

Thy interests. Forgive us that we have come to Thee for so little, that we are so different from what we might have been if we had taken Thee at Thy word and believed that Thou wert able to make us partakers of Thy fulness and fellow-workers with Thee. Give us a simpler faith, and help us to depend on Thee more for all we need, believing that it is by Thy power alone we can effect anything.—MARCUS DODS.

#### Of Ingratitude.

Quicken our consciences, O Lord, by Thy Holy Spirit, that we may feel as we ought our past ingratitude to Thee. Make us ashamed of the idleness, the worldliness, the carelessness, the sensuality, of which we have been guilty before Thee. Lord, our own hearts condemn us; and Thou art greater than our hearts, and knowest all things.—C. J. VAUGHAN.

Forgive, O Lord! we beseech Thee, all that has been amiss in our past, our many acts of unthankfulness, our often forgetfulness of Thee and of Thy will, the follies that have led us away from Thee, the vain attempts to find refuge in others than Thyself. Forgive the coldness of our love, the wavering of our faith, the irresolution of our past desires, the poverty of our service, and the mingled motives that have blended with our purest aspirations.—A. MACLAREN.

#### Of Misspent Time.

Forgive us that we have this day neglected the duty which we have assigned to it, and suffered the hours, of which we must give account, to pass away without any endeavour to accomplish Thy will, or to promote our own salvation. Make us to remember, O God, that every day is Thy gift, and ought to be used according to Thy command. Grant us, therefore, so to repent of our negligence,

that we may obtain mercy from Thee, and pass the time which Thou shalt yet allow us in diligent performance of Thy commands.—SAMUEL JOHNSON.

#### Of Murmuring.

We have often murmured against the allotments of Thy Providence, instead of receiving them humbly at Thy hand, and using them for the correction of our manifold faults and sins.—C. J. VAUGHAN.

#### Of Neglect of Spiritual Things.

We are ashamed that we should have cared so little for these spirits of ours for which Thou hast cared so constantly and tenderly and sacrificed so dearly. We have not been diligent in the use of the means Thou hast provided, and when we have, we have often trusted more to them than to Thy Spirit.—MARCUS DODS.

We call to mind our broken vows and unfinished work, the blossoms that never brought forth fruit, the unheeded prayers of others, the teaching that never came to good, all our foolish desires and wasted passions, all the wine poured out in wrong places, all the worship given to the false gods, all the hours that might have been full of preciousness, all our negligence of duty, all our backslidings and sinnings, our faintings and failings and fallings.—G. DAWSON.

Our past iniquities remain with us, and take hold upon us; our indolences, our idle words, our careless neglects to redeem the time, to seize the opportunity; our occasional mean yieldings, our tarryings to listen to the flesh, our thoughtless infidelities to the spirit; these have not perished in the waters of our repentance, nor has Thy forgiving mercy extinguished them.—S. A. TIPPLE.

## The Unjust Steward in a New Light.

BY THE REV. WILLIAM ARNOTT, DENNISTOUN, GLASGOW.

THE interpretation most commonly given and received of the Parable of the Unjust Steward is far from being satisfactory.

It has given the enemies of the truth an opportunity of bringing a grave charge against the

moral character of Jesus: namely, that Jesus instead of showing His marked disapproval of dishonesty, held up, for the imitation of His disciples, the unrighteous conduct of at least one clever cheat.

This is a serious charge, one that may well lead us to question the correctness of the interpretation which gives occasion for its being made. For we know that the Saviour did no sin, neither was guile found in His mouth, and that neither by word nor deed did He give any countenance whatever to unrighteousness.

In order to evade the grave charge to which we have referred, it is pleaded that the unjust steward is commended in the parable only for his wisdom, or cleverness, in the forethought and cunning displayed in his trying emergency; and that this and this alone is held up by Jesus as worthy of imitation in respect to spiritual things. But this seems a very narrow view to take of the parable, and it would seem as if it was resorted to in order to evade an insuperable difficulty.

Another objection to the interpretation of the parable commonly given is, that it represents Jesus as commending to, or enjoining upon, His hearers, not a *similar* course to that indicated in the parable, but an *opposite* one. This is quite out of keeping with the nature and design of a parable. 'A parable can never be intended to indicate its counterpart.' Hence we may safely say that our Saviour did not intend to recommend to His disciples a course *opposite* to the management of the steward, but a *similar* one. The application is but the carrying out of the parable, and so out of the clear sense we should be able to infer that which is more obscure.

We would like to have such a clear and legitimate interpretation of the parable as would give no occasion to any one to say or insinuate that its Author gave any countenance whatever to unrighteousness. Nay, we would like to have the parable so interpreted as clearly to show that it condemns all injustice, and was intended to stimulate the disciples of Jesus to the practice of righteousness and benevolence towards men, as well as of holiness towards God.

