The Ethical Method of Jesus.[1]

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SOME fifty years ago, two divines carried on a discussion in a Boston journal, respecting the claims of Jesus to the allegiance of men. The one who rested his supremacy on his *teachings* adduced, as the crowning proof, Jesus' condensation of the whole code of ethics into what is known as the "Golden Rule." His opponent — who was disposed to find the distinctive work of Jesus in quite a different field — brought forward as a counter argument the fact that this same summary of social duties is found in Confucius. He received the rejoinder that in Confucius the Golden Rule appears in a negative form, while our Lord puts it positively; and there the discussion ceased, — leaving the impression that Christ's transcendence as an ethical teacher consisted mainly in the wise omission of a "*not*."

Since that time, to be sure, the Golden Rule for substance has been found, in both positive and negative form, not only in Confucius, but in writings by the score belonging to the literatures of many ages and many lands.[2] And, though the emphasis laid upon one aspect or another of the mission of Jesus has shifted with the years, yet with the recognition of his function as a "teacher" — brought into legitimate prominence (as it soon will be) by the substitution of "Teacher"

[1] The following paper, which is printed by request, was prepared as an address before a college "Biblical Club," and, by its cast throughout, gives evidence of having been written for a popular audience rather than for scholarly readers. Indeed, the professional reader will doubtless detect once and again that unacknowledged use of professional works which every teacher allows himself in the classroom, and for which he cannot always, if he would, express his indebtedness. In dealing with the Parables, however, the writer gratefully acknowledges the aid derived from Professor Jülicher's recent volume (*Die Gleichnisreden Jesu, Zweiter Theil*, Freiburg i. B., 1899), although he finds himself unable to follow the Professor in the rigorous application of the principle there advocated.

[2] For an ingenious attempt to defend the practical superiority of the negative form, as "more fundamental, going deeper to the heart of the problem," see Abrahams and Montefiore, *Aspects of Judaism*, London, 1895, pp. 67 ff.

for "Master" more than forty times in our vernacular version, and by the more correct idea of the New Testament synagogues as not only places of worship but of instruction also — homage to Jesus as the world's Great Teacher of Righteousness will certainly not wane. The enlarged view of the historic relations of his teaching which research has brought has tempted occasionally an eccentric thinker like Buckle to deny his originality; or a patriotic Jew like Rodrigues to attempt to disprove it by the fragmentary parallels to the Sermon on the Mount which may be gathered from the *hortus siccus* of rabbinical lore.

I. Of late, however, the centre of interest has shifted from the origin of his teachings to the more important question of their application. How are they to be understood? and how are they to be put to use amid the changed circumstances, the complicated relations, the clashing claims of modern life? These are the inquiries which exercise thoughtful minds.

With some, the answer is as ready as it is brief: his words are to be taken to the letter, and applied without flinching. The Golden Rule, one recent writer tells us, is "the charter of Christian society"; nothing but the degeneracy of "institutional Christianity," with its misguided adherents, obstructs the establishment of the Kingdom.

But one wonders whether the most loyal literalist would not be somewhat shaken in his theory, if the Golden Rule were quoted to him just as he was turning over to the police the man whose hand he had found in his pocket.

Another insists that the Sermon on the Mount is the authoritative compend of Christian conduct, the sum of the Gospel, the intended basis of the ideal Christian commonwealth. "It sustains the same relation to the universal society as the legislation of Moses sustained to the Jewish society. . . . It is the divinest law-making that has been done, or doubtless can be done, for the sons of men."[3]

Accordingly, we have current manuals of ethics denying without qualification the legitimacy of an oath; men like Professor Mahaffy defending the strictest non-resistance; public leaders like the late George W. Curtis putting to his audiences such questions as this: "When you send your boy away to school, do you say to him, 'My son, if a boy abuses you and strikes you, don't strike him back, but get down there on your knees and *pray* for him'? If not, with what right do you call yourself a Christian?"

[3] Herron, *The Christian Society*, pp. 52, 54.

Now, a morbid fidelity to a misjudging theory may occasionally constrain some inexperienced Christian to attempt to carry out notions like these; but, in the long run, the native good sense of men triumphs over subtleties, even though they seem strong as Holy Writ. Like Paul's dissuasive from marriage, they are read — and neglected.

Yet, even when they are practically disregarded, they are apt to leave a misgiving lurking in the mind. Many an aspiring student of our Lord's teachings finds himself losing his ardor for research, and acquiescing — not without a sense of disappointment, perhaps, and personal disapproval — in the interpretations embodied in the current practices of the Christians about him. This easy-going acquiescence, however, this disregard of scruples and blunting of the moral sensibility, must be resisted, or it will prove fatal to the soul's growth.

Probably few persons are stumbled by such a judgment as a prominent English writer[4] has not hesitated to broach, *viz.* that our Lord's teaching can never find general following, for he inculcates improvidence, destructive of organized society: he says, "Take no thought for the morrow." For this stricture convicts its author, not only of neglect of the Greek, but of ignorance of his mother tongue, — the word "thought," in its earlier use, being tantamount to "anxiety." So Saul says to the servant with whom he had been looking in vain for his father's asses, "Come, let us return; lest my father leave caring for the asses and take thought for us" (1 Sam. 9[5]).

