pearl merchant are prophecies and anticipations of the pearl of great price, which

¹ Luke xix. 10.

Christ's Vision of the Kingdom of Heaven

demands all the light in the sun and all the love in the heart. All the pearls had their origin on the weedy sea-bed ; and all the religions had their birth in human orphanhood. One religion and one only comes up from the depths of the Divine heart, of which all oceans are the living symbol. This religion comes late in history and experience. It comes to a world already grey with the hopes and disappointments of quest. The human soul is here portrayed as on eternal pilgrimage, driving on the houseless ocean, lost in the desert wastes, in flight from the consequences of guilt, in quest of the fountains of salvation ; sighing as it goes, like a queen dethroned and exiled.

The plurality of the pearls indicates the infinite variety of religious beliefs. It is not implied that one religious seeker passed through all the systems of faith and worship ; what is meant is, that man's undying need of God went forth as wandering merchant through all the markets of time, searched all climes and sounded all depths. And this quest was not quite in vain. The merchantman's hoard of treasure previous to discovering the pearl of great price stands for the entire achievement of the religious genius during the pre-Christian ages. A melancholy sum total ; nevertheless the greatest thing in history. Surveyed apart from the one supreme discovery, the pearls hold a high place in the redemption of man. It is their weakness that no one of them has the power to displace all the others. The human heart can hold them all simultaneously. As pearls make no appeal to the appetites and passions, minister only to the higher instinct of beauty, so the faiths, forged on the heart of man, express the soul's cry after God ; not indeed the cry of the soul in health, but in sickness and distress. Yet even the fevers of the soul are divine.

The pearl merchant would at first invest inferior pearls with worth and beauty ; and the heart of man feeling its way to God, would for a time rest content with lowly ideals. Those ideals were to the seeker expressive of the highest, of that without which the soul is a fragment. The impotence of all religions prior to Christianity to satisfy and uplift the soul, in no wise removed them from an auxiliary place in God's redeeming plan. They attempted to bridge the river from the human side ; and if the current proved too wide and

The Pearl Merchant

strong, their limitations and failures directed the soul's gaze to the future, to One whose person should solve the problem of spiritual distance. To change the figure, the eagle flapping his dislocated pinions in the dust, keeps alive the memory of a higher sphere, and his innate inability to regain it.

Following this line of thought, the Jewish religion is necessarily included amongst the goodly pearls. It indeed outshines all the others. To Gentiles who like Cornelius and Lydia came through Judaism to the Christian faith, the experience of the pearl merchant closely applies. His experience is theirs. The pilgrimage is an ascent. The Gentile religions, however various, occupy the common level of human aspiration as distinct from revelation. They are the word of the human heart, while Christ is the Word of the Divine heart. The merchant amassing many pearls forcibly expresses the spirit of the time when so many Gentiles found their way into the synagogue.

The pearl merchant seeking new cities and countries, ever adding to his store, carrying an inner hunger after the perfect, faithfully represents the seeker after God, fighting his way through the low jungle lands to the austere elevations of Judaism, and then discovering while he takes refuge in synagogue or temple that it is no more than a milestone, a station of outlook. The tendency amongst the upper ranks of paganism to quench their thirst at the head waters of Judaism on the eve of the incarnation, goes far to account for the amazing conquests of early Christianity. The proselytes had never settled down in Judaism. In the temple and in the synagogue there was no finality, no open fountain for sin. The pagan proselytes remained on the march; and hence when gospel waters broke forth from the smitten Rock of Ages they came in crowds to the quenching stream.

The act of the pearl merchant selling his store in order to buy the pearl of great price declares the inferiority and foretells the renunciation of Judaism. The interval between possession and sale is the point of time at which the disciples stood while listening to this parable. None of their number had journeyed through paganism to the Law and the Prophets; their wayfaring had yet to begin. From the platform on which Christ's ministry found and left them they had far to travel.

Christ's Vision of the Kingdom of Heaven

When Christ was uttering His parables by the shores of Galilee they had not yet begun to distinguish between the religion of their fathers and the kingdom of which Christ was founder and centre. The pearl of great price had yet to be drawn from the depths. This truth found illustration in many ways, but never more strikingly than on the mount of transfiguration. Peter, far from the thought of rearing a tabernacle for Jesus only, desires to detain a trinity of prophets. It was indeed natural and inevitable that the first disciples should hold such a position. This fact Christ always recognized. He always spoke as if two momentous events must take place before His followers could comprehend the arriving kingdom of which they were becoming citizens ; the revelation of Himself through death, and the opening of eyes in their hearts through the energy of the Spirit. The Saviour's human nature, His low estate, the knell of the old order of things sounding through His preaching, assigned Him a place amongst the prophets. The premier place of honour in the prophetic line His followers readily accorded Him. Still, in their minds, He only rounded the cycle of God's great servants. The light had not yet dawned that would reveal the gulf between the kingdom of heaven as conceived by Christ, and the dispensation of the prophets. In finding Christ His followers had enlarged their store of goodly pearls ; but before them lay an unopened world and a new experience—a finding impossible without the possession and the renunciation of all that was highest in the past. Till all was lost and all was found the soul must go on pilgrimage.

It is true, as we have seen, that the first disciples had no experience of passing from one religion to another. The highest level yet attained by the human soul was theirs without seeking ; and the fellowship of Christ involved in their view no renunciation of synagogue and temple. Yet to those disciples our parable closely applies. When it was spoken they knew nothing of mental emigration ; of pitching their tent under new stars. But in the near future they were bound to cross the straits from form to spirit. Heirs of an ancient faith, freemen of old Jerusalem, they would become spiritual merchants, learned in spiritual values, and empty their hearts and hands of all the past to embrace the Crucified.

The Pearl Merchant

Even now while the Syrian sea laps against the boat up-bearing Christ, they are unconscious pilgrims from the local and limited, from city and temple. Meanwhile the restoration of the kingdom to Israel, the dream of distinction in that puissant state fired their mind. The goal of their ambition was confined to earth; and if they entertained Christ's conception of a kingdom of heaven it was as a sphere lending holy splendour to their dreams. But a force mightier than any earth had yet known was shortly to shift the goal from earth to heaven. That force lay concealed in the kingdom of heaven—a kingdom of subject hearts, of personality polarized and uplifted by Divine Personality.

The merchant, although finding goodly pearls, continued to seek until he had found the pearl of his heart, the possession of which ended his quest. In those goodly pearls he had invested his fortune. We should understand that they measured and defined the extent of his buying capacity. Each pearl had a history; each indicated an act of surrender; the last drew the high water line, announcing the merchant's entire renunciation of silver and gold. In their sale he sacrificed the toils and ideals of a lifetime. In a profound sense this casket of gems was his inner, better self. Into these had his sorrows, his tears and his prayers been transformed. The heart and mind after fierce strain and profound emotion demand rest. But here surrender became the condition of *supreme* surrender. The deed was done. By one act the pearls passed out of the merchant's possession forever; by one act he paid away their realized value for the priceless gem. This can literally take place in secular but not in spiritual merchandise. Not in one day or by one act, could the first followers of Christ place on the brow of their Lord the diadem they had reserved for Israel. Parting with those things which had been gain to them, kept pace with the discovery of the treasures in Christ. No man ever found Christ once for all. The finder of the kingdom of heaven is like Columbus landing on unexplored, unmeasured America. Unlike the pearl merchant, the Christian finder never ceases to seek. The inward life of the apostles and disciples who listened to Christ's teaching lies mainly out of sight. Into none of those men can we look as into an illuminated room. The inner life

Christ's Vision of the Kingdom of Heaven

of Paul, however, allows us to penetrate its utmost depths ; and in those depths we see the pearl merchant spiritualized. Although Paul appeared to have passed by one step from Judaism to the faith of Christ, he had taken many steps before that one ; and he took many more afterward. In his own religion he had been a traveller, an explorer working its mines for its gems, paying down his yearnings and his passions for the pearls of legal righteousness. Wherever pearls were to be found, amidst the freezing heights of law, or in the hot arena where self wars with self, thither he went, there he strove.

Paul is the spiritual explorer, urging his way from the circumference to the centre of the kingdom of heaven. In conversion he comes into possession as the gold miner comes into possession when an allotment of the gold field becomes his. He owns the unknown ; he possesses to discover, and delves to find. Unconsciously Paul has supplied the one supreme interpretation of the parable of the Pearl Merchant. From the most inward of his self-revelations we hear the cry, " What things were gain to me these have I counted loss for Christ. Yea, verily, and I count all things to be loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord ; for whom I suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but refuse, that I may gain Christ and be found in him ; that I may know him, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, becoming conformed unto his death ; if by any means I may attain unto the resurrection from the dead. Not that I have already obtained, or am already made perfect ; but I follow after, if that I may lay hold on that for which also I was laid hold on by Christ Jesus."¹

As he ascends to the head-waters of life, he chants " Whether there be prophecies, they shall be done away ; whether there be tongues, they shall cease ; whether there be knowledge, it shall be done away. For we know in part and we prophesy in part ; but when that which is perfect is come, that which is in part shall be done away."² Then when the fountain is reached and the soul as an empty vessel sinks in its depths, He exclaims, " Now abideth faith, hope, love, these three, but the greatest of these is love."³

¹ Phil. iii. 7-12.

² 1 Cor. xiii. 8-10.

³ 1 Cor. xiii. 13.

III

THE FRIEND AT MIDNIGHT

“And he said unto them, Which of you shall have a friend, and shall go unto him at midnight, and say to him, Friend, lend me three loaves ; for a friend of mine is come to me from a journey, and I have nothing to set before him ; and he from within shall answer and say, Trouble me not ; the door is now shut, and my children are with me in bed ; I cannot rise and give thee ? I say unto you, Though he will not rise and give him, because he is his friend, yet because of his importunity he will arise and give him as many as he needeth.”—LUKE xi. 5-8.

THIS parable and that of the Importunate Widow have several points of coincidence, and as many of divergence. Both enforce the indispensableness and power of persevering prayer, prayer that takes no denial even from heaven. The *ecclesia* in continuance of Christ's work must prolong His wrestling with the Infinite. The difficulties besetting unflagging urgency are common to both parables ; the suppliant widow and the interceding friend are at first both repulsed. Once more, both parables set forth the power of prayer to turn defeat into triumph ; the widow is avenged, and the friend receives bread for his hungry guest. But the points of difference are as numerous as the features of agreement. When we pass from the parable before us to that of the Importunate Widow, we exchange normal conditions for an atmosphere of suffering and distress. The widow's voice is the wail of the bereaved *ecclesia* throughout the martyr-ages. The widow has wept over her Lord on Calvary and in the tomb, wept over her children burned and slain. The friend who at midnight visits his neighbour for three loaves of bread, though summoned from the depths of sleep into the cold depths of night, finds the darkness unrent by moan of anguish and unlit by martyr fires ; though the night has doubtless its spiritual value. He has neither been robbed of bread nor compelled to sue for justice ; between him and his right is no unrighteous judge ; he carries not his plea to a corrupt

Christ's Vision of the Kingdom of Heaven

tribunal but to the house of a friend. The miscarriage of justice has here no place ; and unlike the widow exposed to the glare of publicity, the midnight suppliant moves in a private sphere. The wayfarer's appeal to friendship calls forth instinctive hospitality, and the generous host assumes friendship in his neighbour. Here the chief actor stands between friends, whilst the widow appears between enmity on one hand and hardened brutality on the other. Moreover, the present parable represents prayer in its individual aspect ; the other, prayer in its corporate connection ; here the soul asks for daily bread ; there the *ecclesia* for the opening of the prison or the extinction of the fires ; for liberty of assembly, rights of citizenship, freedom to live.

Our parable is drawn from peasant experience and country conditions. The fidelity of the picture to their own social life would arouse the interest of the Saviour's rustic hearers. The traveller in avoidance of the noonday heat journeying by night ; his knock in the silence and slumber of midnight at the door of his friend ; the warm greeting, the empty larder, the host knocking at the door of his sleeping neighbour, his repulse, his persistence and success, his return home and the midnight meal—compose a living view of men and ways in rural Galilee.

How significant are the three loaves of bread, in relation to the owner, the borrower, and the hungry guest ! There they were, ready for use ; ready to change hands through the might of importunity ; to satisfy hunger and reinforce exhausted energy.

Considering that the dominating purpose of the parable is the enforcement of persistence in prayer that knows no shame, it seems strange that it should not furnish an *example of insistence*. With the neighbour's unfriendly refusal, "I cannot rise and give thee," the parable ends. After this blunt repulse we expect to read, "but he without kept knocking until his friend within was obliged to rise and grant the request." The borrower, however, is not represented as renewing his knocks or repeating his request. Is it then without design that the parable closes with the door unopened and prayer unanswered ? We learn indeed outside the parable that the borrower proved importunate and the lender amen-

The Friend at Midnight

able to persistence ; but these facts do not answer the question, why this is said without the parable and not within it.

We must regard the fragmentary form of the parable and the omission of the importunity to enforce which it was spoken as not only designed, but as serving also to illustrate the spiritual facts under review. When the parable brings us amongst the facts of Christian experience, there it leaves us ; for it has then presented the human side of the situation. The man under the midnight sky with no bread in the house, the cottager refusing to lend, with the barred door between them, are to the Christian the stern prose of experience. Every Christian perceives that the man within is God, and that the barred door is the entrance into the kingdom of heaven. "Before that door," exclaims he, "have I stood knocking in the night." We are conducted to the point of experience where the soul seems to hear "No" through the barred door ; or to hear only the echo of its cry. This, then, is the Saviour's profound reading of the soul in its midnight experience, when every hour finds it sinking deeper in the pit.

But the situation requires to be seen from the Divine side also. The circumstances will not allow long seeking and long delay ; the wayfarer's hunger becomes every minute more imperative. And even had the seeker been drawn as asking and knocking until the cottager opened the door, his example would have lacked the force of the direct, personal, authoritative assurance from the Prince of praying men, "I say unto you, though he will not rise and give him, because he is his friend, yet because of his importunity he will arise and give him as many as he needeth." Jesus might have appealed to the examples of Abraham and Elijah in support of His argument, but the infinitely greater stores behind the door of the new age, the profounder hungers of the new kingdom, and the new significance of seeking, asking and knocking, demanded the covenant word of Him whose name unlocks the treasures of grace.

The human types of the parable are men of flesh and blood, always modern ; modern also are the journey in the night, the hunger, and the bread ready in anticipation.

We have admission to the interior working of the unjust

Christ's Vision of the Kingdom of Heaven

judge's mind, when in a moment of solitude he communes with himself ; and we know before the suppliant widow knows, that her cause has triumphed. In the case before us the man without hears the self-revelation of the man within ; " Trouble me not ; the door is now shut, and my children are with me in bed ; I cannot rise and give thee." " Friend," says the man without, but he within returns not the compliment. How closely the parable adheres to the facts of life ! The heart bounds if rank or power calls us friend ; but " friend " on the lips of hunger or misfortune provokes the world's resentment. Knocking and asking loaves at midnight, the borrower puts some strain on his neighbour's friendship. The untimely hour has its significance in more than one direction. But the reason of the midnight visit makes a strong appeal to human feeling. Friendship, however, and the hunger of a fellow creature weigh not against sweet sleep and a barred door. Whilst the reasons assigned touch the sense of humour, we miss the meaning of the situation if, from the weakness of the man's argument, we infer the weakness of his resistance. His reasons lie on the plane of self, and indicate that the door is not so securely barred as his heart. History can tell us that strong inclinations have barred more doors than strong arguments have opened. Friendship in the present instance possesses no weight ; " he will not rise and give him, because he is his friend, yet because of his importunity he will arise." Neither friendship nor humanity, but persistent knocking unbars the door. It is a severe indictment of human friendship that this man should be selected to represent God not by resemblance but by contrast.

Owing to the limited dimensions of his dwelling, the inmate cannot be far from the door ; he and his neighbour converse with ease. As it was midnight when sleep is deepest, the suppliant would knock in order to arouse his friend ; this end secured, knocking would cease and asking begin. The man in bed is, from his point of view, too near the door and the pleader who stands before it. And here we meet the great truth that the suppliant outside mercy's door and God within are near each other. History abounds with instances of great hearts breaking in the midnight through

The Friend at Midnight

inability to engage the ear of power or awaken public opinion. Governments, cabinets, and hierarchies intervened. God is near His door of mercy, and His door of mercy is near mortal distress ; as in the parable, the suppliant soul standing in the night is heard within.

It is in the kingdom of heaven alone that the citizens have direct and free approach to the King. In the prayer preceding this parable, the disciples are taught by Christ to address Him who sits on the throne as Father !¹ The way of approach is open, and the importunate widow and the friend at midnight plead their own cause. From the present parable nothing can be inferred for or against the mediation of Jesus Christ, a fundamental doctrine of the New Testament ; but in parables commanding unabating and unabashed importunity, had the interposition of saint or angel between the soul and God been required or permitted, this was the place to say so. Nay, even although Jesus Christ is our Advocate, He has made the vital truth unmistakably clear, that no being, human or Divine, can take our place in asking, seeking and knocking. Even in Christ's own case it may have been as essential that He should live in prayer as that He should live in the flesh. And certainly the disciples during the years they companied with their Lord breathed an atmosphere of prayer. The place and power of prayer in the life of the King determined its place and power in the life of His subjects. We recall with interest the rations on which the Roman legions subdued the world, with greater interest the principles and truths that sustained Milton while creating new worlds, and Cromwell and Lincoln creating free states ; but surpassing interest belongs to the knowledge that the sublime soul of Jesus lived on prayer while laying the foundations of His kingdom.

Our Lord's emphasis on prayer implies that the *ecclesia's* future on earth would be one of faith ; and that from God's side the aim of prayer is less to move God manward than to move man Godward ; to lead men to the Divine view point and the Divine presence. All is well with the soul when it spends its days and nights knocking at God's door.

Although the parable applies not to the suffering ages, yet it contemplates the night seasons of faith. In a deep sense,

¹ Luke xi. 2.

Christ's Vision of the Kingdom of Heaven

man, the creature of time, stands always in the night. As long as the heart has hunger and the world is without bread, the man of the parable will be found knocking in the midnight, when sleep seems to reign even on the throne of heaven. He lives in the waking souls, few and far between, during the long night of the Papacy; he appears in John Wycliffe, Dr. Morrison of China, Henry Martyn and Griffith John. Once he was Jesus Christ Himself; now he is vital Christianity, or the soul near God yet seeing Him not.

It is not without significance that the suppliant is not the man who has nothing to eat, but the man who has no bread to give. The kingdom of heaven is vicarious in spirit; keeps open house and heart at midnight; deals with essentials; leads emptiness to the fulness of Christ; is the dispensation of the Spirit. Those destined to be teachers and feeders of men, would in after days feel their oneness with the host going to his friend at midnight, when wayfarers who had traversed Judaism, the wastes of Greek philosophy, and the wilderness of paganism, came faint and hungry asking bread. To the apostles whilst novices in spiritual housekeeping, as to all novice-feeders of heart and mind, the man knocking and asking bread because there was none at home, is guidance, incentive, inspiration. The loaves that fed the hunger of Justin, Origen and Augustine, came through the heavenly door where men waited for their message.

When the soul, long a vagabond and wanderer, returning finds midnight and emptiness, the man knocking and asking bread is the gospel of the hour. In the Father's house is bread enough and to spare; and when midnight and silence are the only responses, then from the praying lips of the Forerunner and from the praying lips of His followers in heaven comes the assurance, "Every one that asketh receiveth."

The opening door is best interpreted by eras when heaven opens and bread is given to some vicarious pleader or hungry nation. Whilst the motives for refusal and compliance are in contrast with the Divine instincts, denial and answer are amongst the ways of God. After refusal the door opens. Persistence has prevailed. But why did the pleader persevere? Rudely dismissed, why did he refuse to go away? He knew his man. Were the two men not neighbours?

The Friend at Midnight

As our parable deals with what is elementary in nature and human nature—darkness, sleep, hunger, bread—the imagination is invoked as a factor in the exposition. We not only may, but must open the inward eye before we can stand in the darkness, give value to the wayfarer's hunger, or see in the open door and the loaves all they are intended to suggest. In carrying the bread home and setting it before the traveller, the suppliant moves amongst the central verities of the kingdom.

Our parable and the chapter enshrining it, speak of primary articles of food ; and whilst the theme of the parable is the prevailing power of importunity, it is obvious that the three loaves, as also the loaf, the fish and egg (verses 11, 12)¹ point to the aliment essential to spiritual life, as the object of asking, seeking, and knocking. On this bread the soul goes its pilgrimage and fights its battles. The soul's hunger has been anticipated ; neither borrower nor lender hints at the possibility of the supply being exhausted. The supreme concern is to bring together demand and supply ; and this is accomplished by prayer. We may think in this connection of the midnight Pleader coming down from the mount, bringing His bread with Him to satisfy in the interpreter's house the hunger of His friends. The great teachers of the past had left hunger and midnight practically as they found them ; Jesus broke bread and spread a table in the night.

The loaves are the answer to unabating prayer. The importunate widow sues for well-being, this man for being. The loaves are the most convincing argument on the place and power of prayer. They are fuel for the furnace of the new life. Glad is he who carries them home and breaks them for the hungry traveller. The Good Samaritan of the night has done for his friend the greatest deed man can do for man. The wayfarer feasts not alone ; it is a communion. Behind the loaves is knocking, behind knocking faith, and behind faith God.

In the parable Christ is the Teacher ; in the words " And I say unto you, Ask, and it shall be given you ; seek, and ye shall find ; knock, and it shall be opened unto you,"² He is the Lawgiver of the kingdom. The imperative signifies the

¹ Luke xi.

² Luke xi. 9.

Christ's Vision of the Kingdom of Heaven

continuation of the action denoted by each verb. Should we see in asking, seeking and knocking the suppliant's persistence? Do these three terms denote an ascending climax of intensity? If asking, seeking and knocking express the borrower's importunity, we should require to read backwards; for the man's first act is here placed last. Given midnight and a barred door, knocking would precede asking. If asking, seeking, and knocking, find illustration in the borrower's action, they must mean not only insistence, but increasing insistence. It seems better, however, to understand asking, seeking, and knocking, as coming from different levels of spiritual life and necessity. In the words, "For every one that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened," the three different acts proceed from three different persons. This view better accords with the varied experience of Christian disciples.

Christian prayer, justly considered, was as new to earth as the kingdom of which it is one of the powers. All that the loaves signify in the owner's house or in the borrower's possession, came in with Jesus Christ. In the Christian sense, the bread of life was not in the Father's house until the Redeemer's work was done. The man turning to his friend and finding bread ready for the giving, is the sure instinct of faith that brings, even in the dark, man's hunger to God's supply.

This and its kindred parable, the Importunate Widow, are instructions how to open and appropriate the stores of the kingdom. The bread is ready for the household's use; and hunger is welcome to break in the door and take it by violence.

Whilst the Friend at midnight incites to prayer that takes no denial, yet as parabolic instruction meantime is too indirect, Jesus pledges His word as a basis of assurance, until suppliants acting on faith and driven by the force of need, work their way by experience into the parable. Disciples asking, seeking, and knocking, will in course of time know midnight and the empty house from within, will meet the traveller, knock with the borrower, and hear with him the refusal and the opening door.

The Friend at Midnight

Prayer has two sides ; the soul asks, seeks, knocks ; God knocks for admission, seeks for possession, asks for communion. Our cry is at best an echo of the summons "Come unto Me." It might at first appear that the new nature would ask and seek without injunction or example. So it would ; but in delay or seeming denial it would lose hope. The deepest sense of need wanes when silence reigns within the heavenly door. Besides, faith requires assurance grounded on wider knowledge than personal experience ; long seasons of wrestling in darkness demand the voice from heaven, Ask, Seek, Knock.

Nothing is said as to what shall be received, found, and opened ; in the thirteenth verse,¹ however, the Holy Spirit is introduced as the Heavenly Father's greatest gift and the soul's supreme quest. Instead of the "Holy Spirit" as found in Luke, Matthew has "good things."² Matthew's record is in accordance with Jewish conceptions ; Luke's with the era of the Spirit ; one promises "things," the other God and holiness. We should seek here perhaps for an answer to some of the difficulties that beset the question of prayer. Since holiness is assumed to be the believer's supreme desire, and the gift of the Holy Spirit is God's answer to that prayer which comprehends all prayers the soul can breathe, the suppliant may sometimes continue expecting an answer that has already come. As the effectuation of holiness is the return of divine health to the soul, the process often eludes the patient's eye. And the possibility of the answer coming in disguise is rendered more likely from the fact that its presence creates deeper humiliation, stronger dissatisfaction with self, intenser yearning, new asking and seeking. According to this parable and the context in which it is set, persistence in supplication not only secures but succeeds an answer. When the soul knocks unceasingly the Holy Spirit has already come. And further, seeming delays and denials may arise from a misinterpretation of "good things," that is, of the ends of asking and the ends of answering.

Whilst temporal things may be sought in prayer, they are not visible in the present parable, nor in that of the Importunate Widow. The petition for "daily bread" in

¹ Luke xi. 13.

² Matt. vii. 11.

Christ's Vision of the Kingdom of Heaven

the Lord's prayer must, if the prayer is designed for universal use, not mean in the majority of cases providing bread, but the Divine Host giving bread in such a way as to reveal behind it the hand of the Giver. For the first disciples, hated, reviled, persecuted, the promised gift of "good things" could not be construed in a temporal sense. They were spiritual warriors on a spiritual campaign, and when they received the Holy Spirit, asking, seeking, and knocking had their fullest answer. Disciples are more disposed as individuals to pray for temporal gifts ; but when a company of quickened hearts, engaged in the service of the kingdom, come to head quarters invoking supplies, they ask for the Holy Spirit as the supreme, the essential gift.

IV

THE IMPORTUNATE WIDOW

“And he spake a parable unto them to the end that they ought always to pray and not to faint ; saying, There was in a city a judge, who feared not God, and regarded not man : and there was a widow in that city ; and she came oft unto him, saying, Avenge me of mine adversary. And he would not for a while ; but afterward he said within himself, Though I fear not God, nor regard man ; yet because this widow troubleth me, I will avenge her, lest she wear me out by her continual coming. And the Lord said, Hear what the unrighteous judge saith, And shall not God avenge his elect, which cry to him day and night, and he is longsuffering over them ? I say unto you, that he will avenge them speedily.”—LUKE xviii. 1-8.

The example of the widow overcoming through her importunity the judge who defied God and man, while intended in its first application for the disciples, contains also the last cry from earth and the last response from heaven. The fall of the city and the nation had in Christ's view already begun, the gathering midnight of Calvary was the fore-scene of which the *parousia* was the back ground ; and so Jesus set the parable foreshadowing distress and martyrdom against the dawn of His appearing. While addressing His disciples, He saw, extending between His departure and His coming, the unbroken host of faith on one side, and on the other the united forces of satan and the world ; and the parable sounds its trumpet-call along the whole battle line.

The disciples doubtless felt that the parable was spoken for their sakes, as indeed it was ; yet its message comes with the same directness and authority to each succeeding generation of believers. For tyranny, having killed the first witnesses, will make itself drunk with the blood of the saints. We shall see as we proceed that while the believer is enjoined to pray always, the parable embraces and addresses all the subjects of the kingdom of heaven ; Christ sees assembled around Him all disciples to the end of time, contemporaries,

Christ's Vision of the Kingdom of Heaven

sharers of the same distress, their hands on the levers of faith and supplication.

A religion originating in a cross, might, as long as it breathed the spirit of its Founder, expect a prolongation of the tragedy in which it had its birth; the fear of states, the hate of priesthoods, the fury of mobs, the rancour of the world, the kiss of betrayal, the enmity of devils. He who foresaw the three martyr centuries, and the ages of the Inquisition, might well speak of the risk of fainting.

In this soul and world drama are three figures, a desolate widow, an over-reaching adversary, and a regardless judge. The choice of a "friendless, destitute woman, too weak to compel, too poor to buy, justice; or to say all in a single word, a widow, who in the East was a synonym for helplessness,"¹ to image the suffering elect, the approaching bereavement of the disciples, and the long widowhood of the *ecclesia*, is profoundly suggestive. The widow had been a joyful bride; had known the yearning, inseparable from womanhood, for refuge in another's strength and rest in another's love. These bridal hours answer to the life of the disciples between their call and separation by the cross. The reader of the Gospels feels that Jesus surrounds His followers like a wall of fire; from the assaults of Satan, from hostile scribes and angry Galilee, He hastens to deliver them. Thus had the young wife found defence and strength in her husband. When death sealed her husband's eyes, and the tomb shut its door between those who had been one, what desolation, what sinking of heart, what intolerable silence and emptiness! The four walls of her dwelling had vanished; and the cold blast of the world, the poignant inrush of desolation and loneliness, swept over heart and mind.

It was thus with the disciples when their Lord was removed. The deepest chapters of the soul remain unwritten; and the dark interval between the crucifixion and the resurrection is known alone to those who lived it. It was the time of widowhood, when hearts were rent asunder; the darkest hour through which faith has passed. At the very beginning the parable breaks in amongst the hard facts of soul-widowhood. But did the disciples, the antitype of the widow,

¹ Dr. A. B. Bruce.

The Importunate Widow

become importunate in the hour of their extremity? We need not ask; their faith, their soul fainted; to them there appeared to be no tribunal, no mercy-seat to which bereavement could carry its anguish.

How His disciples prayed while Christ was with them, we may infer: (1) From their request, "Lord teach us to pray."¹ Whether overhearing the Lord in prayer had led them to the conclusion that they knew not how to pray, or that the unfolding of His Divine nature seemed to call for a new way of approach to the Father, is not clear. It is significant that in Christ's model prayer His own name has no place. The Father is directly approached; there is no second name; no intercessor, no hint of a new and living way of access. This prayer, or one similar in range and spirit, may have sufficed for the time to express the disciples' wants. (2) From Christ's words, "Hitherto have ye asked nothing in My name."² It was near the end when Jesus taught His followers the prevailing power of His name. But before leaving them and before that name had been interpreted by Calvary and Pentecost, He revealed it as the door henceforth leading to the mercy-throne. If, on that last night, the disciples began to invoke the name of Christ in prayer, their soul-faint must have been all the deeper when on the morrow and during the succeeding days of bereavement, they saw the name, availing in heaven, nailed to the cross. In the depth of the eclipse it is not probable that the leaderless disciples asked anything in the name of the dead. This hour is analogous to that in which the woman of the parable sounded the depths of widowhood.

Considering that in the time of Christ one man could not form a tribunal, the appeal to a single judge demands fuller explanation than our knowledge supplies. According to Josephus there was in every city a tribunal of seven judges.³ But apart from the question of the number of judges constituting a tribunal, we have not sufficient evidence to prove that the Jewish bench had sunk to the level of the unjust judge. Considering this man's character and the peculiarity of his court, Edersheim identifies him with one of the non-Jewish judges of Palestine, who in every locality as police

¹ Luke xi. 1.

² John xvi. 24.

³ Ant. iv. 8, 14.

Christ's Vision of the Kingdom of Heaven

officials "watched over order and law."¹ The very mention of a single judge would thus summon before Christ's hearers associations of corruption and injustice, defiance of God and contempt for man. A corrupt member of a corrupt body of officials, compelled to give a just verdict, adds to the force of the argument on hand.

In the bitterness of bereavement, in the shadows of death, the oppressor, the tyrant appeared. Was he a debtor refusing payment, a trustee abusing his trust, a land-grabber annexing the widow's house or field? or had he crept in to manage her business and appropriate the profits? The widow's abject helplessness offered irresistible temptation to bully, tyrant and knave. The oppressor could successfully rob the widow and recite the Pharisee's prayer in the temple. Who would listen to the poor widow's charge against a man of substance and influence? There was no redress. Religion and public opinion were both on the side of the strong, the worldly-wise, the fortunate. And should the widow carry her case to the judge, he would reject her suit or accept a bribe from the adversary.

The widow is assumed to have right and law on her side; she is the victim of injustice and oppression; and simply sues for justice and relief.

Sitting by her desolate hearth in the defencelessness of her sex, she would for a while endure in silence the oppression and tyranny of the adversary; but if fatherless children, threatened with homelessness and hunger, gathered round her knee, she would at length in their interest seek protection and deliverance. As, clothed in the raiment of widowhood, she shuts the door and seeks audience of the judge, she is the symbol of faith, the embodiment of prayer out of the depths. Consider her visit to the judge. His reputation, his vaunted defiance of God and man, she knew. The town rang with reports of delay, of unjust decisions, of brutal indifference to the wrongs of widow and orphan. Yet braced by the tonic of distress she appears before him. She came as she went; the judge refused to hear her prayer. Again and again she returned to urge her plea, to be as often dismissed unrighted. From the judge's soliloquy, "the creed of an atheist in

¹ *Jesus the Messiah.*

The Importunate Widow

power," it appears that her visits were incessant, and that unknown to the suppliant, they left their mark on the unrighteous magistrate. If she had not reached his heart she had jarred his nerves. "I believe this wretched woman will bore me to death" he began to say to himself. "With each new visit she becomes more shrill, more determined, more vehement." Some impulse mightier than self-interest, unnamed but implied in the situation, urged her on; was it the cause of her children?

She has returned brow-beaten, spurned from the judge's presence. Her room and its scant furniture remind her of the oppressor, who grows bolder with every futile appeal to justice. If little children look into her face, she can but weep on their account, so near her heart, so far from comprehension of her sorrow. Her cup of widowhood is full; death has removed the storm-guard, and the wind from the wilderness sweeps over her. The powers of the world seem in league against her very life. How she hungers for the death-deafened ear, for the reassuring presence, the strength and sympathy of happier days! The greatest wrench the heart can experience, was re-lived on the occasion of each ineffectual appeal; she felt afresh what death had taken and what death had brought; for oppression doubtless began after her bereavement.

Unconsciously the widow delivered her assault on the point of least resistance. If, when sleep fell on the city, she rehearsed the situation, so did the judge: "Though I fear not God nor regard man, yet because this widow troubleth me, I will avenge her, lest she wear me out by her continual coming." The hardened wretch fears not to sound his creed in the ear of silence, to baptize himself by the name of villain. Indeed, he is proud to have eliminated from his soul all that makes man divine. Let God and man, justice and righteousness, know that if he avenges this widow it is not for their sakes, but solely for his own comfort. So when next the suppliant, sick of heart and desperate, comes to repeat the oft spurned plea, "Do me justice," her plea is entertained, her suit considered, she is avenged; she has wrung a just decision from embodied unrighteousness. Burning importunity, imaged by beating an antagonist in the face, has prevailed. The slothful official, saturated with Sadducean

Christ's Vision of the Kingdom of Heaven

self-indulgence, and utter indifference to the wrong and suffering of others, resents this shameless, this incessant clamour for justice; and of two evils prefers righting the widow to bearing the assaults of her insistence. It is not meant that he feared bodily harm; his office as judge, and the suppliant's helplessness as a woman and widow, forbid such an inference. Jeffreys on the bench is safe from the assaults of poor widows. Repeated blows under the eyes, turning the flesh black and blue, strongly express the judge's apprehension for the defacement of his comfort. The word is used metaphorically in the only other place where it occurs in the New Testament.¹

The judge's soliloquy is the heart of the parable: "Hear what the unjust judge saith." Here the point of view is changed from the attack to the defence. "For a while" covers the period of unanswered supplication: "He would not" assigns the cause of the delay. The widow's task was to bend the judge's will. The reason of Divine delay is not in God, but in ourselves, or our circumstances. The "while" has its equivalent in "He is long suffering over them," "He deferreth His anger on their behalf." The while during which the widow invoked justice in vain is the period throughout which God's elect cry to Him day and night. Greater than anything man has done since the foundation of the kingdom, or will do till its consummation, is this cry, never silent, rising and falling, pathetic, endless. As a sigh for Christ's presence and vision, for His kingdom and glory, it is ancient and modern, present and to come, the one melodious chord in the dissonance of earth. Crying day and night has an individual application also. The "while" of waiting may cover the whole term of life; or the answer, as a new power of continuance in prayer, may come without delay.

The words, "the Lord said," are inserted to show that the application is by Christ Himself. We are asked to hear in the judge's recitation of his creed the dominant note of his character; to hear the response to persistent knocking. Viewed in herself, as she again returns to be again repulsed, the widow is the symbol of impotence. What is her presence? What is her cry? The judge can best answer. On him her

¹ Cor. ix. 27.

The Importunate Widow

incessant coming and imploring have a cumulative power; the latest appeal condenses into one all the others. In the nature and office of the judge lies the widow's power. Had he in his plunge downward lost the capacity of wincing under a blow in the face, she had remained unrighted. The woman had one resource; she could continue coming; on one side the judge was vulnerable; he could not endure her presence or her suit.

At several points the widow is the type of the elect; beloved, betrothed, bereaved and wronged, with a grave behind and the world around, she urges what seems an un-availing suit. In himself, on the other hand, the judge is an absolute contrast to God. In one thing he appears to resemble God—his amenableness to importunity. But here the Divine Father and the judge of unrighteousness present the strongest contrast; God answers because He loves the suppliant; the judge because he loves himself. To the judge the widow is a plague. Is she, a forlorn nobody, because wronged by some extortioner of high standing and influence in the city, to worry a judge to death? If wreathed in smiles, she alighted from a carriage, with a bribe in her hand, then could a judge of unrighteousness court her presence and grant her pleading; but the visits, the insistence, the intensity of this woman in weeds and tears, are insufferable. To right forlorn oppression, although repellent to this judge, is not half so intolerable as these endless irruptions of dead-earnest misery upon self-love.

On the number and urgency of the widow's visits depends the judge's course of action. If at the time of his soliloquy he had been assured that she would return once or twice only, he would have forgotten or ignored the past. It was the future and its possibilities that weighed on his mind. If, however, the parable seems to teach that just as importunity overcame the judge's unwillingness to give the widow justice, so persistent prayer by the elect will overcome God's reluctance to answer them, it must be clearly understood that its real meaning is infinitely different. There are two points of contact between the widow's action and that of the pleading *ecclesia*; in the first place, she repairs to the only source of redress; and in the second, she persists in coming till she obtains her

Christ's Vision of the Kingdom of Heaven

suit. Christ is far from teaching that in God, as in the judge, unwillingness is overcome by importunity. Incessant coming to God and to this judge mean things essentially different. On the judge, perhaps bribed, avowedly unprincipled, the widow's persistence acts coercively. The prayer of the soul or the *ecclesia* is heaven-born and acts on itself. The judge will avenge the widow to prevent the invasion of his comfort; God, on the contrary, delights to see His suppliant children surround the mercy-seat; and has arranged or permitted the conditions that lead them there. He desires the soul's presence, when He has it all to Himself; all its avenues open to His entrance. Often as it seeks His presence it exchanges climates, nay, worlds. The main end of praying always is not perhaps in God's sight receiving what we ask, but the nourishment and growth of the faith that brings us to His presence. Delay or denial of deliverance may not only accompany but lead to triumph of faith. The causes, therefore, that consolidate the faith in God of the elect, manifest greater love in their permission than in their removal. Christ's question "When the Son of man cometh, shall he find the faith on the earth?" points to the loss of this faith that inspires unwearying prayer, as more vital than the presence or absence of tribulation and distress. What the *ecclesia* and the individual soul had to fear was not the delay of victory over Satan and the world, but the decay of prayer-feeding faith—the artery between the heart of Christ and the members of His body.

"Shall not God avenge his elect, which cry to him day and night, and he is long suffering over them? I say unto you that he will avenge them speedily." The question from its very nature must receive an instant, emphatic answer in the affirmative; since it is the elect who cry, and it is God the righteous Judge to whom they appeal. To this absolute security, the Lord adds His own assurance: "I say unto you that he will avenge them speedily." Here the Man of prayer speaks from the depths of experience, and from the inmost secret of the Divine purpose. On the speedy vindication of God's people, time has proved the best interpreter. Whether we render *ἐν τάχει* soon or suddenly, when we place either sense against the centuries intervening between the promise and

The Importunate Widow

to-day, we see that the elect were not avenged on earth. If the suffering *ecclesia* prayed for Christ's appearing, it was that He should come during the earthly life of the sufferers. And the expectant heart would dwell not on the suddenness, but on the nearness of that coming. To this expectation Christ here speaks. "Speedily," then, must be understood in accordance with the Divine measure of time, as in "Behold I come quickly," or for the purpose of encouragement, it must transfer into the sphere of mortal life what is reserved for the life to come. In John's vision the souls under the altar cry, "How long, O Lord?" "and it was said unto them, that they should rest yet for a little time, until their fellow-servants also and their brethren, which should be killed even as they were, should be fulfilled."¹ The martyrs' cry for vengeance cannot be answered till the number of the martyrs has been fulfilled. So the elect of the parable shall be avenged when their number is completed; and *ἐν τάχει* covers the time between the utterance of the parable and that event.

