

A NEW PARABLE.

LUKE xii. 29.

THERE are parables and parables. At times, our Lord recounts a simple and tender story in which every stroke tells, so that we see three or four typical persons, and how they carry themselves, in a critical moment of their lives. Such parables as "the Good Samaritan" and "the Prodigal Son" are not only the most perfect stories to which the world has listened; they are also stories which most perfectly convey to the heart and conscience of the world the simplest and profoundest spiritual truths. At other times, our Lord compresses some deep spiritual truth into parables not more than a verse long,—such parables, for instance, as those of the Mustard-Seed, the Leaven, the Hid Treasure, the Merchant-Man seeking goodly pearls; parables which, brief as they are, are nevertheless fraught with a meaning and a wisdom that we can never exhaust. And, at still other times, so divine was the wisdom with which He spake, He crushes a whole world of meaning into a single word, which, as we study it, resolves itself into a bright impressive picture or parable.

Now a *new* parable, if at least it is to be a parable uttered by our Lord and contained in the New Testament, can only be one of those suggestive pictures which are sometimes contained in a single word, and that a word the full import of which has been veiled from English readers by a defective rendering of the Original; for it cannot for a moment be supposed that an entire story, or even a single verse, should have escaped notice for eighteen centuries. Such a word is contained in the phrase which our Authorized Version renders by "*Neither be ye of doubtful mind.*" In the English Version the phrase conveys no hint of a parable even; but in the Greek the parable is plain enough: for the six English words are used to translate three Greek words (*και μη μετεωριζεσθε*), one of which is a verb of the most unique and graphic force. It would take many more than six English words to bring out its full meaning. For what it really means and implies is "*tossing about on the open sea*" as opposed to riding in a harbour at once accessible and safe. So that the whole phrase, which is complete in itself, and not part of a sentence, would come to this: "*Do not toss about in the windy offing, when you may ride safely in the sheltered haven.*" This is the picture, this the parable of the word or sentence. And if we take the sentence in its connection with what goes before and what comes after it, we find that the complete parable runs thus: "*Do not toss about on the wide dangerous sea of Care, on which so many make shipwreck, but rather take shelter in the safe and tranquil harbour of Trust in God.*" And that surely is a very striking parable, and

means much more to us, and is worth much more, than the words, "Neither be ye of doubtful mind." The parable is picturesque, and seizes on the imagination, while the maxim simply commends itself to our judgment.

The parable, indeed, has many points of interest for us; as, for example, this: That here probably we have the one only occasion on which our Lord pressed into the service of his kingdom "that wide and great sea" which was so terrible to the Hebrew imagination. But for this unique and picturesque word we should have had nothing to remind us that the sea was familiar to his eyes and thoughts. For what we call "*the Sea of Gennesaret*," though it had its tiny bays and creeks and havens, was only a small fresh-water lake, not so large as some of our British lakes, albeit to the traveller *these* seem to be little more than ornamental ponds. Yet, so soon as we are reminded of it, we know that the Lord Jesus must have often looked on the blue waters of the Mediterranean—"the *Great Sea*," as it was called in his time. It was visible from his native hills, the hills round Nazareth, and from the mountains, such as Tabor and Hermon, which He loved to climb. Nor were some of the most famous harbours of antiquity unknown to Him. On one occasion we are expressly told that He "went into the borders of Tyre and Sidon," nay, into Sidon itself.¹ And, in all probability, it was one of these great harbours on the dangerous Phœnician coast which He had in his mind when He bade his disciples sail into the tranquil haven of an assured

¹ See the best authenticated text of St. Mark vii. 31.

trust in God, instead of casting out their anchors into the wide perilous sea of Care; for then, as now, there were no safe harbours on the coast of Palestine, so that He would be compelled to go beyond the borders of his native land for this expressive image. And it cannot but be a welcome thought to us that here, if nowhere else, the sea, which plays so large a part in the history of the world and fills so large a space in our thoughts, is drawn into the service of Christ and compelled to illustrate a lesson of spiritual wisdom.

But what was the special lesson which this graphic image was used to illustrate and set forth?