The unqualified prohibition of oaths, however, presents us with a more delicate problem. Some weight is probably due to the circumstance that the very specifications given — "Swear not at all; neither by the heaven, for it is the throne of God; nor by the earth, for it is the footstool of his feet; nor by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the great King; neither shalt thou swear by thy head, for thou canst not make one hair white or black" — suggest a limitation of the reference; the oaths specified being samples of those current in ordinary intercourse. Common conversation abounded in them. It was these needless appeals in social intercourse to things sacred which Jesus seems here to be particularly forbidding.

Moreover, the Jew was taught by his law that an oath derived special sanctity from the use of the name of God. Hence, all forms of oaths which did not involve that name were tolerated. Philo (*de spec. legibus*, vol. v. i. § 1) accordingly commends those who, when

[4] Greg, *Creed of Christendom*, vol. i., p. lxvii.

compelled to swear, say merely, "Yes, by the ——," or, "No, by the ——," adding nothing more, but giving emphasis by mutilating the usual form and not expressly uttering an oath. But let him add, if he chooses (Philo continues), not the highest and primal cause of all things, but the earth, sun, stars, heaven, the universe. Hence, it was customary to swear by the temple, the altar, the lamb, the dishes, *etc.;* and such oaths were reckoned to be "nothing" (Mt. $23^{16.\,18}$). It was these frivolous distinctions, you remember, on which fell one of the scathing "Woes" of the twenty-third chapter of Matthew.

Unqualified, however, as the language is, both in the Sermon on the Mount and its repetition in the Epistle of James, the general belief among Christians, almost from the first, that it admits of some legitimate limitation, has found warrant not only in Paul's repeated and gratuitous calling God to witness that he spoke the truth, but in the fact that our Lord himself consented at his trial to speak under oath; and that even the Most High, since he could swear by none greater, sware by himself (Heb. 6^{13}).

But this confronts us with the inquiry why our Lord expressed himself thus without restriction? If there are exceptions, why not specify them, or, at least, recognize their possible existence?

The answer is to be found, I suspect, in the fact that Jesus is not intent on giving *precepts;* but would lay emphasis on *principles*. The distinction between the two is most important. A precept is a direction respecting a given action; it is definite, precise, specific, fitting and belonging to particular cases. A principle, on the other hand, is comprehensive and fundamental; it prescribes, not particular actions, but a course of conduct; it is the source whence precepts are derived; it dictates a general moral state, and so makes the man, in a sense, his own legislator. A precept bids him *do*, a principle trains him to *be;* and so begets that inwardness and continuity which are essential to character.

Now, in Christ's day, punctilious obedience to precepts was the characteristic of Pharisaism, the prevalent type of reputed piety. Recall the details respecting washings, given in Mark's gospel — accompanied, as they were, according to a later writer, by fifteen prescribed forms of prayer; remember the ridiculous scrupulosity in the tithing of potherbs, and other petty external observances which Jesus denounced. One method which he adopted of subverting this externalism — alike oppressive and destructive to true morality as it was — consisted in bold, ethical utterances, embodying some obvious duty, but stated so absolutely and impressively, falling on the hearer's

mind with such massive force, as to benumb the spirit of cavilling and evasion. Temporal trivialities are swallowed up of spiritual grandeur, and the lesson remains forever impressed on the memory.

In this sweeping prohibition of oaths, for instance, the mention of exceptions would have turned the hearer's thought the wrong way, and weakened the prohibition. The utterance was a wise counteractive to the frivolous devices by which swearing was legitimated. If, perchance, it should lead an occasional reader into error, it would lead him to err on the safe side. For oaths, when not in themselves wrong, may easily *lead* to wrong — as every custom-house official to this day can testify. The Saviour's statement is not a rule to be blindly followed, not a direction to be mechanically applied regardless of consequences, but the inculcation of a reverent frame of mind; and, consequently, as wholesome as it is axiomatic.

The like considerations may guide us to a correct estimate of the associated teachings of our Lord: — as, for instance, "I say unto you, that every one who is angry with his brother shall be in danger of the judgment; and whosoever shall say to his brother, Raca, shall be in danger of the Council; and whosoever shall say, Thou fool, shall be in danger of the hell of fire." Here the commentators have perplexed themselves and their readers through futile attempts to measure the gradation of the specified offences by the grades of penalty attached to them: — why is it so much more heinous (they ask) to call a man a "fool" than to call him "empty-pate" (the probable meaning of "Raca"), that while the latter has his punishment assigned him by the Supreme Court, the former is consigned to perdition? But no stress is to be laid on the supposed gradation. It marks merely the progress of anger from emotion to expression. Moreover, to a Jew's thought, even the civil tribunals and penalties were in a just sense divine. I have heard, indeed, of a Christian mother who would tolerate in her bickering children a pretty copious vocabulary of hard names, but if one called another a "fool" it was all up with him. How she explained to herself the application of the term by Christ, not only to the Scribes and Pharisees, but also to his own disciples after the resurrection, and its plump personal use in argument by Paul, does not appear. One has more sympathy with the somewhat acrid conclusion of the theologian who said, "The all-wise Creator must have some good use for fools, He has made so many of them."