God is contrasted with the judge, the elect with the widow, the cry of the elect day and night with the widow's continual coming. There was indeed a widow in the city on the night which fell on the uninterpreted cross. In the heart-shock the bereaved disciples would hold aloof from the mercy-seat. Not only faith had failed; its very foundations had been removed. The widow by the bier of her husband is the image of the disciples throughout the dark night between the cross and the resurrection. When after the latter event they first met in prayer, the widow had made her first visit to the abandoned judge; but the conditions similar to those that urged the widow to the judge's presence had not yet arrived. With the martyrdom of Stephen, the Jewish enmity, destined to pursue Christ's witnesses over the Roman world, came to the front. The adversary signifies the oppressor, whether emperor, pope or caliph. Crying day and night has special reference to persecution, which even the prayers of the elect have failed to end or arrest. Avenging the elect in this connection signifies rather the removal of the sufferers than of those who inflict suffering. Other religions may suffer through persecution, Christianity triumphs through suffering.

¹ Rev. vi. 10, 11.

Christ's Vision of the Kingdom of Heaven

God avenges His elect not by taking them out of the world, but by taking the world out of them. He looks less to the absence than to the use of suffering.

"The inference from the parable," says Edersheim, "is not that the church will be ultimately vindicated, because she perseveres in prayer—but that she so perseveres, because God will surely right her cause; it is not that insistence in prayer is the cause of its answer, but that the certainty of that which is asked for should lead to continuance in prayer, even when all around seems to forbid the hope of answer."¹ But the widow's insistence was not caused by the certainty of being righted; with the judge's character before her eyes she could hardly assume certainty of vindication. This view, moreover, seems to sever the connection between prayer and answer; for it fails to make asking the condition of receiving. If in the promise, "Ask, and it shall be given you," Divine giving is not conditional on human asking, how is "and" to be explained? Where then is the incentive to continuance in prayer? A conviction of the prevailing power of prayer is the essence of supplication and the condition of perseverance. It may be urged that God knows our wants, and will unasked supply them; that if we ask what He has not willed to grant, our prayer will not change His purpose. But we are too unacquainted with the secrets of the Infinite to assume that His purposes towards man, His child, are not conditioned on man. In God, love may be the law of laws.

Prayer for things opposed to our well-being, however importunate, cannot be answered. Therefore the injunction to pray always assumes that the things we ask are the things we want. These things God holds in readiness; and prayer will bring them when it has first brought preparedness to receive them. Praying always enables God to give by enabling the suppliant to receive.

The parable implies that the widow will remain the type of the *ecclesia* in a hostile world, and the type of each of its members; that God, by His permissions, His silence and delay, will often appear an unjust Judge; that His silence and delay call for unfainting faith and unceasing prayer, and that God in His own time will vindicate His own people.

¹ *Jesus the Messiah.*

The Importunate Widow

The symbol of the widow, defenceless and forlorn, for ever applies to the believer, who seems to lead a life of bereavement. By the very act of faith he becomes a stranger and exile in the world, which regards him as holding converse with some visionary being. The widowed heart the coarse world will never understand. Yet the widowhood of faith was more keenly felt by the generation that had the memory or the experience of Christ's visible presence, than by subsequent generations. This fact may partly explain the rapid extension of the kingdom of heaven. Men lived in the invisible, crowding the high levels of expectation. Their prayer was heard; the kingdom came, though not as they asked.

The character of the unjust judge as applied to God brings us to the deep waters of Christian experience. The judge is the antithesis of God truly apprehended; but spiritual conditions are here foreseen in which God's people will misinterpret the Divine character; these are the seasons in personal and church life when, after persistent knocking, the door remains shut.

With the lapse of ages, faith in relation to the appearing and kingdom of Christ, comes under an intenser strain. The undermining forces—the assaults of science and scholarship—acquire a new subtlety; in the opium dens of fiction we forget our history, the price of freedom, the imperiousness of principle, the heroic fibre of faith. Spiritual ideals become faint, and the spiritual shores more remote. Instead of seeing Christ in the door of the future, we seem to leave Him with the receding past. Therefore to the elect of our time this parable is a summons and a warning.

The unceasing cry of the apostolic church was less for deliverance from tribulation than for the reappearing of the Lord. With the glorious coming of the King-Redeemer to His kingdom, she assuredly expected to find deliverance from her enemies. This expectation, though strong and passionate, was, however, secondary to the prospect of living in Christ's presence. In the cry, "Come, Lord Jesus," arising from cave and prison, from Rome and Patmos, the Bride found her type in the widow before the unrighteous judge. In the elect, imprisoned, banished, slaughtered for three hundred

Christ's Vision of the Kingdom of Heaven

years, crying day and night, "Come, Lord Jesus," Christ's words, "He is long suffering over them," find interpretation and fulfilment. If suffering faith cried for Christ's appearing and for deliverance from sword and fire, the answer came not in the way faith expected, but it came in another; faith triumphed, her cause was vindicated; Christianity arose nearer the level of the cross than in any subsequent age; and God in the highest sense avenged His elect, first by granting victory over suffering and death, and then calling them to His rest. History knows no baffled impotence like that of emperor or pope barred and defied by the blood or ashes of his triumphant victims.

In the cry of the elect, during the course of time, emphasis has gradually shifted from the coming of Christ to the coming of His kingdom; whether this is owing to the cooling down of early spiritual passion—to decay in the sublime impatience of apostolic faith—or to a wider survey of the Divine purpose and method as revealed in history, or to both causes combined, cannot in the present connection be determined. This is certain; the kingdom comes with Christ, and Christ comes with the kingdom.

The cry of the household of faith is threefold: (1) For the attainment of personal holiness. In the heart and in the world the adversary remains to the last. Sin, Satan and the world-spirit have indeed received sentence of death, but not execution. In Christ they have been vanquished in such wise that in the soul successful war can be waged against them. For deliverance from sin as a presence and power in thought, imagination and desire, the whole body on earth of which Christ is Head, cries day and night. Here the unjust judge often seems to sit on the mercy seat. Holiness is invoked, poverty, sorrow and suffering are the answer; but we are sanctified unconsciously by the operation of these agents; and in death the soul is fully avenged. (2) For the realization of the Divine presence, for fellowship with the infinite Spirit, for conscious citizenship in the kingdom of heaven, the whole family of God on earth has hungered and wrestled day and night. The answer comes in part, and almost always in disguise, strengthening the desire rather than satisfying it. The widowed soul lives still by faith in her invisible Head,

The Importunate Widow

and ideals and attainment are far apart. Since the first Christians departed to be with Christ, the elect have attained these things by leaving earth ; by death they are avenged of all enemies, even the last. (3) The long-drawn sigh, " Thy kingdom come," breathed by apostles and martyrs, from the nature of the kingdom and the nature of man, seems unanswered ; but here the injunction of the parable to pray always has perpetual application. The immensity of the unconquered world, the return to barrenness of territories once reclaimed, the sinking into priestcraft and superstition of wide areas of Christendom, and the worldliness of the best, seem like the widow day by day departing unavenged ; but in this case the heart of the Saviour-Judge is with His elect, and day and night the kingdom comes.

V

THE PHARISEE AND THE PUBLICAN

“Two men went up into the temple to pray; the one a Pharisee, and the other a publican. The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, God, I thank thee, that I am not as the rest of men, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this publican. I fast twice in the week; I give tithes of all that I get. But the publican, standing afar off, would not lift up so much as his eyes unto heaven, but smote his breast, saying, God, be merciful to me the sinner. I say unto you, This man went down to his house justified rather than the other; for every one that exalteth himself shall be humbled; but he that humbleth himself shall be exalted.”—LUKE xviii. 10-14.

I

Wherever an audience assembled around Christ it was almost certain to include a Pharisee. Amidst the curious and penitent the Divine Teacher caught the steel-cold eye of scribe or lawyer. The company that first listened to this parable was evidently an exception. Had Christ painted the typical Pharisee in the presence of Pharisees, He would have suppressed the name and exhibited the spirit of legalism in a veiled personality, as He has set it forth in the elder brother of the lost son. The parable was addressed to “certain which trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and set all others at nought.” In these men Jesus discerns the hidden Pharisee—hidden from their fellows and hidden from themselves. None were more surprised than they when they saw the Pharisee step out of their hearts, pose in the temple and go down to his house in his sins. They had often heard the Pharisee’s prayer in their own hearts, but they could only wonder how this Divine Explorer had discovered the Pharisee and led him forth into the severe light of God’s face. The religionists here brought under Luke’s masterly analysis, whose

The Pharisee and the Publican

spirit assumes objective, living form in the parable, may have been disciples in the wider sense of the term, or may indeed have been numbered amongst the narrower circle of followers. The pharisaic spirit will find its way from the class-room of Gamaliel to the school of Christ. Given a human heart it is at home under all times and stars.

This is the only one amongst Christ's parables of which the scene is laid in the temple; and it is significant that the elaborate institution of priesthood and sacrifice is silently ignored. Pharisee and publican, though under the same roof with priest and altar, seem unconscious of their existence. The former indeed, having no consciousness of sin, had no need of sacrifice, which suggested conditions of forgiveness; but the publican who came under the crushing load of sin, recognizing no human priest and no bleeding or burnt offering, carries his appeal direct to the mercy seat. He thus anticipates the great declaration, "It is impossible that the blood of bulls and goats should take away sins;"¹ he shares with David the spiritual platform: "Thou delightest not in sacrifice; thou hast no pleasure in burnt offering."²

If the temple retained for Jesus any spiritual significance, it was not because of its priesthood or altars, but because it had been called the house of prayer. Many wounded by His arrows, shot in the open air, must of late have carried their soreness of heart to the temple. And the hour and place where the sin-sick met, would have an omnipotent attraction for the divine Healer. He may have witnessed the Pharisee and the publican ascend the great stair and fall into the postures He has described. In His parables Christ paints from life as it passed before His eyes; and we may safely infer that He who sat over against the treasury would frequent the court of prayer. Especially so since the influence of John and His own ministry, had doubtless afforded the unwonted sight of publicans repairing to the temple at the hours of devotion.

The Pharisee taking up his position before the eyes of men and angels, complacently murmuring his soul's trust in itself, and only withdrawing his eye from self-adoration to flash withering scorn on "this publican;" the publican

¹ Heb. x. 4.

² Psalm li. 16.

Christ's Vision of the Kingdom of Heaven

standing "afar off" from the sanctuary and the Pharisee—by his very attitude apologizing for his presence and his existence, not daring to look up, smiting his breast, sobbing out the broken words, "God, be merciful to me the sinner," present the realism of a picture not conceived, but simply framed in parable. The parable, however, consists not in the outward setting, but in making the two men transparent; in shifting the seat of judgment from private and public opinion to the tribunal of Him who reads the heart.

Saul of Tarsus could have been the Pharisee in the temple; a little later the same Saul could have been the publican. The proud Cilician who must often have prayed the Pharisee's prayer in the temple, prayed also the publican's prayer in the house of Judas in Damascus. The third chapter of Philippians presents the two platforms on which he successively stood. The first, "touching the law, a Pharisee,¹ touching the righteousness which is in the law, blameless," is essentially the ground occupied by the Pharisee. The second, "having no confidence in the flesh,"² is the platform of the publican. If Paul ever heard Luke read or recite our parable, he must have exclaimed, "I was that Pharisee," and with the dying Grotius, "That publican am I."

The gospel of Luke, the Gentile evangelist, is generally recognized as stamped with the distinctive influence of Paul. Its wide horizon of grace embracing the Gentile world, the Divine mercy ever journeying to man, justification of the sinner through grace, are the axis around which the Pauline "word of the cross" revolves. If then the materials of the third gospel—especially the parables and miracles—were under Paul's eye in Philippi or Rome, it is difficult to explain how he seems unaware of their existence. In his letters there is no reference to either parables or miracles. Many of the parables recorded by Luke, bear on the question never absent from Paul's mind—the contrast and the conflict between legal righteousness and salvation by grace. In his preaching the apostle of the Gentiles might have passed over these as inapplicable to the Gentile position; but when he sat down to write the letter to the Philippians, in which he draws the portrait of the new Paul, evolved from Saul the dead Pharisee,

¹ Phil. iii. 5, 6.

² Phil. iii. 3.

The Pharisee and the Publican

he would have found pharisaism incarnate in this parable ; still more he would have found in the publican the spirit in which he himself came to the gate of mercy, and in the publican's justification the great seal wherewith to stamp his doctrine. For the key-word of Paul's system is the word applied by Christ to the publican.

No other of Christ's parables approaches so near a doctrinal statement, or draws in lines so clear the only entrance into the kingdom of heaven. The two brothers in the parable of the Lost Son, play the part of the Pharisee and the publican, present two human hearts, one unfractured, overgrown with the foliage of ceremony ; the other riven, revealing the deep, dark reservoir of sin. So far the two penitents and the two legalists agree. Here the agreement ends. The father welcomes, receives his lost son. From the compassion and joy of his fatherhood we infer forgiveness ; still we are in the realm of parable ; we see the Divine under the limitations of the human. But here, when the two men go down to their houses, they become transparent to our eyes ; we know how they appear in God's sight ; we hear the Divine voice removing or retaining sin ; we see prayer negatively and positively defined ; and we are taught the prevailing power of penitent sorrow. In this parable we have the epistles to the Romans and the Galatians ; we have all the battle ground of the Protestant Reformation.

The survey of self engages both Pharisee and publican. Each stands solitary, separated from his kind ; each weighs his own deeds and judges himself accordingly. On the ground of his works one justifies himself ; by his deeds the other is self-condemned. Whilst the Pharisee's works are legal and moral, the publican's unjust and unmoral, they are equally works of the flesh. Paul would call the Pharisee's boasting "confidence in the flesh" ; the publican's transgressions "fruits of the flesh." The publican sees, however, the fountain as well as the river of guilt ; and that fountain is his heart. Not unguided is the hand that smites his breast ; there the head-waters of sin have their rise ; in that recess the plague has its lair.

The standpoints occupied by the two men are these :
(1) In himself the Pharisee discerns no sin, but righteousness

Christ's Vision of the Kingdom of Heaven

only ; (2) In himself the publican sees no righteousness, but sin only.

First, the Pharisee discerns in himself no sin. Although the name Pharisee conveys a suggestion of hypocrisy, the instances of Saul of Tarsus and the scribe who was not far from the kingdom of God, prove that legalism and hypocrisy were not inseparable. Fiery zeal and strong conviction could flourish on the soil of ceremonialism. The Pharisee who goes up to the temple to pray is best conceived as thoroughly convinced of his own righteousness. His trust in himself is unfeigned. Its sincerity is its pathos. The design of the parable shuts us up to this conclusion. A certain group of men, hearers or disciples, required to see themselves as they appeared to Christ. What then was their religious position as seen by the Searcher of hearts ? They " trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and set all others at nought." They were stone-blind with religious pride. It is because they are deceived and not deceivers that Christ undertakes their enlightenment. His purpose is not to expose them to their fellows, but to reveal them to themselves. Their thought, their conviction, their scorn, find objective embodiment, pose and utterance in the Pharisee of the temple. Their religious personality, summoned into the light, wears the Pharisee's phylactery, visibly ascends the temple steps, boasts, condemns, despises ; and all this over against a background of self-condemning humility.

" God, I thank thee that I am not as other men," is an explosion of moral insanity ; the moral reason is unhinged. If the prodigal was drunk with sin, this man is drunk with self-righteousness. And if the Pharisee would enter the kingdom of heaven, he, quite as much as the lost son, must come to himself. The moral reason must regain its balance.

Could conscience hear the Pharisee's self-adoration without protest ? Said it not " amen " to the publican's prayer ? Could not its flashing eye burn through the envelope of self-righteousness to the putrifying heart ? Conscience is God's pilot in the human breast ; but it is a pilot that may be sung to sleep, may through defect of vision mistake a sea-borne lamp for the light at the harbour mouth. Like the needle, it ever turns to its star ; but the star may not be in heaven.

The Pharisee and the Publican

Steadfast to the pole of goodness when enlightened, if depolarized, it will point to a painted star in a painted sky. Destitute of intuitive verifying power, its choice is determined by its degree of illumination. Heir of a transmitted bias towards legal righteousness, and trained to measure holiness by a law of works, the Pharisee's conscience either acquiesced or slept.

The proud Pharisee dreams that he stands aloft and alone on his pedestal of righteousness. He is not a leader or a disciple, he is the human embodiment of holiness. On his giddy eminence there is room for one man only. On a level infinitely lower, separated by a great chasm, he descries afar "the rest of men"—the clay mountain remaining after the jewel of his virtue has been subtracted.

This spirit is the antithesis of religion. It separates God from man and man from his fellow men. Even in his prayer the Pharisee justifies the charge of Paganism, that the Jew was the enemy of mankind. Floating on the iceberg of self-righteousness, he meets the lost son under the same exile sky. But the lost son knows that he is lost; the Pharisee dreams that he sits by his father's hearth. "God, I thank thee that I am not as the rest of men," is the outcome of perverted privilege. The chosen tribe-father, the nation carried out of Egypt, burying in the wilderness its fetters and the generation that wore them; the tribe walled by mountain, flood and desert to be the conscience of the human race, has, by living up to the accidents instead of the essentials of its calling, withered down to the Pharisee in the parable.

Like a blind miser whose pyramid of sovereigns has during his sleep been replaced by baser metal, but who counts and fondles spurious coinage as if it were sterling gold, the Pharisee in the blindness of his soul confounds morality with righteousness. The blindness of religious pride is of all blindness blindest. Dazzled by gazing on the beams of his own virtue, the legalist cannot penetrate to the spiritual core of the law which throbs with a pulse from the heart of God. The Divine heart cries as truly out of the law as out of the cross. From both it invokes and claims the heart of man. It asks and by implication predicts the meeting of the Divine and human hearts. Love alone hungers for love. At the bottom

Christ's Vision of the Kingdom of Heaven

of the law, as in a deep well, lies the love of God, ready to rise and fill the human heart ; but man has nothing to draw with and the well is deep.

Placing himself over against the rest of men, the Pharisee gives thanks that he differs from them. But he measures by a wrong standard. The soul's ideal is in God. The soul had sounded the deep, true note if it had cried, "I am confounded before the living glory of Thy holiness."

"Examine me, O Lord, and prove me," prays the Psalmist. "I know not myself," exclaims Goethe. Man is a stranger on the earth, and the earth is a stranger to man ; its poles have long baffled his approach ; its supreme elevations and abysses resent his intrusion. But if he would touch the shores of a land unexplored and unknown, let him look *within*. Shakespeare's deepest soundings in human nature are mainly confined to the passions ; but where the underlying moral deep moans amongst its caves, his plummet rarely falls. The human nature he explores is fallen human nature ; and the cardinal feature of that nature—the mournful void created by the absence of God—has hardly engaged his thought. Carrying the explorer's torch round the majestic temple of our being, he forgets that it is desolate. His analysis, even where it includes acquiescent or avenging conscience, answers to human nature in its ideal, as disease answers to health. To the temple rebuilt and re-inhabited by God, the supreme dramatist has no access. Bunyan, and not Shakespeare, has sojourned in the new, the regenerated temple of human nature ; has lingered in its courts newly cleansed, viewed its altar of personal surrender, followed the high priest into its inmost recess, bearing the blood of atonement, and glanced with awe into the throne-room sacred to the Spirit of holiness.

Granted that the Pharisee's estimate of himself and the rest of men is founded on perfect knowledge, granted that he occupies a mournful isolation of holiness—supposing self-adoration and holiness could make the same breast their abode—he would in consequence be forced to forget self through sorrow for others. The sin of his fellow men would, like gravity, weigh down his soul in the fellowship of sorrow. Is he emancipated from sin, and can he survey unmoved a

The Pharisee and the Publican

world of slaves ? Is he forgiven ? Then his heart will yearn to proclaim the wonder and attainableness of his secret. Does he love God, apart from which affection there is no holiness ? Then will he fall upon the publican's neck, exclaiming, "There is no difference ; my disobedience laired in the heart, thine rushed into deed ; but the same horizon of mercy encloses both." Having never traversed the ruins of his nature, he was certain to misread the hearts of other men. While he pronounced sentence of condemnation, the publican, hearing from the mercy seat the verdict of acquittal, entered the kingdom of heaven. "The rest of men," included Nathanael, John and Matthew ; and whilst the "insolent spurn of contempt"² was being uttered, Jesus may have stood under the same roof.

The madness of human pride, despising the asylum of mercy, rushes under the uplifted sword of justice. Glorifying in the presence of its Judge, it asks, "Who hath said that I have need of grace ; and on what ground does he come to offer me that humiliating benefit ?"³

Between the platform of the Pharisee and that of the publican, the religious pendulum ever swings. In the inspired hours of the church, in the Pentecost of conscience, the soul hides in the clefts of grace, invoking mercy ; when the critic supplants the prophet, and the dew of Pentecost dries from the heart, the publican's refuge is deserted as the shelter of vulgarity and fanaticism ; and the Pharisee goes up to the temple to render homage to his virtues. The moral distance between the two standpoints is the space between the just realization and the under-emphasis of sin. In the one case the sinner finds his way down to the dungeon of his guilt ; in the other the door leading to that deep is choked by overgrowths of human virtue. But the truth remains, that "man must descend into the hell of his own heart, before he can ascend to the heaven of God."³ The petrification of conscience measures our distance from Pentecosts past and to come.

The sensibility to sin is the first sign of a living church and ministry.

It might be assumed that he who had plunged into the foulness of his own heart would accuse other men of similar vileness ;

¹ Burke.

² Vinet.

³ Augustine.

Christ's Vision of the Kingdom of Heaven

a specialist of the heart and reins, he would credit humanity with his own corruption. But true self-knowledge has a contrary effect. One man it judges, one man it condemns, and one man only. The explorer of his own vileness, instinctively contrasts his guilt with the guilt of universal man; for his fellows he has extenuation; for himself condemnation. On the other hand, the heart sitting in the court of self-righteousness, the heart that never stood a trembling criminal before the bar of holiness, credits others with the vices to which it is most inclined. The sins that the Pharisee places to the account of the publican and the rest of men—"extortion, injustice, adultery"—may have been his own besetting vices, though long abandoned. The most unmerciful censors of sin are those who have discarded its practice, without repenting its guilt. When the merchant's fortune is made he can leave extortion to struggling rapacity, and injustice to those unhampered by reputation for honesty in trade, or distinction in religion. When the expiring fires of passion have lowered the temperature, the frost-flowers may be cited as evidence of virtue.

Perhaps we are to place fasting twice in the week over against carnal excess, and paying tithes on "all that I get," against extortion and injustice. Thus we have repudiation of the vices named, and the affirmance of their corresponding virtues. Giving due value to the virtues claimed, we have only to bring them alongside the law of which they are the vaunted fulfilment. By ascending the law's flight of steps, the Pharisee hopes to attain heaven. But these steps are two fold; moral and ceremonial at the base, and spiritual at the summit—Thou shalt not; and thou shalt. Has he reached the highest step in the moral, he has yet to take the first, the lowest step in the spiritual. Between these two points he must pause; he must give a password. Here he is not asked, What hast thou done? but, Whom hast thou loved? Here he encounters a judge who ignores fasting and tithing; who bars the way upward and inward to all but those who love God and their neighbour as themselves. On the first step in the spiritual flight is inscribed "There is no difference; for all have sinned." "Love is the fulfilment of the law;" and without it "the most generous man has a hard heart,

The Pharisee and the Publican

the most just is unrighteous, the most honourable unfaithful, the most loyal rebellious, the most pure adulterous ; for everything he has spared his fellow men he has done to God."¹

The Pharisee knows no want, urges no request, pours forth no confession, betrays no consciousness of sin. From his prayer, penitence, remorse, sorrow, self-reproach, grief over imperious habit are absent. Immaculate himself, he computes and confesses the sins of his fellow men. He went up to the temple to pray ; he went down from the temple convinced that he *had prayed*. In his journal he doubtless recorded the disturbing presence of the publican amongst the righteous.

Had the temple suddenly vanished, and its marble pavement become the bottom of a deep pit, had the Pharisee felt his feet sink in miry clay, and had love descending in its might lifted and borne him in its arms to the rock of ages, then would hollow thanksgiving have been replaced by wonder, sorrow and shame. His virtues would have hung upon him like the scales and ulcers of the leper ; and God would have been his fortress and his song. " This publican " would then have become his friend and brother : his guilt and mental anguish the Pharisee's own. The icy barrier melting, the Pharisee would have been the good Samaritan, pouring wine and oil into the wounds of the soul. The pedestal of human pride would have vanished beneath his feet, leaving him in the blessed position of chief of sinners. From the tribunal on which he sat in judgment, he would have fallen before the mercy seat, and gone down to his house condemned by his conscience and justified by his Saviour.

II

Second, in himself the publican sees no righteousness : " But the publican standing afar off, would not lift up so much as his eyes unto heaven, but continued to smite his breast, saying, God, be merciful to me the sinner." Standing near, the two men are infinitely far apart. Between them lies a vast moral interspace. The contrast begins with the outward attitude and passes into the interior man. The Pharisee takes up his position as if posing before the camera. As moral artist, he presents a flawless statue to the mirror of public

¹ Vinet.

Christ's Vision of the Kingdom of Heaven

opinion. Posturing on the floor where tears have rained, near the place where the Divine holiness has dwelt, covering a plague-stricken soul with the adorning of holiness, is daringly presumptuous.

The publican has not come to "stand" in the temple; he has come hither to pray. Not self-consciousness but sin-consciousness afflicts him. In the corner where the shade is deepest, he stands as the prisoner at the bar. He is bowed, bent, broken. His eyes are on the pavement, which seems to flame all over with the record of his guilt. Its tiles are to him the shards and splinters of the tables of the law. On his breast, in the rhythm of anguish, he continues beating to assuage the pain and carry self-condemnation home. As the strokes are incessant, so is the cry, repeated again and again, "God, be merciful to me the sinner." The prayer is short, the pulse-beat of the soul; yet it gathers into itself the energy, the agony, the choking emotion of the fifty-first Psalm. The fountains of the soul's great deep are broken up. Behold he prayeth! Prayeth in every fibre of his frame; bowed head, trembling limbs, smitten breast, breaking heart. Sorrow rushes forth through every sluice of the soul—robed in speech, winged with voice. This cry *de profundis* sounds from even a lower deep than the prodigal's "Father, I have sinned against heaven and in thy sight." It arises from under the waves and billows, where the soul beyond its depth finds no bottom, descries no shore, sees no light. The depth is the soul's consciousness of its lost estate; the waves and billows are sin, their voice the foot-fall of judgment. Here in the teeming city, here in the frequented temple, everything has vanished but the soul and its guilt, God and His mercy. Priest nor altar nor bleeding sacrifice remains. Quite as much as Paul, the publican claims the mournful eminence of chief of sinners. He is not *a* sinner, but *the* sinner. To the soul revealed to itself the sins of society grow pale. This effect arises (1) from the view of sin in its fountain, from which it only partially works its way into actual life; (2) the Spirit's illumination is personal, centres on self, and sets personal sin, inward and outward, in clear array.

Gracious souls have no condemnation for others; they sit in judgment on themselves. When they begin to realize

The Pharisee and the Publican

their situation, they break through all barriers to come to God. They confess and pray instinctively, of necessity, and almost unconsciously. They appeal to God's heart, to Christ Jesus, to mercy, the last the only refuge of the convicted and broken heart.

If the publican heard the Pharisee's charge—"extortioners, unjust, adulterers"—he would answer, Alas, all these I see within. The publican is infinitely viler than his name. In point of fact he calls himself the publican and sinner. Tell him to knock gently at the door of mercy, he replies, I am pursued by the avenger of blood. Tell him of the law, he replies, The law has shut me up in the condemned ward. From the last steps of the temple of law I was hurled into these black doom-waters. Tell him of burnt offering and sacrifice, of tithe and fasting, of saint-worship and pilgrimage, of confession to a fellow mortal, and of the efficacy of the mass; these narcotics to conscience insult the soul that has seen the heinousness of guilt, the holiness of God, and the helplessness of man. Two conditions of the soul, self-trust and self-renunciation, receive patents of immortality in our parable.

But for Christ's contact with the temple it would have gone down to oblivion with the temples of Jupiter and Diana; but He has given to its court of prayer a charter of immortality. On Pharisee and publican the roof never falls; the two men pray for ever; the two poles of the soul utter their voices; "God, I thank thee that I am not as other men"; "God, be merciful to me the sinner."

This may have been the publican's first prayer in the temple; it was not his first cry from the depths. The fire had fallen on his conscience earlier; the Spirit had been carrying conviction from mind to heart. Of late the tax-officer had seemed strangely absent in manner. His friends had observed an unusual deafness and blindness to voices and scenes around him. Convicted, burdened, condemned, he seeks the long unconsulted Scriptures; he seeks the Psalm from which ever rises the profoundest cry of the soul; he recognizes the voice as his own: "have mercy upon me, O God," cries the Psalmist: "God, be merciful to me,"

¹ Psalm li. 1.

Christ's Vision of the Kingdom of Heaven

moans the publican. "I acknowledge my transgressions, and my sin is ever before me," confesses the Psalmist; "to me the sinner," sighs the publican.

But conviction deepens, the burden weighs heavier. He thinks of the temple, the house of prayer; but many sordid, guilty years have gone since he trod its courts. How could he, a moral leper, shunned by virtue, excommunicated by religion, ascend that august stairway and brave the blaze of religious eyes? But he went; for he believed God was there. When with trembling knees he finds himself climbing the stepped ascent, he sees the Pharisee, and hears the verdict of pharisaic opinion: There goes that devout ruler in Israel, worn with fasting, and renowned for payment of tithes on all he receives. Every step in this great staircase knows his tread; we can reckon the hours by his ascent and descent from the courts of prayer. He indeed wears the white flower of a blameless life. But a publican going up to the temple! One of the harpies who devour the people. What has induced *him* to carry contagion amongst the devout of Israel?

Perhaps the publican's father had prayed beneath that roof; perhaps he himself in earlier days had stood on that hallowed spot. The majestic beauty of the temple seems transformed into a haze of holy light; all things combine to form a background to the guilty publican. Invisible forces urge him into the Almighty's presence. The sea of the past gives up its dead; it is the hour of heart-resurrection; and he cries, God, be merciful to me the sinner.

The Pharisee is the printed and published inner man of those who trusted in themselves that they were righteous. He is type of the soul confiding in its own sufficiency, when its springs are all within itself. This self-trust is, as we have seen, the axis round which his entire life revolves. We miss his distinctive individuality unless we find it here. From this point we must measure the gulf between him and the publican. In this self-poised confidence lies his isolation from God; here are his idol, his altar and his deity; the exaltation on which abasement waits. Distance is reckoned between the Pharisee's faith in himself, and the publican's faith in God. The publican's faith is not mentioned; but it is assumed as underlying his self-humiliation. It is the vital spark in

The Pharisee and the Publican

his soul, which stripped of self-righteousness voluntarily substitutes the righteousness of God.

Owing to the design of the parable there was no room for the representation of the publican bearing his guilty load 'to Christ. The only constellation shining on both men is assumed to be the Old Testament. But suppose the publican had seen Jesus in the temple—had seen Him not as a rabbi, but as Matthew and Zacchæus saw Him—his faith, as the voluntary act of the soul, would have gone out to Him, and by its incorporating genius possessed itself of righteousness by appropriating Christ. The Pharisee's confidence is based on works. One work, vital and essential, he lacks ; the heart's flight out of self into God. This supreme work belongs to the publican. Renouncing all confidence in self, renouncing even brokenness and sorrow, in an act of obedience, humble, sublime, he submits himself to God. Faith leads him from his own house to the temple ; renders him deaf and blind to sneer and jibe ; enables him to throw his being and its disease on the mercy of God. Knowing himself to be undone does not save him ; but knowing his condition to be desperate, he carries his plague to the Healer ; and like a sufferer on the table of the surgeon uncovers his wounds. He dimly saw mercy crowned and central amongst the Divine attributes ; and his heart found its lost place, its reserved place, its right place in God. If Britain, convinced of the adequacy of her internal resources to sustain her population, allowed her waterways to silt and her harbours to fall into ruin, and sold or burnt her mercantile fleet, she would do what the Pharisee did. But if recognizing the needs of her millions, and the inadequacy of home production, she sent forth her fleets to tap the grain-lands of the world, went out in trust to return laden with the wealth of distant climes, she would go out of self for salvation as the publican went out of self for salvation.

We little know what may be passing in the soul of our fellow worshipper. The Pharisee turned his scorn on the publican when the gate of the kingdom was opening to receive him. We may see no sign of a work of grace, when at the same time the angels are rejoicing over a soul forgiven. " I say unto you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other." He appealed to mercy and mercy

Christ's Vision of the Kingdom of Heaven

heard his prayer. She washed him white in an instant of time, she disburthened him of his guilt, brought forth the best robe and put it on him. With God "there is no respect of persons, no respect of sins; he stops not at some shades of difference; he does not apply to us our own vain measures."¹

The inner evidence of forgiveness may or may not have been clear. The sinner's past and his mental temperament must be taken into consideration. A deep settled self-distrust may hesitate to welcome peace, even when sent from God. A man with the publican's antecedents might have begun the new life with grey twilight, with hope rather than peace in the ascendant. "He went down to his house justified in God's sight, but not, we think, in his own. He has not found peace, to use a current phrase. In plain English the fact was so, but he was not aware that the fact was so. In saying this, we do not forget that there is an instinct, call it rather the still small voice of the Holy Spirit, which tells a penitent, 'there is hope in God.' 'There is forgiveness with him that he may be feared,' 'Wait for God as they that wait for the dawn.' But a man who beats his breast, and dares not look up, and stands afar off in an attitude which seems an apology for existence, has some difficulty in trusting this instinct. To fear and despond suits his mood better than to hope."²

When the publican left home to seek the temple, he had attained the same point of spiritual history with the prodigal son when he resolved to arise and go to his father. The parable indeed bears throughout the closest resemblance to that of the Lost Son. Who shall say what had passed in the tax-gatherer's soul before that memorable journey to the temple? What conflicts within his own abode, what sleepless nights, what groans of remorse, what efforts to stifle the voice of conscience, what unavailing prayers, what burning tears, what wild endeavours after peace, what efforts to unbind the crushing load? Can we tell what passed in Augustine's soul before he heard the voice saying *Tolle, lege*? It is clear that God had visited the publican's house before the publican visited the temple. The Holy Spirit had awakened, alarmed and illumined the soul. Perhaps the publican had been a

¹ Vinet.

² Dr. A. B. Bruce.

The Pharisee and the Publican

rich man, and God had brought him down to scant food and sweaty toil ; had led him from a mansion to a garret. Perhaps God smote his homestead, removing his consort from his side, or hid in the grave the son on whom he had built his hopes. Or maybe disease had smitten his strength, and he had felt the wings of death close around him. Then he began to read life and death, God and eternity in a new light. In that light he became transparent to himself. As from a long, deep sleep he awoke to read the open book of life ; to see himself in the grip of a fatal disease, sick unto death. Once he regarded himself as a merchant, a man of the world, a wealthy citizen, a busy man, too deeply engaged to concern himself with temple or religion, with soul or God. Now he is the sinner, the black sinner, the condemned sinner. Convicted and condemned at his desk, in his house, in the morning, at mid-day, in the sleepless night, he felt as he had never felt before the bitterness of excommunication. The ban of religious opinion pressed heavy and burning on his heart. Owing to the isolation of his position he had no adviser, no spiritual guide, no pilgrim neighbour whose feet had sunk in the slough of despond. Here, in my opinion, the interpreter must take his stand when he asks whether a consciousness of light and peace accompanied forgiveness.

“ This man went down to his house justified rather than the other ; for every one that exalteth himself shall be humbled ; but he that humbleth himself shall be exalted.” He went down disburthened, acquitted, healed ; he went down with a great inward history, with a new revelation of God and a new conception of life. He carried a new atmosphere into his house. He went down as its salt and light, as the advocate and witness of the invisible. He went down to his house to raise an altar for prayer and the offering up of himself and his household ; to erect beside the hearth a throne where God might reign. And from his house he would lead his beloved to the house of prayer, where he had found refuge, sanctuary, mercy ; and where his burden fell.

V

**The Kingdom in Relation to Service and
Reward**

I

THE LABOURERS IN THE VINEYARD

“ For the kingdom of heaven is like unto a man that is a householder, who went out early in the morning to hire labourers into his vineyard. And when he had agreed with the labourers for a penny a day, he sent them into his vineyard. And he went out about the third hour, and saw others standing in the marketplace idle ; and to them he said, Go ye also into the vineyard, and whatsoever is right I will give you. And they went their way. Again he went out about the sixth and the ninth hour, and did likewise. And about the eleventh hour he went out, and found others standing ; and he saith unto them, Why stand ye here all the day idle ? They say unto him, Because no man hath hired us. He saith unto them, Go ye also into the vineyard. And when even was come, the lord of the vineyard saith unto his steward, Call the labourers, and pay them their hire, beginning from the last unto the first. And when they came that were hired about the eleventh hour, they received every man a penny. And when the first came, they supposed that they would receive more ; and they likewise received every man a penny. And when they received it, they murmured against the householder, saying, These last have spent but one hour, and thou hast made them equal unto us, who have borne the burden of the day and the scorching heat. But he answered and said to one of them, Friend, I do thee no wrong : didst not thou agree with me for a penny ? Take up that which is thine, and go thy way ; it is my will to give unto this last, even as unto thee. Is it not lawful for me to do what I will with mine own ? or is thine eye evil, because I am good ? So the last shall be first, and the first last.”—*MATT. XX. 1-16.*

WHILST this parable has a message for every age, its leading portraits were drawn for and from the apostles. An apostle had raised the question of the reward coming to him and his brethren ; Christ in reply promised that when He came to His throne the twelve should also sit on thrones. Then widening His sweep of vision, He pledges to universal discipleship the spiritual equivalent of sacrifice for His sake here, and in the world to come eternal life.

If the apostles possessed no key of interpretation unknown to us, it appears strange that on a question so vital to their

Christ's Vision of the Kingdom of Heaven

ambitions and hopes they sought no explanation. Perhaps indeed they left with time the interpretation.

Although the primary application of the parable to the apostles is obvious, yet is it not without its difficulty. In view of the promised thrones, it appears strange, if the apostles are numbered amongst the labourers, that they should receive the same reward as the others. And assuming that the vineyard represents the kingdom of heaven, the apostles must be identified with the first hired labourers, who instead of receiving recompense equivalent to thrones, occupy the last place, and incur the censure of the lord of the vineyard.

“For” connects the parable with the saying “many shall be last that are first,” which is called forth by Peter’s question, “What then shall we have?” and still more by his boast, “We have left all and followed thee.” Christ had held before the rich inquirer treasure in heaven for self-sacrifice; Peter, mentally contrasting the rich man’s fatal grip of wealth with the apostles’ renunciation of all, desires to know the reward of self-sacrifice; Jesus points to twelve thrones rising amongst the tribes of Israel; then advancing from the special to the general, promises to reward renunciation of home, possession and friends with their spiritual values here, and with everlasting life hereafter; and to discourage reasoning from present distinction to future recompense, adds, “But many shall be last that are first; and first that are last.”

The householder is the study of the parable. If he appeared in the marts and exchanges of the world, men of affairs, capital and commerce would regard him with alarm or pity, as an employer who by the violation of economic laws courted bankruptcy. He borrows humanity to accommodate God to human thought; he transcends earthly laws and measures; finds statutes in his will, and in himself man’s supreme reward.

This parable, confessedly difficult, must be brought under the light of spiritual history and later revelation. The sufferings and death of the apostles, for example, proved that the promise of sitting upon thrones had a spiritual meaning only, and was not fulfilled on earth. So labouring in the vineyard, set in the light of the New Testament, cannot signify legal works of merit, but the good works of the heart—the

The Labourers in the Vineyard

obedience of faith, self-renunciation, love. These instinctively fulfil the law ; but it is the causes that make the effect dear to God. On this question Paul's epistles are decisive.

The meaning we attach to the *denarius* (penny) affects the entire interpretation. The spiritual signification of labour in the vineyard, the destiny of the first called, equal payment for unequal labour, find their explanation here. If merit arose or fell with the quantity of works, payment should be graduated accordingly ; if the *denarius* represents anything outside of God, as blessedness, power, or honour, the labourers must then receive varying rewards ; especially if the apostles—heirs to thrones—are amongst the number. Is the *denarius* then the symbol of reward received here by subjects of the kingdom of heaven ? Is it glory in heaven as a possession separable from the Divine nature ? or is it eternal life, in the sense that the soul's appropriation of God is eternal life ? The answer must be eternal life in God and God in eternal life. Peter's question thus receives answer and rebuke. Like a miner shovelling diamonds aside in search for gold, he overlooks the unsearchable riches of Christ, and asks, What then shall we have ? Well might the answer have been, Not *what* but *whom* is the vital consideration.

But, it may be asked, how can the murmuring of the first hired labourers and the language of the householder be reconciled with this interpretation ? Can we conceive the recipients of eternal life in God murmuring at the Giver because they had not received something beyond Himself ? A man complaining because his own reward is not greater or another man's less, seems irreconcilable with the spirit of genuine discipleship. Besides, the employer's stern rebuke sounds more like rejection than reward. The same difficulty, however, attends every interpretation that assigns to the *denarius* a spiritual meaning. If we take the reward as confined to this life, so long as it is spiritual, the murmuring requires explanation. But if we give the reward a secular signification the parable falls into hopeless confusion, for then it is severed from its context, which in its outlook embraces time and eternity ; the call into the vineyard and out of the vineyard, and even the vineyard itself remain unexplained and inexplicable.