We find that Jesus addressed this parable to His disciples—'And he said also unto his disciples.' By disciples here we understand all those who followed Jesus and gladly received His instructions. The term does not seem to be limited to the *Twelve* or to the *Seventy*; but evidently refers to all who heard and received His teachings.

The expression, 'and he said also unto his disciples,' shows that this parable is connected with those in the preceding chapter. These the

Saviour addressed to the Scribes and Pharisees, in vindication of His conduct in receiving sinners and eating with them. The publicans and sinners whom He so kindly and lovingly received, and with whom He did eat, were those who had drawn near to hear Him. And we understand that these are they who are here called *His disciples*.

Jesus, as was natural, having showed the Scribes and Pharisees that His conduct was right and good, turned round and addressed those who had been the occasion of the whole discourse, and pointed out their duty and guarded them against the danger to which they stood exposed—guarded them against what was perhaps their besetting sin. And He still further showed the Pharisees what was their duty as the professed and boasted children of the light.

We come now to notice the parable itself. In it we have brought before us the case of a steward, one who has proved unfaithful, been reported to his master, called to give an account, and who is threatened with the loss of his stewardship. Doubtless we are all familiar with what follows—the scene described from the second to the eighth verse. Evidently that scene took place in the presence of the rich man—the master of the steward. 'He called him, and said unto him, How is it that I hear this of thee? give an account of thy stewardship; for thou mayest be no longer steward.'

There is no proof—nothing to show that the steward left his master's presence to determine what course he would pursue, and transact what is recorded of him.

Now that he was face to face with his master, and his dishonesty brought home to him, he seems to have made up his mind very quickly as to what he would do. He merely thought within himself and resolved at once what to do. 'Then the steward said within himself, What shall I do? for my lord taketh away from me the stewardship: I cannot dig; to beg I am ashamed. I am resolved what to do, that, when I am put out of the stewardship, they may receive me into their houses.' In what follows we have the resolution of the steward developed. 'So he called every one of his lord's debtors, and said unto the first, How much owest thou unto my lord? And he said, An hundred measures of oil. And he said unto him, Take thy bill, and sit down quickly, and write fifty. Then said he to another, And how much owest thou?

And he said, An hundred measures of wheat. And he said unto him, Take thy bill, and write fourscore.'

This is the principal part of the parable. And the great question comes to be—*Was all this done by the steward to deceive his master, and rob him of more of his property?* We think not. For his master is present hearing and seeing the whole transaction. And then he received the well-done of his master: 'The lord commended the unjust steward, because he had done wisely.'

Now, if we cannot understand the conduct of the steward as a piece of clever deception practised on his master, then there is nothing for us but to regard it as a good and honest transaction. And if good and honest, then also a *generous* transaction. It seems to us to be good, honest, and generous.

The conduct of the steward is very much akin to that of Zaccheus as represented in Lk 19<sup>8</sup>. 'And Zaccheus stood, and said unto the Lord, Behold, Lord, the half of my goods I give to the poor; and if I have taken anything from any man by false accusation, I restore him fourfold.' Now this conduct on the part of Zaccheus approves itself to all as just and generous. And it is just what every unrighteously enriched person ought to do. Of this character was the conduct of the unjust steward when called upon to give an account of his doings. He makes restitution and is liberal at the same time. For, doubtless, what he caused to be subtracted he made up out of his own stock.

This was a master-stroke of wisdom, and could not fail to call forth the admiration of his lord, and the gratitude of the debtors. By it he accomplished two things at once. He made restitution to his lord, whom he openly confesses to have injured, by giving out of his own gains what he caused to be deducted from the bills of the debtors; which, very likely, they were unable to pay, and thus protected his master against loss. Then at the same time he showed kindness to the debtors, who, for want of means, might have been sold with all they counted dear that payment might be made.

Thus he touched the feelings of creditor and debtors, and laid them under obligation to himself. And so 'the lord commended the unjust steward because he had done wisely.'

If the conduct of the steward had been such as it is commonly represented—a dishonest trick, a clever cheat—his lord could not have {so com-

mended him. In that case he would have deserved the severest censure of his master. But his conduct is such that it at once meets with the approbation of the master, and he commends the steward for having *done* wisely.