So again, when Jesus says: "But I say unto you, Resist not him that is evil: but whosoever smiteth thee on thy right cheek, turn to

him the other also. . . . Give to him that asketh thee, and from him that would borrow of thee turn not thou away." The policy of non-resistance and unrestricted giving here inculcated has been followed to the letter occasionally, as we know, by whole bodies of men, and from time to time finds advocacy by persons whose judgment carries with it more or less weight. To be sure, we only smile at the professional non-resistant who, on being forcibly removed when interrupting religious services of which he disapproves, transforms himself into a dead weight of two hundred pounds or so. And we can understand how men like Tolstoï, who would subvert the structure of existing society, can advocate the rigorous enforcement of these words. But here, again, such an interpretation disregards the circumstance that Paul, when smitten on the mouth by order of the religious head of his nation (Acts 23^{3f}), so far from inviting a second blow, exhibited an unmistakable desire for retaliation in kind: "God shall smite thee, thou whited wall"; and Jesus himself, when struck under similar circumstances (Jn. 18^{22}), showed his resentment by the retort, "If I have spoken evil, bear witness of the evil: but if well, why smitest thou me?" And the theorists of every sort forget that they are safe in the indulgence of their vagaries, because the constituted authorities protect them in person and property against the indiscriminate outrage and robbery which, taking men as they are, would ensue as soon as a general adoption of Christ's words as the strict rule of action was avowed.

The rigorous adherence to the letter of these and similar sayings which, under the guise of heroic faith, has a singular fascination for certain minds, ought to be troubled with misgivings when it ponders the terms in which the duty of self-restraint is here inculcated: "And if thy right eye causeth thee to stumble, pluck it out, and cast it from thee: . . . And if thy right hand causeth thee to stumble, cut it off, and cast it from thee." Surely Jesus does not mean to teach that physical mutilation is tantamount to moral conquest; that sin resides in the body; that cherished lust is not independent of the criminal look, — *he* who insisted so emphatically that it is "from *within*, out of the *heart* of men, that proceed evil thoughts, fornications, thefts, murders, adulteries . . . an evil eye," and the like (Mk. 7^{21}).

No; the instances we have been considering are but illustrations of one phase of his ethical method. He takes such cases as are made familiar by everyday life, the ruling motive in which is unmistakable, and sets in glaring contrast with them the *principle* which ought to have sway over act, and word, and thought.

And how does the discernment of Him who knew what was in man disclose itself, when he directs us to interrupt even an act of worship in order to seek reconciliation! The calmness and sacred suggestions of the occasion quicken compunction, and expose the incongruity of the worshipper's asking from God what he himself has not granted to his fellow-man. Yet how would many a Christian congregation be forthwith depleted if the Master's direction were obeyed to the letter!

II. Another characteristic of the ethical method of Jesus comes to view in the fact that he did not make an indiscriminate onset upon the existing constitution of society. He did not distribute men into two groups, "the Classes" and "the Masses" (to borrow Gladstone's phrase). He did not exhort to associated action. He did not exhibit marked preference for any grade of society or the representatives of any social position. He recognized a man's obligations to others as well as to himself; but he dealt primarily with *individuals as such*, quite irrespective of rank or station.

The contrary opinion has, as you know, found considerable currency in recent years. Among its early and prominent representatives stands Renan. Jesus, according to this French writer, was an amiable idealist, longing to revolutionize the world, over which wealth and power tyrannize; a species of "anarchist" who would abolish the "abuse of government," and reverse existing relations. With him the word "poor" (πτωχός, *ebion*) was the synonym of "saint"; and the renunciation of private ownership was demanded of those who would become heirs of the Kingdom. (*Vie*, 14me éd. pp. 120, 123, 129, 131–133, 180, 186, etc.). In short, Renan seems disposed to echo the revolutionist Camille Desmoulin's designation of Jesus as *Le bon sans-culotte*, and to regard him as the typical man of the new sociology. Similar opinions are still loudly reiterated by a certain class of social reformers in this country as well as in Europe.[5] Indeed, the Gospel of Luke, where they are thought to find unequivocal support, is said to have been circulated in France as a Socialist tract.

Now, the popular notion which makes of Jesus himself a penniless itinerant, with a band of poor fishermen as his attendants, encounters sundry qualifying indications even in the Evangelic story.[6] There is no hint, for example, that he, during his ministry, ever supported himself

[5] See W. Walsh, *Jesus the Demagogue*, in the Contemporary Review for March, 1896.

[6] In the treatment of this branch of the subject free use has been made of the facts as brought together in the excellent monograph of C. Rogge, *Der irdische Besitz im Neuen Testament*, Göttingen, 1897, pp. 120.

by practising, like Paul, his handicraft. He has at Capernaum apparently an open house (Mk. 2^{1} 9^{33} 10^{10}) and an attendant boat (Mk. 3^{9} $6^{32.45}$ 8^{10}). He is a guest at feasts (Lk. 5^{29} 7^{36} 11^{37} 14^{1}); and takes at least some of his disciples with him on such occasions (Lk. 5^{30} Jn. 2^{2}). And certainly not all the apostles belonged to the indigent class: the father of James and John had partners, hired assistants, boats, and a house (Mk. 1^{20}), and the account which Josephus gives of the fisheries of the Sea of Galilee proves that the business must have been lucrative.[7] Matthew, the customs official, shows by the great feast he made Jesus on becoming a disciple, that his pecuniary condition corresponded probably with that which, according to modern experience, the calling suggests. The misinterpretation put by some of the twelve on the words spoken to Judas at the Last Supper — "what thou doest do quickly" — which "some thought" was an intimation "that he should give something to the poor," indicates that their means were sufficient not merely to meet their ordinary wants, but to permit gifts in charity. Nay, the direction given (according to all four Evangelists), when more than five thousand people had come together in a lonely spot to hear him, "Give *ye* them to eat" (Mt. 14^{16} Mk. 6^{37} Lk. 9^{13}), would have had a tone of bitter mockery if there were known to be nothing in the treasury.