Christ's Vision of the Kingdom of Heaven

We must not, however, carry the murmuring forward to the judgment seat ; there, assuming that the discontented are heirs of eternal life, it would be impossible. The parable requires the discontent to find expression in the hour of payment, in order to set forth motives in their issues. It is not, however, a vision of judgment, but a view of the operation of principles ; not the prediction of inevitable discontent at the end, but the unveiling of actual discontent with the soul's supreme reward. We are not looking into futurity, but into the depth of the hearts that asked for more than the promised reward.

The apostles had just heard that when Christ ascended the throne of His glory they would sit on thrones also. Peter's question therefore cannot be, What shall we have in heaven ? The inquiry, though vague, is clearly not concerned with heavenly things. It discloses where the apostles stand ; and taken in connection with the subsequent petition of James and John to sit right and left of Jesus in His kingdom,¹ shows that the twelve had not yet grasped the nature of the kingdom of heaven.

(1) Peter mentally contrasts the apostles' self-sacrifice with the rich man's choice of the world ; (2) connects reward with human merit ; (3) thinks of receiving recompense in this life. The apostles had not yet been crucified with Christ ; neither the natural man nor the Jew had received his death blow. While they were the first called into the kingdom of heaven, they dreamed they had never left the old vineyard of the theocracy. Had the labourers been called on the day this parable was spoken, the twelve would have occupied the place of the labourers first hired. It must have saddened Jesus to know that even in the hearts of His own the gift was the rival of the Giver, and here, perhaps, we find the explanation of the severity of the householder's tone to the discontented labourer.

So far then as it relates to the apostles, the picture of the complaining labourers is not a prediction of their future, but a *revelation of their present*. Peter had misread his own heart when he claimed to have left all and followed Christ. He and his brethren had forsaken their boats and their occu-

¹ Matt. xx. 21.

The Labourers in the Vineyard

pations, but not their ambitions. We may hesitate to associate murmuring and jealousy with the apostles, but wherever merit is attached to human deeds, greater merit will expect greater reward. We are wont to read the attainments of post-Pentecostal times into the spirit and motives of the apostles when they were still dreaming of exalted places in a restored kingdom of Israel. In the early morning when the householder went forth to hire labourers, the Jewish mind was saturated with bargain-making morality. It had not yet come home to the most illuminated, that the fellowship of Christ overpaid all self-sacrifice, or that His presence in glory would be man's supreme reward. Nor indeed *could* the apostles previous to Pentecost comprehend the new vineyard, the new labour and the new reward. In the pro-founder meaning, sinners are not called into the kingdom to labour for recompense ; they are called to accept the great day's work of God's Son. So long as we identify labour in the vineyard with good works, to us the parable remains sealed ; for all the voices of the New Testament trace salvation and its sure issues to the love of God ; and the soul's reward to His presence.

Translated into spiritual values, the vineyard is the kingdom of heaven ; the day, the interval between the beginning and consummation of the kingdom of heaven ; the householder the divine Father, the steward Jesus Christ ; engaging labourers is the gospel calling sinners into the kingdom ; going out early in the morning the ministry of Christ in the flesh ; the *denarius* eternal life in God and with God.

Salvation is absolutely the work and gift of the Saviour ; and to the first Christian generation and the last, to apostles and disciples, is given when they enter the kingdom through the marketplace of repentance ; and whether first on the roll of saints and martyrs or last, when the fires of pagan and papal Rome have been quenched in blood, the restored soul is the supreme end contemplated in the uplifting of the cross, which is the federating power of redeemed society. God is the soul's reward ; and in His kingdom none has more and none has less. But whilst all the redeemed drink of the river of life, some will ascend nearer the river head in the throne ; these are the meek and lowly in heart.

Christ's Vision of the Kingdom of Heaven

who tarried in the marketplace, saying within themselves : " No man comes to hire us ; the tax-gatherers and sinners are unworthy to enter the vineyard." These, like Zacchæus and the penitent robber, never ask " What shall we have ? " never weigh their endurance or measure their sacrifice. Wondering that the vineyard is still open, wondering to find themselves within its enclosure, they wonder more to hear the evening bell, and wonder most of all to receive a day's reward.

Perhaps no earthly symbol could more fitly image the kingdom of heaven than a vineyard. The householder going forth amongst the early dews and shadows fits in with the beginning of the gospel ; the first band of labourers called includes the apostles, who like all the pre-Pentecostal disciples occupy a Jewish platform. Trained in a religion that promised rewards in the present life, and taught to expect a supreme man who would bring in a kingdom of glory, with high places for loyal subjects, they carried those aspirations into the presence and discipleship of Jesus, who Himself was subject to the law. To such men the mission of Jesus seemed like hiring labourers into His vineyard. If any one doubts that the promise of reward holds a prominent place in Christ's teaching, let him read the Beatitudes ; there he will find the meaning of the *denarius*, of labour in the vineyard. With the exception of the promise, " The meek shall inherit the land," the Beatitudes point to reward in heaven ; but as Jews, the apostles drew no dividing line between heaven and earth. While Jesus was with them they naturally never looked away from Him to life and reward in heaven.

The first and last visits to the marketplace are significant, defining the beginning and consummation of the kingdom of heaven ; the three intervening visits, however, are not intended to mark periods in that kingdom. They enforce the truth that infinite love and mercy for ever haunt the marketplace—the feeder of the kingdom. The householder goes between the marketplace and the vineyard. His acts are in profound accord with the red-letter days in the realm of grace. Pentecost, the Reformation, the birth of modern missions, were visits to the marketplace. There are hours

The Labourers in the Vineyard

when we are conscious that God is in the marketplace in search of men; when the vineyard's demand becomes imperious. In spiritual affairs there are tides and flood-tides.

Early in the morning the householder bends his steps toward the place where demand and supply have agreed to meet. His visits early and late reveal his bent of mind; he is in search of men. The labourers and the vineyard hold first place in his thoughts; and strange as it may appear, he desires as much that labourers should have wages as that the vineyard should have labourers. The men's presence in the marketplace shows their desire to be hired. At each visit the householder clears the market of the unemployed: the inquiry room empties into the kingdom. None refused the terms; none remained idle. What the employer offered, the labourers accepted. It was the payment of a day's wages for an hour's labour that afterwards led to dissatisfaction. The remark, "He sent them into his vineyard," reminds us that by the agreement he became their master, determining the place and kind of labour.

The repeated filling of the marketplace sets forth the operation of heart-hunger driving sinners to seek means of meeting with God. Without any agreement on their side, the second band of labourers enter the vineyard; "whatsoever is right" is the employer's guiding principle. While all the hours cannot be identified with historical periods, *this* agrees with the visit to the marketplace at Pentecost, when eternal life through Christ, in Christ, and with Christ was the soul's reward. As only a quarter of the working day had passed, payment for nine hours could have been easily arranged; the bargaining spirit, however, had been replaced by grace on one side, and faith on the other. At twelve o'clock and three, labourers are engaged on the same principle. These four visits to the marketplace occur respectively twelve, nine, six, and three hours before closing time. Engaging for broken time evinces a demand in excess of the supply; a dominating desire to bring all the idle into the vineyard. The visit at the eleventh hour (five o'clock) lays added stress on this aspect of the situation; it reveals overwhelming urgency; and the conviction now

Christ's Vision of the Kingdom of Heaven

attains certainty, that the householder's controlling passion is not to receive labour but to pay wages. In the secular view the interests of the labourers and those of the vineyard are separate ; in the spiritual sphere they are identical. If the idlers only enter the vineyard and assume the yoke, the great end is obtained ; they have obeyed the call ; they have passed into the kingdom of heaven. Not the sinner's toil but the sinner's soul is dear to the Saviour. The fundamental truth is here laid bare, that in the kingdom of heaven life eternal is not the reward of man's work. This truth is inwoven with the very substance of the parable. The hours of labour, twelve, nine, six, three, one, each rewarded with the same coin, leave on this point no room for doubt. Surely Luke, imbued with the Pauline doctrine of grace, must have longed to copy this parable from the Hebrew Matthew.

Before six in the morning the vineyard is empty ; the kingdom has not yet received its earliest subjects. In the first hired labourers we recognize the early disciples, including the apostles. When we survey the vineyard at six in the evening all the labourers are before us. In the parable this is a human day ; in the realm of spiritual fact it signifies the Christian ages, the chapters of the kingdom's history between the beginning and the end of gospel time.

The command to call the labourers, under human conditions, empties the vineyard ; whereas from the kingdom the labourers go no more out ; where their reward is there is the kingdom. " Call the labourers, and pay them their hire, beginning from the last unto the first." Now Christ's apothegm assumes form and life ; the householder is revealed ; and by one step we ascend from the human plane to the Divine. The sovereignty in the command is the sovereignty of grace. Beginning from the last seems a violation of equity. Apart from considerations of honour, however, there could be no complaint. The earlier labourers might reason that as the last would receive little, the arrangement arose out of regard for their feelings. Payment ascending step by step would attain a climax in the first hired and highest reward. When, however, it is added " They received every man a penny," it is manifest that the employer lives not on the plane of law but on the higher

The Labourers in the Vineyard

level of grace ; that he thinks far less of the labourers' works than the labourers' wants. While the first hired see those hired last receiving every man a penny, they as *men* might conclude that an employer who gave a day's wages for an hour's labour might for twelve hours' work give twelve days' wages. But since the reward set forth by the *denarius* is eternal life, its increase is impossible. Eternal life, being God in the soul, is one, while it has many degrees.

"When the first came, they supposed that they would receive more ; and they likewise received every man a penny, and when they received it, they murmured against the householder, saying, These last have spent but one hour, and thou hast made them equal unto us, who have borne the burden of the day and the scorching heat." Priority of payment has no place in the complaint ; nor perhaps has it any other place in the householder's thought than to ensure the presence of the first labourers when the last were paid. Had the first hired been first paid and gone away, they would have missed the discovery that they had been in a vineyard fundamentally different from the theocracy, the best side of which was the marketplace. Their complaint reveals the gold of grace alloyed with the ore of legalism. The spirit it breathes is in transition from the reign of law to the kingdom of heaven. They were accounted worthy of reward, the one only reward ; but the sight of grace in operation led them to advance the plea of merit. According to the letter of the parable, they expect an increase of wages of the same kind as the *denarius* ; according to its spirit, they wish the reward of grace to be augmented from the currency of merit.

Evening reveals the name and station of him who had spent the day emptying the marketplace and filling the kingdom ; he is the lord of the vineyard. The voice sounding through the vineyard at eventide is the voice of the steward. It calls from the field the soldier, the missionary, the witness ; the long, fierce campaign of brain and heart is over ; and even death is arrested, disarmed and disrowned. It is a sectional view of the last assize. All are labourers in the vineyard ; all receive the same reward. The lord of the vineyard had revealed his grace in deeds, he will now translate the situation into human speech ; "Friend," he

Christ's Vision of the Kingdom of Heaven

says, addressing one of the dissatisfied, "I do thee no wrong ; didst not thou agree with me for a penny ?" It is the agreement chiefly that divides the first labourers from the last. It is a covenant of works which the first called would supplement with the covenant of grace. The two principles, however, are irreconcilable. If Peter and his brethren would have special terms on account of their early call and entire surrender, they must renounce the thrones which were of grace, not of debt.

The designation of the " penny " as " that which is thine," sounds like the close of a mercantile transaction. It is the language of law to one who has kept its commandments ; and it makes plain what, on Peter's principle, payment must be. Over against this principle the householder sets the law of love, pouring forth its fulness into natures emptied of self : " It is my will to give unto this last, even as unto thee. Is it not lawful for me to do what I will with mine own ? "

Having seen (1) that the vineyard is a spiritual state, or the kingdom of heaven ; (2) that entering the vineyard signifies a change of worlds ; (3) that the lord of the vineyard is the Lord of grace, who knows that the soul can accept and hold no possession but Himself, the parable becomes luminous within. One reward for every labourer, for one hour as for twelve, ceases to cause surprise ; repudiation of the principle that much labour merits more reward is seen to be inevitable. " Is thine eye evil because I am good ? Is thy quarrel with grace ? If grace alone reigned in thy heart thou wouldest rejoice that unto this last I had given the same as unto thee."

In the saying " So the last shall be first, and the first last," " so " implies that this law has received illustration in the parable before us. If the fact that the last called are first paid, and the first called last paid, exhausted the meaning of the apothegm, the exchange of places would not be serious. But the payment from last to first *must have a profounder significance*. Does then the inversion of order signify the rejection of the first employed ? According to some the question demands an affirmative answer ; because " friend," the name applied to the guest without the wedding robe, and to Judas on the night of the betrayal, bears also in its use here the sense

The Labourers in the Vineyard

of estrangement between the speaker and the man addressed. Also the tone of the householder's words, "Take up that which is thine, and go thy way. Is thine eye evil, because I am good?" conveys rebuke and even displeasure. But on the other hand, to be last on the list implies a place on it; the last of a series belongs to it equally with the first; ministers exchange offices and remain in the cabinet. The first called received the *denarius* as truly as the last. It is neither expressed nor implied that an hour of the last employed equalled twelve hours of the first. If the *denarius* is eternal life, or, what is the same, God Himself—first and last relate to degree and not to kind. Neither to the first nor last employed is the *denarius* the reward of labour. Although symbolically represented as wages, in its spiritual signification it is the free gift of God. The *denarius* signifies that which cannot be earned by human endeavour. Neither salvation, the way to God, nor God the end of salvation, can be less than a gift. Eternal life is one, and cannot be less or more than itself. To the fountain of life in God all believers have equal access; but great souls like Paul and Luther drink more deeply than others. So when liberty comes to a nation it meets as many degrees of receptivity as men. To some it is physical; to others mental; to the few it is spiritual. Similarly human life has an endless range of values; it may be existence, enjoyment, conflict, self, service or sacrifice.

II

UNPROFITABLE SERVANTS

"But who is there of you, having a servant plowing or keeping sheep, that will say unto him, when he is come in from the field, Come straight way and sit down to meat; and will not rather say unto him, Make ready wherewith I may sup, and gird thyself, and serve me, till I have eaten and drunken; and afterward thou shalt eat and drink? Doth he thank the servant because he did the things that were commanded? Even so ye also, when ye shall have done all the things that are commanded you, say, We are unprofitable servants; we have done that which it was our duty to do."—LUKE xvii. 7-10.

ACCORDING to the context, this parable arises out of the apostles' request, "Increase our faith." The causes that called forth the prayer, whence came the sense of need, and in what sphere the enlarged faith was to be exercised, we are left to infer. It hardly meets the case to say that the request springs from a deeper consciousness of the central place of faith in the spiritual life. Such an answer confounds the pre-Pentecostal level from which the prayer was offered with the post-Pentecostal platform. It would be an unwarranted anticipation of the unarrived, to credit the apostles on the day this parable was spoken, with the conception of faith that followed the illumination of the Holy Spirit. Did their request mean an increase of faith in Christ, or in the Father? If they desired a stronger faith in Christ, it was not in Christ the Saviour, but in Christ the Messiah. There is no evidence that the apostles, while Christ was with them in the flesh, either held or comprehended faith in the crucified Redeemer as the condition of justification.

In every era faith is called to wage its own distinctive battle; and the conflict between faith and doubt in the hour when this parable was uttered, was the Messiahship of Jesus. Faith in Jesus as the Messiah was indeed the high water mark attained or demanded previous to Pentecost. Christ's

Unprofitable Servants

reply would seem to indicate that the apostles were thinking of augmented faith as the condition of working miracles; for He connects faith with the achievement of the impossible. "If ye have faith as a grain of mustard seed, ye would say unto this sycamine tree, Be thou rooted up, and be thou planted in the sea; and it would have obeyed you."¹ The last clause of this statement seems to recall some experience through which the apostles had recently passed. The bold figure of the uprooted tree transplanted in the deep at faith's imperative word connects faith with the heroic order of deeds, rather than with the avoidance of offence, rebuke and forgiveness of the offender. The permanent relation between the Lord and His apostles was not that they, like Him, wrought mighty works. It is not for the disciples to command victory by will or word. On the contrary the triumph of faith is the attainment of obedience. The subjects of the kingdom are related to their Lord as bond servants to their master.

It is not said that the apostles' prayer for an increase of faith was answered: unless indeed the answer is the parable itself, which shows that faith makes bondservants of those who possess it, and grows by surrender and service.

Though the reply to the apostles' request and the parable seem closely connected, yet the fact that the hearers are asked to imagine themselves the owners of bondservants, indicates a wider audience than the twelve. The parable would appeal with greater power to farmers and graziers than to fishermen. Whether, however, Christ's words on faith and the parable were spoken on the same occasion, they are pervaded by the same atmosphere. The sycamine tree waving over the Speaker's head, the flock on the hill-side, the ploughman in the valley, supply a sudden glimpse of country life. The light, however, is not concentrated on the ploughman in the field, or the shepherd and his flock. The day-worker might be a freeman who would throw off the yoke with sunset. Then would he return home and rest until the morning. But it required a bondservant, obedient to every command of his lord and owner, to illustrate the relation between Christ and His disciples. Thought is therefore fixed on the evening

¹ Luke xvii. 6.

Christ's Vision of the Kingdom of Heaven

scene, when bondman shepherd or ploughman slave returns from field or hill, and the plough rests in the furrow and the flock in the fold. The bondservant, worn with toil and sun, might with reason expect food and rest; and as a freeman he would have heard wife or sister say, "Come straightway and sit down to meat." Burns and Longfellow have portrayed toil crowned and hallowed by rest. But our parable is based on other customs; set in an atmosphere and time when ownership in man prevailed. The bondservant was bound to serve wherever and whenever his master willed it. Hence on returning to the house, and laying down the yoke of the day, he is commanded to resume the yoke in another field of service; "Make ready wherewith I may sup, and gird thyself and serve me, till I have eaten and drunken; and afterward thou shalt eat and drink."

But this is not the full-length portrait of the servitude that supplies an analogy to the disciple's relation to his Lord. The ultimate depth is found, not in endless toil and obedience, but in the employer's state of mind. This man knows nothing of a day's labour or a day's wages, and therefore nothing of overtime. He regards the bondservant as the instrument of his will: "Doth he thank the bondservant because he did the things that were commanded?" Neither master nor servant thought of thanks; for the service was not rendered by a freeman. The master was accustomed to receive, and the servant inured to give, bond-labour. The want of regard for his fellow man, the hardened feeling evinced by exacting attendance from the weary servant, reveal the slave-master. The man who never speaks but to command, who makes fatigue and hunger wait upon his appetite, who keeps the bondservant ever mindful of the gulf between slave and master, presents a harsh picture. His self-centred severity is thrown into strong relief; he indeed is the hero of the parable. This slave-master may represent either Jesus Christ's absolute claim to all that is in His disciples, who are bondservants in virtue of their purchase; or the inexorable demands of the law over those who like the Pharisees are its subjects. The first view is taken from the standpoint of grace; the second is the outlook of the synagogue. But we must ask, which is the view-point of the parable? Is the

Unprofitable Servants

bondsman the disciple of Christ, or the Pharisee under the bondage of the law? In the words, "Even so ye also, when ye shall have done all the things that are commanded you, say, We are unprofitable servants," Christ applies the teaching of the parable to the apostles, or to them and the wider circle of disciples; the servant and the disciple sustain the same relation to their respective masters, both are bondsmen. It is true that the legalist also is a bondslave to the law; but unlike the disciple and the servant of the parable, he *works for wages*. This point determined, the question whether the master represents law or Jesus Christ is easier answered. Whether Jesus addressed the apostles only, or resumed the wider appeal of verse 1, it is more probable that He spoke of the disciples in relation to Himself than in their relation to the law; that is, that the spiritual bondsman should be taught the terms of service in the kingdom of heaven, rather than the nature of service in the system he was forsaking.

To this view, however, objections are not wanting. It may be contended that the master's inhumanity is at variance with the character of Jesus Christ; that his demands on the time and strength of his bondsman are not consistent with Christian service; that the refusal of reward, even of thanks, is contrary to Christ's teaching on service and recompense; and further that an impossible situation would be thus presented in the words, "When ye have done all the things commanded you." And these words, be it remembered, are in the application, not in the parable. Has any man, even under grace, done all the things commanded him?

The parable in itself applies with almost equal fitness to the bondsman of the law or of grace. Under the law, as we see in the case of Saul of Tarsus, merit had no place, even when the law's demands were supposed to have been satisfied. If, as a Pharisee, Saul found that the law was not his creditor, neither was it his debtor. Ascending from the "righteousness which is in the law," to the claim of the undivided love of the heart, the very thought of merit appears impossible. The rabbis had, however, introduced the figment of supererogation, crediting Abraham and other saints with redundancy of virtue. This fact must not be overlooked when we consider

Christ's Vision of the Kingdom of Heaven

the question, whether the labours of the bondservant are carried out under the law or under grace. In an atmosphere saturated with tradition, the teaching of our parable might apply to the disciples and the Pharisees. The injunction, "When ye shall have done all the things that are commanded you, say, We are unprofitable servants," is as applicable to the latter as to the former; with this difference—taken in its legal connection, it implies attainment of the legal ideal; addressed to the disciples it would teach the inadequacy of good works, even when those works are the effect of grace. Addressed to legalists it would seem to concede the possibility of perfect obedience; but applied to apostles, it lays down the inexorable law of grace, that the saved are inclined and bound to serve; and that their service can never be their salvation.

Understanding the parable as addressed to the apostles, or to the wider circle of disciples, it emphasizes fundamental relations: (1) the disciples are related as bondservants to their Lord; (2) their work is not for their own salvation, but in the service of their Lord and Saviour; (3) they will yet learn that the Lord whom they serve, did in His Father's house as a servant, what He desires His bondservants to do in His house and kingdom. For Him there was no rest until He had said "It is finished"; surrender, service, sacrifice, ended with life. The law of grace is as imperious, as uncompromising, as the law of works; but unlike the latter law, it has a subjective place in the heart and will of the servant; Paul is as ready to spend and be spent as his Lord to accept the sacrifice. The deepest and truest conception of Christian service is life offered up to its Redeemer. Service is the redeemed sinner's prayer in the new speech of deeds.

The apostles and disciples could only view from the plane of their spiritual attainment the programme thus sketched by the Lord for their day of life; and that fact goes far to explain the exacting nature of the slave-master's demands. But when the cross in its inwardness was at length revealed to them, behold! they had bread to eat the world knew not of, while they ploughed the field or kept the flock, or as prisoners at Rome and Patmos waited on their Lord.

Unprofitable Servants

To the apostles while Christ was with them the parable could have no immediate application ; at that stage they could hardly have longed for rest or expected reward. They were neither ploughmen nor shepherds returning at eventide from their long day's toil ; nor had they endured the strain of overtime service. The long day in the field, followed by service in the house, points to conditions of sour toil, ending only with strength and life. The eve to which the labourer looked wistfully forward, when some great hunger expected to be fed, some utter weariness expected rest, has arrived. The command to gird and serve points to prolonging the working day, and imposing new demands on faith and obedience ; points beyond the cross and Pentecost, to the toil and suffering of the ploughmen who drew their furrow across the Roman empire. It foretells the sense of deferred rest that weighed early and heavily upon Christian faith. Every spiritual ploughman and shepherd had heard in the promise, " I come quickly," the triumphant approach of their returning Lord. But when evening fell and ploughing ceased, and servants began to plod their way homeward, the summons came to serve in jail or gird on the robe of martyrdom. Here came in the trial of faith and patience ; the bondservant's dumb obedience was the lesson for the disciples and for us to lay to heart. In the overtime we should see hope deferred ; and hear in the slave-master's command the voice of the ascended Lord, " Gird yourself and serve me, and afterward thou shalt eat and drink."

The master and his bondservant could not sup together ; and the interval between their sitting down to meat is in its first application the space of time between Christ's accession to glory and power, and the apostles' call from the plough to rest ; and in its wider range, the economy stretching between the cross and the end of the world. Between these points lie the expansions and shrinkings, the charges and retreats, the burials and resurrections of Christian history. " Afterward thou shalt eat and drink," is a promise fulfilled in eternity ; " Gird thyself and serve me," is the command for to-day.

If the parable did not at the time apply to the labours of the apostles, it closely applied to their *spirit*. From their

Christ's Vision of the Kingdom of Heaven

heart issued two voices—one for an increase of faith ; the other for rank and reward. Theirs was still the direction of mind that drew forth the parable of the Labourers in the Vineyard. It required the cross to kill the passion for temporal reward. The parable therefore deals with the apostles' spiritual attitude in the intermediate stage of their development. They were not what they had been—bondmen in the house of the law ; they were not what they would yet become—sons, conscious of their sonship in the house of grace. Reward was something outside and apart from Jesus Christ ; but when they came under the arrest of grace, their Saviour Himself was their only reward. As long as they connected duty with merit, they were bound to confess, " We are unprofitable servants " ; but when at length they came as blood-bought men to serve their Saviour, they would say, What can we render for " Love so amazing so divine " ?

If we distinguish between fulfilling Christ's " express commands," and service inspired by " all-prevailing love," the first receiving no reward, and the second expecting none here, and give due weight to the semi-legal spirit of the apostles and the exaltation to the life of love and sonship awaiting them, we secure the parable's connection with the Labourers in the Vineyard, recognize the appeal to the apostles, assign a valid reason for the absence of reward, and, above the level of duty, see love-inspired sacrifice followed by reward unfailing and unsought.

† Neander : *Life of Christ*.

III

THE TWO SONS

" But what think ye ? A man had two sons ; and he came to the first and said, Son, go work to-day in the vineyard. And he answered and said, I will not ; but afterward he repented himself and went. And he came to the second and said likewise. And he answered and said, I go, sir ; and went not. Whether of the twain did the will of his father ?"—*MATT. xxi. 28-31.*

WHILE Matthew omits the parable of the Lost Son he inserts that of the Two Sons ; which partly covers the same field. In both parables that field is the house of Israel, represented by two sons, one following the way of legal righteousness, the other in open revolt against law and lawgiver. In both parables one son stands for religious caste as expressed by Pharisaism, the other for the lapsed element in Jewish society ; in both it is the law-abiding son who revolts in spirit, while the avowed rebel passes over to filial obedience ; in both it is the taxgatherers and sinners who rise to the crisis of their lives. The sons under consideration are not formally introduced as elder and younger ; yet, as in the Lost Son, he who represents the lapsed section of society is placed first ; while the son who obeys in word and rebels in deed, occupies the place of him who was " in the field " while his father ran to meet the returning prodigal.

Both parables sound the note of fatherhood, even while one son is in the rebellion of open transgression, and the other in the rebellion of self-righteousness. " Son (*τέκνον*), go work to-day in the vineyard " ; thus the infinite Father addresses taxgatherers and sinners ; " son " is still his name who passes the Father's door and the vineyard gate.

As Palestine was almost literally a vineyard, it was inevitable that the vine should occupy a prominent place in the teaching of Jesus Christ. What his patch of ground is to the small landed proprietor in France, or his croft to the

Christ's Vision of the Kingdom of Heaven

Scotch highlander, that was his vineyard to the peasant householder amongst the Jews. The vineyard might in accordance with the owner's wealth cover a wide or limited area. The wealthy vinegrower could employ hired labour ; the man of limited capital would depend on members of his own household. " First let a man build his house and plant a vineyard, and then let him wed a wife," was a counsel of Jewish prudence ; and the prevalence of vine-culture and the custom of vine-growers employing their sons in the vineyard, offered a striking illustration of the Jewish nation as God's own home farm.

As Christ asks His adversaries to pass immediate judgment on the conduct of the two sons, this parable, like that of the Two Debtors requires to be brief and self-interpreting. The question " What think ye ? " reveals the Saviour waiting for the answer which appears to have been immediately given ; " They say, The first." While Christ's question could receive one answer only, it is doubtful whether the priests and scribes perceived all that their admission involved. They may indeed have felt that, having sought refuge in a confession of ignorance regarding the origin of John's baptism, they must now recognize the manifest intention of the parable. In doing so, however, they gave sentence against themselves.

" A man had two sons ; and he came to the first and said, Son, go work to-day in the vineyard. And he answered and said, I will not ; but afterward he repented himself and went. And he came to the second and said likewise. And he answered and said, I go, sir ; and went not." Thus the morning acts of a small vine-grower and his two sons set forth the challenge brought by the greatest day in a nation's history—a challenge evoking two infinitely divergent responses. That far distant morning can never become yesterday ; every dawn repeats the father's call ; the three figures meet henceforth at the vineyard gate, " I will not " entering, " I go, sir " passing by. But while the father for ever stands and calls, the sons come and go with the day ; to-day is the term of engagement. Even when the parable was spoken the two sons had made their choice ; for its mirror reflects the past, not the future. All that claimed orthodoxy, or patriotism, rank or righteousness had agreed to pass the

The Two Sons

door of the kingdom. Already the submerged and execrated multitude had in tears and contrition been entering the kingdom of heaven. Hence in saying that every morning repeats the call at the vineyard gate, we mean that the old choices and the old issues of life and death come anew with the new day ; but never again can the same father say to the same sons, " Go work to-day in the vineyard."

We might have expected the first son to represent the religious leaders, seeing the parable is addressed to them. The call of John the herald must in the nature of things have been early directed to the centres of authority and influence. Rank and pride, luxury and self-righteousness were certain to arrest the eye of the ascetic preacher, who, as a Hebrew prophet, came on the lines of law, summoning the nation back to what was inmost in the Ten Commandments. On the other hand, Jesus in His very person was a call to the despised and excommunicated ; and the places assigned respectively to the lapsed class and the religious rulers is in close accord with Christ's ministry and the genius of the gospel.

The preaching of John, and especially the appearing and ministry of Christ, brought on the national crisis; hence the call in the parable is followed by an immediate course of action. With Christ the unconcealed rebellion of the taxgatherers and sinners ends ; with Him their repentance begins. His person and call proved that the chief priests and Pharisees, outwardly loyal, were rebels at heart. When we assign to facts their historic perspective—an impossibility in the parabolic presentation—it is obvious that it was not in response to the Saviour's call that the taxgatherers and the abandoned replied " We will not." That blunt refusal recalls and condenses their past into a word. To temple and priesthood, to duty and law, to persuasions of the spirit and intimations of conscience, they had replied " We will not." Like other Jews, they had heard voices from their own history, from the dead prophets, from the advancing future calling to the kingdom ; but the son of Abraham passed the vineyard gate on his way to collect the Roman tax ; the daughters of Abraham in life's morning turned down to the illusive path of shame. Flagrantly, defiantly, they transgressed the law ; but their sin, however heinous in its nature, in its effects was far removed

Christ's Vision of the Kingdom of Heaven

from the sin of the nation's shepherds. On a day such as had never dawned before, Christ addressed them as children and called them into the vineyard. With that day came the revelation of their unalienated heirship. When the Friend of sinners in the humility of holiness entered their leper quarter, when they saw united majesty and lowliness, Divine compassion and profound humanity; when over the woeful past a new day of God arose, and the gates of the kingdom of heaven opened wide even for them, they pressed into its refuge and peace.

The religious leaders, the priests and rulers, are drawn as they appeared to the outward eye—obedient sons of the Highest. The response "I go, sir" may refer to their early attitude towards Christ and His mission, before He had uttered the Sermon on the Mount, or openly declined to rebuild the shattered state; before He had declared His kingdom to be in the world but not of the world; while there was yet hope of enlisting His popularity and power on their side, of hearing His voice raised in command of a united and triumphant Israel. Had Christ in compliance with the tempter's suggestion leaped unharmed from the tower of the temple, and in the glory of the miracle summoned the dispersed and discontented to His standard, a wall of fire would have risen round the Holy Land. In the bland response "I go, sir," we may read the assent of the legalists and politicians as long as they heard in the Redeemer's call a summons to replant the Hebrew vine and enclose the vineyard with a wall of independence. The refusal to enter is partly explained by the hidden antagonism, the open breach and settled hostility. But we fail to grasp the significance of the second son's conduct unless we recognize his "I go, sir," as an expression of conscious superiority, set in sharp contrast with the blank refusal of the first. "God, I thank thee that I am not as other men, or even as this publican," comes to mind. Self-knowledge places a man first on the roll of sinners; self-righteousness first on the roll of saints. We should read the response not as an assent afterwards retracted, but as obedience in profession and disobedience in spirit. With such a past, with institutions fostering hope and expectation, with professed zeal for God and righteousness, it was

The Two Sons

reasonable to expect that when Christ came with a fuller, more endearing revelation of God, inviting men to enter a kingdom of holiness and peace, the spiritual watchmen of Israel would have been first to hail and head the exodus into the holier land. But here is the fact: "Verily, I say unto you, that the publicans and the harlots go into the kingdom of God before you. For John came unto you in the way of righteousness, and ye believed him not; but the publicans and the harlots believed him."

Had the Sanhedrin desired even a legal reformation, the movement headed by John, with its Mosaic ideal of righteousness, would have won their favour. Coming in the way of righteousness, John proclaimed no new doctrine, added no new territory to the law; to the way forsaken by the national guides he demanded a whole-hearted return; for along that fiery line Messiah's chariot would run.

Baptism unto repentance set forth this purification, this effort after righteousness, as the condition of Messiah's advent. Thus was prepared the way of the Lord and His paths made straight. In symbol John's baptism expressed the end desired—repentance. But repentance in this connection was just what the field of law could produce. Other it could not have been; for the Spirit's advent was still future; and Christ the end of the law for righteousness, had yet from the cross to confront and convict the sinner. The cross adds the thunderbolt to the thundering law, and arms the Spirit with striking power infinitely more effectual than broken commandments. The high water mark of John's reformation was fruit "worthy of repentance"; that is, works evincing a change of mind.

Considering that religious reformers are popular in proportion as they make man the predominant partner in his own salvation, it is hard to explain how the legalists remained almost unaffected by John's ministry. Within the old order was ample room for quickened conscience, for deepened realization of sin, for a nearer approach to God, for following the prophet into the wilderness of repentance; but reviewing the situation, Christ is constrained to declare, "Ye believed him not," and when they saw the uplifting effect produced on publicans and harlots by faith in John, still they repented

Christ's Vision of the Kingdom of Heaven

not. From this point of outlook we attain a juster conception of what on the surface appears to be the failure of John's mission; "the publicans and the harlots believed him." In John they heard God calling them to repentance; they believed the witness borne by John to Jesus. When therefore we see taxgatherers and sinners straining to catch the words of Christ, we may hear within them, if we listen, the voice of the herald crying, "Behold, the Lamb of God!"

What then is the inevitable inference from the fact that neither John nor Christ evoked the faith of men in high places? The forerunner left, and Messiah found, the national leaders unprepared. The social depressions retained their depth; the hills of pride and place soared stern and cold; the way of the Lord was not prepared; the national tree continued barren. When therefore came the call to enter, not the wilderness, but the kingdom of heaven, those who had missed the last flood-tide of law, missed also the first flood-tide of grace, and the scorned and fallen who had heard in John the voice of a Divine era crowded into the kingdom when a greater than John opened its gates. The eye that had welcomed the morning star hailed the dawn; and the order of the day of small things prevailed in the day of great things: "Verily I say unto you, that the publicans and the harlots go into the kingdom of God before you."

This parable teaches that morality is not only not the religion of Jesus Christ, but, as here, may be its antithesis. But while morality is not Christ, Christ is the sublimest morality earth has seen. The truth audible in the parable and in the circumstances which gave it birth, is, that a man or a nation may attain great moral elevation and yet remain outside the kingdom of heaven. "Between religion and morality there is not necessarily any close tie. Religion has to do with a power outside ourselves, morality with our conduct one to another." Could modern Europe hear Jesus Christ pronounce judgment on the legal holiness of scribe and Pharisee, it would raise its hands in surprise; for its spiritual ideal hardly rises to the level of the Sanhedrin, and falls short of that cherished by Saul of Tarsus. Could the Jewish temple and the morality of which it was the centre be planted in the

¹ Dr. Sayce.

The Two Sons

heart of Christendom, most Christian churches would confound them with Christianity. In the Pharisee praying in the temple, in the ruler who from youth had kept all the commandments, in the holiness that shrank from the approach of a sinner, Roman Catholicism would find endless material for the creation of saints ; yet this very morality closes the kingdom of heaven against the Pharisees.

In the present parable, as in the Lost Son, we are confronted with the truth that morality divorced from spiritual life may, even more than open transgression, unfit the soul for the reception of Christ's salvation. This was the Saviour's experience ; it was also the experience of Paul. The submerged tenth of Jewish society gave Christ most of His disciples ; Gentiles, aforesaid steeped in sin, largely composed the churches of the Pauline mission field. The cause determining this result is to be found in the fact that morality severed from religion, weakens and finally kills the consciousness of sin. The representative Pharisee who in the temple thanks God that he is not as other men, has no point of contact with a salvation from sin. The moralist who confounds morality with spiritual life has no need of forgiveness. Morality as truly as transgression can be a far country ; the elder son needed not to journey into exile ; already he was there.

Christian teachers early ceased to imitate Christ in telling morality the truth. This action had behind it the fear of appearing to undervalue what is never absent where living Christianity is present ; and the fear of seeming to countenance sin ; but even more to the petrifying law that converts a living religion into a cold morality, not more exalted nor more evangelical than that which Saul the Pharisee renounced for Christ.

IV

THE POUNDS

"A certain nobleman went into a far country, to receive for himself a kingdom, and to return. And he called ten servants of his, and gave them ten pounds, and said unto them, Trade ye herewith till I come. But his citizens hated him, and sent an ambassage after him, saying, We will not that this man reign over us. And it came to pass, when he was come back again, having received the kingdom, that he commanded these servants, unto whom he had given the money, to be called to him, that he might know what they had gained by trading. And the first came before him, saying, Lord, thy pound hath made ten pounds more. And he said unto him, Well done, thou good servant: because thou wast found faithful in a very little, have thou authority over ten cities. And the second came, saying, Thy pound, Lord, hath made five pounds. And he said unto him also, Be thou also over five cities. And another came saying, Lord, behold, here is thy pound, which I kept laid up in a napkin; for I feared thee, because thou art an austere man: thou takest up that thou laydest not down, and reapest that thou didst not sow. He saith unto him, Out of thine own mouth will I judge thee, thou wicked servant. Thou knewest that I am an austere man, taking up that I laid not down, and reaping that I did not sow; then wherefore gavest thou not my money into the bank, and I at my coming should have required it with interest? And he said unto them that stood by, Take away from him the pound, and give it unto him that hath the ten pounds. And they said unto him, Lord, he hath ten pounds. I say unto you, that unto every one that hath shall be given; but from him that hath not, even that which he hath shall be taken away from him. Howbeit these mine enemies, who would not that I should reign over them, bring hither, and slay them before me."—LUKE XIX. 12-27.

LUKE says that Jesus spoke this parable "because he was nigh to Jerusalem, and because they supposed that the kingdom of God was immediately to appear." Whether "they" refers to the hearers in general, or chiefly to the disciples, can only be decided on internal evidence. In the two preceding instances where "they" is employed, it means, in verse 7, the pilgrims from Galilee; in verse 11, those apparently who had entered the court or house of Zacchæus.

The Pounds

The acclamations of the multitude as they approached Jerusalem prove that both disciples and pilgrims were ready to hail Christ as king of the Jews: "the whole multitude of the disciples" cried, "Blessed is the King that cometh in the name of the Lord"; and this was after they had heard in Jericho the parable of the Pounds. Christ's mode of entrance doubtless tended to strengthen the Messianic enthusiasm which He defended as wholly legitimate. It was, however, one thing to hail Him as Messiah, another to expect the immediate appearing of the national monarchy. All depended on the nature of the kingdom of which Christ should be the Sovereign; yet He had no rebuke for the Messianic fervour of the multitude, although He understood the kingdom of God in one sense, they in another.

Why should Christ's nearness to Jerusalem be connected with the expectation of the immediate appearing of the kingdom of God, as calling forth this parable? The reasons as they appear to us are twofold: first, Jerusalem was the headquarters of the conspiracy against Christ and His kingdom. The revolt and punishment of the citizens are not meant to apply to the pilgrim multitudes at Jericho. Scribe and Pharisee were doubtless present, and raised the cry, "He is gone in to lodge with a man that is a sinner"; but the mass of pilgrims from Galilee regarded Jesus with expectation rather than hostility. Such men were not expected to see their own portraits in the citizens who in hatred conspired against their sovereign. The reason is not obvious why a parable that paints the guilt and foretells the doom of the national leaders should have been delivered at Jericho and not at Jerusalem; for Jerusalem supplied the originals of the rebels. Jesus may have seen that it was vain to hold up the parabolic mirror to the priests and rulers at Jerusalem. He, therefore, unfolds some of the last things to His disciples and the friendly multitude, before entering the stronghold of hostility and blindness. The parable with its foreview of reward and punishment rises like a star beyond the brewing storm at Jerusalem.

Second, the disciples who at heart expected the immediate appearing of the kingdom of God, had their theocratic hopes

¹ Luke xix. 37, 38.

Christ's Vision of the Kingdom of Heaven

fired by the enthusiasm of the passover pilgrims. During three years every wind had blown abroad the hopes and passions aroused by the Man of Galilee. Around the hearths of Israel in Palestine and in far distant provinces, the sacred records had been searched, predictions scanned, the signs, claims and aims of the national Deliverer examined. Daily, men became more conscious of an unwonted presence disturbing and quickening their mental and spiritual atmosphere. The raising of Lazarus, almost under the shadow of the temple, had seemed like hoisting Messiah's ensign in the capital. The cure of Bartimæus and the conversion of Zacchæus fanned the flame of expectation. Every road was pouring its human torrent into Jerusalem; Israel, elate with wonder and hope, was assembling in the city of the kings. Every pilgrim said in his heart, Who knows? The day of national deliverance may be at hand. Those who expected much from Christ hoped the Passover would reveal Him; those who expected nothing hoped the Passover might bring exposure.