We wish to emphasize the word *done*. It is not said that he managed wisely, but that he acted wisely, that is, that he returned to a wise course; not a course in the carrying out of which he was under the necessity of resorting to new acts of unrighteousness and defrauding his lord to a greater extent. But a course by which he redeemed himself—recovered his character, and secured the good opinion of his lord, and made friends of the mammon of unrighteousness. And that which received the approbation and commendation of the steward's master is also pointed to by Jesus as manifesting the higher wisdom. '*For the children of this world are wiser in their generation than the children of light.*' We have now come to the inference drawn by our Saviour from the narrative.

In this inference we have two classes specified, and a comparison drawn between them—the children of this world, and the children of light. And of the children of this world it is affirmed that they are wiser in their generation than the children of light.

At this point the question comes to be, Who are denoted by the expression, 'The children of this world'? Whoever they are it is plain that they are those who are represented by the steward in the parable. It is said of him that he had done wisely. And, evidently referring to this, Jesus says, the children of this world are wiser in their generation than the children of the light. Our question now is, Who constitute the class represented by the steward? There is but one answer can be given to the question, namely, the *publicans and sinners* who had become the disciples of Jesus.

The Scribes and Pharisees looked upon them as peculiarly the children of the world, whilst they, the Scribes and Pharisees, looked upon themselves as in a peculiar manner the people of God. The Scribes and Pharisees constitute the class called by Jesus *the children of the light*. And such without doubt they considered themselves. They trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and despised others (Lk 18<sup>9</sup>); that they alone knew the law, and were not blind as other men. 'Behold, thou art called a Jew, and retest in the

law, and makest thy boast of God, and knowest his will, and approvest the things that are more excellent, being instructed out of the law; and art confident that thou thyself art a guide of the blind, a light of them which are in darkness, an instructor of the foolish, a teacher of babes, which hast the form of knowledge and of the truth in the law' (Ro 2<sup>17-20</sup>).

There is no evidence in favour of the common idea that our Saviour is here drawing or making a comparison between Christians and the unbelieving world. The evidence is on the other side. For if they are meant the proposition is not true. The unbelieving world is not wiser in its generation than the Christian in whose heart is shed abroad the light and love of heaven. But understanding the children of light to denote the Jews in opposition to the publicans and sinners—the children of this world—the proposition is true.

How are the children of this world, namely, the publicans and sinners, wiser than the children of light, namely, the Scribes and Pharisees? They are wiser in respect to their generation. By generation here is meant *state and character*, as in Mt 12<sup>39</sup>, 'An evil and adulterous generation seeketh a sign'; and Mk 9<sup>19</sup>, 'O faithless generation, how long shall I be with you? how long shall I suffer you?'

That is, they manifested more wisdom in respect to their state as sinners. This they showed by the way they acted. The Scribes and Pharisees trusting in themselves that they were righteous, not only despised others, but despised and rejected Jesus because He preached the glad tidings of

great joy to the poor and needy, the lost and degraded. But the publicans and sinners, conscious of their lost condition and feeling their need of a Saviour, welcomed Jesus, and drew near to hear Him. Jesus gives a beautiful representation of this in the Parable of the Two Sons in Mt 21<sup>28-32</sup>. 'But what think ye? A certain man had two sons; and he came to the first, and said, Son, go work to-day in my vineyard.' He answered and said, I will not; but afterward he repented, and went. And he came to the second, and said likewise. And he answered and said, I go, sir; and went not. Whether of them twain did the will of his father? They say unto him, The first. Jesus saith unto them, Verily I say unto you, That the publicans and the harlots go 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: and ye, when ye had seen it, repented not afterward, that ye might believe him.' The steward in the parable beautifully represents the publicans and sinners who thus entered into the kingdom of God, whilst the Pharisees—the professed and boasted children of the light—went not in. In his unfaithfulness to his master, when he wasted his goods, he was a type of the publicans and sinners when unconverted and living in a state of supreme selfishness. But when he was led to follow a new course and to act wisely, he represented the publicans and sinners as returned to Christ. And in their return showing themselves wiser than the children of light—the Scribes and Pharisees.

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## Literature.

### *THE APOCRYPHA AND PSEUDEPI- GRAPHIA OF THE OLD TESTAMENT.*

If ever a man has had his name associated with a special branch of study that man is Professor R. H. Charles of Oxford. It might be said almost that he had created the study with which he is identified. For before he began, not only were there no critical editions of the Old Testament Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha in English, but it does not seem to have occurred to any one that such a thing was necessary. If he has not

created, he has certainly revolutionized, his study. It is only now, and it is only because he has published so much, that it is possible to offer in English an edition of the Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha that can be relied upon for history or for doctrine.

He has worked upon this edition for several years, and Dr. Charles knows how to work. He has had colleagues who could work with him. The book is in two volumes, the first volume containing the Apocrypha, and the second and much larger volume the Pseudepigrapha. Here is a