We are told, indeed, of Levi (Lk. $5^{27.28}$), prior to the account of the "great feast in his house," that he "forsook all and followed Jesus"; and the same statement is made in the case of Peter and Andrew, James and John (Mt. $4^{18 f. 21 f.}$); and that fact is subsequently brought forward by Peter as the basis of a claim for reward (Mt. 19^{27}). It is "into the house of Simon and Andrew" that Jesus comes after the miracle in the synagogue of Capernaum, when he cures "Simon's wife's mother." The phrase "they left all," therefore, must not be pressed to mean 'they utterly stripped themselves of earthly possessions,' but understood as signifying 'they quit the business in which they were engaged,' 'changed their whole mode of life.'

It is true that Jesus, in his answer to the deputation from John, specifies, as the crowning proof of his Messianic mission, that "the poor have good tidings preached to them," in evident allusion to the same prophetic passage which was read by him in the synagogue at Nazareth. And other passages which seem to favor the view of those who maintain that he insisted on poverty as essential to discipleship, are such as these: (Mt. 8^{20}) "The foxes have holes and the birds of

[7] See Merrill, *Galilee in the Time of Christ*, Boston, 1881, pp. 40 f.

the air have haunts; but the Son of man hath not where to lay his head." (Lk. 14^{33}) "Whosoever he be of you that renounceth not all that he hath, he cannot be my disciple." (Mt. $19^{23 f.}$) "Verily I say unto you, It is hard for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of heaven. And again I say unto you, It is easier for a camel to go through a needle's eye than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God." (Lk. $6^{20 f.}$) "Blessed are ye poor," says Luke, — not "poor in spirit"; "Blessed are ye that hunger now," — not "hunger and thirst after righteousness"; and this Evangelist adds "woes" (ch. 6^{24-26}): "Woe unto you that are rich! for ye have received your consolation. Woe unto you, ye that are full now! for ye shall hunger." Moreover, the stories of the foolish rich man who planned to pull down his barns and build greater; and the rich man at whose gate the beggar Lazarus was laid, make at first glance the impression that the rich are the wicked, and the poor the good. Both these stories are peculiar to Luke; who, as we have seen, connects with external condition the blessings which Matthew connects with an inward state.

But in estimating the alleged "communism" of our Lord's teaching several things must be taken into consideration: (1) In the first place, to the Jewish mind worldly prosperity was of itself proof of divine favor;[8] hence, admonitions designed to thwart its deceitfulness were especially incumbent on a spiritual teacher like Jesus. (2) The orthodox Pharisaic legalism was of such a type that only the well-to-do could meet its requirements. Appropriately, therefore, does Luke (16^{14}) describe the Pharisees as "lovers of money." They devoured widows' houses while for a pretence making long prayers. Through confiding sons they laid their greedy clutch on everything they could, as "Corban" — 'dedicated to God' — even though they thus left the parents to starve. (3) Again, the term "poor" carried with it to the current thought of that day suggestions of meanness and contempt. One of the commonest Greek synonyms for 'poor' (πτωχός, 'crouching') "always," the philologists tell us (Liddell and Scott, *s.v.* I. 2), "had a bad sense till it was ennobled in the Gospels." In speaking special words of comfort to this class, our Lord was but attesting his divine mission, agreeably to the description of the Psalmist (35^{10}): "Who is like unto thee, O Lord, which deliverest the poor from him that is too strong for him, yea, the poor and the needy from him that spoileth him." (4) In those days, further, the "poor" were

[8] See for example Enoch, ch. xcvi. 4 (ed. Charles, Oxford, 1893): "Woe unto you, ye sinners, for your riches make you appear like the righteous, but your hearts convict you of being sinners."

the victims of constant ill treatment alike from tyrannical rulers and especially from rich and lawless neighbors. The attitude of these classes toward the poor is graphically described by the Son of Sirach (13^{18f}): "What peace is there between the hyena and the dog? And what peace between the rich man and the poor? Wild asses are the prey of lions in the wilderness; so poor men are pasture for the rich." Pertinently does James in his Epistle appeal to his fellow-Christians: "Do not the rich oppress you, and is it not they who drag you into the courts? Is it not they that blaspheme the honorable name by the which ye are called? . . . Did not God choose the poor as to the world to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom which he promised to them that love him?" It was a veritable Evangel, then, that addressed itself particularly to the poor; and those were timely and wholesome warnings which by their sweeping boldness startled the rich from their security and revealed to them the folly of their trust in riches.

The story of the rich fool teaches the lesson, apposite in every age, that the man with superabundant worldly possessions will prove to be finally and forever poor, if he has nothing else. The inference from the parable of the rich man and Lazarus that "wealth is sin," a notion as old certainly as the second century,[9] is often met by injecting into the story unwarranted assumptions respecting the contrasted moral character of the rich man and the beggar. But of this Jesus says not a word. He portrays the character of neither party. That the rich man dies unrepentent he himself, indeed, indirectly acknowledges by begging that his five brothers may be timely warned. But impenitence and penitence are not the invariable accompaniments of wealth and beggary. The parable cannot have been designed to convey any such fallacious notion. Evidently its emphasis lies upon the rich man — his life and his destiny. But *he* incurs condemnation not because he is rich, but because he uses his riches upon himself, employs it in a life of easy self-indulgence, indifferent to the most obvious and appealing needs of his fellows. He turns a deaf ear to the "cry of the human," and is less compassionate than the scavenger dogs. The perils of a life of self-indulgence are all the more impressively suggested because the rich man is not described as avaricious, dissolute, oppressive, given to any of the flagrant vices which not infrequently accompany great wealth. The closing reference to Moses and the

[9] Clem. hom. 15.9: τὰ κτήματα ἁμαρτήματα, 'possessions are transgressions'; to the same purport speaks Renan (*Les Évangiles*, 275): "the rich man is always blameworthy; perdition is his certain destiny."

prophets shows that it is no more for want of incentive than for want of opportunity that the gifts of God are ruinously misused.