Nor was the purer element in this hope disappointed. By riding into Jerusalem Christ openly asserted His Messiahship. As Crown Prince of the kingdom of heaven He entered the capital where His cross awaited Him; and whence in spirit He would go forth to extend His empire.

Spoken in the last week of the Saviour's life, this parable is not confined to the disciples and the kingdom. Its first message is for the disciples, who required to know that hitherto they had been at school; but that in the near future they would be called to the trust and responsibility of spiritual business. At this point The Pounds and The Talents are practically identical. In the second place, the parable warns the enemies of Christ that he is a "nobleman" who is about to "receive a kingdom." Placing ourselves at the view-point of that day, and remembering the early Christians' hope of their risen Lord's near return, the horizon of our parable is not wider than the existing generation and the Jewish people; but as we ascend the slope of time, the horizon encloses all the servants of the kingdom, and all who refuse submission to Jesus Christ. The King's return at the fall of Jerusalem is the forerunner of His final coming to reward His servants and punish His enemies.

The Pounds

The parable sounds a royal note at the beginning. The departure of Christ, so far from being His descent into execration and oblivion, is like a nobleman going into a far country to receive for himself a kingdom and return. The disciples, soon to witness their Lord's departure by the path of death, were thus taught that the cross was the way to the kingdom. By word and deed Jesus had proved Himself to be the Son of Man; now within a few days of His cross He unveils His glory. On reflection, the disciples would remember that He had set His humiliation and His glory side by side. They must grasp the certainty of their Lord's departure; and bear in mind that in His apparent absence they would still be in His house and service; that He would go away as a nobleman and come again as King; and that He would bring with Him rewards and punishments.

1. Widespread longing for the hour that should bring the king and the kingdom, and the deep sympathy of the disciples with the aspiration of their countrymen, led Jesus to show that coming was preceded by departure, and reigning by dying. The two dominant ideas in the popular conception of the kingdom of God were the nearness and the glory of its appearing. The disciples had been told that the kingdom of heaven in principle and spirit was already in their midst; but though the new idea had entered their mind, the old captivated their heart. Their training, designed to enable them to sustain high ministry during an interregnum, seemed to them education for court life. Knowing Christ at home, living in the atmosphere of His native greatness, it was hard for them to believe that such grace and majesty could long remain under eclipse. Conscious of an infinite reserve of life and glory behind the beloved human form, fired by complex feelings—love of country and desire that He whom they loved should come to His own—they longed to see their Lord on His throne in Jerusalem, with the nation round His feet. The errors of men sometimes reveal their noblest qualities. So it was with the twelve; and while their Teacher dispelled illusion He could appreciate its cause.

Although the expected monarchy is termed the kingdom of God, it was infinitely removed from the kingdom of heaven as conceived by Jesus Christ. To have wished the speedy

Christ's Vision of the Kingdom of Heaven

advent of the latter kingdom, would have been but to pray the Lord's prayer. But it was the kingdom's *appearing* that drew longing sighs from the disciples and their countrymen.

2. In His absence or invisibility, Christ would remain Lord over His servants and His house : " He called ten of his servants, and gave them ten pounds, and said unto them, Trade ye herewith till I come." In the Talents there is a descending scale, five, two, one ; here each of the servants receives a pound. No one is exalted over his brethren ; thus Jesus struck a mortal blow at vaulting ambition amongst His followers. The number of the Talents was determined by individual capacity ; because the servants were considered in their relation to each other ; here the ten servants stand on a dead level of equality before God. The one thing needful for the soul is God and the one thing desired by God is the soul.

The smallness of the entrusted sum is significant ; placed beside the eight talents given to three servants, the ten *minas* divided amongst ten servants are insignificant. The conclusion is therefore forced upon us that the hunger after distinction in the coming kingdom was perceived by Jesus to be dying hard in His followers, and that He unveils before them a future of fundamental equality. At the same time the injunction " trade ye " suggests an aspect of service certain to call forth individuality. To enter the market of life is to go to war, man against man, enterprise against lethargy, belief against unbelief, the spirit of to-day against the spirit of yesterday.

3. Archelaus, whose castle dominated Jericho, in his career supplied the incidents on which this parable may have been based. He, like the nobleman, went into a far country to receive a kingdom from the " lord of the world " ; his suit was opposed at Rome by his subjects of whom he had slain three thousand in the temple. Jesus asserts His rank as that of a crownless king who can only come into His kingdom by passing into the heavenly world. The kingdom into which He comes is not in Cæsar's gift. He goes away that His kingdom may come, by shifting the centre of attraction from earth to heaven, and by securing dynamic power for the

The Pounds

founding and extension of His reign in the dispensation of the Spirit.

The nobleman's departure to receive the kingdom is the Son's return to the Father; and implies the acceptance of His work, and the continuation in heaven of His ministry begun on earth. Jesus suffered once, but His sacrifice retains its unexhausted efficacy; His mediation goes on for ever. Where He is there is the cross, the sacrifice, the seat of power. Let us grasp the great truth that His kingdom comes because He is at the right hand of God. Archelaus returned from Rome when he had received the government of Judæa and Samaria; and Christ comes again bringing dominion with Him.

The king's first act is judicial: "when he was come back again, having received the kingdom, he commanded these servants unto whom he had given the money, to be called to him, that he might know what they had gained by trading." In the Talents three servants received money and three were called to account; here out of ten servants the trial of three only is mentioned; but we must assume that the *ten* were called to account. We are not told whether failure was in the proportion of one in ten or one in three; but here, as in the Talents, unproductiveness is in a minority of one. The dip from ten pounds increase to five is striking; if five is meant to come next the highest. Perhaps, indeed, it represents the lowest gain and the smallest number of cities secured.

The inquest is personal; each servant has kept his pound and brings it before his royal judge. It was when the unproductive servant was brought to the royal tribunal that his pound was taken from him. But the law that takes from him that hath not even that which he hath, had been in operation; and according to the spiritual facts of the case, this servant had lost his pound before he came to judgment.

The parable requires that the king and his servants should meet where they parted. As household slaves, his servants lived in the house of the absent nobleman; from it they went forth to the market; to it they brought their gain; there they received their reward. The interval between

Christ's Vision of the Kingdom of Heaven

the departure and return seems brief; the same slaves in the same house meet the same lord. In human circumstances the king's reign would begin when he returned crowned; but Christ reigns, and "must reign till he hath put all his enemies under his feet."¹

On the king's return his long silent voice is heard commanding the servants to appear before him.

Self-effacement marks the spirit of the diligent servants: "Lord, thy pound hath made ten pounds more; thy pound hath made five pounds more." The capital is the king's, and to it the slaves trace the increase, which in the application is as much the work of grace as the entrusted pound. The contrast between the reward in the Talents and in the Pounds is very striking. There, it is the joy of the Lord; here, authority over cities; at the end, the former parable passes from figure to reality; the symbol here prevails throughout. In both parables faithful stewardship is rewarded with government. The cities are in the same sense as the pound and the kingdom, secular symbols for spiritual things. The use of the term "servant," instead of slave, robs promotion of half its effect. The promotion of a son from limited trading to the government of cities would be natural; the elevation of servants in our Western sense of that term would excite surprise; but the leap from slavery to authority over cities arouses wonder.

The two servants pass the royal tribunal on their way to promotion. As they were men of deeds their account is brief, and the words of approval and reward are few. On the contrary, the slave who misapplied his pound has much to say. He traces his inactivity to fear caused by the king's austerity and injustice. In spirit he was a slave, in spite of his enlargement; while under the government of the kingdom of heaven he retained the old leaven of Judaism. Christian trust appears to be the one thing lacking. Here arises the question, Was the third servant a real disciple when he received the pound? However otherwise we may interpret the pound of silver, its spiritual signification must be assumed. When this is granted the reality of the servant's

¹ 1 Cor. xv. 25.

The Pounds

discipleship cannot well be denied. On the contrary, the disabling fear, the misconception of the king's character, the absence of all attempt at trading, the withdrawal of the pound, seem inconsistent with genuine discipleship. Perhaps the solution lies in the fact that fear, though at first compatible with discipleship, when harboured led to misconception and mistrust of the absent king, whose absence was the time when mistrust was most natural and trust most essential. Paralyzing fear had, it seems, not manifested itself while the nobleman remained at home. The slave's gaze fixed on the future rendered him blind to the present; and the vast marketplace of opportunity was replaced by a vision of judgment. As the nobleman was to return crowned, the vision of austere majesty was ever before the slave's eyes. The pound was neither wrapped in the tear-cloth nor recalled in a day.

Wrapping the pound in a tear-cloth represents on the spiritual side a continuative act, and is therefore a continuous disobedience of the command, "Trade ye till I come." Advantage is thus taken of the king's absence; in his presence the slave dared not have ignored his command. The loss of the pound began with hiding it; and the covering which hid its presence from others, concealed its loss from its owner. As the pound is removed, fear and misconception increase. The idle servant becomes subject to spiritual disease, the penalty of violated law; the perverted estimate of the nobleman's character is the effect, not the cause of disobedience. The question, "Wherefore gavest thou not my money into the bank?" disposes of the plea of fear, for the bank would have afforded security and interest. The bank stands for that which removes risk and yields interest on the capital. No condition in Christian life and service allows a man to delegate his responsibility to others; but what comes nearest the bank is the association of the individual with the fellowship of the disciples. Thus are the soul and its endowments united with the solidarity of spiritual brotherhood. A man without commercial training or capacity, justly fearing the risks of trade, puts his money into the bank and thus taps the currents of trade through others; and so in spiritual things he who gives his pound to the bank, becomes part

Christ's Vision of the Kingdom of Heaven

of a spiritual whole, acting with others under wisdom higher than his own. The servant's mistake indeed was isolation, the withdrawal of his sum of being and endowment from the living currency of the kingdom of heaven.

The command, "Take away from him the pound, and give it unto him that hath the ten pounds," is addressed to servants in the background. The pound is part of the currency of the state which symbolizes the kingdom of heaven; and represents what that kingdom brings to the soul in citizenship and service. Here, the emphasis seems to rest on ministry. The servants were such before they received the pound, and we may infer that what the pound signifies was given to disciples. Its removal would therefore mean the loss of power and opportunity for service. Here we are met with the difficulty, that if the pound signifies service, the first servant in accordance with his endowment should receive rule over eleven cities. In the spiritual sphere, moreover, the gain of one is not the loss of another.

It was those "that stood by," the servants of the king and not the Saviour's hearers, who interposed the reminder, "Lord, he hath ten pounds." The reason for the insertion of these words is not obvious; their presence adds nothing to the force of the parable. They may, however, be intended to serve a collateral purpose, to show how God's servants get beyond their depth as judges of God's ways. From the servants' standpoint it seems unjust to take the pound from him who had least and give it to him who had most. The king's servants saw in the act of transference the expression of arbitrary will, whereas they were commanded to carry out an eternal law. The interruption of the king's servants who "stood by" affords Christ an opportunity for enunciating the great principle, "I say unto you, that unto every one that hath shall be given; but from him that hath not, even that which he hath shall be taken away from him." These words are addressed by Christ to His hearers in explanation of the difficulty that drew from the king's servants the parenthetical remark.

Would the wicked servant have forfeited principal and interest if he had placed his pound in the bank? The words "I at my coming should have required it with interest,"

The Pounds

imply an affirmative answer. But the meaning must be, "Granted I am the man your fears painted, claiming as mine what I never gave, you should have expected me to require money I had lent, together with its interest."

The introduction of the rebelling citizens at first sight appears to destroy the unity of the parable; but as a last vision of last things, it was meet that one frame should enclose the Jewish nation—the rebel theocracy and the subjects of the kingdom—in the hour of judgment, with the universal assize in the background. The day of salvation that visited and tested the Jews, will visit and test the family of man; and the same king will summon Jew and Gentile to the same judgment seat.

The rejection of Jesus by the Jewish rulers answers to the embassy of the citizens. The subjects' protest may be against an actual or prospective appointment by the suzerain power; the latter sense agrees better with the fact that previous to his return the king only held the rank of nobleman. The citizens' protest is not the cause of the nobleman's journey, who, had the citizens been on his side, would have repaired to Rome to present his claims, oppose his rivals and secure imperial favour. The opposition of Christ's enemies was on the other hand the cause of His departure. The cry, "Away with this man,"¹ is anticipated by the protest, "We will not that this man reign over us." Both voices are inspired by hatred, both breathe hot contempt. Between the citizens of the parable, however, and the citizens of Jerusalem there is this difference: the former could not give effect to their hatred, the latter did. The trial and crucifixion of Jesus expand and emphasize the words, "We will not that this man reign over us." In rejecting Jesus and delivering Him up to the Roman power, the Jewish rulers were the immediate cause of His death.

As in the first and narrower application the ten servants represent Christ's disciples, so the revolting citizens signify the nation in its leaders. The judgment on the rebels points to the destruction of Jerusalem and the downfall of the theocracy. None of those who heard the parable

¹ Luke xxiii. 18.

Christ's Vision of the Kingdom of Heaven

lived to see their Lord coming in His kingdom; some of their number doubtless witnessed His earlier return to judgment, in the overthrow of city and nation. But to those who died before their country, or survived its fall, reckoning and reward came with death.

VI

**The Kingdom Consummated in Judgment
and Separation**

I

THE DRAW NET

“ Again, the kingdom of heaven is like unto a net, that was cast into the sea, and gathered of every kind : which, when it was filled, they drew up on the beach ; and they sat down, and gathered the good into vessels, but the bad they cast away. So shall it be in the end of the world ; the angels shall come forth, and sever the wicked from among the righteous, and shall cast them into the furnace of fire : there shall be the weeping and gnashing of teeth.”—*MATT. xiii. 47-50.*

This parable at first sight seems to belong to the group addressed to the multitude from the boat on Galilee. It prolongs the subject of final separation introduced in the Tares of the Field ; while its connection with the Treasure Finder and the Pearl Merchant is less obvious. But if for the moment we assume its dislocation from the parables of the boat, the question arises, Would its teaching have appealed to the multitude, most of whom were unacquainted with fishing either in its physical or spiritual significations ? The absence of distinction between good and bad while the net is in the water, and the invisibility of the submerged net itself, made less appeal to an inland throng than to men who had spent their days and nights casting their nets in Galilee ; and who knew that they were ordained to be fishers of men.

The inevitable mixture of good and bad fish in the net, and the sure separation at last, warrant the assumption that this parable is addressed to the apostles. We must, however, seek the reason for Christ's enforcement of final separation. As the parable covers the entire field of Christian time, the reason is not to be sought in local or temporary circumstances. The subject of separation had indeed a peculiar application to the first disciples. They belonged in the first place to a race and a religion of separation. In his very features the Jew seemed cast in a mould distinct from other men. His religion severed him in thought and life from the nations.

Christ's Vision of the Kingdom of Heaven

But what was designed for a granary, the Writers and Ritualists converted into a prison. The Pharisees erected a judgment seat and sat in it ; the theocracy was the salt of the nations, and they were the salt of the theocracy. To men accustomed like the apostles to such an atmosphere, the kingdom of heaven, penetrating all provinces of human life, knowing neither race limitations nor geographical boundaries, could not fail to prove a stumbling-block. This kingdom could have no native land, no earthly metropolis, no temple. While its Divine energies separated men from their former selves, and by character from their fellow men, the separation being spiritual, left them in the world, members of the family, citizens of the commonwealth. Its diffusive and expansive genius viewed man in the solidarity of his sin, and the solidarity of his salvation. In its wide dominion there was to be no present-day judge or judgment seat. The day of time would be the day of the draw net, combining all nations in the dispensation of the kingdom.

Since the apostles were destined to be entrusted with the extension and consolidation of the kingdom of heaven, their mental eye must learn to accommodate itself to the new conditions. They were beside their own Sea of Galilee whose mirror the lightning had often mingled with fire. This sea, Jesus transformed into parable and prophecy. On its practical side, our parable presented the part of the apostles in the kingdom of heaven ; they would be fishers of men. On its prophetic side, it set forth the central event of time, the filling net, and the farther shore of time, with judgment and eternity in the background. The Sea of Galilee symbolized the dispensation of the cross ; its finny tribes the human race ; its former toilers the future fishers of men ; the net they had often cast, setting forth the instrumental means of man's salvation. Little had the apostles thought when they cast their net that they were in figure prophesying the beginning of the kingdom of heaven ; or that when they drew it up on the beach, they were rehearsing on their native strand the drama of the kingdom of heaven, and its consummation, the beginning of judgment.

By the *sea*, some understand the nations of earth ; and by the net the Christian church. But taking the *sea* as

The Draw Net

equivalent to humanity introduces a strange confusion of ideas. The fish in the sea before the net is cast signify human beings ; and the fish within the net have the same signification. All the fish in the sea must stand for the human family. From these the apostolic fishermen and all who cast the same net in the same waters must draw the draught of men. The net, however, cannot be cast into *men*, but into the *sea* that contains them. The sea is the element in which fish, that is, human beings, live. This containing element has its shore on which the net is drawn, and on which the angels carry out their work of inspection and separation. If, however, the human nations are the sea, where is the shore ? The net, according to the opinion under review, would be filled with the sea, not with its inhabitants.

If, however, we understand the sea to represent time as the element or condition of human life, or if still more precisely we regard the age (*αἰών*) as the sea, then the shore as the sea-limit, on which the net is drawn, is the end of the age. We are denizens of the age-sea into which the net is cast, through which it is drawn, and on the further shore of which its draught is delivered.

Illustrious names are associated with the opinion that the net is the Christian church. But the *ecclesia*, or congregation, must have been to Christ's audience "in the house" by Galilee, an unknown quantity, and could not have been used to illustrate spiritual futurity. How could the church have supplied the image of the draw net, when the church is a "congregation of believing people" ? Besides, the net is instrumental to an end, and not the end itself. In the hands of the apostles and of those who continue their labours, it is the means by which the *ecclesia* is gathered. Otherwise the apostles have no part in this parable, which is the history of fishing for men. But the parable loses its point if the apostles are not in charge of the net, which is once cast into the sea and once drawn on the beach. If the church is to be found in the present parable, its place is *within* the net ; but whether it embraces the entire contents, bad and good, must be determined by the acknowledged meaning of the term "church" in the New Testament. Christ's promise to the apostles, "I will make you fishers of men," forbids the identi-

Christ's Vision of the Kingdom of Heaven

fiction of the net with the church. Fishers of men require indeed a net ; but as we have seen, the men that net encloses, and not the net itself, are the church. Peter cast the net at Pentecost before the church's birth ; and Paul fished for men before there were churches in Galatia, Philippi and Corinth. The net is the Gospel, which existed before the church and which called it into being.

It is singular that while the parable was addressed to the apostles and intended for their illumination, they should be kept in the background. The net is cast impersonally. On it the light, on the men who cast it the shadow, falls. " The kingdom of heaven is like unto a net, that was cast into the sea, and gathered of every kind." Why this impersonality ? That the main lesson of the parable lies in the closing scene is obvious. Still, few if any of Christ's parables, it may be said, crowd their signification into one story of the building ; on the contrary, the whole fabric has an organic unity. Did the parable in its impersonal setting teach its first hearers and their successors that man plays a very subordinate part in the salvation of man ? He finds the net prepared, he casts it, it fills whether he sleep or wake, and angels draw it ashore.

" The drag net or ' wade,' which is let down into the water and drawn to the shore in a similar manner to that prevailing on the coasts of England,"¹ is still used by the Galilean fisherman ; and was doubtless the net selected by Christ to illustrate the kingdom of heaven. It resembles the British herring net with this difference, that the former is drawn to the shore, while the latter is hauled on board at sea.

Like the parable of the Tares, this of the fishing net has been invoked in the interests of the inevitable mixture of good and bad in the Christian church. The advocates of that theory sometimes argue as if the mixture were to be referred to Divine decree. Doubtless when the net is drawn on shore good and bad are found in it. All, however, depends on the meaning we attach to the net. If we take it to mean the church, the question is decided ; for all must admit that the net contained good and bad. But should the net signify the Gospel as a revelation of redeeming mercy, as heralding a kingdom of salvation, the question wears a different aspect.

¹ Major Wilson.

The Draw Net

To reply that the church and the kingdom of heaven are interchangeable quantities, proves nothing but the confusion of things essentially different. For the kingdom of heaven contains the church, as the greater contains the less. It is not the church that brings the kingdom of heaven, but the kingdom of heaven that brings the church. It is the kingdom of heaven that is compared to a net cast into the sea, filling with fish, and when full drawn ashore for the separation of its contents. The net is only once drawn on shore, and as the shore represents the end of the age (*αἰών*), the entire question of church discipline lies outside the scope of the parable. The net and its contents were alike hidden by the waters. At this point our parable comes into close contact with the Tares, where human attempts at separation are resisted, because wheat might be pulled up with the tares. Wheat and tares must share the same field till the harvest—the end of the age; and the fish, good and bad, must share the same net till it is drawn upon the shore, at the end of the age.

The parable marks two supreme events—casting the net into the sea and drawing it on shore. The net lowered into the sea ends the dispensation of a chosen land, an elect nation. The hour of the universal has arrived. Henceforth it is no longer Jew or Greek, but *men* whom the net encloses. That net is framed to sweep the entire sea. Within its infinite enclosure there is room for all nations; it will be filled when it has enclosed humanity. The process of filling is the continuance and expansion of the work begun by Jesus Christ and His immediate followers. This missionary parable addressed to ordained missionaries, presents the slow, unbroken ingathering or Christianization of the world. When the whole world shall have been enclosed within the net of the gospel of the kingdom, the end of the age shall have come; and the net shall be drawn up on the shore. “When it was filled they drew it up on the beach.” That is the last act in the drama of time; the next scene belongs to eternity.

In actual fishing the men who cast the net draw it on shore; in the application this is impossible. In whatever light we regard the net, those who cast it into the sea cannot draw it and its contents out of the sea, that is, out of time. In the

Christ's Vision of the Kingdom of Heaven

wider sense, the fishermen themselves are in the net which encloses the good and bad of the age.

It rests with the Lord of the kingdom of heaven to determine when the net is filled. It would appear that the agents who drew the net on shore are the same who "sat down, and gathered the good into vessels," and cast the bad away. The picture is drawn from life. Often had the Saviour's hearers drawn up the net on the beach, and sat down to separate the good fish from the bad. The attitude of sitting down may suggest judicial calm and thoroughness of investigation. But it is questionable whether the mind should be diverted from the act of inspection and separation. Gathering the good fish into baskets and casting the bad away may be equivalent in meaning to the charge to the reapers: "Gather up first the tares, and bind them in bundles to burn them; but gather the wheat into my barn." Gathering the wheat into the barn and the good fish into vessels, is the pledge of a perfected kingdom of heaven. Only the good and all the good are there. On the other hand, from the bundles of tares and from the fish thrown away, good is absolutely absent. Thus shall the kingdom of heaven cast its vast missionary net on the sea of Christian time, and draw that net from shore to shore, enclosing all nations and races of men; making Christendom commensurate with the world; knowing only one dividing line, that which at the end of the age separates between good and bad.

"So shall it be in the end of the age"; these words contain the key of the parable. They limit and define the part on which attention is fixed. It is not the course of time, but the end of the age or Christian dispensation that is held before our view. "So" (*οὕτως*) refers not back to the casting, the filling, or perhaps to drawing the net. The acts on the beach where the sea ends, and these acts only, foretell and typify what is to take place at the end of the age. The severance of the wicked from the righteous at the close of the Christian dispensation constitutes the burden of the parable.

In the present connection "age" is much to be preferred to "world" as a rendering of *αἰών*. In a context obviously conveying the dispensational conception—the close of an economy, the term "world" introduces a set of ideas foreign

The Draw Net

to the subject under illustration. To the unlearned reader at least, the end of the world suggests the dissolution of nature, the end of physical creation, and thus displaces the vision of time, the age of human redemption, coming to a close. It may seem that between the end of the "world" and the end of the "age" there is no practical difference in meaning; that the end of the earth would be the end of the Christian dispensation and of man himself. It is true that the end of the world implies the disappearance of man and the close of the present economy. But the disappearance of man and the close of the Christian dispensation would not necessarily involve the end of the *kosmos*. When the term *world* implies moral ideas, they are in direct contrast to the ideas that distinguish the *age* of Christ and His salvation from all preceding ages. The "world" as the cradle, the workshop and the grave of man, would have applied to any era before Christ came; but "the age" of Christ and His cross, the age at whose close "the angels shall come forth, and sever the wicked from the righteous," is not interchangeable with any other period of time. Keeping the *age* in view, the interpretation determines itself. (1) The analogy between the sea and the age is obvious. (2) Between the beach and the end of the age. (3) The draught of fishes is separated beyond the limits of the sea, and the righteous are separated from the wicked beyond the limits of the age.

"So" (*οὕτως*) recalls attention from the lowered net, from the process of filling, and from the character of its contents while submerged in the sea. The remark that it "gathered of every kind" might indeed be meant to express the inclusive character of the net; but it is better to regard it as spoken in the light of results. The heap of fish on the beach consisted of every kind. The presence then, of good and bad fish in the net, must not be taken as supplying by analogy an argument for a mixture of good and bad in the Christian church. The parable up to the point when the net is drawn on shore appears not to be designed for analogical uses. This becomes clear when we apply it. Suppose, as some contend, that the net signifies the church. The net must have been visible before it was cast into the sea, and invisible while in the waters. By analogy, then, the church must have been visible before it was founded, and invisible

Christ's Vision of the Kingdom of Heaven

from the time it began its mission. If the net signifies the church, then the *net* and not its contents should come into judgment.

The fact that the net was only once cast and once drawn out of the sea, forbids us founding on the mixed character of its contents any argument for or against impurity of church fellowship. Fishermen cannot separate bad from good until the net is drawn on shore; and it would be as reasonable to infer because they do not inspect their fish till they reach land, that they prefer a mixture of good and bad, as to found on the fact that inspection and separation were reserved for the beach, an argument for the presence of the righteous and the wicked in the Christian church. The fish in the submerged net were out of sight and touch; hence it was not in the fishermen's power to examine and separate them. In proof that this part of the parable should not be pressed, we need only notice, that it is not in agreement with the facts of the case for which it is supposed to furnish analogies. In the church of Corinth, for example, the offender was neither hidden nor beyond the power of the church to deal with him. Nor did Paul hesitate to counsel his exclusion from the church. Experience has taught men the impossibility of securing on earth absolute purity of church fellowship. But while the actual church is a mixture of good and evil, it should be remembered that this even on earth is not the ideal church. Had the mixture of good and evil been recognized as a prominent, accepted feature of church membership and church life, Paul would not have addressed his letters to one moral class—the saints, but to the constituent elements of the church—saints and sinners.

II

THE UNFRUITFUL FIG TREE

"A certain man had a fig tree planted in his vineyard ; and he came seeking fruit thereon, and found none. And he said unto the vine-dresser, Behold, these three years I come seeking fruit on this fig tree, and find none : cut it down ; why doth it also cumber the ground ? And he answering saith unto him, Lord, let it alone this year also, till I shall dig about it, and dung it ; and if it bear fruit thenceforth, well ; but if not, thou shalt cut it down."—LUKE xiii. 6-9.

ON certain trees Jesus Christ has conferred endless renown. From the shade and solitude of the fig tree he called Andrew ; in a fruitless fig tree planted in a vineyard he read the failure and doom of the Hebrew nation. The blue-grey olive is the historian of His agony ; from the vine He borrowed one of His names, and chose the blood of the grape to show forth the central fact of the Christian faith in His Last Supper. The palm paved the last stage of His journey to the cross. Owing to the decrease of moisture in Palestine, the palm has almost disappeared ; the olive, gnarled and grey, keeps sentry here and there ; the fig tree has become a stranger in a strange land, the vine climbs slope and hill no more ; but they all abide for ever green in the "fruitful hill" of the gospel.

The vine and fig tree are frequently associated in the Old Testament. Moses describes the Canaan he was destined to see in the distance and visit in the spirit, as a land of "vines and fig trees and pomegranates."¹ And the favoured race in Micah's dream of religious glory and national peace "shall sit every man under his vine and under his fig tree."² In the time of Christ the appearance of a fig tree in a vineyard was perhaps as common as the oak or beech in the wheat-fields of modern England. As, however, the fig tree was oftener found without than within the vineyard enclosure,

¹ Deut. viii. 8.

² Micah iv. 4.

Christ's Vision of the Kingdom of Heaven

a special reason must have led to the selection of one in the less common situation. What that reason was we shall discover in the interpretation.

The parable is found in Luke only; and whether the Gentile evangelist assigns to it the connection in which it was spoken, he obviously regards it as generalizing the question of individual sin and individual punishment. The Galileans falling beside the altar by Pilate's sword, and the eighteen crushed beneath the collapsing tower in Siloam, were not exceptional sinners, nor would they be exceptional sufferers. The whole Jewish nation, one with them in guilt, will be one with them in penalty. Repentance is urged as the only condition of salvation. The fig tree amongst the vines withdraws the mind from the shallow categories of men who as righteous stood apart from the sinners, and of sinners who stood apart from the righteous; and proclaims national solidarity in national sin. A psalmist had sung the planting, the glory, and the desolation of the Hebrew vine, had seen it spring from one living root, and as a single organism wither away.¹ That was solidarity in growth and decline. Isaiah's song of the vine bewails solidarity in deterioration;² the fig tree in the vineyard stands for solidarity in unrighteousness and exposure to judgment.

Identification of the fig tree with the Jewish nation is a point on which interpreters are generally agreed. Two alternatives might be urged; that the tree had a personal significance, or that it referred collectively to a great party like the Pharisees. The personal or party application would avoid the difficulty connected with the conception of a nation planted in a vineyard, seeing that the writer of the eightieth Psalm and Isaiah had made, one a vine, the other a vineyard, the emblem of Israel. It was a vine that overhung the temple door,³ expressing the nation's recognition of its calling, its religious genius clinging to the invisible, and its covenant engagement to be spiritually fruitful. To themselves the individual or the party could easily apply the

¹ Psalm lxxx.

² Isaiah v.

³ Above it (the entrance to the Holy Place) hung that symbol of Israel, a gigantic vine of pure gold and made of votive offerings—each cluster the height of a man—Edersheim, *The Temple*.

The Unfruitful Fig Tree

fruitless tree—growing within the enclosing wall on soil enriched and sheltered for the culture of the vine. Few even of Christ's parables so powerfully appeal to the individual conscience. And certainly the parable, beginning its journey down the centuries, was intended to arouse secure and impenitent sinners to repentance. But Christ's warning (verse 3), "except ye repent ye shall all in the same manner perish," foreshadows not the destruction of a person or a class, but of an entire people. The warning is addressed to the ear of the nation. The words, "Ye shall all in the same manner perish," reveal the Roman sword crimsoned with the blood of the Galileans, as ready to fall on impenitent Israel. While the parable has infinite adaptation to individual men and to all ages, it is manifestly a warning, an appeal and a prophecy addressed by Jesus to His country and His contemporaries.

But granting that the fruitless fig tree represents the Jewish nation, how can we explain its position in a vineyard? and what does the vineyard represent? If the fig tree had been planted in a garden there would have been no difficulty; but it was planted in a vineyard. Some see in the vineyard the whole human race; but with Isaiah's vineyard song in our ears we are bound to refuse such an application: "My beloved hath a vineyard in a very fruitful hill; and he fenced it and gathered out the stones thereof, and planted it with the choicest vine, and built a tower in the midst of it, and also made a winepress therein." Now this was the way vineyards were made in the time of Christ as well as in the days of Isaiah. Like all great poetry, the song only uplifts earthly things into unearthly relations. But had the world sat to Isaiah or to Christ, would this have been its portrait? The vineyard of our parable suggests a hill-side richly cultivated, walled around and under the skill and care of a vine-dresser. The vines we assume to be fruitful; and the fig tree the only unfruitful tree in the vineyard. Is this picture, let us ask, true to the religious life of the Jews in the time of Jesus Christ? The vines, if fruitful, find in that life no analogy; if fruitless, why were not they adopted instead of the fig tree as the type of a nation spiritually barren? The difficulty remains unsurmounted, and indeed, unrecog-

¹ Weymouth.

Christ's Vision of the Kingdom of Heaven

nized. Yet it reacts on the interpretation ; surrounds the vinedresser with so much uncertainty that Alford identifies him with the Holy Spirit. Even the sure sagacity of Bengel wavers : " the Father," says he, " has a vineyard and Christ cultivates it ; or else Christ has the vineyard and His ministers cultivate it." With the pleader there need be no great difficulty, for Christ is the Advocate with the Father, and the Holy Spirit the Intercessor with men ; but since the vinedresser is the advocate, and since the vineyard can neither be the world nor the Jewish nation—for the fig tree is that nation—the question arises, where is there room for a vinedresser ? This is how the haze surrounding the vineyard reacts on the interpretation. With some hesitation in departing from the exegetical past, but with confidence in my reason for this departure, I believe the vineyard represents neither the Jewish nation nor the world. The barren fig tree encumbers nobler, diviner soil than the blood-soaked world, or the hill-slope of the elect commonwealth. The vineyard is the kingdom of God ; and the fruitless tree is in it, but not of it ; in it in Christ's sense when, addressing His countrymen, He said, " The kingdom of God is among you." In this kingdom grows the fruitless fig tree, the fruitless nation of Israel. From this point of view (1) the identity of the vinedresser is established ; (2) his ministry of intercession and fertilization is emphasized ; (3) the question of time receives a fresh and profound significance.

The fig tree had been planted, not sown by carrier bird or wind. In prose its planting is the record of Exodus and Joshua ; in song the eightieth Psalm. In Egypt as a seedling it was watered with tears. The emigrant of destiny and miracle, it was carried by the Divine Vinedresser to the vineyard of Palestine. The sea, the river, the mountains and the wilderness, were its vineyard wall ; whilst around it rose a stronger defence—the presence of God, the absence of idolatry, and the instinct of striking root in the future and invisible.

The parable says not whether the fig tree was planted after or before the formation and plantation of the vineyard. In point of parabolic time the fig tree, that is the Hebrew nation, was planted first. As a fruit-bearing tree it ranked lower

The Unfruitful Fig Tree

than the vine. The human fig tree, however, was the highest product of law and prophecy. Although the vine was Israel's emblem, it represented the national ideal rather than the historical attainment. The human vine belonged to other conditions; its fruitful hill was in futurity. And the creation of these conditions was what we may call the formation of the vineyard around the Hebrew fig tree. As it requires millenniums of time to pulverize the rocks of our globe into the soil of our fields and gardens, so the process of vineyard-making was slow. Its history was like the history of the Canadian wheat-bottoms. Where the grain fields of Canada wave to-day, the forests had shed their leaves a thousand years. The lord of the vineyard had employed many labourers, who contributed to the great result their hearts and brains, their sweat and blood. To human judgment the whole enterprise often seemed a failure; and the last labourer, casting tearful eyes over the vineyard hill, and seeing only a forest of barren trees, exclaimed, "Even now is the axe laid unto the root of the trees."¹ Law had done its best; given the choicest soil and climate in its dominion for a vineyard to the human vine; and this was the result.

Then came the kingdom of heaven, an invisible, a spiritual vineyard; such a vineyard as earth had never known; its wall invisible, its climate Divine, its soil fraught with new possibility—Calvary in the centre and the cloud of Pentecost brooding over it. Already this vineyard-kingdom was being planted with living vines, with publicans and Galilean peasants, the least of whom was greater than John the Baptist. In this vineyard-kingdom of eternal life, of righteousness, peace and spiritual joy, stood the fig tree, the Jewish nation, a dome of leaves, perverting the soil, unresponsive to the new conditions, fixed in arrested development. It had been long planted and long barren; but the disappointment was that it should have remained unfruitful during the last three years, when the prophets and vineyard makers had been replaced by the Son of the Lord of the vineyard, who was present digging amongst the roots of the nation.

Only one thing was wanting. Root, stem, branches and

¹ Matt. iii. 10.

Christ's Vision of the Kingdom of Heaven

leaves were there, but fruit, the fulfilment and crown of the tree's life, was wanting. In its fruit the tree returns to first principles; repeats the cycle of endless life; lifts to heaven its beginning, its being, multiplied and glorified. The want of fruit is the seal of death; the barren tree has no future. Fruit is the emblem of unselfishness, the ideal of true life; transmuting sap, sun, air and rain into food for others; a votive offering for place and privilege. The Jewish tree wounded by the forerunner's axe stood erect, proud of its place, its planting, its history. Proudly it waved its boughs over the graves of patriots, poets and kings. It exulted in isolation, in the spread of its branches over all lands, and in the men who had dreamed and bled beneath its shade.

Such was the tree of Israel when the owner of the vineyard came seeking fruit for the first time. He had sought fruit before; now under new conditions he comes with new expectations. The coming of the owner in person seems to favour the opinion that Jesus who "came to his own" was the planter and owner of the fig tree. This opinion we are forced to reject, when we find that Jesus is represented by the vinedresser. On three successive visits the owner and planter of the fig tree went empty way. Seeking fruit year after year is an accommodation of the Divine ways to the human requirements of the parable, in which a man is the type of God; and where the search is not that of the gold-miner who may dig every day, but of a vine-lord who comes once a year at the fruit season. The repeated visits and renewed examinations are deeply suggestive; expressing the Divine hunger after repentance and holiness in men; and foreshadowing the beginnings of judgment. The words "I come seeking fruit and find none" are infinitely sad, the escape of a Divine sigh. They mean that the tree of Israel had nothing for God. Under its branches there was room for the crowds of priests and Levites; in sacrifice and ceremony the tribes found shelter; the high priests, scribes and doctors roosted amongst its leaves; but for Divine hands and Divine hunger it had nothing.

The seasons of seeking fruit were not three years of Old Testament time; but "these three years"; the three creative years of human history; when the "fruitful hill" of the old

The Unfruitful Fig Tree

order has drifted from the frigid clime of law, under the heavens of grace ; where the nights are short and the days long ; where drought has been exchanged for plentiful rain, and the airs amongst the leaves are the motions of the Spirit.

If my interpretation of the vineyard as the kingdom of heaven is well founded, the mention of " these three years " explains the owner's surprise and impatience : " Behold these three years I come seeking fruit on this fig tree, and find none ; cut it down." Considered in themselves, the three years are open to a threefold interpretation ; the frequency of God's visits to Israel in search of repentance ; periods of time distinctly marked by Divine favour or judgment ; or the years covered by the ministries of John and Jesus Christ. Now (1) if the intention was to emphasize the frequency of God's visits to His human tree, the wonder is that a higher number was not chosen. Jesus often employs numbers in His parables, but three is not one of them. (2) If three sharply defined periods in Jewish history are intended, what were they ? Not the periods of Moses, David and the prophets ; for the first period can neither begin nor end with Moses, in whose time the Hebrew tree, whether typified by fig or vine, was not planted. (3) The introduction of three successive years appears to point to a time then recent, and having a definite and well-known beginning. It may be objected that they cannot be literal, since nothing else in the parable is literal. Whilst giving the objection due weight, it must be remembered that several of Christ's parables become literal at one point and at one point only. It may also be urged in opposition that when Jesus uttered this, His ministry had not extended to three years. He was in His third year of ministry.¹ But the meeting of owner and vinedresser are not represented as historic ; the parable is prophetic and the interviews may in part be prophetic. With Christ's foresight it might have been spoken at the beginning of His ministry ; and three years would have held the place in the parable they hold in it now. For we are blind to the situation and the nature of things, if we do not see those three years written across the heavens and the earth, and graven on the Redeemer's soul.

¹ Bengel.

Christ's Vision of the Kingdom of Heaven

John in his person and ministry, bringing the mountain chain of the old order to an abrupt termination, and looking forth on a new land, a new kingdom, carves the deepest line hitherto drawn across Jewish history. He is the headland in the province of the old world. As the leader in a national panic of conscience; as a voice calling the nation into the wilderness; as a preacher of repentance or doom, burying his axe in the unfruitful tree, the year in which he drew the nation to the Jordan was one in which the owner of the vineyard might well expect to find fruit on the fig tree—threatened by the axe of judgment, its leaves stirred by the dying sighs of an era, and by the morning breeze from a new land.

From the beginning of John's preaching to the close of Christ's ministry is more than three years; and the parable requires more than three. The vinedresser "answering, saith unto him, Lord, let it alone this year also." It was in the fourth year from the beginning of John's ministry when the cross arose and the Mediator prayed with blood for Israel's reprieve.

It is contended that "these three years" cannot refer to the period of Christ's public ministry; since "this year also," the space of time for which the vinedresser prayed, extended to forty years.¹ How it came to be so widely assumed that the vinedresser pleads for a year to be added to the life of the barren tree, within which time the tree's destiny shall be decided, according as it ceases or continues to be barren, is difficult to conceive. It must be borne in mind that the owner demands instant execution, because the tree is persistently unfruitful. Keeping to the idea of years, this command must have been given after the owner came on his round—that is in the fourth year. Three fruit-seasons had already passed since the recorded visitations began. Hence the vinedresser pleads that the tree may be let alone "this year also." But he is far from stipulating that should it be found barren at the next fruit season, the lord of the vineyard should cut it down. What he craves is that the owner should act towards it this year as he had acted during the three preceding years. But what did he do to the barren tree on the three preceding years? In the way of penalty, nothing.