As He was teaching a great multitude in one of the Towns of Galilee, the Lord Jesus took occasion to repeat the homily against harassing anxiety for the future which formed part of his Sermon on the Mount. Once more He set forth the calm and tranquil ideal of life which He would have us cherish, as opposed to the fretting cares and feverish ambitions by which our lives are too often wasted and degraded. Once more He bade his disciples consider the birds of the air and the lilies of the field, and learn from them the secret of inward serenity and repose. The birds have neither storehouse nor barn; yet they are fed. The lilies neither toil nor spin; yet they are clothed in robes of richer hues than the most gorgeous apparel of the most magnificent of kings. It is God who clothes the lilies and feeds the birds. And if He cares for the flowers that grow in His garden, and for the birds that sing among its branches, must He not much more care for the children whom He has placed in

the garden "to dress it and to keep it"? He does care for them, and care "much more" for them; and therefore they are not to let what they shall eat and wherewithal they shall be clothed be their sole, or even their main, thought. Let them seek first the kingdom of God—which is righteousness and joy and peace, and all these things shall be *added* unto them; or, as the word implies, all these things shall be "*thrown into the bargain.*" That very Solomon who, in all his glory, was not so gloriously arrayed as the commonest flowers of the Galilean fields, sought "first the kingdom of God" when he preferred wisdom for a right discharge of his kingly duties to riches and length of days; and, because he asked wisdom, that he might be a righteous man and king, God *threw in* with wisdom both riches and length of days, these being but things of comparatively little worth with Him. Why, then, should men waste away under the feverish strain of anxiety, instead of relying on the loving care of God their Father? Why should they toss wearily on the perilous sea of Care when, in his grace, He has provided a haven in which they may be quiet and secure?

This is the framework of thought in which our parable is set. And, obviously, our Lord intended it as an invitation to men to escape from the harassing anxieties by which they are commonly oppressed, through patient trust in their heavenly Father's care and bounty. Had He paused to expand the parable, and had He thrown it into the form which most of his parables assume, He might have used some such words as these: "*The kingdom*

of God is like unto a large and tranquil harbour, into which all who sail across the stormy sea of life may enter and be at rest."

Now the calm and simple ideal of life which Christ here holds up before us is one that has a special claim on us, and a special charm, in days such as these when most men are seeking outward good—seeking wealth and worldly advancement—with a passionate and feverish eagerness. Who does not long, at least at times, to escape

"The heavy trouble, the bewildering care,
That weigh us down who live and earn our bread?"

Who is not weary of the strain, the waste, the ungenerous rivalry, the intense and protracted drudgery which what men call "success in life" demands? Who does not see that the pursuit of what we call "comfort" is well-nigh taking all comfort out of our days? Who does not admit, in any moment of cool reflection, that the general homage to wealth is becoming a degrading and unmanly idolatry, inducing false estimates of character, and leading men to value the means of living above the true ends of life?

Wealth is good, if it be wisely used, if it be held as a means to an end higher and better than itself; but it is an utterable evil so soon as it becomes the end for which we live, so soon as it is valued for its own sake, or for the indulgences it procures. Yet how many men make it an end, and the supreme end, to the attainment of which all else is to be sacrificed? If a man have a garden, and would cultivate it, he must supply himself with the ap-

propriate tools; he must buy spade, and rake, and shears; or how shall he plant and tend it, and obtain from it the flowers or fruits that he desires? But what term of contempt would be too strong for the man who should come to value his tools more than the fruit or the flowers, valuing them more than the very ends for which he purchased them? Yet there are many men who care more for the means and instruments of life than for its true ends,—more for the house in which they live, and the clothes they wear, and the food they eat, and the business by which they procure the necessaries and luxuries of life, and the success which lifts them to higher social station, than they do to become wise and good and kind. To gain a livelihood they fling away their life; to rise in station, they sink in character. They serve Mammon instead of making Mammon serve them.

Or, take another illustration. Many of us love books; but what is it that we love in them? their gay outsides or their interior worth? We should account him no better than a fool who should love books mainly, or solely, for their gay gilded covers, and not for the wisdom, or humour, or genius of their contents. Yet the man who loves books simply for their fine bindings is no whit more foolish than he who admires his neighbours simply because they wear “soft clothing” and fare sumptuously every day. A man, like a book, is worthy or unworthy, noble or ignoble, according to what there is *in* him, what of wisdom, power, virtue. A good book, indeed, is all the better for being well printed and well bound; it deserves all that printer and binder can do for it.