Matthew (8^{20}) joins Luke (9^{58}) in attributing to Jesus the description of his life quoted just now: "The foxes have burrows, and the birds of the air have haunts; but the Son of man hath not where to lay his head"; and he describes the volunteer follower, to whom this saying was an answer, as "a scribe" — one of the upper classes. The circumstances of the case, therefore, as well as the indications already noted respecting the life of Jesus, show that he merely means that, in the fulfilment of his mission, he leads the life of a wanderer, not that he is in extreme poverty and never the recipient of hospitality. The answer is given to warn the scribe beforehand what he is to expect if he enters Christ's service. It bids him count the cost of the step he is proposing to take. It is no precept laid down as the ideal of life for every disciple; no test by which every one, in all lands and through all time, should try himself, who aspires to "walk in His steps."

But how about the young ruler (Mt. 19^{16} Mk. 10^{17} Lk. 18^{18}), he whose zeal for eternal life brings him running to Jesus, and whose uprightness calls out the exceptional statement, "Jesus beholding him loved him." Why does Jesus impose the exacting requirement, "Go, sell whatsoever thou hast and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come, follow me"? What clearer proof can we have that Jesus required as the condition of discipleship complete renunciation of earthly possessions? He emphasizes, too, the lesson taught by the sorrowful departure of the applicant, by the saying about the difficulty of a rich man's entering into the Kingdom.

The answer is obvious. This is a special demand, made of a particular individual, whose personal, spiritual needs Jesus — as the event showed — discerned with true insight. It is no more to be made the standard of action for every rich man than the indiscriminate almsgiving, which the last part of the command seems to inculcate, is to be taken as the type of true benevolence in Christ's opinion. Like other of our Lord's utterances, that direction has been misused; as it was, indeed, by St. Anthony, "the father of asceticism," as he is called. Happening to hear the words in church when eighteen years old, and shortly after the death of his parents, he gave away all his patrimony — and his sister's too, apparently — and lived in isolated indigence till his death at the age of 105. As wisely might every one who aspires to become a son of Abraham offer up his first-born — as a certain Mr. Freeman in Plymouth County attempted to do a few years ago — or swell the great army of tramps by "getting him out from his country and kin-

dred (Gen. 12[1]), not knowing whither" (Heb. 11[8]). The "rich chief publican" Zacchaeus, in his formal profession of faith (σταθείς, Lk. 19[8]), only makes over half of his goods to the poor (although he promises fourfold recompense to those whom he has wronged), and receives the commendation "To-day is salvation come to this house, forasmuch as he also is a son of Abraham."

It should be noticed that this interview with the rich young ruler is recorded not by Luke alone, but by all three of the Synoptists; and all three preserve the associated saying about the difficulty of entering the kingdom for those who have riches. These two items, therefore, must be deducted from the evidence on which some critics are disposed to charge Luke with favoring Ebionitic ideals of social life. His Gospel cannot be fairly called "the glorification of poverty" (Renan, *Les Évangiles* 275). So far as he shows any distinctive tendency to favor asceticism and encourage the renunciation of wealth (*e.g.* 6[20. 24] 12[33 ff.]), it may be due (*a*) partly to that side of Christianity which appealed most strikingly and attractively to a mind approaching it from heathenism (witness the prominence he gives to the compassionate treatment of sinners and women);[10] and (*b*) partly to the rising of that extravagant communistic zeal, which soon spread widely in early Christian circles, reduced the church at Jerusalem to a condition of beggarly dependence,[11] and gave name to believers for generations.[12] Jesus did speak comfortably to the poor, for their need was and is special. He did utter warnings to wealth, for its perils were and are peculiar. It was to be renounced by the twelve (Lk. 12[32 f.]) as an obvious distraction and hindrance in their apostolic work. But he uttered no sweeping denunciation of private ownership. One whose life work is to minister is congruously enough the friend of publicans and sinners.

Equally untenable is the assertion that Jesus aimed to subvert the established organization of society; that his ministry was shaped by revolutionary designs against the existing order of things. His assertion in the Sermon on the Mount (Mt. 5[17]) that he came "not to destroy

[10] "Luke might well be called the 'Evangelist of Philanthropy' if this word had not lost its sacredness. Such a Gospel became the man who had travelled much among Greeks and Romans with Paul, and who dedicated his work to a [person of station like] Theophilus." Herder, *Vom Erlöser der Menschen*. Sämmtliche Werke, 16[ter] Theil (1830), p. 284 (*cf.* Zahn, *Einl.* ii. 392).

[11] Yet many of the modern representations of the primitive community of goods described in the Book of Acts are exaggerated, and neglect the counter indications imbedded in the narrative.