¹ Grotius.

The Unfruitful Fig Tree

He let it alone. In the first, second and third years he let it alone even in its barrenness ; and the vinedresser pleads, " Lord, let it alone this year also," even as a fruitless tree. The obvious inference is that the barren tree had been more than once arraigned and more than once reprieved. This interpretation secures for *καὶ* (also) its due force. If the proposed extension of life had been preceded by no similar respite, why should *also* have been introduced? In the common explanation " also " has no rightful place and no reasonable signification. Therefore the year is not to be closed by the owner coming with a fruit basket in one hand and an axe in the other. If the intercessor stakes all on the condition of the tree bearing fruit that year, he does not say so. He unfolds a purpose of filling the year with remedial, quickening measures: " till I shall dig about it and manure it." He will delve amongst the roots of the nation, invade its security, remove the world of sapless hope and sterile pride in which it has so deeply radicated ; pursue its feeding roots into the dark, and conduct them to the silent currents and forces of life. The vinedresser asks for more than an experimental year. Whilst pleading to have the tree during the coming year under his own charge, his eye is on a wider futurity: " and if it bear fruit thenceforth." Beyond the regenerating year, when the husbandry of grace will bring forth the new resources of the kingdom of God, he points to a " thenceforth " of possible fruitful years. Removing with the spade that on which the tree had fed, comes after three unfruitful harvests. The keen, searching undermining measures come late. This is in close accord with the line of development in the teaching and work of Jesus Christ. During the bright, brief months of the Galilean revival, His doctrine falls on the national tree as rain and light. Then comes the day of priestly suspicion, jealousy, hostility, calling forth a note of sad severity in the Saviour's words. When hatred glooms the Pharisaic brow and murder rankles beneath the high priest's breastplate, the patient Vinedresser seizes the spade and, sinking deep, lays bare the roots and tendrils of the nation's heart. He digs a chasm of infinite width and depth around the nation's roots ; He removes the many-layered world that hid and fed them. His sharp spade cuts through

Christ's Vision of the Kingdom of Heaven

the mass of tradition and sterile legality that had risen around the barren tree, and buried its roots beyond the reach of Divine light and rain. The spade acquired a keener edge as the Vinedresser stood deeper in the pit He had made ; and the axe was carried down and laid amongst the roots of the tree in a manner never contemplated by the stern forerunner. John's vision of the axe is faint and pale compared with the vision suggested by this parable. He saw the axe laid to the root of the trees, and heard the crash of their fall. He saw the nation divided into fruitful and unfruitful. He saw the fruitful hill of Israel cleared of barren vines, and stocked with a remnant of grape-burdened trees. To his eye, Israel could be judged and survive the judgment, thinned by the coming Vinedresser and still remain the immortal vineyard. It was reserved for Jesus to see in Israel a single tree ; to penetrate to the sap, and in the sap to discern the virus of sterility circulating through root and stem and bough.

In ordinary human circumstances, digging would have been the first effort to create conditions of fertility. A human gardener could have exercised no control over sunshine, dew and rain. With the Divine Vinedresser it was otherwise. He had flooded the tree around with the renovating climate of the kingdom of heaven. The legal winds, hitherto setting hard and dry from Sinai, came blowing softly through the gates of grace. The softening, quickening rain of the Spirit hung over the vineyard, because the heavenly Vinedresser was there. And in Jesus, the true vine, the fruitless tree met the keenest reproach, the strongest incentive, the noblest example.

Digging around the nation's roots, we may take as the Lord's death and resurrection, the descent of the Spirit, and the preaching of the apostles.

The forty years between the crucifixion and the fall of the nation are not to be confounded with "this year." "This year" is the vinedresser's year ; a year for the output of Divine energy, a year of unprecedented causes, entitled to yield a long "thenceforth" of unprecedented issues. On Israel's side the succeeding years were years of grace ; the "thenceforth" of response and result. The vinedresser's intercession, "Lord, let it alone this year also," for affecting

The Unfruitful Fig Tree

sublimity takes its place beside the crucifixion prayer, "Father forgive them; for they know not what they do." When we reflect that Jesus foresaw in "this year" His rejection by the nation, His murder by the religious leaders—foresaw Himself crucified amidst the execrations of the citizens, with no room in the nation's heart for its Saviour and no place in its desires for its King, the prayer, "Lord, let it alone this year also," comes with amazing impressiveness. Again we hear it sounding from lips that had drunk "this cup" in the injunction, "beginning at Jerusalem." During forty years the Vinedresser's prayer held the Roman eagles far from Scopus and Olivet. For city and temple it secured a long reprieve. The priests and rulers and scribes who compassed His death were suffered to die in their beds and sleep with their fathers. Had the city perished on the day of the crucifixion, tragedy would have reached its climax; but grace would have missed its triumph. Considering the Murdered and the murderers, the delay of judgment requires explanation; and the explanation is found in the vinedresser's intercession.

It is significant that the vinedresser declines to wield the axe before or after the year of the spade; "but if not, thou shalt cut it down." In allowing the blood-red generation to buy and sell, to eat and drink, to marry and give in marriage, to walk over Calvary and forget its tragedy, to pray in the temple as if its veil had never been "rent in twain from the top to the bottom," the Sufferer and Intercessor manifests the majesty of His soul. And when the beloved, the blood-watered tree fell, we may believe that another law than that whose temple is the cross, claimed and received fulfilment. The prayer, "Let it alone," arose not in vain. The day of Pentecost gathered around it the cloud burdened with the issues of Calvary. Peter stood under the shade of the barren tree; stood on a ground of new causes and living forces; and as he seized the spade that fell from the hand of the dying Vinedresser, and digged deeper and nearer to the tree's life, the first spring of the redeemed world was ushered in; fresh sap drawn from the heart of the Vinedresser rushed through the veins of the Hebrew tree; and the Divine Owner filled His storehouse with fruit. But the branches were fruitful

Christ's Vision of the Kingdom of Heaven

in proportion to their distance from the centre ; Jerusalem and Judæa, the scene of the digging, of emptying out the old and pouring in the new, the scene of fruit ripening in one Pentecostal day—began to turn the vineyard saps into bitterness and barrenness.

The crucifixion, the earthquake, the darkness, the mighty wind, the tongues, the revival of Pentecost are receding into yesterday. Still the fig tree is standing ; exhibiting no axe-mark and no withered leaf. It stands in its old place, amongst its old companions, surrounded by the same wall and under the same vinedresser. Yet under its shadow death and life have met ; judgment has raised the axe aloft and mercy has arrested the stroke. Little does it know that sentence of death was passed, or that the prayer of grace has ascended, that it has entered on new conditions, and stands on a limited lease of life. And so with ourselves ; years have come and gone and we are left in the vineyard amongst the living. The vineyard wall surrounds us, we have felt no Divine presence investigating our past, heard no voice arousing, judging, or pleading on our behalf. That life shortens in tenure and deepens in solemnity, we see not. We forget that when heaven becomes silent, mercy with her spade is amongst our roots. If the fig tree on entering its new term had communed with itself, This year I shall grasp the earth with fierce embrace, and consolidate my strength ; I shall increase my stature, and wear a richer robe of leaves—it would have given a tongue to the human heart when crossing the dividing lines drawn across our life.

It is not said, but it is implied, that the vinedresser's intercession prevailed. Mercy triumphed. Had the tree been instantly cut down, the majesty of grace would have been lowered and sullied. Justice would have triumphed over mercy ; and the parable would have been untrue to fact, since the Jewish nation was " let alone " forty years after the Vinedresser's intercession.

If in this parable Jesus Christ declares to His countrymen the fact that God is visiting the nation and weighing it in the scales of justice, that He has come to reckon with His people, to balance their spiritual yield against the expenditure of His husbandry ; and, conceiving the nation as a tree, reveals

The Unfruitful Fig Tree

the uplifted axe, He reveals also an Advocate in the act of intercession. He shows that even on earth He came between men and sin, and between sin and its penalty. What was the plain literal message of the vinedresser's intercession to those who first heard this parable? It was, that Jesus Christ had prayed for the whole nation, and that its period of probation had been prolonged in answer to His intercession and His work. The people amongst whom Jesus lived and moved were ignorant of the Divine edict of removal; but they were also ignorant of the other truth, that He whom society reviled had by His prayer stayed the execution of the sentence. There is pathos in the mother praying for her sleeping child; there is deeper pathos in the Redeemer's intervention between a slumbering nation and the sentence of judgment. How often may the prayer "Let it alone" have risen from the Redeemer's soul on the cold mountain, in the lonely night, or when town and city repulsed His overtures of love with rage and scorn? His prayer, His person, His sacrifice stayed the stroke and gave a long year of grace to Jerusalem.

Some refuse to believe in prayer, because it seems to them opposed to the established order of things. Are they thinking of a fixed order of relationship between the attributes of the Divine nature, or of a fixed order amongst His arrangements? If they look into heaven they will find that there prayer is made continually. Nor is it that justice dwells in the Father and mercy in the Son; both justice and mercy dwell in God; and Divine grace pleads with Divine righteousness. But if these men look within themselves, they will find the judge and the advocate in their own breast. Their own heart has room for the hand that uplifts the axe, and the hand that arrests the stroke. Though a man declares and believes that he is under no obligation to intercession, he must be reminded that he may be as unconscious of the great facts under and beyond his life, as was the Jewish fig tree. Is it not owing to the intercession of Christ on His cross and throne that he is left in the soil of privilege, repentance and salvation? And whilst there is one Advocate between God and man, men through faith may prevail with God in prayer. Foremost amongst the forces operative in any state

Christ's Vision of the Kingdom of Heaven

are the prayers of its saints ; and one of the supreme assets of life is the father or mother or wife who fills heaven with prayer for the beloved on earth.

The vineyard owner grants the vinedresser's prayer on the ground that better things are possible ; his respite is based on the expectation of fruitfulness. The vinedresser's mediation rests on the fact that all the resources of husbandry have not yet been exhausted. He can yet surround the unfruitful tree with untried conditions. There is no word of transplantation ; for the tree already stood in the kingdom of heaven. In the letter of the parable, sun and climate remain unaltered ; these are not in a human gardener's power ; but in the spirit, the climate as well as the soil will undergo regeneration. By the sharp ministry of the spade the vinedresser will break the peace of the barren tree. His remedial measures will begin low down ; he will visit and disclose the roots ; he will grapple with causes and not issues. If he can infuse a new life all will be well ; and that life must begin in the unseen, and work its way into outward facts.

Digging implies the removal of surroundings. Removal of cherished possessions and surroundings is one of the measures of grace. God dug around the tree of Israel when He removed its temple, ordinances and political freedom. Had the tree eyes and ears and thought, it might fear and wonder as the vinedresser lays bare its roots ; but the spade is in the hands of love. Perhaps the vinedresser would dig until he reached the tap root, which he would require to sever. When fruit-trees send the taproot deep into the earth, they become or remain unfruitful ; and when the soul sends deep its main root into the world, the axe finds employment.

To remove that he might add was the vinedresser's plan. He would irritate by his innovations ; he would make fruitfulness possible, almost necessary.

In the days of His public teaching, Christ had not exhausted on Israel the infinity of grace. His final resource would not be in word but in work. Calvary had still to come. The cross would lay a new foundation beneath the universe. It would enable the Saviour to assail the soul of man with the applied power of God. Hence He would dig away the old ; He would strike at the root of failure, and send His life pulsing

The Unfruitful Fig Tree

through the dead heart. The cross is God's final resource for salvation. Whilst Jesus digged round the nation, it was yet in His hands ; when digging failed, it was left to another principle : " Thou shalt cut it down."

We are under the administration of Jesus Christ, who desires to reach the roots of our life. Let us not mistake the spade ; nor confound a year's respite with fixity of tenure ; the application of the conditions of salvation with salvation itself.

III

THE WICKED VINEDRESSERS

"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. And at the season he sent to the husbandmen a servant, that he might receive from the husbandmen of the fruits of the vineyard. And they took him, and beat him, and sent him away empty. And again he sent unto them another servant; and him they wounded in the head, and handled shamefully. And he sent another; and him they killed; and many others; beating some, and killing some. He had yet one, a beloved son: he sent him last unto them, saying, They will reverence my son. But those husbandmen said among themselves, This is the heir; come, let us kill him, and the inheritance shall be ours. And they took him, and killed him, and cast him forth out of the vineyard. What therefore will the lord of the vineyard do? he will come and destroy the husbandmen, and will give the vineyard unto others."—MARK xii. 1-9.

Now we enter the chill of the temple and the shadow of the cross; Christ and the powers of Jerusalem have met for their final conflict. Here the sunshine of the early parables finds no place; the only light in the picture rises over the nation's grave; and the glow of Israel's rise but deepens the darkness of its fall.

In its main feature this parable admits little difference of opinion. Since Jerusalem fell it has remained the acknowledged history of the Hebrew nation; between that event and the day when it was spoken, it afforded the rare instance of a people reading their own epitaph. Supposing the hierarchy or the Pharisees had preserved the picture of the rise and fall of the theocracy, some of the older generation must, when Titus besieged the city, have recalled Pilate's judgment hall and Calvary.

The symbol of planting a vineyard was singularly appropriate to the settlement of the Jews in Palestine. Nations have their beginning in conquest, planted colony, or pioneer

The Wicked Vinedressers

city. Sea rovers settle down in Britain, Rome expands into world-wide empire, the *Mayflower* wafts to New England the beginning of a mighty commonwealth. But as a nation Israel crossed the Jordan. The vines which the Divine Householder planted in the land of promise were young; derived from the nursery of the wilderness. By experience they knew nothing of Egypt; they had never breathed pagan air; from the wilderness, their motherland, they descended on Palestine, a nation newly born. They sprang from a nation whom they had laid to rest beneath the desert sand. Before them no people had come from God's nursery to the field of settlement; their out-planting was a new event in history. The wandering horde was established; the landless and homeless possessed the land. The settlement of Israel is truly described by the planting of a vineyard; the young vines are not more closely connected with the soil than the Hebrew farmers and shepherds, who, like the peasant proprietors of France and Denmark, were by their very calling wedded to their country.

The hedge or wall that enclosed a vineyard was the emblem of Israel's distinctive nationality, of its separation from all other races and religions. The hedge served to protect the vines from the wild boar of the wood and from the incursion of thieves. Nature had set a hedge about Palestine in the physical environment of the country; sea and river, mountain and desert. Rites and ceremonies composed part of the separating wall; but the sublime revelation of God's unity, invisibility and holiness, the law that demanded love to God and man, separated God's vineyard from the nations of earth. Not in the vineyard, but in the commonwealth which it represents, the hedge was intended to prevent exit from within and entrance from without. The Ten Commandments are based on the assumption that loyalty to God secures against the invasion of the world. Could a nation attain the ideal—every subject loving God with all his heart, and his neighbour as himself—then would God be its bulwark.

Digging the winepress, in its human connection, was a work of faith, in its Divine, a pledge of expectation. While the hedge was yet low and the vines fruitless, the householder hewed a chamber in the rock, where the grapes could be

Christ's Vision of the Kingdom of Heaven

trodden, and beneath it another for the reception of the juice. The winepress supplied the reason for the vineyard's existence ; the owner expected fruit ; so the chief end of Israel's planting was holiness to the Lord.

The tower was the watchman's station from which he surveyed the whole vinefield. It assumed the insufficiency of the hedge or wall to prevent the incursions of thieves or wild beasts. Spiritually, it is the perpetual presence of the Divine Householder, in temple, law and worship. The "Father's house," in the Divine design, was the heart of the theocracy.

The parable follows Isaiah's song of the vineyard,¹ omitting the very "fruitful hill," and "gathering out the stones." The prophet's aim was to emphasize the fostering conditions in which the vine from Egypt was planted. The parable also dwells upon the vine-owner's expense and toil in planting and protecting the vineyard. Isaiah bewails the deterioration of the Hebrew vine ; the parable turns on the conduct of the vinedressers. Isaiah sees the falsification of the nation's early promise ; Jesus Christ, the treason of its religious leaders. The nation in Christ's time may have brought forth wild grapes or no grapes at all ; but, unlike its priests and Pharisees, it never assumed a position of deadly hatred towards Christ and His kingdom. It neither rejected, condemned, nor crucified the Messiah. The masses, "distressed and scattered, as sheep not having a shepherd," ever moved His compassion ; even up to the last it was the adhesion of the common people that withheld the intriguing priests and Pharisees from killing Christ without the mockery of trial. While the accents of this parable were ringing in their ears, the leaders "sought to lay hands on him that very hour ; and they feared the people." Had their leaders been favourable, the masses might, it seems, have ranged themselves on the side of Jesus.

Although, as Luke observes, the parable was delivered in the hearing of the people, the priests and scribes could easily see its application to themselves ; and the truth aroused the devil within and led them to thirst for revenge.

As the vineyard represents the nation, and the hedge, winepress and tower, the laws and institutions which dis-

¹ Isaiah v.

The Wicked Vinedressers

tinguished the theocracy, the husbandmen signify the priesthood and religious leaders—the agencies for moral guidance, of which the temple was the centre. In Israel no man played so great a part as the prophet. He, more than any other, was the representative of the invisible King ; but as the prophets continued loyal to the Lord of the vineyard and suffered for their allegiance, we must not seek them amongst the husbandmen, but in the maltreated and murdered servants.

On letting out the vineyard and going into " another country for a long time " depends what we may term the action of the parable. Such instances were doubtless of common occurrence. A man who could afford to remain for a long time abroad must have possessed some capital. The owner entrusts his vineyard to vinedressers to cultivate and keep, and to render to him his share of the season's produce. In the interpretation, the householder's departure describes a transition in Jewish history. The time of preparation, represented by planting and fencing, we may regard as ending with the settlement in Canaan : for then the process of planting was carried into effect. The fame of the wandering host whose God no eye had seen, served to separate Israel from the surrounding peoples.

The householder's departure has its parallel in the disappearance of the visible presence in the pillar of cloud, and in the cessation of miracle on a national scale. Bringing the vine out of Egypt had been attended by miracles rising to the measure of the nation's wants. The sea opened for their escape, their table was spread in the wilderness, the fiery cloud determined their encampment, Jordan divided its waters, and Jericho's battlements fell. From that time the Divine government was committed to rulers, statesmen and prophets. Less emphasis was laid on inspiration, and more on organization. The whole land like a vineyard surrounded the Father's house—the brain, of which the Eternal was the invisible soul. God in her midst was the ideal of Israel's life ; His disappearance from the eye of sense, however, was an advent, not a departure.

A similar departure into another country followed the planting of the Christian vine. On this departure hinges

Christ's Vision of the Kingdom of Heaven

the parable of the Talents, which, like that before us, sets human freedom and responsibility side by side with Divine invisibility.

While varying in detail regarding the different sendings, the Synoptists are in practical agreement; they agree in the denial of fruit and the maltreatment of the messengers. In each the servants are beaten; in Matthew and Mark some are murdered; Luke reports wounding and expulsion from the vineyard. They all convey the same impression of patience on one side and deepening guilt on the other; that guilt attaining its climax in the murder of the son. The parable requires that the sending of the messengers should apply to the nation from its planting in Palestine. The evil treatment of the servants anticipates Stephen's charge before the Council: "Which of the prophets did not your fathers persecute? And they killed them which shewed before of the coming of the Righteous One; of whom ye have now become betrayers and murderers."¹ "Ye witness to yourselves," says Christ to the scribes and Pharisees, "that ye are sons of them that slew the prophets."²

The mission and murder of the son open a new chapter in history; here the parable sounds infinite depths in man and God. In the words, "He had yet one, a beloved son; he sent him last unto them, saying, They will reverence my son," Jesus Christ leaves no room for doubt regarding who is meant by "the lord of the vineyard." After refusal of his rights and the murder of his servants, a human father would have hesitated to send his son amongst the red-handed crew. Human nature at its best would have cast the murderers out of the vineyard. The infinite hope and longsuffering implied in the mission of the Son, the assumption that men would distinguish between Him and the prophets, tell us that we are for a moment admitted into the Divine council, and read the record of man's guilt in the light of redeeming love.

In the murder of the Son, Christ draws aside the veil of metaphor, boldly asserts His Divine nature, and proclaims His death. The Son has come not only to receive, but to produce fruit by the tillage of those three years; but the sons of them that slew the prophets will also slay the beloved Son. How

¹ Acts vii. 52.

² Matt. xxiii. 31.

The Wicked Vinedressers

reasonable the expectation, "They will reverence my son"; but when they "saw him, they reasoned one with another, saying, This is the heir, let us kill him." Isaiah had sung, "When we see him there is no beauty"; and when the vinedressers saw Him they planned His murder. It is the same hour of Divine nearness and human blindness. The messengers were killed, not because they were servants, but because they sought fruit; the Son was slain because He was the heir. It is here distinctly implied that the Sanhedrin could distinguish between Him and the prophets. The men who suffered John to perish by Herod's sword had already determined to be the Redeemer's murderers.

The husbandmen reason that when the heir is killed the inheritance will be theirs; but they forget that the lord of the vineyard lives. They may indeed assume that he will never return to claim the vineyard. This would agree with the Sadducean outlook of the high priests, and the dead ceremonialism of the Pharisees. The Sadducees had found in the material a tomb for the spiritual; the Pharisees had arrived at the same result by crowding the heart, the seat of God, with self-righteousness. As the demand for fruit enraged the vinedressers, so the call to faith and repentance roused the enmity of Pharisee and Sadducee. The heart-humbling kingdom of heaven, stripping the soul before God of earthly merit and distinction, was odious to men who owed the high priest's mitre to the Cæsars. "The inheritance will be ours," expresses the settled determination of the national leaders to inherit the vineyard and depose the owner, to convert the situation into a field of ambition and power.

According to Matthew and Luke the son is cast out and then killed; in Mark the order is reversed. Some see in the casting out a prediction of Christ's suffering without the city. From Matthew and Luke this conclusion may indeed be drawn; their order harmonizes with the historical facts; the Saviour had been rejected before He was crucified. The act of expulsion from Jerusalem would thus be the equivalent of ejection from the vineyard. But casting the messengers out of the vineyard points to the rejection of Christ by the leaders of the people, a deed of which the crucifixion beyond the walls of Jerusalem was the consequence. Had Christ

Christ's Vision of the Kingdom of Heaven

been crucified within the walls, the national guilt would have been the same ; but the universality of His sacrifice would have remained unexpressed.

Hate is blind ; otherwise the priests and rulers would have paused had they seen that they were filling up the outline of Christ's prediction, when the Son, closing the line of servants, went forth by the gate of death, and earthquake rocked the cross without the camp, and men smote their breasts. Surely this picture, drawn that very week, leaped into life from its frame of earthquake and night.

The vinedressers, as we have seen, forgot that in murdering the heir they left out of account the lord of the vineyard, whose departure was not his funeral. The servants and the son may die, responsibility survives ; the witnesses perish, truth is everliving.

"What therefore will the lord of the vineyard do?" In each of the three evangelists, Christ asks this question ; for each has caught the momentous issues involved in the answer. The change of appellation from "householder" to "lord of the vineyard" foreshadows doom. The owner of the vineyard was householder while his servants and son were yet alive ; their murder brings forth the august side of his character. The new designation must be read in the light of the conspirators' calculation, "The inheritance will be ours" ; so must the certainty of the vineyard owner's return. In Mark and Luke Christ answers His own question ; in Matthew the hearers ; but "they say unto him" of Matthew leaves undecided whether the people or the priests and Pharisees are meant. The answer, "He will miserably destroy those miserable men," savours too much of spontaneity and conscience to come from the priests and rulers ; unless, indeed, we assume that they missed the drift of the parable, or feigned ignorance of its application, a conclusion forbidden by the threefold testimony, "They perceived that he spake the parable against them." Further, the answer as given by Matthew commits the speakers by condemning the vinedressers' conduct. The ejaculation, "God forbid," must have come from the people, for it implies, besides a clear perception of Christ's prediction, a belief in its truth.

To the question, "What therefore will the lord of the vine-

The Wicked Vinedressers

yard do ? ” the whole parable leads. Here the three evangelists have one voice : (1) He will come ; (2) He will destroy the husbandmen ; (3) And give the vineyard to others. In the parable it is the Father alone who returns ; parabolic limitation and the audience addressed prevented the Son's resurrection coming into view. Yet the return of the Son to life is silently assumed ; He is not destined to sleep forever outside the gate. The coming here foretold is not the final advent, but the judgment of the Jewish nation ; and the question arises, When and how was the prophecy fulfilled ? History has supplied the answer ; the Lord of the vineyard came when temple and city fell before the arms of Titus.

The lord of the vineyard destroys the murderers without the intervention of law. At this point the type gives way to the antitype ; the outraged majesty of the Divine nature burns through the human symbol. Fallen temple, smouldering city and mounds of dead, supply the commentary on “ destruction.” The husbandmen, representing the Jewish leaders, are alone destroyed ; but in point of fact the destruction involves the nation. A city that had raised the cross must as a city suffer. The vinedressers perish ; the vineyard remains : “ He will give the vineyard to others.” Taken in connection with Christ's interpretation, “ the kingdom of God shall be taken away from you, and shall be given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof,” the vineyard signifies the kingdom of God potentially considered. Previous to that time, the kingdom of heaven as conceived by Jesus Christ had never been Israel's to hold or lose, but if not theirs by possession it was theirs by promise. Whatever distinguished the Jews from other nations, or trained to devout living and obedience ; whatever tended to illuminate and uplift the soul—that was the vineyard the Jewish leaders were about to lose. Hence their loss was not confined to what the past bequeathed, but included what was coming with the cross. Casting out Christ, they closed against themselves the temple where Christ is priest and sacrifice.

The kingdom of God, or in Paul's phrase the “ advantage ” of the Jew, shall be given to a nation bringing forth fruit. Taken from a nation, it is given to a nation ; and as the human family had only two divisions, the Gentiles are meant. History

Christ's Vision of the Kingdom of Heaven

has taught us not to interpret Christ as meaning that the theocracy, with the laws, temple and priesthood, should pass over to the Gentiles. Nothing local, temporary, or merely typical was to be transferred from the Jews to "another nation"; a missionary like Paul could carry in his spirit all that was distinctive of the kingdom of heaven. As that kingdom begins and ends with Christ, in passing over to another people, it carries the King with it. Crucified, raised, glorified, He will give the universal human vineyard to the new conditions—the new revelation of God, the infinite resources of the cross, the mightier operations of the Spirit, the Gospel with its outlook on Calvary, on the endless mercy of God, and the rising temple of regenerated hearts. As it was necessary to create the new vineyard and the conditions of fruitfulness, the nation bringing forth fruit is drawn from all lands and times: "an elect race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation."

Even had the Jewish vineyard been fruitful, had the nation accepted Christ and the Divine day He brought, the vineyard must have lost its enclosing wall, the temple its priesthood, the city its temple, and the nation its capital, so far as temple and city confined and localized the universal impulses and ideals of the cross. The new wine demanded new bottles. Imagine the temple courts sounding no more with the moans of dying victims, and deserted by the crowds of sacrificing priests; the pilgrim hosts gradually cease to "appear before God in Zion"; while the Roman eagle still spreads its wings over the subject city. What then has the nation obtained by receiving the "beloved Son"? It has exchanged God in His temple for God in His subjects, the ways deserted by the pilgrim throngs are alive with the servants of the King going into all the world with the good news of the kingdom of heaven. Had the Romans and not the husbandmen slain the Son, with the Divine tillage and the new climate, the old vineyard would have spread its vines over all the earth.

"Rejected" is the water mark running across our parable. The shadow of that rejection with its glorious reversal had crossed the Psalmist's vision: "The stone which the builders rejected, the same was made the head of the corner."² What-

¹ 1 Peter ii. 9.

² Psalm cxviii. 22.

The Wicked Vinedressers

ever their secondary reference, primarily these words apply to Christ, who quotes them as a prophecy to be fulfilled in His experience. The stone answers to the son; the builders to the vinedressers. Christ thus in explanation of His parable introduces an idea which lay beyond its limits. It was an hour of beginnings, when foundations were being laid. The kingdom of heaven had hitherto existed in plan only; now the time of realization was come; God was laying "in Zion for a foundation, a stone, a tried stone, a precious corner stone of sure foundation."¹ This stone the Jewish builders were about to reject from the fabric of the theocracy; on that rejection indeed the Sanhedrin had already decided. Already the Saviour's prophetic ear could hear the fall of the temple and city, and the theocracy of which they were the symbols. Events were preparing to lay in death the foundation of the everlasting state, where the corner stone rejected of men should underlie that dominion, at once temple and city and kingdom.

The great priests dreamed of crowning the national edifice with political supremacy. Christ hears the nation's passing bell; sees the kingdom of heaven founded; the spiritual architects from all lands and all ages; men, events and heavenly powers, preparing the living stones for the universal temple. The foundation stone, laid deep in the dust, might in its majestic passivity appear weakness itself; even thus it broke in pieces the man or nation stumbling over it; but this corner stone, symbolized by some mighty monolith shifted from its bed by upheaving earthquake, would by its inherent greatness, carry ruin to man or nation on whom it fell.

¹ Isaiah xxviii. 16.

IV

THE WORLDLY-WISE STEWARD

“ And he said also unto the disciples, There was a certain rich man, who had a steward ; and the same was accused unto him that he was wasting his goods. And he called him and said unto him, What is this that I hear of thee ? render the account of thy stewardship ; for thou canst be no longer steward. And the steward said within himself, What shall I do, seeing that my lord taketh away the stewardship from me ? I have not strength to dig ; to beg I am ashamed. I am resolved what to do, that when I am put out of the stewardship, they may receive me into their houses. And calling to him each one of his lord’s debtors, he said to the first, How much owest thou unto my lord ? And he said, A hundred measures of oil. And he said unto him, Take thy bond, and sit down quickly and write fifty. Then said he to another, And how much owest thou ? And he said, A hundred measures of wheat. He saith unto him, Take thy bond, and write fourscore. And his lord commended the unrighteous steward because he had done wisely : for the sons of this world are for their own generation wiser than the sons of the light. And I say unto you, Make to yourselves friends by means of the mammon of unrighteousnes ; that, when it shall fail, they may receive you into the eternal tabernacles.”—LUKE xvi. 1-9.

THIS parable has had as many interpretations as interpreters. “ No one who has seriously considered can underrate the difficulties of this parable,” observes Trench. It is true that the difficulties of exegesis have increased or diminished with the life of the church. When evangelical hope warmed the air and widened the horizons, the interpreter found beneath the parabolic veil the features of grace ; but in the glacial age of the faith, the parable yielded only a lesson of frigid worldly prudence to Christians already worldly.

“ The main difficulty in the way of one who would get to the heart of the parable is the apparently low level of the very moral lesson itself which the parable is employed to convey. It seems to be a lesson of mere prudence in the use of money with a view to the salvation of our souls in the next world.”¹ Scarcely less perplexing is the part played by the

¹ Dr. A. B. Bruce.

The Worldly-Wise Steward

“ friends ” in receiving their benefactor into the eternal tents.

The parable is peculiar to Luke. Its presence in Luke is less remarkable than its exclusion from Matthew. A wide agreement of opinion sees its bearing upon penitent publicans in their stewardship of wealth. It seems strange then that like the two parables which defend seeking and receiving publicans and profligates, it should find no place in the gospel of the publican apostle. (1) The light in which we understand the “ rich man ” must very largely determine the conclusions at which we arrive. With some expositors he represents the world ; with more he stands for God. Others, like De Wette, consider that the rich man is not intended to convey any particular meaning ; an opinion which betrays an innate unfitness for parabolic exposition. Whilst some recent expositors have not positively effaced the rich man, they have in interpretation well nigh ignored his existence. Could it be proved that the rich man (verse 1) was intended for God, it would be the only instance in our Lord’s parables in which God is so represented. Whilst Christ’s gospel knows no Ebionite taint, yet within its compass earthly riches are not associated with human holiness, and still less with the Divine. That a “ certain rich man ” should in this parable signify God, and a “ certain rich man ” in the twin parable of Dives and Lazarus personify worldliness, exceeds all probability. “ The word $\tau\iota\varsigma$ itself, which gives a certain vagueness to the idea, is inconsistent with such an interpretation.” If, moreover, the Christian conscience is justly concerned lest the rich man’s praise of his dishonest steward should seem to come from Christ, should it not equally resent the ascription of that commendation to God? (2) The steward finds perhaps his nearest modern reflex in the agent of an estate, where the landlord is wholly or in part an absentee. The rich man’s possessions are so great or so distant, that he needs to manage them through a factor who stands high in his master’s confidence and administers the estate with a free hand.

Sweating to earn a penny a day, the agent might have lived in honesty and died in sanctity. As Arctic frost is said

‘ Olshausen

Christ's Vision of the Kingdom of Heaven

to paralyze the bacillus of consumption, so poverty and sour toil deaden the germs of avarice and ambition in the human breast ; but the sultry clime of high office, high wages and high living hatch the brood of reckless ambition. The man thus placed first envies, then emulates, and finally exceeds his superiors in station. Are their mansions grand, his must be grander. If they walk in purple and fine linen, so must he. If they drink rarest wines from vessels of gold, he must slake his thirst from cups aflame with gems. For richer banquets and heavier gaming he must have more money. As mammon is the stuff from which glory is made, mammon must be wooed and won. At length mammon steals his heart from his worldly master, bribes, seduces and yokes him to the slavery of unrighteousness. (3) The steward under notice of dismissal. If an impenitent publican supplied the original of the unjust steward, accusers would not be wanting ; every victim of extortion would be a potential informer. Men smarting under intolerable exaction would maintain a keen outlook on their oppressor. Nor would they have long to wait. The lure of gold is so omnipotent, that men bewitched by its spell become reckless and blind. The heart under the petrifying touch of mammon begins to simulate even the boldness of innocence. Wolsey, blind to the avaricious jealousy of Henry VIII., goes on outbuilding and outshining his royal master. Information accusing the steward of wasting his master's property came in from various quarters. His master must have been long absent, for the indications are that wasting had been extending into the past. His squandering connects him closely with the Lost Son and with Dives ; with this difference, that the steward appropriated what he squandered.

Pained and astonished, his master summons the unjust agent before him. Henry VIII. visited Wolsey at his palace, to share his princely hospitality, survey his magnificence, and decree his downfall. The steward may have been as abandoned a slave of mammon as Wolsey, but his sphere of operation was narrower, or his gift of hoarding plunder inferior. With all his speculation he had neither estate nor credit ; and the companions who helped to unburthen him of his golden load, would, like the associates of the lost son,

The Worldly-Wise Steward

leave him in the hour of extremity severely alone. If arraigned on information, the steward is not condemned without proof—"Render the account of thy stewardship"; by which demand the master may mean the account which should have been periodically rendered, but had not been called for owing to absence or implicit confidence; or he may mean a financial presentation of the affairs of the estate while under the steward's administration. Then, if the facts sustain what the accusers allege, "thou canst be no longer steward."

While making out the account, instructing his clerks, and correcting the falsified books, the agent well knew that he was signing his own death-warrant. We have seen his modern type in the clerk who robbed his bank to bet on the Derby; in the society founder embezzling the shares of his victims. His soliloquy discloses a man who has outlived shame; whose moral nature is unsound to the core. There is no groan of anguish for having betrayed his master's confidence and played the rogue by method; for having forfeited the esteem of his fellow men, or arrayed a moral sepulchre with purple and fine linen. Memory might have sat and wailed among the ruins of the past; instead, anxiety fixes her wistful gaze on the future, and asks, "What shall I do?" Does he ask where he may find a sea in which to wash his hands white or his heart clean? Existence and existence only is the burning question before his mind. The soul needs no physician and knows no future. His question is, Could I wield the sweaty spade or grasp with jewelled hand the beggar's staff? And when his resolution is formed, the one absorbing aim is that "they may receive me into their houses." For him, other aims and other men have no existence; "they," the debtors, flash up from the depths of being, nameless, insistent, paramount. Other souls in their silent soliloquies may have been as grovelling and earthly; none has ever more fully lost sight of God and the immortal tent-dweller within.

(4) "I am resolved." The notice of dismissal quickened and clarified thought. To this agent scheming was familiar; and scheme after scheme flashed and faded on his inward eye. It is a night scene, when darkness falls but sleep denies oblivion.

Christ's Vision of the Kingdom of Heaven

Beneath his uneasy head the downy pillow burns like flaming fire. The hailing moments gall him to the quick ; they remind him of the hours emptying their jewelled sand. He springs from his couch, strides up and down the room, while the glaring moon slants down the black heavens to the Western sea. Penniless, without credit or influence, the world my chess board, I must play my game with fate. Only a day of grace ; to-morrow only is mine. Without friends—friends did I say ? I have it. I see it. Friends can be made ; and one day will suffice for their creation. I shall grapple them to me with hooks of obligation.

Resolution and action are intentionally linked together, as if one and the same moment gave them birth : " And calling to him each one of his lord's debtors." The effeminate voluptuary by the vision of homelessness and hunger is transformed into a man of energy and a master of strategy.

We must transport ourselves into the grey morning of that day of grace. The dismissed agent has seen for once the sun rise. Already along the silent, streets his messengers are hastening to summon a full meeting of debtors. The debtors receive with misgiving heart the early, imperative summons. Poor men who fear the approach of rent day as they would dread the sudden emergence of a lion, are commanded to meet the agent at his office ; the only explanation, urgent business, attendance imperative. The agent is at his desk, the last debtor has arrived ; the room is filled with careworn men. In a general meeting all are interested and all are implicated. Cast a glance round the office. Narrow circumstances, the sternness and sourness of life are written deep on every aspect. They are the sons of a decadent nation, in which there are two divergent camps, the oppressors and the oppressed. Seen aright, these care-seamed men are the truest earthly emblem of a revival morning, when spiritual debtors are summoned to the feet of God.

" And calling to him each one of his lord's debtors, he said to the first, How much owest thou unto my lord ? And he said. A hundred measures of oil. And he said unto him, Take thy bond, and sit down quickly and write fifty. Then said he to another, And how much owest thou ? And he said, A

The Worldly-Wise Steward

hundred measures of wheat. He saith unto him, Take thy bond and write fourscore." How the debt was incurred, whether as rent in kind or as price of produce purchased, is immaterial. The salient point is that abatement was made in each case. Various reasons have been suggested for the variation in the remission. According to Alford, "there does not appear to be any designed meaning in the variation of the amount deducted." Van Oosterzee thinks that fifty and eighty were the amounts really due to the master, the excess having been imposed by the steward in his own interest. Goebel sees in the agent's act a mere parade of power; and with this suggestion, the explanation of Prof. A. B. Bruce, "that he adopts the arbitrary line as most imposing," substantially agrees. Perhaps we should look, with Olshausen, for the explanation "in the application of the parable to the wise distribution of benefits according to the existing wants of those who receive them."

(1) The agent is profoundly impressed with the shortness of time at his command. He leaps into life before our eyes, as with the bonds in his hand, he turns to each debtor, saying, "Take thy bond and sit down *quickly* and write." His master's words, "Thou mayest be no longer steward," toll the death knell of position, confidence and power. He hears the foot-fall of his successor, the keys falling from his hands, the doors closing behind him. His purple and fine linen blanch into the cold cerements of the tomb. The burning eagerness that each debtor should sit down quickly and write, the dread of discovery, the anxiety to have the batch of bills reduced before news of the debtor's meeting could reach the ears of his lord, the ceaseless tramp of nearing doom—supply the best secular ideal of the true convert under notice of dismissal; with innumerable bills against suffering humanity to be lowered; with so many oppressed lives to be disburthened.

(2) Thrown into the future outcast and homeless by the foundering of the coffin ship Mammon, he perceives that he may carry something out of the wreck. That something is human friendship. When doors are closing all around, shutting him out on the icy world, he devises a golden key to open human hearts. His lord's possessions he must leave

Christ's Vision of the Kingdom of Heaven

behind ; his lord's debtors he can carry with him. And Matthew and Zacchæus must eschew his motives and imitate his actions. The analogy between the worldly-wise steward and the converted publican runs no further back than the hour when the master calls his agent to account. From that hour, the stern imperiousness of life, the narrowing and deepening of thought and will, have their birth. Although the steward experienced no moral change, his mental powers were born again. He weighed conflicting lines of conduct and pursued *one* ; he formed his decision swiftly as a general in the heat of action, and braced himself for its fulfilment. The changed relation to his former lord, the new relations to his fellowmen, the new-born emotions, the driving impulses and incentives bearing down on the future, have their equivalents in the men who had changed masters ; who had found in humanity a wider family circle, whose resurrection of soul brought a new impulsive power.

(3) The rich man's praise of his worldly-wise steward. " And his lord commended the unrighteous steward because he had done wisely." The master's praise assumes his knowledge of his agent's device. As verse 2 clearly evinces the anger of an injured and deceived employer, the agent's adroit tactics have not replaced rage with approval. Although moral feeling is absent quite as much from the master as from the servant, yet while the former smarts under his loss and betrayal, he cannot but admire the dexterity and ingenuity wherewith he has been circumvented. It is praise on the moral level of the stock exchange. The game the two worldlings play is, on a limited scale, the game of trade and commerce, the game between capital and labour. We need not wonder at the master's praise ; the hero of the press and the multitude is the man who has built his castle, bought his estate, or given laws to the market by over-reaching his fellows. The burglar who evinces consummate resource in breaking a bank or robbing a mansion, may extort praise for his capacity even from his victim.