And a good man shews more fairly in the eye of the world, and is often a happier and better man, for the wealth he wisely uses. But it is not his wealth that makes him good, any more than it is the gilded back of a book which makes that good. And, therefore, what we should admire in our neighbour, what we should chiefly aim at for ourselves, is not a gay and wealthy outside of circumstance, but noble character—virtue, wisdom, piety, inward worth. And this is the aim, this the ideal, which the Lord Jesus sets before us. He bids us seek first the kingdom of God; and the kingdom of God is *within* us, not without. He would have us cultivate those graces of spiritual character which fit us both to meet any circumstances and changes of circumstance in this life, and to enter with the joy of a foreseen triumph on the dark and narrow avenue which leads to the life to come.

If we take his counsel, He promises us an absolute freedom from care. He assures us that we shall ride safely in a sheltered port, instead of tossing on the heaving storm-swept sea. Not that He prohibits care and thought. A man *must* take thought, must study and plan and contrive, if he is to be a wise man. We *may* make the voyages which the necessities of life demand, and bring home much store of merchandize; but, then, we are to *have* a home, “a city of the soul” to which we may repair; and when we reach it, we are not to cast anchor in the windy offing, but to take refuge in the tranquil haven. That is to say, we are to attend to the duties and labours of life, attend to them with diligence, give our best thought and care to them; but,

when these duties and labours are discharged, we are not to vex our souls with an incessant anxiety as to the issue of our toils; we are to leave that with God, and not to be careful because He cares for us.

So, again, *forethought* is no more forbidden than thought. A wise man, a man "with discourse of reason," *i.e.*, a man in whom reason is not dumb and inert, must "look before and after." There would be no unity in his life, no continuous development and activity, no linking on of month to month and year to year, if he did not look forward and scheme for the future as well as for the present. What Christ forbids is so looking onward to to-morrow as to cloud to-day, so anticipating the future as to darken the present. And this is the very point at which we commonly fail. To-day may be well enough, we admit; or, at the worst, we could get through its tasks and endure its trials. But what of to-morrow? what of the future? how shall we meet the toils and losses and troubles we foresee? I suppose any man who takes his life thoughtfully, and tries to know himself, will confess that most of his anxieties have sprung from fear of what the future might bring; and will also and thankfully confess that not one in a score of all the things he has feared has come upon him, or has proved intolerable when it came. It is our needless fears, our groundless anxieties which undo us.

Now it is from this pernicious habit of "borrowing trouble from the future," as though we had not enough of it in the present, that Christ would save us. "Trust in God for the future," He says; "do your duty to-day, and leave to-morrow with Him.

And let this trust be your tranquil haven, your harbour of refuge, whenever the waves of Care run high."

But this is a lesson we are slow to learn, even if we try to learn it. Even when we are at rest, we fear that some "trouble may be a-brewing to our rest;" even when the day has gone fairly to our mind, when its duties have been done and its difficulties surmounted, we look forward with anxious and apprehensive eyes. "To-morrow," we say, "this trouble may come upon us or that, this loss or that, this blow to our peace or that." Very well; it may come: but why not wait till it does come before you begin to fret over it? And, again, like so much else that you have feared, it may not come; and you are wasting strength in groundless solitudes. And, again, if it should come, strength may come with it, and all the more strength if you do not foreweaken yourself with unfounded apprehensions. And, again, if it should come, and for the moment you have not strength to meet it, so that you are driven out on to a wide stormy sea of trouble, even then the harbour of trust in God will still be open to you; and you may once more find that judgment is but an austerer form of mercy. In any case, to borrow trouble from the future is bad thrift, bad husbandry, since all the energy you expend in care for the future is subtracted from the stock you want for to-day's use; and by doing the duty of to-day less perfectly, you so far forth unfit yourself for the claims and duties of the morrow. Rest and refit in the harbour to-night; and if, when the morning breaks, you have to sail out into a stormy sea, you will at least be in a better condition to meet it.