[12] "Quod plerique pauperes dicimur non est infamia nostra, sed gloria" (Minucius Felix, 36, 4). See Uhlhorn, *Ebioniten*, in R. E.[2]

but to fulfil," may possibly warrant the inference that some such charge had been early brought against him; and at his trial there were some who (according to Lk. 23^2) alleged that he was "perverting the nation and forbidding to give tribute to Cæsar, saying that he himself is Christ, a king." But no proof of the charge is produced; and it is refuted by the threefold declaration of Pilate himself, "I find no fault in him" (Lk. $23^{4.14.22}$). Moreover, it conflicts with the fact that when the people, in their blind enthusiasm, would take him by force and enthrone him, he hid himself (Jn. 6^{15}). True, in the same sermon he repeatedly — as we have already seen — contrasts his teaching with that given "to them of old time" (Mt. 5^{21}, *etc.*). But the contrast finds its warrant and explanation largely in the traditional amplifications with which the Mosaic statutes had been encumbered; partly, too, in the readjustment which incrusted and petrified legislation requires to changed circumstances and new needs. The "new wine must be put into new bottles." In *principle*, however, he reaffirmed it: "It is easier for heaven and earth to pass away than for one tittle of the law to fall" (Lk. 16^{17}). His quarrel with the hierarchy is that in their petty punctiliousness they "leave undone the weightier matters of the *law*, judgment and mercy and faith" (Mt. 23^{23} Lk. 11^{42}). His practical attitude toward the institutions of the times is shown by his declining to concern himself with the division of an inheritance; by the fact that he vindicates his alleged violations of the Sabbath by Old Testament precept and precedent; by his repeated injunction to cured lepers to secure forthwith the official priestly authentication, and make the prescribed offering; by his direction to Peter respecting the payment of the temple-tax; and especially by his reply to the combined delegation of Pharisees and Herodians sent to ensnare him with the artful question, "Is it lawful to give tribute unto Cæsar or not?" (Mk. 12^{14} Mt. 22^{17} Lk. 20^{22}). To this question Jesus is sometimes erroneously said to have given an evasive answer. Far from it. By confronting them with one of their own coins — coins which, with all their Pharisaic scrupulousness, they were doubtless eager enough to accumulate — he convicts them of actually acknowledging the dominion of Cæsar, in common with all their fellow-subjects; yet at the same time he reminds them that there is a supreme sovereignty, fidelity to which is not inconsistent with secular citizenship. Christ's reply is a crushing *argumentum ad hominem*. The fancied dilemma turns out to be only an exposed plot.

III. But this incident, like the interview with the rich young man, directs attention to another phase of the ethical method of Jesus,

which must not be left unmentioned. I refer to its *specificness*. It is not general, abstract, academic, like the theoretical or casuistical discussions in the books; it is direct, personal, meeting — often with startling boldness, and what seems like perilous imprudence — the precise need of the moment.

Let us notice the illustration this characteristic finds in one or two parables, which have been thought to be of questionable character:

1. Take the Parable of the "Unrighteous Steward," which Luke has preserved for us in his sixteenth chapter. The steward of "a certain rich man" (you remember) has been accused to him of wasting his goods. On being called to account, and threatened with displacement, he, in his perplexity, makes friends of his master's debtors, and provides a hospitable reception for himself when thrown out of office by cutting down their dues, in one instance by half the amount, in another by far more than as much in value. In short, he atones for one offence by committing another: with the result that his shrewdness is "commended."

Now we need not (with certain interpreters — Bruce among them; see *The Expositor's Greek Testament*, p. 585) aggravate the embarrassment of the case, by understanding "the lord" who utters the commendation to be the Lord Jesus: an interpretation opposed both by the immediately following mention of "the sons of the light," *i.e.* Christians, and by the emphatic "*I* say unto you," which distinguishes Jesus from "the lord" (or "master") of the steward. But the story, as it stands, has been a scandal to readers both in and out of the Christian church through the centuries. Some, otherwise mild and sympathetic judges, have said: "If Jesus spoke this parable as we have it — without the slightest hint of disapproval (but rather the reverse) for the reiterated and selfish fraud of the steward — then I must renounce allegiance to him as an ethical teacher"; while others have been as downright in their censorious misjudgment of it as Renan, who extorts from it this conclusion (*Les Évangiles*, p. 276): "In Christ's new kingdom, it will be worth more to a man to have made friends for himself among the poor, even by injustice, than to have been an upright trustee."

Loyalty to the truth forbids us to betake ourselves to any subterfuges or evasions: — as that the parable merely represents the steward as "accused" — whether correctly or not it does not say; or that he is accused of "wasting his master's goods"; but the wasting may not have been by dissipation, but in some creditable way — by lavishing them, for example, upon the poor. One supposition, how-

ever, in which some minds have found relief as respects the steward's character, is ingenious enough, perhaps, to be worth a passing mention. It is conjectured that, as the rich man's agent, he may have been invested with full power over his estates — to fix rents and exact dues. Consequently, in reducing for his own advantage the creditors' bonds, he is not adding fraud to fraud; but making some amends to them for former extortion. We have an account in Josephus (*Ant.* 12, 4, 7 *sq.*) of an actuary who was intrusted in this way with full control of his master's affairs; and from whom the master's son, on getting permission to ask for some ten pounds, extorted a thousand.