The parenthetic comment, " For the sons of this world are for their own generation wiser than the sons of the light," is described by Bengel as a " sublime sentiment, most worthy to come from the Divine lips of Jesus Christ." As it comes

The Worldly-Wise Steward

in between the rich man's commendation and Christ's injunction—two things most clearly associated in thought—we may perhaps attribute its insertion to the evangelist. Keeping for the moment the parenthesis out of sight, read thus: "And his lord commended the unrighteous steward because he had done wisely. And I say unto you, Make to yourselves friends by means of the mammon of unrighteousness." The analogy between the two lines of action is thrown into strong relief. "The sons of this world" include the worldly-wise steward who conceived the plan of spoliation, and his lord who praised it. "In Scripture a person is called the child of anything, the nature and properties of which he has in himself." The sons of this world are engrossed with the earthly, the visible, the perishable. The sons of the light have come in to the light of life, of truth and holiness. The sons of this world and the sons of the light are viewed as two family lines having their sources in darkness, and light. The sons of this world are our teachers in this, that they consider the future, use the past and control the present. In foresight, enthusiasm, application to one absorbing endeavour, worldlings amongst worldlings are wiser than sons of light amongst sons of light.

"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 into the eternal tabernacles." This verse looks back on the steward's scheme to secure shelter in the houses of his employer's debtors, as well as on the rich man's praise of that scheme. As the rich employer praised his steward for making friends out of debtors by lowering their bonds, so I also, says Jesus, recommend you who are rich, to make not palaces, nor barns, nor estates, nor treasures, but friends.

The mammon of unrighteousness, or in other words unrighteous wealth, has suggested various shades of meaning. In the opinion of one, wealth is called unrighteous because the unequal division of earthly possessions is a consequence of the fall; another traces the unrighteousness of wealth to its instability; while others find the reason for the name in the abuses which, through human infirmity, grow out of it.

· Lisco.

Christ's Vision of the Kingdom of Heaven

Considered abstractly, gold is unrighteous because it supplants God in the human breast. As related to the tax collectors whom Jesus addressed, it was unrighteous because acquired by fraud. But as wealth had made victims and enemies, it could yet be used to make friends, by restoration or beneficence.

Could we see a piece of money in its true light, is it not crimson with blood and damp with tears? For it, was virtue sold, principle bought, honour lost, friends divided, life taken, souls undone. Look on these thirty pieces of silver flung by despairing Judas on the inmost temple floor, and be silent. Your heart will interpret what is meant by the mammon of unrighteousness. Has not Satan counted these coins of doom into the hand of the chief priest, and the priest into the hand of Judas? Are they not stamped with betrayal, the price of blood? A lure to avarice, a bribe to covetousness, gold is the enchanted sceptre that secures for Satan the principedom of the world.

Whilst Jesus addressed publicans escaped and escaping from the grip of mammon, His words flew through the air of ages then unborn. Ever in the Divine Man's audience were two classes present—the visible and the invisible; and His eye travelled to the back seats in the gallery of infinite time.

In the era of Christ the Jewish commonwealth had fallen from the luxurious splendour of David and Solomon. When resistance to civil government becomes patriotism and patriotism becomes a religion, as then in Palestine and now in the Roman provinces of Ireland, national decline ensues. The want of wealth and consequent usury supply the economic background of the evangelic history. Men of wealth like Dives and the rich man of this parable were still to be found; but there was no middle class. For the steward there was no halting place in his social descent until he should grasp the delver's spade or beggar's staff. Dives and Lazarus meet in enforced contact, as if the removal of the shaft from the column of Jewish society brought the sculptured capital and the base together. Political unrest and excessive taxation had done their work. Perhaps the frequent appearance of the tax collector in the Gospels arises from the fact that want of

The Worldly-Wise Steward

capital and depression of trade may have reconciled men to an office that kept the people poor. To take a single instance from the teaching of Jesus : the instruction to the rich young man to sell all that he had and give to the poor—points to a state of society in which poverty was common and crimeless. Christ's references to the poor as a main part of the commonwealth—"To the poor the gospel is preached"; "the poor ye have always with you"—suggest a widespread destitution and homelessness.

While men of wealth were still sufficiently numerous to justify Jesus in devoting a part of His message to that class, setting rank and gold in the light of two worlds, and while the parables of the Worldly-Wise Steward and Dives were a message for that age; their voice, at first the blast of a trumpet, waxes louder and deeper as it smites the millionaires of America, and the wearers of purple and fine linen at home. The spiritual King comes down amongst us, re-issuing His words of spirit and life.

How, it may be asked, can the worldly-wise steward illustrate the true administration of wealth? In so far as he has wasted his master's possessions, he is a warning; for during that time he appears to have made no provision against the contingency of dismissal. Like many men of our own time, he had lived beyond his income; in luxury, dissipation and splendour. In prodigality he recalls the lost son and Dives; with this difference, that the lost son wastes moral wealth, while he and Dives dissipate the mammon of unrighteousness.

It might have been expected that Jesus, who had cast in His lot with poverty, and who had lived His laws before He preached them, would deal with wealth, the ancient rival of Jehovah in the heart of man, the invader of the kingdom and the claimant of its crown. It was not certain what attitude a peasant prophet might assume. Would he, like the ascetic Essenes, rule wealth out of his kingdom altogether? Would he banish riches from the kingdom of heaven as St. Columba excluded women from Iona or Mohammed wine from Islam? Jesus no more condemns wealth in itself than He condemns the sea because it drowns, or the precipice because the unwary fall over it. In the parables of the

Christ's Vision of the Kingdom of Heaven

Worldly-Wise Steward and Dives and Lazarus, He shows how, in the kingdom of heaven, wealth should be subordinated, directed and distributed ; how in the person of Lazarus it creates opportunity to imitate God ; how the worldly-wise steward may build around himself here a sanctuary of grateful hearts and secure a welcome of open arms in eternity.

Let a man inherit an empire or create millions by trade, his real title is neither emperor nor millionaire, but simply steward ; he is trustee, not heir, borrower, not owner. As the rose holds its fragrance and the sun his light vicariously, so the rich man is ordained to be the almoner of God. His wealth may outgrow his calculation, but not the calculation of his Divine employer. The revising angels check his books by their own. His gold he may crown and worship, or with its affluence pave the quagmire between his heart and its passion or ambition. Jesus weighs each sovereign in the scales of the kingdom—according to the wrinkles it may efface, the bread it can purchase, the sleep it may restore. Wine is harmless in the cellar and gold in the hoard, but when wine enters the brain and wealth eats into the heart, death begins.

In the kingdom of heaven no man is condemned because he is the steward of wealth ; he is condemned when he forgets his stewardship. Investment of wealth in feeding the hungry, in kindling fires on cold hearths, in clothing the shivering and dying, is as holy in Christ's eyes as preaching the gospel. Samuel Morley's open hand is as eloquent in God's esteem as Chrysostom's golden lips. The sisters Baxter of Dundee, who convert gold into missionary ships, and the Arthingtons who pour their affluence into the missionary chest, must rank in Christ's kingdom with the saviours of our race. The passing of wealth into the pierced hands of Jesus Christ may hasten the coming and consummation of the kingdom of heaven by many thousand years. The zeal of Paul, the devotion of the martyrs, the inspired momentum of Luther, the silent fire of Wesley, the melting fervour of Whitefield may never be surpassed ; but the kingdom of heaven awaits a new asset ; wealth, in age-long antagonism, has yet to be consecrated and yoked side by side with the regenerating

The Worldly-Wise Steward

forces destined to uplift the nations. I live in hope that before the sward has knit over the grave of this generation, Jesus Christ, who has opened so many doors, will enter the temple of mammon, and in the name of the heavenly crown, and for the soul of universal man, take possession of altar and edifice. The Dr. Barnardo of that time, having exhaustless funds on which to draw, will be able to cover with his Christly robe the entire orphanhood of London; and the new apostles will divide the nations into parishes, where every shepherd will know each member of his flock.

Remembering that he is a steward only, a rich man may live in God's presence; for then the stern truth that he is a steward under notice of removal will daily stare him in the face. Every hour of the day, and first amongst the voices of the night, will he hear the words, "Render the account of thy stewardship: for thou canst be no longer steward." The stiffening limb, the shortening breath, the dimming eye, the roughening brow and whitening hair, will each proclaim his notice of dismissal. The day of reckoning of steward to Owner hurries on apace. The invisible evicting officer is ever in the room; a shadow walks among the piles of yellow gold; his successor's footsteps are sounding in the distance. While it is true that riches make themselves wings, like an eagle that flieth toward heaven, it is as true that man flees away from riches.

Man, like a snail melting away in his house of earthly glory, is a pathetic sight; disease and decay making breaches in his citadel of power and splendour; pain, anguish and fear scaling golden ramparts; death passing the edifice that like a coral worm the rich man had built, and claiming the builder. For death the earthly symbol is dismissal, removal from stewardship. The chair empty where he sat, his name an echo, the keys of the treasury wrenched from his icy grasp by the bony hand of death, his body without a soul and his soul without a body—this is dismissal, this is death. Jesus' words, "When it fails," are a death-knell sounding over the ruins of human glory. Mammon fails to exclude reality from the dreamer, and the invasion of the eternal; fails to array Dives in lasting purple and fine linen; fails to arrest the step of years, to maintain the

Christ's Vision of the Kingdom of Heaven

heart's beat or the crown on the kingly head ; fails the head as a dying pillow, fails as a shield in the war of dying, as a medicine to heal the broken heart, as a ransom to pay the debt of sin, as a comrade and sustaining angel in the valley of death.

Wealth accumulated into great centres has the barrenness of the lake ; distributed it is gracious rain, arriving from heaven with life and fruitfulness. When the debtors were summoned to the steward's office, with downcast brow and heavy step and heart they obeyed, questioning with themselves, What next ? Immediate payment ? What burdens fell away as each sat down with swift alacrity to write off a large part of the galling debt ! With lightened heart and springing step they issued from the great man's presence ; with tone and smile unknown for months, they surprised and gladdened their wives and families, telling of the unaccountable magnanimity of the steward, of the altered mien and the caressing note in his voice. See the household listening, with parted lips and widening eye. The heart, touched and melted by the unexpected stroke of favour, colours opinion. After all the steward has a generous heart ; he has the will if only he had the power. It is to him and not to his austere master we are indebted. Can we ever forget or repay his kindness ?

To Lazarus a pound would seem a fortune. If an angel came with the quarter's rent, or cancelled the bill that killed the small tradesman's peace and banished sleep, or paid the funeral expenses of the friendless widow's child, or kept a roof over the crofter's head, when crops failed and cattle died, he would arrest the rush of despair to the Thames and the Seine.

God makes room for human angels ; sets the rich man at the point whence ten thousand lines diverge into empty homes and hopeless lives. May the day never dawn when confiscation will receive Christian baptism, the principle that the possession of private property is wrong, secure Christian assent. Here and there the gift of creating wealth will come to men as surely as poetic genius or musical inspiration. But the day cannot arrive too soon when the current of a nation's wealth shall cease to stagnate in

The Worldly-Wise Steward

the Dead Sea controlled by industrial kings and deer-slaying idlers.

The abyss of poverty may be so deep, and Lazarus at the bottom so undone, that whosoever lifts him up and gives him a chance, shall henceforth wear the aspect of a saviour. The benefactor never dies ; men are his living monument. The widowed mother blesses him on her dying bed ; he stood in the breach of death ; through him her sons have found their way into prosperous callings. In hearts soured through daily contact with human selfishness he smooths the way to faith in God. Mammon, so often unrighteously gathered, hoarded, or squandered, can thus not only pave the way to the city of God on earth, but burn uncorroding beneath triumphant feet in heaven. If men may not lay up gold itself in the life to come, they can treasure in heaven its achievements. When it has added years to life, removed mountains from the heart, barred the door against the famished wolf, supplied the base of the missionary army, given wings to human mercy, procured a home, a nurse and daily bread for Lazarus, it vies with the ministry of angels. The natural heart may indeed forget its deliverer, but the poor of the kingdom will bless on earth and in heaven, the hands that relieved their hunger and clothed their nakedness, assuaged their suffering by skill and smoothed the descent of death.

Could ambition engrave its name in the stars, something would have been done to appease man's hunger for immortality ; but infinitely more has been accomplished when angel eyes read in ransomed hearts the burning seal of the benefactor's name, and ransomed lips pronounce that name among the imperishable memorials of earth.

The kingdom of heaven is founded in grace ; the city of God, lying in shadow here and in light hereafter, rests on the blood of the Lamb ; and nothing has been added or can be added to Christ, the sole, unaided, absolute Saviour of men. If men of wealth are counselled to make through their riches friends on earth who shall receive them into the eternal tents, it is not for a moment meant that their gifts to the needy, or the needy who receive those gifts, shall open heaven. Those whom beneficence has made friends, receive their

Christ's Vision of the Kingdom of Heaven

benefactor with grateful welcome, as one of their deliverers under the supremacy of their Lord.

The striking description of the abodes of the blessed as the "eternal tents" sustains the air of strangeness pervading the entire parable. So deep, indeed, is the consciousness of the unfamiliar, that we sometimes ask ourselves, is this the voice of Christ? Is this the home of immortality that He has brought to light? On reflection, however, we are reminded that the instances in which Christ has given objective expression to the state of future blessedness are few. In John xiv. 2, He consoles His apostles with the assurance, "In my Father's house are many mansions." When we place this glimpse of glory over against the "eternal tents," we are impressed with the contrast. The Father's house, as the whole of which the many mansions are the parts, suggests transfigured homes within or around the temple abode of God. Although an early English poet might apply the term mansion to the grave, in modern English, strength, permanence, magnificence are the contents of the word. Whereas "tent" in spite of the adjective "eternal," conveys the impression of the unfixd, the frail, the transient. It must be observed, however, that the term mansion has acquired associations of stately grandeur to which the Greek *μονή* has no claim. The Revised Version has "abiding places" in the margin—a translation that brings the two visions of the blessed state into closer accord, and better conveys the original sense. If the dwelling places in the Father's house still appeal more powerfully to our hearts than the eternal tents, we may find an explanation in the fact that it was a disclosure to the inner, the apostolic circle, later in date than the parable under consideration, and designed as a parting consolation to assure the sorrowing apostles, that when the world shut its door, there was infinite room for the whole family of God in the Father's house. Moreover, the house with its many dwelling places, satisfies the hunger of the western mind with the vision of arrival, settlement, rest—the idealization of home.

The declaration, "In my Father's house are many dwelling places," is conceived by some to have been spoken by Jesus after leaving the Upper Room and before plunging into the

The Worldly-Wise Steward

shadows of Gethsemane. They picture the rejected Saviour standing in the Syrian night and turning His homeward gaze to the ebon sky and blinding whiteness of moon and stars. But associations more human, better qualified to suggest and illustrate the house of many dwelling places, lay nearer hand. It was the feast of the Passover ; and Jesus not only stood in the metropolis of His country, but amidst the assembled myriads of His race. On its commanding, rocky platform arose the temple, the Father's house in defiant majesty, with the sleeping city coiled around its feet. Those homes, mansion and hovel, were filled with far-travelled worshippers, footsore and weary. Jerusalem opened its doors to the pilgrim hordes during the great religious festivals. But no city, then or since, much less this highland town, could have found room around its hearths for a host of two million seven hundred thousand men, the number which, according to Josephus, attended the passover in Nero's reign. The mighty human overflow were obliged to cover the surrounding slopes and hills with a greater, wider city of tents. To this lack of room, and to the fact that all the dwellings in Jerusalem—mansion or tent—lay without the temple, once the Father's house on earth, the unnumbered dwelling places in the Father's house on high have manifest reference. To men who have forsaken home and severed earthly bands, and on whom temple and city were about to close their doors, it would prove a profound consolation to know that when exiled from earth, they should find abodes awaiting in the eternal house of God.

The custom of receiving guests into the house of the citizens, taken in connection with the endless array of tents in which poor and solitary pilgrims must often have found a shelter and a share of the memorial lamb, may well have suggested the symbol of the eternal tents, and the reception of arriving benefactors into them.

The Jews were never suffered to forget their nomadic ancestry. Their shepherd fathers warmed and coloured their imagination and tingled in their blood. The patriarchs' tents still seemed to flutter in the morning air of the nation ; the history of their emancipation from the slave life of Egypt had the tents and the desert grave of a nation for frontispiece. Jehovah had condescended to dwell in a tent which

Christ's Vision of the Kingdom of Heaven

found expansion and immortality in the temple of Solomon. The jocund festival of booths and the graver Passover annually recurring, tended to fire the imagination of childhood and youth with the wildness, the freedom, the fascination of tent life. To Hebrew thought a tent stood for the environment of being at its highest and lowest. Isaiah conceives Jehovah spreading out the heavens as a tent to dwell in. The writer of the fourth Gospel describes the eternal Word as dwelling in a tent of flesh amongst men. Peter, dazzled with the glory of the Lord and His heavenly guests on the holy mount, proposed the construction of tents in which to house the conference of the cross; a separate tent for each glorious guest. And when Paul the tent maker would express the burden of suffering mortality, he declares, "We that are in this tent do groan, being burdened"¹; but in the bold affirmation of immortality, he exclaims, "We know that if the earthly house of our tent were dissolved, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens."² While Paul is thinking of personality in connection with its glorified embodiment, Jesus refers to the housing of glorified personality in the eternal tents, when the Passover of redeemed humanity arrives, and heaven is filling with the pilgrim throng. Then the dwellers in the eternal tents will welcome home their benefactors as the Jewish master of house or tent made the homeless pilgrim his welcome guest.

When we sink in the deep waters of sorrow and separation, we are surprised to discover how little light has been shed on the near and further shore of death. Rightly or wrongly, human affection longs to have in view those who take the last lone way. Innumerable questions crowd around the passing: And what of the other shore? Was the arrival of our beloved anticipated, watched, welcomed? Were vanished comrades and human angels waiting? Unless the words, "that they may receive you into the eternal tents," supply an answer, I do not know of any other in the New Testament. Those who in the parabolic representation of the last judgment "are welcomed to the abodes of the blessed, are they who

¹ 2 Cor. v. 4.

² 2 Cor. v. 1.

The Worldly-Wise Steward

have done acts of kindness to Christ in the person of the poor and needy." There, it is the Judge who welcomes ; here it is the poor and needy themselves, who in wasting frames and empty hovels received their benefactors on earth, and now guide their steps to the eternal tents—tents perhaps to those only who knew no other name for home.

V

THE RICH FOOL

"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, be merry. But God said unto him, Thou foolish one, this night they require thy soul 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."—LUKE xii. 16-21.

I

LET us mingle in thought with the multitude who tread one upon another that they may feast their eyes on the great Teacher. While the mighty human press sways inward to the centre, and strains to catch the low voice tuned to address the clinging group of disciples, a rude voice issuing from the very shrine of mammon cries, "Teacher, bid my brother divide the inheritance with me." "Man," replied Jesus, "who made me a judge or a divider over you ?" The intruder could not see that beneath the new Lawgiver was a spiritual throne, the throne of the kingdom of heaven ; but Jesus informs him, not without rebuke in address and tone, that the bench of the secular judge belonged to a secular world. The fires of avarice, long nursed, burn while the intruder broods not on Jesus' words but on his own wrong, and explode half unawares. Far, however, from regarding the fire as confined to one breast, Jesus perceives it smouldering in the heart of the mighty throng, and ready to flare up in the bosom of discipleship itself. So withdrawing His eyes from the victim of injustice, real or imaginary, to His little disciple band, He says, "Take heed and keep yourselves from all covetousness ; for a man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things he possesseth." Then from the didactic plane, He is carried up to the heights

The Rich Fool

of parable. The veil concealing the poetry, the pathos, the inwardness of life is drawn aside ; nature acts her pastoral, thought knits its brows, and with draught-board on knee sketches new granaries and storehouses ; the rich man at dead of night in his waking dream arrays himself in purple and linen, and invites his soul to many prospective years of joyous revelry. Avarice appears in its labours and achievements, in its schemes, its surprise and its shroud. As the man of success and fortune utters the words " many years," a voice seeming to fall from the pole of night, says " Fool ! " And the scene hastens into tragedy ; a mansion without a tenant ; a plan without the planning brain to give it embodiment ; a body without a soul.

From the pressing throng we are transported to an earthly paradise : " The ground of a certain rich man brought forth plentifully." We pause on the white glaring road when the broad fertile lands of the successful husbandman break on our view. The house, standing amidst its palms and vines, is eloquent of affluence and peace. Wide expanses of wheat whiten the smiling valley ; vineyards laden with their own fertility climb the terraced slope far as the eye can range. Labourers, dark as the grapes they store, swarm amongst the vines. The reapers bear the burden of the burning day. Amongst his toilers we recognize the master, the muse inspiring all this vital moving poem. A man of the open air, bronzed with exposure, rude of health, presenting the outline and aspect of early manhood ; a model farmer and controller of provincial markets ; a captain of industry, a man whose presence is a rebuke and an incentive to the entire community ; who has raised agriculture and fruit-growing to the eminence of a fine art. Fathers point to him as a shining example of application, capacity, success. They find him first of employers in the market place waiting to hire labourers for harvest field or vineyard. A solitary man, he is ambition's monk, narrowing down the world to the four walls that enclose his fortune. From the second rank of Jewish society he is urging his way into the first. Every year is a witness to his increasing value as a social asset, as a pillar in the framework of the commonwealth, as a courted ally, as a coveted son-in-law.

Christ's Vision of the Kingdom of Heaven

This wide rich oasis is the creation of an agricultural master, who by brain and hand converts prose into poetry. It has been a time of peace ; these lands have not felt the scourge of war, the flame of blood, for many years. Also Roman law has reared its bulwark around the prosperous estate. Vineyards are allowed to wear their purple, and cornfields their yellow gold. In a country subject to drought, this son of fortune has fallen on years of full springs and streams, of timely rain and restoring dew. In Christ's parables, based on Jewish men and manners and the natural phenomena of His country, there is no allusion to contemporary drought or famine.

For heavy crops and abounding vintage the present season excels all former years. The granaries can no longer store the corn, nor the wine-vats the overflow of wine. Young Dives has invoked nature and fortune, and this is their response. His cup runneth over. It is the penalty of success ; but to the rich man it is a pleasing penalty. His question in counsel with himself, " What shall I do ? " knows nothing of sour worry. It is the welcome embarrassment, the delicious perplexity of success. Yet as the seed of prosperity was watered with brain-sweat, so must the reaping be watered. Success brings new appeals to thought, louder knocking at the door of inventive resource, nights broken with feverish elation, ground plans for the house of fortune. If there is anxiety in the question " What shall I do ? " it arises from the emergency of the situation. The man of initiative and resource is summoned to swift conception, decision, execution. The redundant crops are unhoused, corn and fruit are perishable ; summer is flying. The brevity of harvest, the need of storage, divert the busy man's mind from hiring reapers and vineyard labourers, to sketching plans and choosing sites, engaging men to quarry, hew and build.

From lowly beginnings this man's fortune has attained such imposing proportions. The firm has two partners ; the visible and recognized, and the Invisible and unrecognized. When younger and poorer, the agriculturist may have invited God to his counsels and dimly witnessed the majestic miracle of sunshine becoming bread, and water wine. Yet the great fortune was the result of co-operation—human and Divine.

The Rich Fool

And if ever fortune grew like a pastoral poem it was this. Like a white temple it arises in the light, unstained by widow's or orphan's tears, uncursed by spoil of oppression or price of blood. Injustice, fraud, speculation, forgery, appropriation of shareholders' substance, the tortuous wiles of chronic bankruptcy, find here no place. A new Adam transmutes earth, air and sun into wealth. Foresight, industry, economy underlie fruitful vines and abundant harvests.

Dives emerges on our view the heir of achieved fortune. He exhibits no wish or ambition to augment his riches. On the contrary, he gives himself to expenditure and enjoyment. The hero of our parable comes before us as a man still absorbed in fortune-building. If he has advanced far along the path of success, his goal is in the future. As a man of affairs he cannot yet afford to wear purple and fine linen. He has far to climb before he can sit down with Dives. He is temperate, even abstemious; for he is still running for the worldling's crown. Although an agricultural Dives, a man of the market, with high credit at the bank, an authority on corn, vine and olive culture, he is the overseer of his overseers, holds in his own grasp the innumerable threads of a great industry.

The question "What shall I do?" is, in the sense already defined, an anxious question. "This will I do," is a decisive answer. The question is addressed to self and answered by self. It is a council of one man; the decision of one will. Mentally quickened by the bath of night, the man of care sinks immersed in thought. He is challenged to a new departure; to extend his granaries, or find accommodation for his fruits in human want. The latter alternative seems never to have crossed his mind. The extension of old storehouses, or the erection of new, was the only alternative before his mind. The end to be attained is storing capacity for "all my corn and my goods." In the little word "all" we see the heart closing like a vice on its possessions. What shall I do? may be the first cry of re-birth. All depends on its direction and its completion. If, like the Philippian jailor's prayer, it has for burden "to be saved," then it is the greatest question man has yet addressed to his Maker. But when the rich man unfolds his ground of perplexity—"because I have not where

Christ's Vision of the Kingdom of Heaven

to bestow my fruits"—all is changed ; and we say, He forgets that he himself may perish sooner than his grapes and corn, he knows not that an invisible Lazarus lies at his gate. The occasion that summons him to reason within himself is God in disguise. Not by chance is he thrown into the deep of self and the deep of futurity. In the silent room were watchers awaiting the issue of his counsel with himself. Compelled to reflect, perhaps he may think downward to his soul ; forecasting the future, perhaps he may extend his vision to the harvest and the granaries of eternity. The mind called in as architect for the flesh may ask, Where shall I abide when dispossessed by death ?

" 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." The decision, swift, clear, practical, vital with motive impulse—a programme of deeds—bespeaks a man of the world ; no audience afforded to the still small voice within ; no recognition of the Divine partnership. It is a worldling's ground-plan of life. Other men have devised the enclosure of continents, empires, sovereignty, glory ; they have demanded more space for their castles of air ; but no worldling has more hungrily stored his possessions in his heart, more successfully crowded out the spiritual from his being ; humanity, eternity and God from his outlook. He is a materialist without dogma, and an atheist without denial. Man of fact and execution, his fabric is founded on the air and built of air. He outlines a purpose never to be realized. The old barns were not to be pulled down by him, and by him the " greater " were never built. This man ever lives, lives and proposes in our time, lives and proposes in ourselves. This will I do, exclaims he as he draws the lines ; This shalt thou not do, whispers the shadow behind him.

Building out God is a melancholy sight ; building in animal enjoyment is the necessary sequence. This will I do, uttered in response to a Divine command may be spiritually sublime : This will I do, as a human resolve severed from its base of resource in God, betrays the heart's insanity and rebellion. Isolation of human being from Divine being is death. I will pull down, I will build, disowns dependence and deposes providence. The speaker assumes a right to frame his life

The Rich Fool

without regard to God or man ; he assumes the permanence of life and health ; he takes for granted that he shall live to see the old granaries replaced by more capacious storehouses ; he calculates on seeing the buildings filled with fruit and grain ; and then after turmoil and brain-ache he foresees a long continuance of earned indulgence, when the soul will be invited to sit in melancholy hunger at the revels of the flesh.

Practically the worldling is an atheist. In his speculations and in his counting house there is no room for God. And hence the folly of his programme of life. That programme he bases on false assumptions. Amongst worldly men he bears the reputation of practical sagacity and common sense. But what folly surpasses that which assumes the certainty of mortal life ? which dares to shape events and actions after the pattern of his own will ? Who dreams so wildly as the man who imagines he can feast his being with the bread of sense, or with four walls build out death ?

Building on the unstable as if it were permanent is one of the rich man's fatal mistakes. Pulling down may be necessary, and building imperative. Youth is called to pull down the erections of childhood, and manhood to cast down the boundary walls of youth. Our prejudices, our dream-temples, the environs of nation and race, demand removal ; our holy cities of science, law, thought, history, belief, require the elimination of the temporary and the untrue, and a fresh laying of foundations on eternal truth. The city of God must be built on God. Building is a work in which all who live, willingly or unwillingly engage. Every new day adds a new course to the walls of the house in which we shall live for ever. We are laying our foundations in the permanence of faith or in the insecurity of sight. The mistake lies not in building, but in the purpose of the structure and the world on which it rests. The rich man lays his foundations in the dust ; he is a workman in perishable material. The great work of his life is to be the excavation or erection of a granary, which the thunderbolt may shatter or the earthquake swallow. Is it hinted that man as a being partly material must build on and with the material ? Assuredly. But man as a being partly spiritual must build on and with the spiritual. The man under consideration lays up treasure for one nature in one world.

Christ's Vision of the Kingdom of Heaven

And therefore it is the child of eternity founding his house on the quicksand. But the purpose, "there will I bestow all my corn and my goods," renders the very conception of this edifice a wrong and a crime. The wall separates between the builder and his kind ; between the soul and its only heritage. It consigns two Lazaruses to hunger ; the outward Lazarus at the gate of wealth, and the Lazarus in the rich man's breast. It is not the immortal in the man that says "and there will I bestow all my corn and my goods." It is not the soul that speaks of "my goods, my fruits." The soul has been deposed, and a usurper ascends the throne of personality. No one can even dip into our parable and fail to be impressed with the shifting of personality from the spirit to the sphere of the senses. Only if the soul were hypnotized could it speak of "my fruits, my corn and my goods." The lower nature masquerades in the crown and purple of the soul. The self-centred egotism of avarice breaks through every line. It is I, I, my, my. Yet we pity more than we condemn the state of mind that makes a universal desert with self as its only centre. It is Pharaoh and Napoleon in the raiment of husbandry. The repetition of "my, my" shows how his possessions have sunk into the substance of the man's being. To sacrifice a part would be like the amputation of a limb. This is the result of making the heart a bank ; the treasure incorporates with the walls that enclose it. Avarice denies Divine ownership and control ; it does more, it refuses to share what has become its own self, with human want.

Suppose the granaries completed and filled from floor to roof with corn and goods. Suppose the rich man stands beside the achievement of his dream. O rich man, let me survey thy treasures ; open thy storehouse doors that I may take an inventory of thy wealth. I have read the inscription over the entrance, "All my corn and my goods." All thy goods ! These cannot be all. These are limited ; these are perishable. The thief may break through these walls to-night ; mildew may assail their hoards to-morrow. Under certain conditions these are not goods, but ills. If stored in the heart, they bring the putrefaction of the grave. Can you carry them with you throughout the pilgrimage of life ? Have they value in the hour of suffering ? Can they accompany you through

The Rich Fool

the gate of death? But where are the *other* treasures, the dowry and fortune of the soul; the living bread and manna of the mind; the fruits of Golgotha and Gethsemane? In this inventory God has no place; neither has salvation, nor the immortal land, nor the crown of righteousness. If these things were taken from you or you from them, what would be left?

II

Now we come to the rich man's psalm of life: "And I will say to my soul, Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years; take thine ease, eat, drink, be merry." In the tower of futurity sleeps a silent carillon of bells, waiting to break into wild melody on the day when avarice reaches its promised land and self is crowned. But that day has never dawned. The heaven of earthliness, just as truly as the heaven of hope and faith, lies afar off in the future. A Jordan flows between the worldling and his promised land. The rich man here turns his eyes toward futurity as eagerly as the saint. His goal is in the unarrived and unborn years. He lives more in his house of dreams than in the mansion where he eats and sleeps. His ideal is low, but it is the motive force in his life. It floats before him as an enchanted land wrapped in golden haze. We may infer his attained condition from the character of the unattained; for as our actual state determines the standard of our ideals—so we may reason from our aspirations to the condition in which they have their rise. If much goods laid up for many years is the height of the rich man's ambition, if to eat, drink and be merry is the estimate of life at its highest, what must be the heart in which these thoughts are hatched? And yet earthly and contemptible as such a goal of striving may appear, it arrests and suffices the majority in every generation. The heavenly land which for multitudes underlies the sunset of life, is many years, secured fortune, careless repose, physical enjoyment.

God has no quarrel with wealth righteously acquired, or with success justly achieved. The rich man of our parable is condemned because viewed as an immortal being, as a destined emigrant to a spiritual sphere of life, he is absolutely

Christ's Vision of the Kingdom of Heaven

destitute. In the stint and limitation of his hunger he has sinned against the greatness of his birthright and the nobility of his being. A peasant, if asked to draw a boundary round his ambition, need not surprise or offend if his aspirations only extend to a cottage and a few acres of land. A king's son, sketching his ambitions and dreams, will enclose palaces, cities and kingdoms. The least in the kingdom of heaven would include the vision, the likeness and the enjoyment of God. The rich man's aspirations and ideals are confined to this life. What the peasant is to the king's son, that is he to the heir of God. Hence a barn can contain his goods and a banquet suffice his wants.

The rich man of our parable is wrong in his estimates. He mistakes "many years" for eternity. Assume that his waking dreams are fulfilled, that he lives to see his purpose carried into effect, the sum of his possession is "much goods," and the utmost of their duration "many years." Let those years come and go; let him call the revel the night his new storehouses are filled, his lease after all is terminable. The last year comes round; he sits down to the last banquet. And what then? When the many years are numbered, eternity remains to be considered. If the being who reasons within himself were transient as a summer flower, if after the "many years," the ease and the revel, he dropped out of existence, then were he wise in providing for the entire term of his life; but it is an immortal mind that speaks of provision for many years. If a man received a revelation from heaven that he should live a hundred years, while he only made provision for twenty, what would worldly policy say? Yet he were wise compared with the man who, assured by voices without and within of endless existence, takes only many years into calculation. As the heart withers our horizon shrinks, and the infinite invisible ceases to lap against the vessel of the world. Even the many years exist only in the worldling's dream. The years are with God, and none of ours. What draws from heaven the withering epithet "fool" is the assumption that earthly possessions will abide with the soul, and the soul abide with earthly possessions.

"I will say to my soul" is a covenant with self. The soul is conceived as a sleeping partner, an absent relative.

The Rich Fool

The man of senses and appetites means that he will summon all that is deepest and inmost to the feast of leisure, song and wine. He defers as host to invite the unconsulted passive guest until the dream-castle is finished and the house-warming begins. The soul shall be a fellow-reveller if not a fellow-labourer. This is not the first man who has bribed his soul. We ask the soul to wait till our speculations have ripened into gold, till we have found the gate into the kingdom of society, till we take the shoes off our feet and worship the world. When evening bells ring out the worry and weariness of keeping in life or creating wealth, the soul will have its turn.

The address "Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years," will remain unspoken. The soul will be spared the unconscious irony. For what affront could equal the invitation of the immortal in man to the revels of sense? or what affront could match the proposal to dower the spiritual with the material, the undying with the transient? To stand in the fever ward and urge the patients in the fires and delirium of disease to take their ease; to call over prison walls, enjoining the convicts in their cells to enjoy social communion, life, liberty, were in comparison kind and wise. The soul that has avarice and sense-worship for fellow lodgers is sick unto death, under arrest of justice, in the grip and condemnation of consequence. Yet this sick prisoner awaiting execution is to hear lullaby through its window bars. What an invitation! Life a revel, and the highest word for a man's better self, an invitation to sink to the level of the flesh. The deification of wealth removes the crown of divinity from the soul. This rich man has unbounded confidence in the power of earthly abundance to satisfy the profoundest instincts and divinest cravings of his being. Eat, drink and be merry; as if the soul were a mere animal. Could the soul accept the invitation, take its seat at the banquet, what then? Let life become a festal hall, let revelry drown the footfall of change and death, let voluptuous joy and laughter abound—is this the place, the state wherein the soul can calmly hear the voice, "This night they demand back thy soul from thee"?

Had the dreamer finished his sketch on the blue field of the future, or was the designing brain arrested by the sudden frost of death? The brevity of the scheme, restriction of

Christ's Vision of the Kingdom of Heaven

its aim to the joy of wealth, to mindless browsing in the sultry vale of sense, might lead to the conclusion that time had not been allowed for the inclusion of colour and atmosphere, for the flash of beauty and the blending chords of friendship. Avarice which closes the heart to the spiritual may leave it open to the æsthetic and social. But the purpose of the parable requires the rich man to have answered his own question, "What shall I do?" Few and rapid as are the strokes expressing the dream of avarice, they in seed-form contain the worldly man's paradise. "Be merry" sounds the highest note in the register of self-enthronement. Let the voices of singing women drown the wail of tragedy and silence the voices of the spirit; let the daughter of Herodias dance upon the intuitions, the fears, the forebodings of the soul.

The whole parable is thrown on the canvas in broken burning lines; but the artist's hand moves swifter toward the end. The word "but" like a key closes one world and opens another. "I will say to my soul"; "But God said"; "Soul, thou hast much goods laid up"; "the things which thou hast prepared, whose shall they be?" "For many years"; "Fool, this night they require thy soul of thee." Are the words, "God said," intended to signify the Divine decree determining the rich man's time of death? Should we find in them "those unspoken words of fact which cannot be gainsaid or answered"?¹ Or do they reveal the "invisible King of heaven appearing in speech and action"?² It must be remembered that we are dealing with parabolic and not historical representation. We must, I believe, understand God speaking to the rich man in the same sense in which the rich man spoke to himself. This, the dramatic unity and force of the parable demand. The rich man's reasoning with himself need not have been spoken aloud. What was a train of thought is shaped into uttered speech, that we may be admitted into the secret workings of the avaricious mind. And so the voice of God was the voice of event; of heart disease or apoplexy or the flash and stab of the robber's knife. Parabolically the rich dreamer speaks aloud, and the decree or prescience of God assumes the form and sound of the rich man's native tongue. But when we come to the facts behind the symbols, what do we find? Great

¹ Edersheim.

² Van Oosterzee.

The Rich Fool

scheme-wrights like Warren Hastings or Cecil Rhodes revolve their plans and measures in the silent depths of thought ; and while God may give inward warning, He comes to us in the disguise of fact and event. The words, " So is he that layeth up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God," teach that the parable is but an instance—a poetic instance—of what underlies the prose of daily life.

It is the misfortune of rank and success to live in an atmosphere of adulation. The public, like a gallery hung around with flattering mirrors, deceives with servile praise. Would the rich man's neighbours, servants or friends, dare to breathe suspicion of his wisdom ? Would any of them have applied the epithet " unwise " to the agricultural magnate ? Did he not hear on all hands the changes rung on fortunate, lucky, successful, wise ? Had a letter come from heaven addressed to " The fool," he would not have taken it in. Perhaps it would have been sent to the door of some man who had left all to follow Christ. But God delivers His own message ; and names the rich dreamer by the inward, essential name, " Thou fool."

1. The summoned soul : " Foolish man, this night they demand thy life from thee." These are the fearful terms of arrest. The summons falls with awful suddenness. Without a note of warning, doom rushes down on a young, sanguine man, who gave promise of many years of carrying the world before him ; many years of luxurious leisure. While his fancy paints the majestic hall aglow with light, the spread feast, the admiring guests in their seats, death stalks up the floor, arrests the dreaming host at the head of his visionary banquet. Trench justly asks " Why not render ' This night they require thy soul of thee ' ? leaving who ' they ' are by whom this is done in the fearful obscurity of the original." Apart from its greater accuracy, this rendering deepens the awe of the situation by hinting that the night, perhaps the house, is infested by the ministers of death. While the rich man dreams of golden years, awful visitants shelter beneath his roof. Are death-angels or robbers and murderers here obliquely indicated ? It would be in harmony with the setting of the parable to infer the latter. Under cover of night the robber horde have swept down on bountiful

Christ's Vision of the Kingdom of Heaven

Esdraelon or the plain of Gennesaret and entered the rich man's abode. While he nurses the vision of many years, troops of friends, the joy of wealth, they are planning his dispatch. The dark hour arrives, the deadly blow is struck, and the homeless, surprised, awakened soul begins the pilgrimage of eternity in the night. Rudely, suddenly shattered is the dreamer's dream ; dreadful is his awaking from the trance of earth.

In the parable of Dives and Lazarus the curtain rises on the future ; here it hangs dark and impenetrable between the two worlds. Thought and eye are fixed, centred on the summoned soul, the lifeless body, the ownerless wealth—the work of a single night. But although we must pause where the Divine Teacher draws the line, the parable would be robbed of its warning if we failed to grasp the great truth, that a life whose treasures were all on earth, must find itself treasureless in eternity. Death, eternity, God, judgment, were words this man seldom heard. He heard much of profit and loss, of capital and interest, of bad debts and good debts. The summoned soul had heard of fortune in the making, of fortune amassed, realized ; of old families, good families, distinction, leisure. Often had it heard the praise of ease and affluence ; but repentance, faith, hope and holiness were words foreign to its ear. Seamen provision their ship for the voyage, an army provides for the emergencies of the march ; a man summoned to answer for his life arranges his defence ; but immortal souls who have passed through time and enter eternity without God, go out, taking nothing with them.

2. The ownerless wealth : " The things thou hast prepared, whose shall they be ? " Morning dawns on the rich man's dwelling. Labourers assemble before the gates. Workmen are here to pull down the old barns. The whole establishment is astir, little suspecting that the mainspring of the machine is broken. Stillness reigns in the master's room ; the hours pass, but his door is fast. Slaves hearken ; all is still ; they enter ; and find that their lord is dead. *He* is gone ! But the goods are left behind. What ! Has he not carried away his jewels, his silver and gold ? Went he not away arrayed in purple and fine linen ? From dead hands the robbers have removed the precious rings. A shroud is all

The Rich Fool

they wear who join the convocation of the dead. When Saladin felt that his end was come, he ordered his standard bearer to descend into the streets of Damascus carrying his winding sheet on a high pole; and crying to the people, "Lo this is all that remains of the great Saladin." An hour since, the rich man asked, What shall I do? Death has answered his question. An hour since he spoke of "my fruits, my granaries, my corn, my goods"; now the deserted wealth must advertise for an owner. Through the mansion, over the granaries and the broad fertile estate, the voices ask, Whose shall these things be?

Standing beside the cold clay, let us hear the application: "So is he that layeth up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God." He is a fool who dreams that life consists in possessing "these things"—the gifts without the Giver; who hoards that he may spend on selfish enjoyment; who leaves the soul in famine while he feasts the flesh; who builds on uncertain life and ignores inevitable death. He seeks his paradise on earth, but never enters it. He goes out of life unexpectedly, surprised and poor.

The barque of death often comes in with fortune's flood. Fame with her laurel and fate with her shears meet Moore at Corunna. Pope Clement VIII. had called Tasso to Rome. The author of "Jerusalem Delivered" was to be crowned prince of poets in the Capitol. But Tasso died on the evening preceding the coronation. And the rich man of our parable on the night when wooed by voices to rest in his earthly paradise, hears the call to the exile of eternity.

Surveying all that is left of Baalbek and Tadmor, the mind saddens to witness the consummations of human genius crumbling into dust. The lingering columns and capitals bereft of all but majesty and beauty, like fragments torn from a great poem, suggest the glory of the epic bequeathed by the master poets in stone. But if the dust of majesty and beauty softens and saddens the heart, Baalbek can awaken as deep a pathos, not by the exhibition of glory in ruin, but by an instance of arrested design. In the quarry lies a colossal block nearly seventy feet in length, hewn from the living rock to which it remains united at one end, and along its under side. We think of the mighty builder who saw this Titanic

Christ's Vision of the Kingdom of Heaven

rock slumbering in the quarry, of the hewers devoting sweaty years to shape and sever it from its parent bed, of the foundation of some future temple where it was designed to rest ; and we ask what counter force of pestilence, earthquake or war intervened to arrest a purpose so grandly self-reliant ? Thus is man buried beside his unfinished design. Blessed is he, if like Christ and Paul he has died while hewing foundations for the temple of hope and holiness. But hapless our rich man from whose dead hand falls, written in his heart's blood, a plan of futurity rich in all but God.

VI

DIVES AND LAZARUS

" Now there was a certain rich man, and he was clothed in purple and fine linen, faring sumptuously every day : and a certain beggar named Lazarus was laid at his gate, full of sores, and desiring to be fed with the crumbs that fell from the rich man's table ; yea, even the dogs came and licked his sores. And it came to pass that the beggar died, and that he was carried away by the angels into Abraham's bosom : and the rich man also died, and was buried. And in Hades he lifted up his eyes, being in torments, and seeth Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom. And he cried and said, Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus, that he may dip the tip of his finger in water, and cool my tongue ; for I am in anguish in this flame. But Abraham said, Son, remember that thou in thy lifetime receivedst thy good things, and Lazarus in like manner evil things : but now here he is comforted, and thou art in anguish. And beside all this, between us and you there is a great gulf fixed, that they who would pass from hence to you may not be able, and that none may cross over from thence to us. And he said, I pray thee therefore, father, that thou wouldest send him to my father's house ; for I have five brethren ; that he may testify unto them, lest they also come into this place of torment. But Abraham saith, They have Moses and the prophets ; let them hear them. And he said, Nay, father Abraham : but if one go to them from the dead, they will repent. And he said unto him, If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded, if one rise from the dead."—LUKE xvi. 19-31.

I

THIS is the parable of the three windows, opening one on life, one on death, and another on eternity. As from an elevation commanding infinite sweep of vision we survey the life of man ; where good and evil work side by side, where good and evil part company, and where they attain the goal of final consequence. Our view is unconfined by the horizon of time ; we discern the separation of soul and body in the valley of death, and we follow the living, remembering, thinking Dives and Lazarus to their last abodes.

The first window opens on the present world, disclosing

Christ's Vision of the Kingdom of Heaven

the perplexing problem of prosperous worldliness and suffering goodness. It is an ancient outlook. It was through this window that the writer of the book of Job surveyed the mysterious ways of God; that David gazed and pondered on the prosperity of the wicked and the afflictions of the righteous. The picture of Dives wearing Tyrian purple and snow-white linen from Egyptian field and loom—the garb of princes—would have had no application to a primitive state of society. Such a steep social gradient comes with the advance of civilization, where, as in ancient Rome, purple and rags represent the two divisions of society. While Dives and Lazarus had their originals amongst the palaces of the Pharisees in the West-end of Jerusalem, the parable finds in the modern world its fullest illustration. It confronts London in purple with London in rags; contrasts the great British landowner with the famished hind who slaves on his estates. More than all Christ's parables it cries aloud to the ages of sated materialism—when the floor of the world is cleared for the dancing in of animal delight, and the planet is cut adrift from its Creator and Saviour. The longer it lies among the furrows of time, the more it unfolds its application to succeeding ages.

Why, let us ask, have these two men sat for their portraits? Why is one drawn in luxurious splendour and the other in absolute destitution? From the days of Celsus until now, Christ has been charged with holding a brief for poverty. Is, then, His aim in this parable to preach up poverty and preach down wealth? No contention could be further from the truth. The anguish of Dives springs not from his affluence, nor the consolation of Lazarus from his penury. Dives might have transformed his gold into angel wings for flights of mercy, and Lazarus have made his hunger and his ulcers indictments against the love and mercy of God. It is quite possible that Lazarus—the Job of the New Testament—had been a man of wealth and rank, surrounded with sycophants and sated with adulation, proud of invincible strength and manly grace, and indifferent to the tragedy and sorrow of life. It may have been necessary, as with the earlier Job, to bereave him of family and friends, to strip him of mansion and estate, and to fling him into the fiery furnace of suffering, struck with

Dives and Lazarus

leprosy or other incurable malady. In destitution and suffering he may have first heard the still small voice calling him to rest in God. It is equally possible that Dives was the architect of his fortune; that his youth was distinguished for godly fear and austere endeavour. From successful trade he emerged a prince merchant, or coming into fortune by the death of a relative, he found himself the envy of ambition, with a mansion in the town and a mansion and estate in the country. With purple and snow for the body came nakedness for the soul. With the lighted hall and brilliant guests, oldest wine in service of purest gold, hired song and voluptuous dance, the soul at first ignored is soon forgotten. But there was nothing more in poverty or wealth than its owner took out of it. Lazarus, succumbing to the temptation of Satan, might have cursed God to his face; and Dives might like Abraham Lincoln have held his grand simplicity of faith and life on the giddy height of temptation. Lazarus is not set forth as an example because of his rags and sores; these were not his recommendation to the angels who carried his soul from its stricken tent, nor to the Lord who comforted him with Paradise.

Nevertheless, the fact that emphasis is laid on pomp and splendour, on luxury and magnificence only, and that the destitution and suffering of Lazarus are singled out and set over against the garish state of Dives, proves that wealth and want play a decisive part in these men's destinies. Dives is not accused of swindling, embezzlement, or extortion. He is not a publican like Zacchæus; nor is he charged with usury, drunkenness or blasphemy. If he passed through the furnace of the lower passions, there remains not the smell of fire upon him. Under the smile of fortune he may have touched the world with clean hands, and it has turned to gold. He may have been an exemplary son, an affectionate brother, an ideal husband; a man of high principle and stainless honour. It would not surprise us to learn that charm of manner, the "perfect gentleman" and the winsome personality, drew around him hosts of friends and worshippers. Who could preside over banquet or synagogue like the lord of the manor? Who like him carry dignity and weight into the deliberations of the great council? Dives was one of the "righteous,"

Christ's Vision of the Kingdom of Heaven

who caught up their robes to prevent defiling contact with the fallen, and who almost fainted when they saw Jesus welcome profligate and tax gatherer to His feet. It was godless self-seeking in the name of God, corroding avarice in the guise of unworldly holiness, that forged the gold of Dives into fetters of doom. His destiny turned upon the fact that he was a son of this present world. He and Lazarus present strong contrasts ; but at one point they meet ; each is a man of *one* world. Each has his paradise ; the rich man's paradise is of the flesh ; the paradise of Lazarus—the land of streams and shade and rest—is God.

That wealth surrounds the soul with infinite peril, the sons and daughters of our aristocracy and merchant princes can testify. When a man has health and leisure, when the banquet tempts his appetite, music ministers to his ear, and art to inward and outward eye ; when there is no demand for action or self-denial, when flattered by beauty and intoxicated by power, when enchanted air soothes the senses and lulls the soul—he becomes deaf to moral voices, blind to the sorrow and tragedy of life ; his world seems too good to think of another ; and at last he shuts the door on the face of religion and God. Dives, exulting in physical health and animal spirits, had shut himself in with enjoyment and mirth, with banquets and brilliance, with gaiety and indifference ; but he had excluded all the stern, imperative facts of the universe ; faith, accountability, death, judgment and God. How could he whose eyes were dazzled with the blaze of rank and beauty, with the blandishments of human glory spare a glimpse for Lazarus ? Could feelings so delicate, so refined, survive the sight of the leprous beggar, the scarred repellent wreck amongst the pariah dogs ? If Lazarus was allowed to lie at the rich man's gate, it was because Dives could give him a wide berth, or regard him as advertizing the great man's beneficence.

Sore-covered Lazarus was God's challenge to the pampered reveller ; he was opportunity undisguised. Every rag on his frame announced a divine occasion for the imitation of the infinite love and compassion of God. The beggar's presence was intended to remind Dives that the sea of tragedy was beating and moaning around his mansion ; that it was high

Dives and Lazarus

time to cease dancing to doom, and to begin faith in God and the brotherhood of man.

More realism than these immortal and inseparable portraits convey was never achieved on so limited a canvas; and this arresting realism attains its culmination in the life-infusing touch, "yea, even the dogs came and licked his sores." Are we to understand a contrast between animal sympathy and the rich man's inhumanity? Is the action of the dogs cited to shame and condemn the merry reveller? Or does it portray in throbbing lines the presence of physical collapse and the absence of power to drive the intruders away? If compelled to choose between the two alternatives I would accept the second. Doubtless the dogs' soft moist tongues would soothe the sufferer's fiery ulcers; but we must remember that Lazarus was a Jew, who, far from viewing the dog as the friend and companion of man, the sharer of his hearth and often the last and truest mourner at his grave, would regard the intrusion of the mangy scavengers—always unclean in Oriental eyes—with the loathing revulsion a Brahmin may be supposed to feel at the touch and odour of a butcher. And his inability to drive the dogs away would add mental horror to physical revulsion. But the words are open to another interpretation, as little strained and more qualified to condemn inhuman neglect. The mention of the dogs licking the beggar's sores proves the exposure, the visibility of those unhealing wounds. Dives is drawn with two strokes; his sumptuous fare and princely apparel; with two strokes the beggar also is depicted; what falls from the great man's table his only food, his only clothing nakedness and sores. While the exposure of open sores to dust and sun would aggravate their pain, it wrote "misery" in letters that Dives could not fail to read. Lazarus is dumb; so indeed in this life is Dives. In silence and hunger the beggar awaited the crumbs, which he seems to have received. The wasted, ulcer-riddled frame, the hollow cheek and sunken eye were misery's advocate. Those who carried the sufferer to the rich man's gate unconsciously fulfilled God's design, which was to confront fortune with famine, to burn the image of Lazarus on the outward and inward eye of Dives. Dives saw and remembered. In eternity the name and aspect of

Christ's Vision of the Kingdom of Heaven

Lazarus were familiar. Abraham assumes a thorough acquaintance with the earthly tribulation of the beggar, when misfortune lay without the mansion and fortune caroused within : " Child, remember that thou in thy lifetime receivest thy good things, and Lazarus in like manner evil things." The freedom of the prowling dogs to surround the sufferer with unwelcome attentions, points to the absence of love amongst his social equals. With the beggar bending on his staff we often see some pensive child guiding his steps and sharing his fate. But at the rich man's outer door lingered no pensive boy, no angel in disguise of threadbare womanhood ; no guardian staff was raised to hold the dogs at bay. The neighbours who in the morning bore in haste, and with relief cast down their burden at the gate, and whose shadow is not allowed even obliquely to dim the page, might have engaged our sympathy, had not their manner of easing themselves of their repellent load suggested what their absence from the scene before the gate confirms—that Lazarus was in their way. But relief was nigh : " It came to pass that the beggar died."

This is the window on the river ; the outlook on the nearer shore of earth and the further shore of eternity. Death comes first to Lazarus. Of all the angels who ministered to the sufferer, none was fairer or tenderer than the messenger who struck the tent of flesh ; who said of the inner Lazarus, Loose him and let him go. Death plays many parts ; invader, deliverer, divider, revealer, and comforter. Like a burglar he enters the halls of emperors and kings. He levels the distinctions of earth. He fills with dust the gulf of social inequalities ; and discrowns the brows that wore burning gem or piercing thorn.

To Lazarus death came as the deliverer. Lazarus has uttered no word. In this respect he differs from Job. He neither bemoans his misfortune nor inveighs against providence. In the fires he is silent. In silence meet silent sufferer and silent death. We speak of men meeting death. Had we a full view of the moment when dissolution confronted these two men, we should see death welcomed by Lazarus as the poor man's friend, the saint's good Samaritan ; while Dives hides from the august king of terrors.

Dives and Lazarus

Where was the place of meeting? Did the beggar breathe out his soul at the rich man's gate? If so, the menial who carried the crumbs from the banquet table came with the dole of charity, but Lazarus made no response. His eyes had closed on time; the lines had vanished from his face; the expression of suffering had given way to peace; the rags throbbed no more with the stab of pain. Lazarus hungered no more; death had made him independent. While the great house rang with flying feet and blazed with Tyrian purple and burning gem, the angels were at the frowning gate. They came and went, and the revellers knew it not.

Or had Lazarus been carried to his nightly lair, when death came to his release? There on the humid ground he lies in his roofless shed. That is his dying couch. He is alone. The last combat is ever a duel without seconds. The night winds sigh and moan as he sinks deep and deeper in the river. The poor man's cabin is dark and not dark. Faith and hope and resignation are there. Lazarus is glad that the endless days and wearisome nights are over. The shed is full of silent witnesses. The angel convoy are there.

Life is full of death the invader. The creator of wealth is a martyr to hard work. His family see him during a brief space on Sunday only. He is always pursuing, mapping, planning, speculating. Yet he dreams of some day throwing off the yoke of trade or commerce. He lives in hope of retirement amongst his trees, his books and pictures. At sunset it shall be rest. But while he dreams death is at the door. What sight more common than a great mansion with a history. The local gossip or antiquarian will recite the story. The rich man had made his fortune; his wife and family yearned for high connection and social distinction. So he began to build the great house; and all went well. The longed-for day of entrance drew near. But one never entered. He was the owner. Death invaded his dream before the last act of the drama began.

The sudden invasion by death of earthly glory receives lurid illustration in his summons to Herod Agrippa. Herod, according to Josephus, was at Cæsarea exhibiting shows in honour of Cæsar. Arrayed in a robe of silver he entered the theatre with the rushing dawn. The rising sun, reflected

Christ's Vision of the Kingdom of Heaven

from his silver mail, flashed back a sudden, blinding splendour. His flatterers, deep in superstition as in fawning, exclaimed that they behold a god. Herod looked up. An owl sat overhead. It was an omen of doom. He was immediately smitten with mortal pain. "I, whom you call immortal," he exclaimed, "am immediately to be hurried away by death."

And thus the summons may have come to Dives. Perhaps it came on the night succeeding his election to the great Council ; or on his return from Rome where he had established his claim to an ancient crown. In the flush of imperial favour he had made a royal banquet, for his chair had now become a throne. His former peers, now his subjects, vied in homage and adulation. When wine quickened every pulse, and incense rose from every tongue, the brow but newly crowned bent low and the cup fell from the sceptred hand. And death presided at the feast. Or, it may be, death became the rich man's guest ; sat down by his bedside and watched the transference of his own hollow eyes and fleshless cheek to the anguished Dives. He strips the rich man of his purple and his health to wear it, of his fortune, his mansion and his flesh. He evicts the soul from earthly glory, not even leaving rags to cover the ulcers of its sin.

The rich man also died and was buried. For Lazarus earth had no funeral. After life's long disease the riven tent would be flung into the nearest pit, or cast forth with the offscouring of the streets. How often God buries in obscurity and silence the greatest and holiest of our kind : Moses on Nebo, Aaron on Hor, Livingstone in the African forest, and the Redeemer of the world, with the deepening shadows for His pall, in the privacy of Joseph's tomb.

Had Dives lived and died in Britain, his fall would have eclipsed the gaiety of clubs and fashion, and drawn from priest and scribe venal tears. Acolytes of mammon would have sung his lavish hospitality, and pointed to subscription lists where the name of Dives kept lords and princes company. Had he added to his other virtues the lust of killing something, men and women whose ideal delight is to hunt to horrible death the timid deer or gentle hare, would have deplored his disappearance from the chase ; and his epitaph might have read : His engaging manners had their rise in a gentle heart,

Dives and Lazarus

in which met all the virtues and none of the vices. His great fortune was the least of his wealth; he was rich in the devotion of innumerable friends. He never made an enemy.

Lazarus falls asleep on the bosom of the angel who carries him to Paradise; Dives awakes "from his flattering dream of self-enjoyment to the stern and terrible realities of eternity." The two men have exchanged fortunes. Dives begs for a drop of cold water, supplicates the great tribe-father for mercy; death, the herald, has called Lazarus to the banquet in Paradise, where, occupying the seat of honour, he reclines on Abraham's breast. We must think of him as wearing the wedding robe over a nature in which there is no pain and no death. He is the spiritual Dives, the rich man, the heir of God. The angels have borne him from world to world; the blessed are his fellow guests. The two men once so near, inhabitants of the same planet, members of the same race, contemporaries, neighbours, are infinitely separated; he "seeth Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom."

Had Christ's purpose been to shed new light on the state of the dead, he would have made the revelation to His apostles apart from the crowd, or to the most susceptible of their number, just as He had chosen the inner three to witness the glory of His transfiguration. His profound humanity must, in accordance with human instincts, have responded to the receptivity of His audience. If His hearers were sympathetic His holy soul would unfold its glory. He was at home on the holy mount, in the presence of His brethren the prophets, His fellow citizens, who alone could share His forelook on Calvary. When surrounded by soaring scorn and heart blindness, even His wonder-working power flowed back upon its source. There was no communication for the transference of Himself into other selves. "He did not many mighty works there because of their unbelief." What inspired speaker or singer has not felt his soul give up its treasures in the enchanted air of community of spirit? While song or eloquence froze at its source in the presence of soulless animalism or frigid shallowness.

The apostles, it is true, were present. But instead of the air being electric with the sighs of the seeker, the learner, the worshipper, it was laden with Pharisaism. Avarice, scepticism,

Christ's Vision of the Kingdom of Heaven

pretence were being unmasked, and they in return, flinging aside all disguise, stood to arms with bitter scorn and hot resentment.

In such circumstances fuller light on the future life of man would have been out of place. The dawn is for the living not for the dead. If, therefore, Jesus was led to extend His parable beyond the frontier of time, it was not to enlarge the area of the human outlook, but to react on the conduct of life. It was to afford the barren fig tree of Pharisaism room to expand, and time to ripen its fruit. It was to carry the Pharisaic spirit into its inevitable issues ; to give a stage of two worlds in which to evolve and judge itself. Hades, as here painted, is no emanation of the Christian genius. *It is Jewish in every feature.* Dives and Lazarus are two Jews in two Jewish worlds. Abraham is the fountain of the race in the land they left behind, and the president of the banquet in the land to which Lazarus has attained.

Jesus had defended the repentant publicans and profligates whom the Pharisees despised ; now He defends the poor whom they ignored. To Dives, the sublimated genius of their sect, Lazarus was nobody. Jesus had assailed the worship of their virtues ; He now exposes their aristocratic assumption. They were given to think that publicans and sinners had no standing in Israel ; their boasted descent from Abraham He proves to be a foundation of quicksand. Dives in torment is an acknowledged son of " father Abraham."

Dives lived as if the drama of life were composed of two acts only—living and dying—when the curtain fell. The sting of his supplication to Abraham to send Lazarus to warn his five brethren is that, although they had Moses and the prophets, they did not believe them. Neither had Dives believed his own creed. The necessary inference is, that Jesus was not the first or only prophet whose report had encountered unbelief. Jesus brought the first and last acts in the drama of life together ; showed that when the curtain falls on the second it rises on the third ; that from world to world and for ever and ever, we are pursued, haunted by ourselves. He showed that the heart is the man ; that when the heart has no room for God or man here, it finds no place with the just hereafter.

Dives and Lazarus

The world beyond the grave required to be so far unveiled as to disclose the goals to which wealth-worship and godliness inevitably lead. The invisible, however, must find expression in familiar symbols. The portraiture must appeal to Jewish thought and hope. But this concession affects the form and not the substance of the revelation. Stripped of Jewish garb and parabolic presentation, the land of glory and the penal world are found beneath consolation in Abraham's bosom, and torment in Hades. As the part of the parable peculiar to earth conveys its lessons in symbols, so does the part stretching into the invisible world. The first part is a parable of self-seeking and sainthood in the making; the second, a parable of self-seeking and sainthood on their arrival at finality.

In Jewish terms and under Rabbinic colouring, Jesus has driven home His lessons and warnings. He has laid bare the foundation fact—the continuance of life after death; He has thrown into bold relief the persistent individuality of character; He has shown that spiritual conditions determine destiny; and brought to light the immortality of what should have been. He has taught all time that self-conquest is the way to eternal life; that temporal wrong to our fellow men is eternal wrong to ourselves. He has burned into the texture of human thought the picture of mammon rocking the soul to sleep in a cradle of gold; of death arousing the sleeper and leaving the cradle empty. He has made the truth that self-indulgence is hell blaze through its wrappings of Oriental imagery. He has written on the flags where Lazarus lay, "Wouldst thou understand the ways of God, look forward." He has inscribed on the castle of indolence, left silent and empty by Dives, "He possessed all, he kept all, he lost all."

II

The Divine Speaker requests us to look through the window that opens on eternity. From this view-point we can form an estimate of the limitations of death. We can more fully conceive the extent of his power and the boundaries of his reign.

Here, after death, are Abraham, Dives and Lazarus. The

Christ's Vision of the Kingdom of Heaven

worldling survives, the sufferer has triumphed. Death may deliver Stephen and Lazarus, may reveal worth and console anguish, separate the just from the unjust, the worldly soul from its embodiment ; but he makes the good no better and the bad no worse ; he exercises no power over the quenchless mind ; he leaves identity unchanged and memory unimpaired. The soul retains its capacity for joy or anguish. To the good and to the bad, death is a mental resurrection. It murders sleep of thought. It summons to sight and hearing and consciousness. It strikes every chord of being into endless vibration.

Dives has awaked from his life-long slumber. He is earnest at last. No longer an Epicurean or cynic, he smiles at immortality no more. In time he was a man of song and laughter. He had salutations for his equals and commands for his vassals. He praised wine and flattered beauty. But no man ever knew that he possessed a soul, or heard him address one sentence to God or Lazarus. Now he cries, " Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus that he may dip the tip of his finger in water, and cool my tongue ; for I am in anguish in this flame." Now his sole cry is the cry of his soul. It is the cry of a soul that knows all, sees all, feels all ; of one who had all of earth, who kept all of earth, and lost all of earth. For such a cry we have not ears. No imagination can conceive its accent of forsakenness and desolation.

But it arises from a wrong world. He who knew what touched the deepest chords in heaven, has assured us that there is joy in the presence of the angels over one sinner that repenteth. Behold he prayeth, is the heavenly announcement of a great event on earth. Behold he prayeth, when affirmed of Saul of Tarsus, was sweetest music in the ear of redeeming love. But when a man ceases to be a citizen of time, when he drifts into the night that follows the day of grace, his prayer may mean no more than a cry of pain or despair.

Earth is the land of prayer. Earth is Gethsemane ; earth is Calvary. Seen from the throne, these are the battle field of the universe. From these prayer ascends for ever. In virtue of what the Son of God accomplished here, the cry of every contrite penitent, the moan of every broken heart, is

Dives and Lazarus

heard on high. But earth has drifted from beneath the rich man's feet. In Hades from which he lifts his eyes, the cross is a land-mark no more.

It is a suggestive comment on the rich man's state of heart that in eternity as in time he appears to forget or ignore the existence of God. His imploring appeal is addressed to Abraham. A continuance of self-worship has emptied the heart and the universe of their chief Citizen. "He seeth Abraham afar off and Lazarus in his bosom." The welcome guest in great men's halls, the president of a hundred banquets, views the province of Paradise in Hades—and sees the thronging guests in the infinite abode of blessedness. Hades and Sheol have the same significance; both meaning a place of thick darkness; where the shades of the dead are gathered together. Job calls it the "land of darkness and the shadow of death; a land of thick darkness as darkness itself."¹ And the Psalmist affirms, "For in death there is no remembrance of thee; in Sheol who shall give thee thanks?"² It does not seem certain that the outlook of these passages extends beyond the grave. The beginning and development of immortal hope, the change of view-point from regarding the gate into the grave, to the recognition of a gate leading out of the grave into a state of disembodied souls, is very dimly traced in the Old Testament. But from the day when a great poet wrote the sixth Psalm, and a greater poet sang of the man of Uz, to the era of Jesus, the Hebrew mind had made this great advance. But it had gone further. It had divided Hades or Sheol, the aggregate assemblage of the dead, into two provinces; Hades, or Gehenna, the prison of the wicked, and Paradise the abode of the righteous. The wicked went into punishment and the just into blessed rest. These states lay close to each other. Jesus has separated them by "a great gulf fixed," signifying the infinite interspace between good and evil in their final issues. This is the only feature in the lurid picture differing from the Jewish conceptions of the time.

It was across this chasm of moral separateness, from amidst the thick darkness, to Abraham afar off, that Dives addressed his prayer. His is the only instance known to Scripture of the invocation of saints; and that invocation was in vain.

¹ Job x. 21, 22.

² Psalm vi. 5.

Christ's Vision of the Kingdom of Heaven

" Abraham said, Son, remember that thou in thy lifetime receivedst thy good things, and Lazarus in like manner evil things ; but now here he is comforted, and thou art in anguish. And beside all this, between us and you there is a great gulf fixed, that they which would pass from hence to you may not be able, and that none may cross over from thence to us."

It is obvious that Hades, from which Dives " lifted up his eyes, being in torments," is not purgatory. Purgatory is held by Roman Catholicism to be a place of cleansing by penal fire, through which all souls must pass that enter heaven. But (1) Lazarus did not pass through this fire on his way to Abraham's bosom. (2) Had the flame and the anguish been remedial, Abraham would surely have reminded Dives that his torment would come to an end ; that a gate opened from Hades to the place of blessed rest. But he, on the contrary, establishes the impossibility of the dwellers on either shore of the great fixed gulf, crossing to the opposite side. And Dives, acquiescing in the impossible, turns from the thought of his own anguish to the peril of those he has left behind on earth. If Lazarus cannot carry water to Hades, surely he can carry warning to Jerusalem. " And he said, I pray thee therefore, father, that thou wouldest send him to my father's house ; for I have five brethren ; that he may testify unto them, lest they also come into this place of torment. But Abraham saith, They have Moses and the prophets ; let them hear them."

Hades and home ! What an infinite distance between these two points ! Yet are they closely and fearfully connected ; connected by the great downgrade highway to doom ; and connected inseparably in the mind of Dives.

A home mission proposed in Hades ! A mission to his father's house ! A mission of which Lazarus is to be the missionary ! This is passing strange ; that a Jewish family, a family of Pharisees who could boast of synagogue and temple, priest and law, should need the visitation of a dead beggar, a preacher from eternity !

Dives would send Lazarus up the line on which his five brothers are travelling to their doom. He would assign no limits to the plainness, the directness, the urgency of the warning. Be particular, be earnest, he would say. Cry aloud,

Dives and Lazarus

Speak in the accent of eternity. Warn them by their lost brother. Paint him as he is. Warn them that they come not here. Have no eyes for their mansions, for their rank, their luxury and splendour. Have eyes only for their souls and their peril.

The rich man's dread of re-union, of meeting his brothers again, of ever seeing their faces, is pathetic beyond measure. The pang of parting is amongst the bitterest that wring the heart; when the members of the household go their ways over the world, or when some of their number cross the silent river. The heart yearns for re-union; for meeting on some coming hour. But this passion has died out of the rich man's heart. He would be alone in his torment; he would have a great gulf fixed between him and his brethren; he would burn the bridges behind him.

He travelled in the sleeping car on the downgrade rail; and like many other travellers dreamed as he descended. He failed to discern the sternness and gravity of life; he fancied he was resting when drifting; conceived of merry years as rounded by a sleep, and discovered that death is resurrection. In the supernatural and invisible he had no faith. For him there was no other world. For Moses and the prophets he had no ear. Faith and repentance, the way to the kingdom of heaven, became an article of his creed when too late. Death teaches much. Death demonstrated the spirituality, the majesty of man's nature; the immortality of human deeds. We carry from earth our evil and the spark that sets the pile on fire.

This man of the world, this popular citizen, considered that he knew the world. The other world he left to other men; but on this he was an authority. What was there within the four corners of life that he did not know? Yet he had never heard the message of Moses and the prophets. It had never dawned upon his mind that these great spiritual guides had more concern with blessedness and misery, with life and death, than all the world besides.

Dives sees his brothers travelling on the line by which he travelled; sleeping in the dream-car in which he slept; and he thinks, O that they knew whither they are going! If only they could be warned! If a messenger who has been

Christ's Vision of the Kingdom of Heaven

behind the veil could visit them. If Lazarus whom they have seen and known should go to them from the dead, they would repent. I heard John the Baptist wake the desert with the clarion of repentance ; I trembled and I forgot. I wrapped around me the mantle of our father Abraham and slept. Now I see and feel the imperative necessity of repentance, the essential, central greatness of the sackcloth and ashes of the soul. I see that the kingdom opens its gate only to the heart that weeps tears of blood.

This dead man's prayer has an echo in our human feeling. (1) Because of its humanity. Dives must have known many companions and associates who were following him to Hades ; yet he intercedes on behalf of his brothers only. The pathetic human concern for his father's house has furnished some great minds with an argument for the final restoration of such natures. The argument being that only souls who are lost to all good can be permanently lost to God ; but since Dives evinces a human concern for his brothers, he cannot be regarded as hopelessly lost. Those who cherish this opinion, say that after ages of anguish, such souls come forth purified by fiery discipline.

(2) The dead man's prayer has an echo in our hearts, because we cherish a hankering belief that, if messengers from the dead came to our world, we also should believe and repent. How often do we find our hearts assenting to the dead man's plea, "Nay, father Abraham, but if one go to them from the dead they will repent."

Dives' prayer has been answered in a way he did not anticipate. Christ has risen from the dead, but His resurrection has neither led Jewry nor Christendom to repentance. When Dives asks that a messenger from the dead may warn his brothers, he forgets that they have been warned already, that the danger signals have been raised, and that they are setting those signals at nought, as he set them at nought.

"But now here he is comforted." These are words of eternity ; the passing bell of mortal sorrow ; the first note of eternal joy. The angels have held their last watch around the dying Lazarus ; have left the light of their glory on his dead face ; have carried his ransomed soul into the presence of the King.

Dives and Lazarus

These words announce a great result. A human soul consoled fully and for ever is a glorious issue. But who is comforted? It is Lazarus of the gate who rests in Abraham's bosom. But what is his consolation? He has the comfort of release. He was full of sores. The motherly hand that might have soothed his pain was cold in the dust; the wild Eastern dogs were his physicians. Night that brings repose to other men, brought none to him. The sun rose and set on his suffering. He lived unheeded and died unhealed. But when he awoke immortal he discovered that he had been made perfectly whole. The body with its sores and fires was as far removed from Lazarus as East from West. Perhaps the angels left it at the rich man's gate when they bore Lazarus away to Paradise. To many a suffering saint this is a blessed gospel: release will come; death will be healing.

But Lazarus came into the place of consolation. On earth he lay at the great man's gate. Wealth and beauty passed him day by day; he saw the mansion from the outside; but in its interior he had no place. Amongst its inmates he had no friends; in its luxury and repose no share. His place was at the gate. The toiler had his hearth; Lazarus had the pavement and the night. Death at length opened a door into a diviner palace; the angels ushered him into the assembly of those who feast. He obtained fatherhood at last. With unspeakable surprise the outcast and friendless found himself enfolded in the arms of love; the forgotten discovered that he was remembered.

Want had ceased, possession begun. Yesterday he begged, to-day he is satisfied; yesterday he seized in wasted hands the fragments swept off the rich man's floor; to-day he eats the fruit of the tree of life; yesterday he drank the cup of cold water conveyed by the hand of colder charity; now his supply is the river of water of life.

Along what lines has the sufferer come to comfort? The ship now in port sleeps with folded wing, in still waters; but what of the voyage? The temple is complete, but what of the building? This soul reclining at the festal board has a history. It has come to immortality through great suffering. Lazarus has had his Gethsemane and his Calvary. God denied him all round. Had the sufferer no yearnings

Christ's Vision of the Kingdom of Heaven

after peace and home and human sympathy? Did not he pray for recovery, for cessation of pain, for some human voice to soothe his grief? The answer never came. Nay, heaven on principle denied him all that makes life sweet: bread and raiment, friends and home, and a sanitary tent for the mind. Yet even denial was one of his ministering angels.

But another angel came. To Dives also came the messenger. Dives saw and shuddered, for to him death was crowned with terror. While as servant he disrobed Lazarus, clothed him with the house from heaven and led him into the rest, the presence, the vision of God. Of all consolers God is gentlest. Never was voice of mother singing lullaby to her dying child so tender as the voice of God when He comforts the mourners in Zion, and wipes away the tears and smooths the furrows of mortal pain.

When was Lazarus comforted? After the close of this life; but not till then. If, however, consolation came not before, it came immediately after death. Did light arise upon the weary eyes in the last conflict? Did the closing eye discern the waiting angels? Or did they stand in the dark behind the angel of death? This we know: when the mortal chain was broken, white wings bore the white soul to everlasting rest. The rest was waiting; the gate was open; the cup of blessedness was full. Then and then only, was the sufferer prepared for consolation.

Lazarus at the gate of Dives and Lazarus at the banquet in Paradise seem two different men. There is the strongest contrast between the destitution and suffering of the one life and the blessedness of the other. There seemed no connection between hunger and homelessness, and the glorious banquet of satisfied yearnings and attained ideals. God's sketch plan of life is wide, and part of it lies out of sight.

VII

THE TEN VIRGINS

"Then shall the kingdom of heaven be likened unto ten virgins, who took their lamps, and went forth to meet the bridegroom. And five of them were foolish, and five were wise. For the foolish, when they took their lamps, took no oil with them : but the wise took oil in their vessels with their lamps. Now while the bridegroom tarried, they all slumbered and slept. But at midnight there is a cry, Behold, the bridegroom ! Come ye forth to meet him. Then all those virgins arose, and trimmed their lamps. And the foolish said unto the wise, Give us of your oil ; for our lamps are going out. But the wise answered, saying, Peradventure there will not be enough for us and you : go ye rather to them that sell, and buy for yourselves. And while they went away to buy, the bridegroom came : and they that were ready went in with him to the marriage feast : and 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. Watch therefore, for ye know not the day nor the hour."—**MATT. XXV. 1-13.**

I

As Jesus left the temple for the last time, one of His disciples exclaimed, "Master, behold, what manner of stones and what manner of buildings ! And Jesus said unto him, Seest thou these great buildings ? There shall not be left here one stone upon another which shall not be thrown down."¹ The prediction read over the temple's ashes, the mind easily accepts ; but to the Galilean peasant surveying the stupendous pile, much of it modern, all of it sublime, with Herod's workmen swarming around its columns and towers, it would seem impossible for the temple to perish and the world to remain. While Jesus and His disciples crossed the Kedron and climbed the ascent of Olivet, a ferment of speculation stirred the minds of His followers, and the sound of the falling temple drowned the bleat of lambs, and the low of oxen, and the tumult of the pilgrim hosts assembling for the Passover. "And as he sat on the mount of Olives over against the temple, Peter

¹ **Mark xiii. 1, 2.**

Christ's Vision of the Kingdom of Heaven

and James and John and Andrew asked him privately, Tell us, when shall these things be? and what shall be the sign when these things are all about to be accomplished? "x

In His reply, Jesus draws on the foreground the falling temple and city, and on the background the end of the world. With the destruction of Jerusalem His second coming begins; with the last judgment closes the assize which opened when Titus raised the Roman eagles on Scopus and Olivet.

In answer to the question *when*, Jesus, according to Matthew, uses the word *then* fifteen times. In each instance where "then" is employed it introduces some new point of view in the widening perspective of events. Where, as the first word of the parable of the Ten Virgins, it summons the eye to the vision of judgment, it occurs for the tenth time. Here it is more than emphatic; it indicates the distance and elevation of that last verge of time from which we are called to survey Christ's final appearing: a vision of the operation of principles, running through the interval between the hour when the parable was spoken and the end.

This parable, like many others, was doubtless in its essential features often witnessed in the social life of Nazareth. Even more than most scenes and customs on which the parables are founded, would the village marriage engage and fascinate the boy who looked out from Joseph's workshop. The young bride leaving her father's house, her white robed companions, the joyful procession, the torches moving against the background of night, the bridegroom leading the bride and her happy train into the marriage feast, compose a scene of deep human interest. In actual life that interest centred around bride and bridegroom; here, the bride has no visible place; she leads not her virgins from her father's house; distinct from her maids and yet in their company, she is not seen entering the house of the bridegroom. The reason is, that apart from her maids she has no existence; for in accordance with the requirements of the parable the bridesmaids are the bride; just as the guests at the marriage supper of the king's son are the bride.

Before entering on the exposition, it will be necessary to ascertain the extent and application of the parable. That

^x Mark xiii. 3, 4.

The Ten Virgins

it is a parable of judgment is agreed on all hands. More, it is a parable of final but not of universal judgment. Its vision of judgment is universal as far as the kingdom of heaven is concerned; but as the judgment of the world is not under consideration, that judgment is held out of sight. Here many questions naturally and legitimately present themselves. Does the horizon of this majestic parable enclose the entire visible church on earth? nay more, the professing and secret disciples of Jesus? Are the virgins the professing Christians of the last age only? or of that and all preceding Christian ages? Is the parable, in other words, a continuous inner view of the kingdom of heaven from the age of the apostles to the closing of the gospel door? Does the vision of the virgin procession in the night, stand for a section of visible Christianity in the last age? Is it a panel setting forth the last march of the whole professing host? or should the parable of the Virgins and the parable of the Talents be held as companion panels presenting two aspects of the judgment of avowed disciples?

1. The principles moving behind the events of the great marriage night pervade Christian time. The virgins are ever taking their lamps; ever slumbering and sleeping; ever arising to trim their lamps; ever entering the marriage feast. The bridegroom ever tarries, ever comes. The judgment is one. Virgins in exterior are awaking to discover that their lamps are going out; that there is a fatal emptiness of heart: then ensue panic and separation. Were the veil removed, perhaps any day would reveal the lighted procession, the closing door, the dead lamps and the midnight quest of oil. But the last day makes all men contemporary with the virgins of the parable, and spectators of the bridegroom's appearing. Besides, the parable seems to indicate a set of circumstances which, although in degree present in all Christian ages, receive distinctive emphasis in the last.

2. We should see in the Ten Virgins and the Talents two aspects of the kingdom of heaven; devotion and service; contemplation turning to an absent Lord, and faith discerning His presence in His interests. One exhibiting more the personal element in the soul's quest, the other stewardship in God's house of life.

Christ's Vision of the Kingdom of Heaven

The opening words, "then shall the kingdom of heaven be likened unto ten virgins, which took their lamps and went forth to meet the bridegroom," determine the subject to be unfolded. It is not the church, but the kingdom of heaven. The church as a professing fellowship comes doubtless into view in the company of lightbearers; but the kingdom is both wider and narrower than the church; wider because it includes all true believers, and narrower because it excludes all untrue believers. Attention is fixed on the kingdom at last separating itself and emerging from the alloy of disguised worldliness. The kingdom then appears in a new light and enters upon a new experience.