We gain little, however, by resorting to far-fetched suppositions in the case. For, resting on ignorance, they have validity only for minds that desire to believe them; and such a desire is tantamount to an indirect impeachment of the narrative as it appears in the record. That record and its aim seem to me alike plain and justifiable. The very "commendation" passed upon the steward's fraudulent conduct ought to open the eyes of the hostile critics to the parable's true purport — all the more because it comes so unnaturally from the unfortunate victim of the fraud. The lesson inculcated is sagacious foresight in things spiritual: — recall the wise man who built on the rock, and the wise virgins. It is the swindler's shrewd ingenuity in providing for impending needs which extorts praise even from its dupe. The parable is spoken "to the disciples" — a trained and trusted circle of hearers, who already had their senses somewhat exercised in discerning good and evil. Jesus draws from it for them an admonition not to let themselves be surpassed in prudence by the "sons of this world." He enforces the lesson, and carries it still further, by reminding them that even "unrighteous wealth" — (rightly enough so styled, because it so commonly tempts to wrongdoing, as the story shows) — can be made tributary to everlasting profit. The exhortations which follow it, and which several expositors (Weiss among them, *Leben Jesu*, ii. 67 note) regard as an incongruous addition or misplacement, for which the Evangelist is answerable, are but variations and amplifications thoroughly in the style of our Lord's teaching: as is seen, for instance, in the allegory that blends sheepfold and shepherd, in the tenth chapter of John. Chargeable with improbabilities and incongruities the story may be, if tried by a *rhetorical* standard. But it is *not* a literary but a *didactic* production; designed not to entertain, but to *edify*. The morality of the measures the steward adopted does not come into the case.

Like other fictitious illustrations which the great teacher employed, it is shaped not to meet the squeamish or the correct taste resultant from nineteen centuries of Christian culture; but is modelled in conformity with the current views and practices of his contemporaries. Its very boldness makes it take the hearer captive and set him to pondering: — as its history proves. It may be placed by the side of the story of the man who, having hit upon buried treasure, conceals the fact till he has bought the field (Mt. 13^{44}); or the still bolder parable which brings God and an unrighteous judge into comparison (Lk. 18). Over all these may stand the inscription, "Evil to him who evil thinks."

2. We have another example of the intrepid way in which Jesus charged home a single but pertinent moral truth, in the reply he made, when dining with a Pharisee, to the surprise expressed "that he had not washed before dinner" (Lk. 11^{39}): "Now ye the Pharisees cleanse the outside of the cup and of the platter; but your inward part is full of extortion and wickedness. . . . But give for alms those things which are within; and behold, all things are clean unto you."

Here, again, fastidious critics shake their heads. What is this, they say, but the sophistical doctrine, which so often finds favor with the possessors of ill-gotten wealth, that charity cancels rapacity! Accordingly, ingenious devices have been resorted to in order to make our Lord say something different from what he does say — as, for example, that the language is ironical, and does not express the teaching of Jesus; but is a hypocritical maxim of the rabbins, quoted by him as an addition to his impeachment of them: "Only give something to the poor and your wrongdoing is condoned"; "almsgiving is the sum of all virtues"; "charity (you think) covers a multitude of sins"! Others, who rightly acknowledge the language to be an intentional exhortation, think to preclude the inference that mere acts have value apart from motives, by saying: "Of course, Jesus means, 'Give — in the right spirit; with genuine love for the needy,'" *etc.*, an essential in the case of which, unfortunately, Jesus, in addressing these votaries of externalism, has given no hint.

The truth is, he simply puts his finger directly on the sore. To give their wealth to the needy was just the last thing these greedy and self-indulgent extortioners could bring themselves to think of. The act would work a revolution in their character. Jesus in giving this command proceeds as he did in the case of the rich young ruler. He strips off their disguises, and exposes them to themselves; — with

a result apparently less promising even than in the former case, to judge by the woes which immediately follow in the Evangelist's report (Lk. $11^{42 f}$).

3. We can take but one more example of the boldness and directness which characterized Jesus in enforcing without qualification a specific truth; *viz.* the illustration of it given in the parable known as The Laborers in the Vineyard, or Equal Pay for Unequal Work (Mt. 20^{1-16}). The owner of the vineyard, you remember, has hired five different sets of laborers, at different times during the day: the first set early in the morning, the last at the eleventh hour. The first group had agreed to work for a denarius[13] a day. The others, subsequently hired, had merely been told that they would be paid what was "right." At the close of the day, when, according to law (Lev. 19^{13}; Tob. 4^{14}), payment was to be made, the owner of the vineyard told his steward to call the laborers and give them their hire, "beginning from the last." These received every man a full day's wages for an hour's work. This generous overpayment of course stirred expectation in those who were hired first. Consequently, when they received every man only a denarius, they complained, saying, "These last have worked (or "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 shilling? 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?" The answer would have been more likely to silence the complainant than to satisfy him. On the ground of strict justice, indeed, neither his complaint nor our scruples can find any standing. But the wisdom of the gratuity seems open to question. What would be the effect of such apparently ill-timed and capricious generosity upon social economics? The mere defence of it seems to be a provocative to labor troubles. Hence, some indiscreet interpreters have been forward to assume that the inequality in payment must have been justified by inequality in work. But of difference between the laborers as respects zeal, capacity, amount accomplished, and the like, not a word is said. Nor can the