The division of the bridal party into two equal groups must not be taken as implying that only half of those who profess Christian discipleship will be saved. Had the ten been divided say into six and four, or seven and three, the numbers might well have suggested proportional reference; but the division into five and five fixes attention on the line of separation. No doctrinal significance should be imported into the designation "virgin"; that is, the unmarried estate of the ten should not be carried into the interpretation. As showing that the name in this connection bears no spiritual value, it is applied to the imprudent five after they went to buy and after the door was shut. Had it been the custom for matrons to act as bridesmaids, the parable would have conveyed precisely the same meaning.

In verse 1, the virgins "went forth to meet the bridegroom"; in verse 6, there is a cry, "Behold, the bridegroom! Come ye forth to meet him." The first impression these verses convey is that the virgins went forth to meet the bridegroom before sleep and again went forth after sleep. Taking each her own lamp and going forth signifies, we are reminded, the beginning of the Christian life, while the second departure represents its close. The first step is out of the world into the kingdom of heaven; when the virgins like Bunyan's pilgrim leave the city of destruction behind; the last momentous exodus is out of time into eternity, out of the flesh into the spirit. But all these vital lessons flow as naturally from one departure as from two. I believe the statement in the first verse signifies the virgins' engagement to meet

The Ten Virgins

the bridegroom, and is "a preliminary description of the great event of the parable."¹ The response to the midnight cry is the fulfilment of the covenant. In accordance with this view, however, all the harvest of application finds place in the virgins lighting their lamps at home and bending their steps toward the abode of the bride.

If we assume that the bridal company took their lamps and went forth and falling asleep by the way were aroused by the cry, "Behold, the bridegroom!" we must supply a halting place. But what are we to make of this half-way house in the interpretation? If a point between the house of the bride and the abode of the bridegroom, it is without analogy and without significance. The force of these questions will appear if we consider: 1. That the virgins are the bride—ten, the kingdom of heaven in its visible totality; five, that kingdom in its sifted essential form. 2. The spiritual bride, symbolized by the virgins, only leaves her dwelling at death or immediate transformation. 3. The call to meet the bridegroom is the summons of death or the occasion of instant bodily change. 4. Filling the oil-vessel and kindling the furnished lamp, signify the first inflow of Divine life in the soul and its outflow in Christian service. Going forth to meet the bridegroom is the end of the Christian career.

The virgins taking "their own lamps," suggests rather than describes the scene of individual choice and action, preceding the formation of their bridal company. Of their own free will the companions of the bride prepared themselves in their father's house for the part they were to sustain. There, they provided lamps, oil-flasks and oil; from hence began their journey. There, too, arose the distinction between wise and unwise. Separately and inwardly they fall into two classes, before in outward uniformity they assemble at the house of the bride. If not in custom yet in spiritual significance, the lamps were lighted separately at home. They all knew the requirement of light, for it was night; and of festal attire, for it was the night of the marriage feast. Their separate lights moving toward one centre, rather than the procession from that centre, to meet the bridegroom is the pilgrimage of the Christian life. Here

¹ Lange.

Christ's Vision of the Kingdom of Heaven

begins the life, the spiritual virginity of the soul. The choices and decisions that determine our future lie near the beginnings of life ; and omission may be more ruinous than commission.

The lamps borne aloft, rendered their bearers conspicuous. If the virgins belonged to the same village, they would arouse the interest of the little republic. The flash of their white attire, their lamp fires floating like white lilies on the dark lake of night, the lights converging in front of the bride's dwelling, rendered their action and themselves public. Still more arresting would be the lights if borne over a wide district to their tryst at the bride's abode. The lamps are mentioned first, not on account of their primary significance, but from the fact that they belonged in common to the ten ; they draw the public eye on themselves and their bearers. They assert an important place in the bridal pageant and in the interpretation ; but if we invest them with unwarranted significance, we distort and dislocate the proportion of the parable. I cannot believe with Alford that the " whole lesson of the parable turns upon them."¹ This false emphasis arises :
1. From Alford's view of the efficacy of the sacraments.
2. From giving a subjective signification to the burning lamps. " Those," he declares, " who are baptized, those who have confirmed the vow of their baptism, may be said to have taken their lamps. They have taken their souls in hand." Had the virgins, in the act of taking their lamps, " taken their souls in hand," had " a light been kindled within them," surely the end of the unwise would have been different. However we may account for the fire that kindled their lamps, and for the oil that temporarily fed them, we must regard the lamps as external, the symbol of an open avowal of Christian discipleship. But on no account must the lamp and its flame, which are effects, assume the place of the oil in the vessel, which is a cause. With profound truth may each virgin be described as taking her own lamp, perhaps the present of a proud father, or an heirloom that had twinkled through many a Galilean night. Every soul going forth to meet the Bridegroom carries, like the stream, the impregnation of its source.

The ten have many points of agreement ; they are all young ;

¹ *The Coming of the Bridegroom.*

The Ten Virgins

they are all friends and companions of the bride ; they are alike in apparel ; they all take their own lamps, and all light them ; all wait and all sleep ; all spring to their feet and trim their lamps. The name " virgin " is common to all. But there is one fundamental distinction ; " the foolish when they took their lamps, took no oil with them ; but the wise took oil in their vessels with their lamps." They either left the oil-flasks behind or carried them empty. The language implies that oil was as obtainable as lamps. Had their lack of oil arisen from dearth, the imprudent would have been unfortunate, but not unwise. *On this point of difference, on the presence or absence of oil, the entire meaning of the parable turns.* Here, we pass from the visible to the invisible, from the accidental to the essential. Their burning lamps failed to make the foolish virgins wise. Their folly was like his to whom it was said, " One thing thou lackest." Readiness or unreadiness dates from that hour. One asks how it came to pass that those ten young companions could be so closely associated and yet so profoundly hidden from each other. Those who prepared for the momentous emergencies of life and death, appear not to have suspected the absence of preparation in their foolish sisters. The wise asked no questions regarding the essential element of religion, and the foolish made no revelations. The foolish were hidden from their companions and perhaps hidden from themselves. Were the foolish one company ? the harvest of one ecclesiastic tillage ? the victims of salvation by ritual, murderers of the soul of Christianity and martyrs of its shroud ? Perhaps the omission of oil arose from mutual influence, or from conformity to a common standard. Every form of religion evolves its own unwritten law. Each imprudent virgin may have said to herself, If I am without oil so are my four companions. I am in good company. Or she may have reasoned, The oil-vessel cannot be empty ; for God is everywhere equally immanent. Was it possible the unwise had seen the wise making preparations, and had preferred to follow the easier and cheaper way ? In early life companionship becomes a second conscience. The besetting sin of youth is the fascination of external things. The white raiment will be remembered and the flaming lamp ; the modest flask of oil will be of less

Christ's Vision of the Kingdom of Heaven

account. Lamps, wick and fire, without a supply of oil, suggest forcing the pace, a rivalry in the race for sanctity without the galling burden of the cross. The most debased forms of Christianity conceal their emptiness of spiritual truth and life beneath a flare of artificial holiness.

II

THE HEART OF THE PARABLE

The oil, like the lamp and the vessel, is a symbol; but a symbol that stands for everything vital and essential to all who would enter the kingdom of which Jesus is the door. The oil vessel was not prominent, and may have been easily overlooked or forgotten. Yet that vessel is the Christian heart, and the oil is the life of God in the soul, the fountain that feeds and sustains the burning and shining of the holy life. By many the oil is held to represent the Holy Spirit; and it is certain that the Spirit originates the new life in man. Christ declares that the new man is born of the Spirit. Paul sums up the kingdom of God in its personal, subjective aspect as "righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Ghost." His words mean that righteousness, peace and joy are the effect of which the Holy Spirit is the cause. They imply the Spirit's permanent residence in the quickened soul. While, however, oil is the recognized symbol of the Spirit, and the Spirit is the Author of re-birth, He must not be viewed apart from His works. He is no more a part of the re-born personality than the builder is a part of the house he builds. He works in all hearts, and doubtless wrought in the hearts of the unwise virgins. What but His presence kept their lamps burning for a season? The lamps could not burn without oil, and oil we have seen is the Spirit's symbol. But conviction of sin, illumination, faith, repentance, hope, love, holiness—all that constitutes the new man in Christ Jesus—were absent. The Spirit works in all hearts, but dwells in new hearts only. No two of Christ's parables centre so persistently around one master idea as the Sower and the Virgins. Both parables present hopeful beginnings; in both a line is drawn between early promise and ultimate fulfilment; in both disaster is traceable to the heart. Seed cast on stony

The Ten Virgins

soil or amongst thorns, germinates as vigorously as that which fell on good ground ; and forms a close analogy with the transient outwardness of the unwise virgins' religion. The seed on thin ground sent up its green flame, and their lamps their flower of white fire.

Before the midnight cry the ten virgins stood for ten saints. Perhaps we are looking into a time when the saint will depose the millionaire, the warrior and the man-woman. The dark ages have produced and will produce again monastic fireworks in imitation of living faith. A ceremonial religion whether in Rome or England is a store where oil cannot be obtained even if virgins wished it. Lamps, wicks, tapers, endless ceremonial millinery—but oil, the Divine life in the soul, is unknown. The olive tree grows on other soil ; draws its sap from Calvary and empties its fulness into the broken, believing heart. In brief eras of clear inspiration, sinners saved from sin and on the way to confirmed holiness are the material of which the church of Christ is composed. It may appear an unattainable ideal ; it is nevertheless the ideal in every one of Paul's letters to the churches. In times of reaction and spiritual decadence the church, unable to sow the gospel and reap saints, walls in a nook of life and erects a forcing house for the production of lamp-bearing vestals, who, fleeing from the world, carry it instead of oil in the vessel of their heart ; who make religion a trade and not a life ; invoke effects and ignore causes ; trim the torch of sanctity and leave the heart to enclose the world.

What, we may ask, would the fortune of the unwise virgins have been had the bridegroom arrived while their lamps were burning ? Would they have entered the marriage feast ? From the point of view which the question suggests, we may best appraise the relative importance of the oil and the lamp. It was not want of lamps, nor up to a certain point want of flame, but want of oil to feed it, that determined destiny. Doubtless while we keep on the plane of the Eastern marriage feast we are bound to admit that a bridegroom meeting his bride with her light-bearing companions, would have received the company to the marriage supper, not asking whether they all carried oil in reserve. But the thing signified here departs from its earthly image. Rising to the spiritual level,

Christ's Vision of the Kingdom of Heaven

we see that the light of the unwise would have expired with the arrival of the bridegroom, whose coming signified separation of the prepared from the unprepared.

Time has underlined the words, "while the bridegroom tarried." To their first hearers on Olivet, they might seem a reference to a common occurrence, or a plank in the scaffolding of the parable. If the church at Thessalonica knew the parable, they, in their expectation of Christ's immediate appearing, had overlooked the hinge-words on which the story turns. Like an Andean peak rising through successive zones of air, these words soar up through the centuries. From their elevation the last, the greatest of the prophets surveys the ebb and flow of ages. Sublime in their simplicity, they fore-shadow, under the figure of a village bridegroom detained by distance, the great slow-moving event of the world. Tarrying is the word of the watcher, the voice of human love and longing, the sigh of the spouse sounding through the long night-watches of history. That word sounds and interprets the soul of the first Christian age, the soul of all succeeding Christian ages. In the words "the bridegroom tarried" a haze is wisely hung around the horizon. Had Jesus said what He foresaw, that the bridegroom tarried nineteen hundred years, the impulse to hope and endurance would have been infinitely weakened. "That bright day which has been the hope of the church in every age, is not a question of figures but of faith. It was 'at hand' in the apostles' day; it is at hand to-day, and in the same sense; and if He should not come for a thousand years more, it will still be 'at hand,' and in the very same sense. Chronologically, this was not true in the apostles' day, nor for more than a millennium after. But no matter. He will come, says the expectant Christian, when He is ready to come, and I am ready when He is."¹

The road whereon the Bridegroom travels has two outlooks: from eternity to time and from time to eternity. Reverently we may think that to the Divine Traveller it is long. But the Bridegroom is on His way. His face is turned to the dwelling of the bride. Between Him and that goal, distance can only have a spiritual import. His coming is the disclosure of His

¹ *The Structure of the Apocalypse*, David Brown, D.D.

The Ten Virgins

eternal presence. Paul could speak of his own presence and absence,¹ but the conception of Christ's absence is foreign to the New Testament. It would be a vast gain to faith if the invisibility of Christ were clearly and firmly grasped; if the words "absence" and "distance" ceased to occupy a place in its thought and speech.

In another and deeper sense, Christ has been coming ever since He ascended over Olivet. Through the door of martyrdom He leads James, Stephen and Paul into the marriage feast. To myriads of loving hearts, including the apostles, who had hoped without death to acclaim His glorious appearing, to see Him crowned on the world where He suffered, He came through dungeon and fire with the marriage robe for the great supper.

The bridegroom's delay, as we have already seen, is the point on which the action of the parable turns. From night-fall to midnight the virgins waited. Such vigil brides may have sometimes held in Nazareth or Cana of Galilee. With deepening gloom fell silence and marrow-biting chill, when drowsiness and sleep with leaden eyelids stole upon the bridal watchers: "they all slumbered and slept." They resisted the first advance of slumber, but slumber called up its rear guard—sleep. They fought under heavy disadvantage; for they accepted battle on the field that sleep had chosen. No song filled their mouths, no work engaged their hands; no great sorrow for the millions sunk in sleep and night gnawed their heart strings. It is religion living on its capital; the winter season between the summer of Christianity and the spring of eternity. Survey the scene. The bride's abode at first is full of light; its windows open to receive the expected cry. Ten human lamps burn with lessening flame. Ten bridal lamps are on the wane. While we gaze these become two groups; five feebly burning, and five hastening to extinction. Is this the watch of the church in any or all of the midnights of Christianity? Or is it the final watch when the virgins stream from all shores toward the opening door? It is the last night of the world, the last vigil of faith and hope, as the opening word of the parable, "then," at that time, indicates. The night of our parable is not the interval between Christ's

¹ *ἡ παρουσία*.

² *ἀπουσία*: Phil. ii. 12.

Christ's Vision of the Kingdom of Heaven

ascension and re-appearing. The vigil of the virgins is no longer the watch of the Jordan. Looking back to Olivet, the interval has not deepened from sunset down to midnight. It is true the night of Islam early settled over the land of the cross, and over the mission fields of Paul; and papal darkness overswept heaven and earth in Europe. But day broke in Germany, Geneva and Britain. In the preceding discourse Christ declares, "This gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in the whole world for a testimony unto all the nations; and then shall the end come."¹ The great globe ringing with the voices of the Christian messengers would imply a profound quickening of the Christian conscience; the genius of the good Samaritan universalized; the advent of a generation of great givers, some laying their fortunes and others themselves on the missionary altar. Such an era would involve international peace; and the rising flood of Christianity would sweep away persecution and suffering for conscience' sake. To make the world one vast ploughfield sown by innumerable husbandmen, would in itself be one of the comings of Christ.

From reading the past we know that the human conscience, having climbed its Nebo, begins its descent into the valley of sleep. The generation of burning hearts dies; the full river of revival shrinks in its bed; inspiration and conviction dwindle down to fashion; and spiritual chivalry becomes a bridal procession. Many take their lamps and swell the joyous train. We can feel the chill and silence of coming night. This is the night of reaction; the sleep of reaction. Other nights in Christian history brought dungeon fire and sword. Do the virgins hold their vigil in prison? No. They watch in the house of the bride. No warder watches over their sleep; no martyr blood stains their white raiment; no fetter galls their limbs. Church and world have signed a treaty of peace. Hearken as we may, no tramp of marching hosts is heard; no war bugle is blown. The virgins have appointed no watch. The cry, "Behold, the bridegroom!" issues not, it would seem, from within the church.

It is sometimes affirmed that the wise virgins were wise in their sleeping; that, their lamps lighted and oil in their vessels, sleep was natural and necessary. But this contention

¹ Matt. xxiv. 14.

The Ten Virgins

arises from failing to penetrate through the outward circumstance to the spiritual situation. The sleep of the virgins is spiritual sleep ; sleep wherein the spirit's eyes and ears, all the avenues opening into the spiritual sphere, are sealed. All voices from heaven and all wailings from the heart of humanity are unheard. Moreover, it is the sleep of universal Christianity. It would be a bold position for any thinking man to maintain the right and privilege of all Christians within and without the church, of all subjects of the kingdom of heaven on earth, to sleep, with midnight and doom at the door. In mental and spiritual night nothing is so precious as light ; and the wasting flames of the five—the real kingdom of heaven—raise a question beyond their own rights or losses. Allowing the situation to speak for itself, their sleep lowered the illumination and temperature of the age. They sink into spiritual passivity. In the letter of the parable, night is the interval between sunset and dawn, and the sleep occurs within those limits ; but in the spirit of the parable, night is an age of time, and the sleep of the virgins is an era of depressed religious life—when the watch on the walls, where watchmen from the ascension have listened for the wheels of His chariot and died, lose hope and patience and forget the power within themselves to shorten the distance by extending heavenward the frontiers of the kingdom. Had the bride gone forth beyond the village or town to meet the bridegroom, her lamps would have illumined new spaces.

Physical sleep looks backward into yesterday with the historian, and forward with the prophet into to-morrow. It refills the lamp of life ; rebuilds the waste places of the mind ; is the mother of whom new energies are born. On the other hand, mental and spiritual sleep is not only twin brother of death but death itself. To the sleeper personally it is life in abeyance ; but to his fellow men it is the negation of the vicarious principle on which life rests.

Following spiritual law, the unwise watchers would fall asleep first. Evil operates from the lower to the higher. In the foolish, interest was feeble ; hope and faith inoperative or absent. And if hope was absent so was fear. The sleep of the foolish virgins is amazing, when we consider that the bridegroom is also the judge. As if air and stars rained down

Christ's Vision of the Kingdom of Heaven

drowsiness, they give way to fitful slumber, then to sleep. In like manner the wise succumb one by one. And the world is without an example of living, waking Christianity. Had the living element in the church remained awake and witnessed their unwise sisters' expiring lamps, they would have said soon what they said late, "Go ye to them that sell, and buy." It was the time to search formalism, to break through restraint, to arouse the sleepers and enforce the need of oil.

III

BEHOLD, THE BRIDEGROOM!

"But at midnight there is a cry, Behold, the bridegroom!" Taking midnight as the end of the world, the cry finds its interpretation in Paul's words, "The Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel and with the trump of God."¹ As we must understand midnight in a spiritual sense, we find Christ here veiling in a sublime symbol what elsewhere He has spoken plainly: "When the Son of man cometh, shall he find faith on the earth?"² The Revised Version, omitting "cometh" of the Authorised Version, conveys the suddenness of the appearing. The cry, "Behold, the bridegroom cometh," would have been true on any day or night since He sat down at the right hand of God; but "Behold, the bridegroom!" announces the uplifting of the veil, the visibility of the Lord.

"Come ye forth to meet him," is not the voice of earthly watchmen. It appears to sound from amidst the ranks of the glorious train. The first step of discipleship is an exodus from the kingdom of the world into the kingdom of heaven. In the beginning of the gospel the convert went forth from the temple of his ancestors, from the companionships of life, from the love of parents and brethren, from the arms of his wife. Often he went forth alone, his sole companion the burden on his heart. He went forth to follow the Lamb: not to shun the world, but to conquer it. Following, serving, witnessing, thus every disciple takes his distinctive lamp and goes forth to meet the Bridegroom.

¹ 1 Thess. iv. 16.

² Luke xviii. 8.

The Ten Virgins

"Come ye forth to meet him" is a new trumpet in the camp. It is no longer the adjuring blast, Stand to arms! Stand to arms! Sounded in the ear of the last age, it calls to change, to sudden exodus: "We shall all be changed in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed."¹

Although the parable presents the last coming, it applies to every previous coming. The individual believer is an example and a prophecy of the whole family of God. No other parable fits into personal Christian life at so many places. As the greater contains the less, the last great exodus is foreshadowed in every individual departure. To every age preceding the *parousia*, death sounds the last trumpet, "come ye forth to meet him." Like a wave-rung bell this trumpet sounds unceasingly. It comes to Stephen with each crashing volley; to Paul in the fall of the Roman axe; to the martyrs with the roar and rush of the lions. It is the executioner awaking John of Argyll; the summons calling Samuel Rutherford from prison to the presence of the Judge of all the earth. It is the soul going forth from the "earthly house of our tabernacle." "This closest and most familiar home of all, the life-long investiture of the personality of each of us, even this body must be laid aside, and we must go forth, beings unknown on a path unknown, to meet Him—to stand spirit to spirit close up to Him who died for us and reigns over us, who claims us and shall judge us, the Bridegroom of our souls. This is that last going forth, that exodus from our house of bondage, that midnight departure, much to be remembered through the ages of eternity."²

The cry has never ceased since the men of Galilee stood gazing up into heaven. Through the heart of human life and history, through the heart of time and nature, it has gone sounding on; sometimes as a still small voice, again as the voice of a trumpet. In the uproar of war and politics, in the exchange and mart, in the even flow of days and years, the cry is unheard; but when our feet touch the waters of death, it swells long and loud.

The village streets are still; the ten lamps twinkle dimly;

¹ 1 Cor. xv. 52.

² *The Coming of the Bridegroom*, Alford.

Christ's Vision of the Kingdom of Heaven

their bearers are asleep. But the nuptial convoy, seeing the flickering light in the bride's abode, cry, "Behold, the bridegroom!" In what character and aspect comes he? What spectacle meets the eye of the surprised watchers? He comes in festive attire; for it is the greatest hour of his life. He wears whatever of costly array his rank and resources demand. In the land and time of Jesus, the bridegroom went forth crowned. And thus Christ, accompanied by those who in Him fell asleep, comes to meet His waiting bride. The day of passion is over; in His hand there is no cup of dying anguish. The battle-field lies no more across the mighty Pilgrim's way. Accompanied by ten thousand angels and the whole family of just men made perfect, He comes forth with everlasting joy to meet all who keep the vigil of faith and expectation.

It was from the festal house or hall the Jewish bridegroom came forth to meet his bride, for whom home was prepared and full of mirth and light. To the house of which this is the earthly symbol, months and years, separation and sorrow, are bringing home the bride of immortality. If we take the virgin choir as starting from the bride's dwelling, we have the symbol of the soul leaving its tents and friends for eternal tents and profounder friendships. It is from the church of God—meaning by that term the whole household of God on earth—that the departing soul goes forth. "Go ye forth to meet him," is the marching order of life. Our true attitude is that of departure. We are not called to advance into emptiness. In the midnight is a Person; if we go forth to meet Him, He has come to meet us. "Come ye forth to meet him" suggests the communion of saints. The morning stars of spiritual history trod a lonely way; the kingdom of heaven is a household, a host of living hearts. Ye who sing the psalm of ascent, who watch for the soul's bridal dawn, may go in the attire of the King's daughter, assured that through seeming isolation and loneliness you keep step with the homeward assembly of God.

The end of the world for the individual, and for the last generation of men, comes like a thief in the night. According to the profound conception of Jesus Christ and Paul, the world is dead; and where soul-sleep has been broken by the voice of the Son of man, awaking is only partial. No

The Ten Virgins

human soul has yet attained full consciousness. In physical sleep we have no sense of time, no use of ear or eye, of taste or smell, no consciousness of neighbourhood, of environing flesh, or even of existence. Like a man born deaf and blind, who, having spent his life in a great city, yet seems to himself encompassed by desert space, so the most spiritual man lives in the city of God crowded with deathless presences and powers, yet he thinks of melancholy emptiness between God and him. Perhaps he speaks of his Saviour as "absent," and of His appearing as a "return." He fails to feel in the falling moments the pulse-beat of eternity. Jesus has known two tombs. In the first, two brave disciples laid His flesh to rest ; in the second funeral we have buried Him in heaven.

When awakened, the fiercest strife of the soul is to keep awake. Joy and suffering, solitude and companionship, effort and repose, conspire to drown the heavenly voices and dim the Divine glimpses.

In sleep no difference appears between the wise and unwise virgins. All alike rest ; all forget that they are pilgrims, watchers, light-bringers to the world. Yet in their sleep they are divided. In unconsciousness we are ourselves and speak the truth. The lamps of the wise are waxing dim, those of the foolish expiring. In the case of the former, the waning light is the depression of hope and love through the cessation or diminution of spiritual service, and the encroachment of self-indulgence. The missionary fire sinks in its ashes. The world drifts in wreck around the bleared flame of the lighthouse. In the sleep of the unwise the heart unrenewed or partially changed reasserts itself. Feeling, emotion, social affinities, false Messianic hopes combining, leaped into flame which, like the meteorite's fire, flared while sustaining conditions remained.

"Then all those virgins arose, and trimmed their lamps." The voice that calls the dead from their graves summons the sleepers to action. Fewer words have never painted a great scene. The start of the sleepers, the surprise in their eyes suddenly opened, the bound from the sitting or reclining to the standing posture, the swift seizure of their lamps, their glance along the burning sky, flash upon the reader's sight. But in the background arises another view ; we can discern

Christ's Vision of the Kingdom of Heaven

the wrinkled brows and wide eyes of the disciples who first heard the words, and marked the interpreting light and shade on the Speaker's face.

The need of awaking and rising goes far to establish the conclusion that the wise, the subjects of the kingdom, in sleeping had unconsciously slipped from their high plane of privilege and duty. Awaking, arising, trimming their lamps—these acts are of the nature of revival. Springing from the sepulchre of sleep, beholding the heavens filled with their Lord's glorious convoy, with all powers aroused, they grasp the situation. They had been living on the past, on their reputation. Each seizes her lamp, dresses the wick, stirs, arouses the flame. These acts depict the searching of heart, the quickening of spiritual life, the living disciple's appeal to his sleeping self; fresh energy of prayer, the soul in awe and surprise drawing upon the reserve fountains in God.

In its individual application we more easily understand the effect of the summons. However long or seriously the end may have been anticipated, it seems to come at midnight, to enter by an unknown door. Then sleep is past; the soul hears one voice; does one thing only; seizes and trims the lamp; turns the eyes to Calvary; seeks nearer contact with the blood of Christ.

"Give us of your oil; for our lamps are going out," is the confession of personal discovery. From the imprudent themselves, and not from their wiser companions, comes the intimation. Perhaps we may find the explanation in the absorption of each in her own concerns. The presidency or viceroyalty over man's self is the most exacting of human administrations. The request for oil is extorted by extremity. The foolish virgins have found themselves out; for it is not in harmony with the situation to regard them as hypocrites. Their appeal to their companions, their instant rush to buy, their impassioned cry for admission to the marriage feast, point to self-deception. They are composed of negative qualities; they are virgin souls in the same sense that the ruler who had observed all the commandments from his youth was a virgin soul. They have lived within the hedge of the law; abounded in fast and vigil, conformed to rite and ceremony, passed their days and nights in the temple of routine;

The Ten Virgins

they may have fed the hungry, clothed the naked, and shared their savings or their affluence with distress.

The oil of the wise is the best commentary on the great saying, "One thing is needful"; the lamps expiring for want of oil, the best illustration of the words, "One thing thou lackest." Here the man without the wedding robe and the foolish virgins meet. In each case the want is one thing; and the discovery of the want comes late. The absence of the marriage robe is discovered by the king; the lack of oil by a sudden self-revelation. A galaxy of virtues may conceal the absence, but cannot supply the place of virtue. Paul paints a soul adorned with all the surrenders, attainments and sacrifices, as dry and barren in the absence of one thing—the vitalizing sap of love!¹ In the midnight of great causes many lamps go out. In Gethsemane the lamps of the favoured three burn sadly low. In the judgment hall Peter's light almost expires.

No great teacher has approached Jesus in the emphasis He has laid on humanity between man and man. He has charged the word "give" with unexampled authority. One of His most arresting parables is devoted to teaching the divinity of human brotherhood. He delighted to think that His disciples would do greater works after His exaltation than He had done in His humiliation. He pictures Himself at the last day rewarding mercy shown to His needy brethren as if it had been shown to Himself. So closely indeed has He associated man with Himself in the relief of human misery; so nearly has He allowed and required the disciple to imitate his Lord, that there was risk of man conceiving himself to be a co-saviour with Jesus. The omniscient Saviour could foresee arising out of the wreck of imperial Rome the embodiment of political ambition, which would at first consent to share the salvation and government of souls with Jesus Christ, and finally oust Him from cross and throne. A line needed to be drawn between the sphere of human influence and the exclusive province of the Saviour; and that line is drawn here; a line which neither the will of God nor man can efface. For it belongs to the eternal nature of things. God cannot will that the holiest saint should undertake the debts, the plagues

¹ 1 Cor. xiii.

Christ's Vision of the Kingdom of Heaven

and woes of the soul. And man's attempt to give life, to confer the Spirit, to remit sin, is more blasphemous than would be his effort to uncreate the present and then create another universe. The request of the unwise virgins on the eve of judgment shows the temptation human distress places in the way of man to become priest and soul-broker. While the last day appears distant, and souls in emergency approach fellow mortals of reputed sanctity for help, two powerful passions incline the invoked to play the part of priest—the craving of avarice and the lust of power.

The reply of the wise, "Lest there be not enough for us and you," has not time to say, No. It is the aside of minds profoundly stirred and wholly dominated by one concern. It is abrupt, broken, and strikes to the heart of the situation. On first view it seems unsympathetic. The command, "give to them that ask of thee," the wise appear to forget. Their reply is not wisdom's disdain of folly. They knew that the oil was not theirs to give. Had the appeal come to them in the common prose of life, they would have come under the command, "give to him that asketh of thee"; but the oil belongs to the poetry of being; it is the shadow of whatever in the new man is central, personal, spiritual, Divine. It is neither work nor redundant merit; it is the sap that burns into the flower and fruit of holiness. It were as possible for the saint to give his soul to animate a dead body as for the wise virgins to share their oil with their hapless sisters. The refusal turns not upon human will, but on the nature of grace in the soul. The supplies of Divine grace never rise above emergency, and never fall below it. The last supreme crisis differs only in degree from similar crises preceding it. We go singly into the lists of death. And for once the believing soul must centre solely on its own salvation.

The advice, "go ye rather to them that sell and buy for yourselves," is far removed from jest or mockery. If the refusal and the advice suggest severity, they are free from heartless levity or more heartless exultation. The dread circumstances account for the hardness of tone. The wise said, perhaps, all that sorrowing love could say. Were the oil-stores open still? Was it a fact or merely a hope that oil might yet be bought? "Those who sell," has received

The Ten Virgins

various interpretations. The Scriptures, the church, Christian ordinances, have their several advocates. In certain applications of the parable these opinions may find a place; but not in its grand general design. On approach of death to the undeceived professor, the gospel would direct to faith and repentance; an immediate approach to the crucified Saviour; the shortest way to Calvary. No human interposition, no ceremonial rite, not even the Scriptures, must be regarded as more than channels between the fountains of grace in God and the heart of man. As, however, the verge of time rises in the background of our parable, the advice of the wise virgins can have no reference to the church and its rites and teachers. It can only mean that the soul aroused and undeceived in the last moments of life is directed to appeal to the mercy of God. "Buy for yourselves," implies that the wise had bought their own supply. This is the inevitable sense of their words. Is all that the oil signifies purchased, it may be asked, or the free gift of grace? We must first inquire what buying in the present connection means. It must have something in common with purchase in the world's mart, where money is given in exchange for the commodities of life. The point of analogy consists in giving away one thing in order to possess another. That other thing is ours on the condition of cost. On that condition the new life is ours. For it we yield up our will, our heart, our way of salvation, our heritage of guilt and sin. God must be in possession of us before we come into possession of God. Mary broke her flask to let the spikenard forth; God breaks the heart to let the Saviour in. It is being for being; heart and mind, according to Paul's profound conception, becoming the bond slaves of their Redeemer.

The bridegroom's words, "I know you not," explain why the attempt to buy oil was fruitless. There had been no just knowledge of the Saviour or His salvation. Else, though late, the appeal to the mercy-seat would have availed. The cry of the repentant robber was late; arose from deepest extremity; a voice from the depths. From its example we might expect to see penitents on the last cross-crowned hill of time turning their dying gaze to the Crucified.

"While they went to buy, the bridegroom came"; thus

Christ's Vision of the Kingdom of Heaven

the business of life is crowded into the night of death. It is an instance of doing right in the wrong season. Going to buy oil may be in itself the work of the wisest; the five wise virgins had done this very thing. They, however, as soul merchants went to buy in the day time; *this* is the soul going to market at midnight. The true order of things is inverted. Purchase of oil should have preceded joining the bridal company and lighting the bridal lamps. But we also are perverting the Divine order when to the body we devote the day of life, and leave the concerns of the soul to the midnight of dying. Is it not a common belief that religion is for the end of life? Are not many acting on the assumption that they can rush to buy at the midnight hour? Are not some going forth into the night with just as much religion as will keep the lamp alive till the hour of extremity? Are we not daily staving off the claims of eternity, huddling the arrears of a life-time into its evening, crowding concern, faith, repentance, sanctification, holiness into the hour of death?

"They went to buy," shows the earnestness of the effort to qualify for admission; the later cry, "Lord, Lord, open to us," the effort to enter without the qualifying condition. The bridegroom came: the sublimest vision in the entire range of prophecy. To Jesus seated on Olivet, surveying the countless heights of futurity, every hill an age of time, with Golgotha in the foreground, the intervening vales red with battle-fields, the banners of the kingdom carried now to the crest of victory, now borne down the hill by the charging forces of the world—the vision of disrobing Himself of the blood and shame of the cross and the wrappings of the tomb, and arraying His strength in the glorious raiment and crown of the Bridegroom, of leading all the risen subjects of the kingdom to the immortal land of the cross, must have proved more than a legion of angels to strengthen Him.

Almighty Jesus, Thy ministry has many parts: Creator, Redeemer, Mediator, Bridegroom, Judge and King: of all these great departments may we think it was the joy of the Bridegroom that arose over against the cross?

"And they that were ready went in with him to the marriage feast." Thus were the virgins divided into two distinct companies and classes, and related to two essentially different

The Ten Virgins

worlds. Readiness in God's sight has a momentous significance. It is preparedness to enter the marriage feast, that is, to be with Christ. And readiness and unreadiness turn on the possession or lack of oil. At this point are revealed the relative values of oil and lamp. Readiness is likeness to God: "we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is."¹ Likeness springs not from seeing, but seeing from likeness. Seeing in this connection signifies knowledge founded on community of character: "Ye shall be holy, for I am holy." The believer is a temple of the Holy Ghost, and the temple of the Divine holiness must be holy. When we consider that to sin God is a consuming fire, the meaning of preparedness for seeing and dwelling with Him will appear.

IV

AND THE DOOR WAS SHUT

The closing door drew the final line of separation between the ten. It was the last door; but other doors had closed before it. On the life misapplied and wasted the doors of doom shut with unflinching certainty, but from man's first to his last breath, doors have been incessantly closing. All the houses we have inhabited in the city of our past are barred against re-entrance. Key-bearer after key-bearer has locked us out from conditions and places where we have been. We have lived in zones of possibility and experience where we shall not sojourn again. We are ships that touch a port once and once only. To youth and manhood, childhood is a paradise guarded by flaming swords. Behind the horizon of the past lie our childhood and the enchanted land of youth; the fenced and walled city from which we are expelled. And the past is ever enlarging its territory, widening its boundaries and annexing our heritage and ourselves.

Doors are shutting us out from what and where we should be. God has commanded our repentance, and the acceptance of His Son with the confidence and the affection of our heart; He calls us to become followers, servants, witnesses of His Son. Is deferred repentance becoming easier? Is not the door *within* closing on Christ's face? With passing days the conditions of faith and salvation become remote. When we

¹ 1 John iii. 2.

Christ's Vision of the Kingdom of Heaven

cast our lot with the indifferent, the uncertain, the deferring, the mocking, the hostile—sleepless laws like volcanic forces lower the platform whereon we stand, and raise an environing wall of impossibility around us. Take warning, ye who defer, who delay, who waver ; ye who think of turning, who dream of repentance, who bear aloft a burning lamp without the feeding fountain of grace in the heart ; doors are closing with every setting sun ; the last door shall shut you out from where and what you might have been.

God has put many things and many stations beyond our reach. Beauty and genius descend on the few. All men cannot be masters, rich, famous, or great. We may not evade toil, suffering, sickness, death. These are some of our mortal limitations. In another direction, God has set no bounds to our attainment. We may be forgiven, we may seize eternal life, we may be ransomed, sanctified, kings and priests unto God, we may wear the best robe—the imparted character and image of God our Saviour. But if we trifle and delay ; if we confess in form and deny in spirit ; if the fire in the lamp fails to derive its supplies from the heart ; if the life eternal sinks not as deep down as our being—the hour is coming when the door opened out of the world by death will be the closing of the door into the marriage feast. The hour cometh when the old heart will discover that doors once open for its exit have closed it in ; when the old conscience will become the eternal prisoner of our breast ; and the new nature amongst possibilities now impossible.

“ The Master of the house has arisen and shut the door.” It is the separation of the tares from the wheat ; of the bad fish from the good ; of the sheep from the goats ; of the servant who hid his talent from those who doubled theirs ; of the man who lacked the wedding robe from the guests assembled at the marriage supper. The door separates within from without. Within is the kingdom of heaven ; purified from whatsoever counterfeits or opposes. It is the whole, “ the blameless family of God.” Some lived before the cross was raised on Calvary, but none before the cross was raised in heaven. The whole family assembles in the Father's house after the long day of time. The sphere of life and ministry reserved for redeemed humanity is presented under the similitude of

The Ten Virgins

a house. Within the house the Bridegroom and bride have met in full perfection and glory of being. But what is without the door? Better that love should stand in silence, blind with tears. Better in awe and fear to grasp the stupendous event, the closing of the door. The home-door of the meek, of the downtrodden just, the refuge door of the suffering saints, long open to the streaming martyr hosts, the door known to the penitent, the broken-hearted, the homesick prodigal, the door which Satan, pursuing escaping souls, reached but could not enter, the door where the converging pilgrim hosts laid down the cross, the door whose threshold is stained with bleeding feet and whose posts echo the sigh of departing faith—this door opened in redeeming blood amidst the song of the universe, this door is shut.

We dimly discern the unwise virgins standing without. It is moral night, not capable of illumination by moon or stars. Lately the lamps of the bride and her festal train broke the reign of night. These are now withdrawn; and the lamps of the foolish virgins are dark and cold. "Afterward, came also the other virgins, saying, Lord, Lord, open to us." Here the virginity of the unwise can best be estimated as an asset in the interpretation. The name is retained in the absence of lighted lamp and oil and in the presence of midnight. They are virgins in the outer darkness. If it is asked, Had they obtained oil, or were their lamps rekindled? the closed door requires an answer in the negative. Indeed, the closed door involves the closing of the doors where oil once was sold. The cry, "Lord, Lord, open to us," offered so near, so earnestly, so unanimously, rising from the lonely, the benighted, the forsaken, presents a prayer-concert once conceived, never forgotten.

With the closing door the parable passes from symbolism into reality. He who shuts the door is Judge. The virgins plead not with an equal; they plead with the Supreme; and the reply from within is expressed in no other symbolism than what we find in the saying, "I know mine own!" "But he answered and said, Verily I say unto you, I know you not." Thus Jesus sits on the throne of judgment, while only two or three days separate Him from the cross.

¹ John x. 14.

Christ's Vision of the Kingdom of Heaven

The human bridegroom need not know all or any of the bridesmaids. Here, however, we see the Saviour-Judge separate those who are members of His body from those who are not. The unwise were not members of Christ. To Him their voice was new ; He had never heard it breaking in penitence and confession ; He had never met them at the mercy-seat, or found them under His banner in the day of battle.

“ Watch, therefore, for ye know not the day nor the hour.” The parable is a watch tower with three outlooks—one into the heart, one into the enemy’s territory—the world, and one into heaven. Watch that the heart receive and conserve the oil of eternal life ; watch and feed therefrom the burning lamp of holy living ; watch against spiritual unemployment, against the spirit of sleep ; and stand ready for His appearing. “ Thou must watch, O man, over all that is in thee, and what is without thee, what works upon thee, what can elevate or depress thy spirit, inflame or allay thy passions. Watch over all that tends to withdraw thee from Jesus, or bring thee near to Him.”¹

¹ Ewald.

BY THE SAME AUTHOR

THE STEWARDSHIP OF LIFE

Studies in the Parable of the Talents

"A model of homiletic treatment."—PROFESSOR A. B. BRUCE.

"A masterpiece of exposition."—DR. S. H. HOWE, U.S.A.

"Quiet but strong thought."—*Scotsman*.

"Strong independent thinking—instinctive genius."—*Edinburgh Courant*.

"Ought to commend itself to all students of the New Testament."—*Nonconformist*.

"Culture and even genius."—GEORGE GILFILLAN.

"Fresh, striking, suggestive, beauty and power."—*Freeman*.

"A minister of originality of thought, of true genius."—*Dundee Courier and Argus*.

"Very striking."—*Literary World*.

"A remarkable book."—*Preacher's Lantern*.

FINDERS OF THE WAY

SECOND EDITION

Considered only in the decisive hour between sleep and waking, between the sinking city and the first vision of the cross. The reader is requested to follow a vision of spiritual creation, when the old man becomes new, in the hands of the Crucified Creator.—*Preface*.

BT 375 .S7
Christ's vision of the kingdom
Stanford University Libraries



3 6105 041 278 248

BT
375
S7

**Stanford University Libraries
Stanford, California**

Return this book on or before date due.

DATE DUE		