[13] In intrinsic value nearly equivalent to the old-fashioned New England shilling, as money of account; but in purchasing power equivalent probably to three times that amount at the present day. It seems to have been the ordinary day's wages at the time. Compare Tobit 5^{14} and Fuller's note *ad. loc.*

late comers be assumed to have received for one hour the payment of twelve, because they were willing to work all day but did not get the opportunity. Nor is that exposition any more satisfactory which, by overpressing the introductory words, "The kingdom of heaven is like," *etc.*, refers the scene to the consummated Christian state, and finds the explanation of the identity of reward in the fact that all alike receive the same gift, "eternal life." This interpretation (although it finds favor with Weiss, *Com.*, p. 349) is not only intrinsically irrational, but it conflicts in principle with the answer Jesus gives to Peter's question (19^{27}): "Peter said unto him, Lo, we have left all, and followed thee; what then shall we have? And Jesus said unto them, Verily I say unto you, that ye which have followed me, in the regeneration when the Son of man shall sit on the throne of his glory, ye also shall sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel. And every one that hath left houses, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or children, or lands, for my name's sake, shall receive a hundredfold, and shall inherit eternal life. But many shall be last that are first, and first that are last"— a clear recognition of gradations, as in merit so in reward. And, at the final award, the "cup of cold water" shall receive its recompense, he tells us. No. The bestowment of the extra remuneration is expressly removed from all economic or imaginary grounds, and assumed by the owner of the vineyard as his sovereign prerogative: "*It is my will* to give unto this last even as unto thee." This phrase lifts us at once to the true point of view.

It is the exercise of his gratuitous and unmerited benevolence; an exhibition of it which to us is inexplicable; but not on that account censurable. For the act typifies God's conduct; which, however inscrutable it often is, must be equitable, because it is His. That he makes wide differences in his distribution of blessings, and for reasons, too, which we cannot conjecture, is as true in things temporal as things spiritual. And to the murmuring spirit in either realm the answer is irrefutable: "Is it not lawful for me to do what I will with my own"? Are you jealous, because I am generous? — when my generosity does not rob you of a farthing; you ought not to envy those rejoicing in their good fortune, but to rejoice with them.

But the pertinence of the parable — as in other instances — relates primarily to those to whom it was spoken. It contains a most suggestive rebuke to Pharisaic *claims*. The attitude of the Pharisee is unquestionably correctly exhibited by Luke's representative character ($18^{11f.}$), who congratulates himself before God that he is superior

to "the rest of men," fasting Mondays and Thursdays all the year round, and paying tithes on all his income as well as his capital. Such men were naturally jealous of everything which looked like an encroachment on their fancied rights. And our Lord, as in the former instance, carries the principle he so strikingly exhibits to an application fitted to awaken their alarm. This friend of publicans and sinners, this proclaimer of good tidings, who gave indiscriminate welcome to '*all*' the weary and heavy-laden, reminds them that, by the law of *gratuitous* bestowment, present positions may be reversed: "the last become first, and the first last."

IV. Additional characteristics of Jesus as a teacher might well be dwelt upon did time permit — prominent among them his habit of appealing to other than the intellectual powers. Moral instruction requires insight, rather than reasoning. It demands more *sympathy* and *candor* than logic. Hence, things hidden from the wise and prudent are revealed often unto babes.

One comprehensive lesson which our topic teaches must not remain unstated, *viz.:* The admirable *educative* power lodged in the teachings of Jesus.

Jesus does not deal with his disciples as many an eminent instructor, ancient and modern, has dealt with his pupils. He does not give them a rigid and classified collection of rules, to be stored up in memory and obeyed as occasion may require. He puts upon *them* the task of extricating from the figurative, or pictorial, or axiomatic, expressions in which his lessons are couched, the particular direction befitting the diversified temperaments and circumstances, and the constantly changing conditions, of individual life. He furnishes the principle; it is for the disciple to apply it.

"But" — it may be objected — "have you not made it evident that there is by no means complete agreement, among experts even, respecting the meaning of not a few of his teachings? What, then, shall the average disciple do? According to the probabilities of the case, is he not foredoomed often to err in his decisions?"

Even apart from experience, we should answer affirmatively; and Christian history from the early days of the church at Jerusalem down confirms the decision. But what follows? Only a more positive proof of the power of discipline inherent in the sacred record; a more emphatic conviction of the need of patient, candid study to ascertain its meaning, and of sincerity and discretion in the attempt to apply it.

This conviction is of itself an education.

For frequently the Christian principles of conduct are dealt with as though they were a *code of laws;* and the only task of one who would regulate his life by them were to look up the injunction which seems most nearly to fit the need of the moment. In fact, multitudes deal with the New Testament as though it were a moral receipt-book; as though Christian living were to be degraded to the level of cookery. The very intricacies of interpretation, the queries and perplexities in which we often become involved in our attempt to enucleate the lesson of a given section of the record, the clashing opinions of professional exegetes, the doubts that beset one detail or another owing to our fragmentary knowledge of the circumstances of the times — such things are enough to discourage a student who comes to his work under the misconception alluded to. A little reflection will convince him that all this is inevitable. For true morality cannot be imprisoned in words. The letter of Christ's teachings remains like himself — "the same yesterday, and today, and forever." But duties change with circumstances; and every age must adjust the unalterable principles to its own particular requirements. In this task, a share of which falls to every disciple, lies (as I have said) the training. The profit results, as in the case of the child with its problem in arithmetic, not from the *answer* but the *getting* of it. Yes; and in both cases even failure, if it result from honest, patient, prayerful effort, is but success in disguise. Such is Christ's school. This is the divine method of training souls. This is the way in which, if they are but docile pupils, they come to discern more and more of the Master's mind, and gradually grow towards the measure of his stature.