

and movements have been frowned upon with jealous caste prejudices by the latter, when they found much hearty recognition from the former. Such policy however, is in the end dangerous to the authority in whose interest it is employed. The motive of it is ultimately divined; and then the people rise against it, just as the man born blind was goaded by the false pretences of the Pharisees into a rejection of their authority. A modern poet¹ has put into the mouth of an historical character a prediction of what would befall the Christian Church, and how it would

Wax weak, by seeming to be strong ;
 Till there shall be on earth a sight to scare
 Earth's holiest hope from human hearts away :
 A priesthood, purchased by complacent prayer,
 Leagued with earth's pomps, for profit and for pay,
 Against heaven's love ; praisers of things that are,
 Scorners of good that's not : cleaving to clay,
 Strangling the spirit : purblind unaware !
 Contracting, not enlarging, day by day,
 The charities of Christ, with surly care ;
 Till man's indignant heart shall turn away,
 And choose the champions of its faith elsewhere.

Who can deny that all branches of the Christian Church have, at one time or another, contributed filaments to the poet's bitter prophecy? JOHN GIBB.

THE DUTIFUL SERVANT.

ST. LUKE xvii. 7-10.

THIS parable of the Dutiful Servant, though not absolutely unknown, is, I imagine, comparatively unfamiliar to most readers of the New Testament ; and that probably for two reasons. (1) It has no setting, no sig-

¹ Lord Lytton.

nificant and illustrative framework of circumstance; and (2) it has a sterner, a severer, tone than we commonly hear in the parables of our Lord.

1. Almost every one must have noticed the difference between a picture framed and unframed, and have observed how much even the most beautiful picture gains, how much its beauty is enhanced, when it is placed in an appropriate frame,—just as the loveliest landscape grows more telling and picturesque the moment we look at it through an arch, or from between the trunks and under the meeting boughs of two adjacent trees. But that difference is slight as compared with the contrast between a parable the occasion of which we know, and a parable of which we do not know when, and to whom, and under what conditions, it was spoken. Even the sayings of our Lord gain immensely in significance and power so soon as we can set them in their proper historical framework.

Now St. Luke is the most distinctively and genuinely historical of the Four Evangelists. In the preface to his Gospel, indeed, he tells us that it was his leading aim to trace the events and sayings of our Lord to their true historical origin, and to set them forth in their true historical sequence. Many memoirs of Christ were already in circulation; but so fragmentary were they, so unmethodical, that he was content with none of them. And, therefore, he set himself to learn, from those who were “eyewitnesses and ministers of the Word from the beginning,” the exact order of the life and teaching of Christ, that he might arrange every saying and event in its true period and place.

This being his aim, it is all the more curious that in the first ten verses of this Chapter we find four dis-

jointed sayings of our Lord's—one on the guilt of scandalizing the weak, one on the pardon of trespasses, one on the power of faith, and one on the incessant claims of duty; four sayings severed from their true historical connections, flung down in a heap, as it were, without a word to explain why, or when, they were uttered.

How are we to account for this obvious departure from his usual method?

The answer to that question is very striking, and throws no little light on the conflicting theories of Inspiration in vogue among us. For the true answer to it, that which the best and ablest Commentators accept, is this. St. Luke acknowledges that he drew up his Gospel from certain *logia*, certain reports of the sayings of Christ which were already current in the primitive Church. It was his aim to trace these sayings to their true place in the ministry of our Lord, to weave them into a connected and orderly narrative. And in most cases, no doubt, he had been able to recover, from the eyewitnesses and ministers he consulted, the historical occasions of these sayings, and to reduce them to their true order. But in the manuscripts before him some sayings were reported of which he was *not* able to recover the proper historical place; and these he was compelled, since they were far too precious to be omitted, to insert in his narrative without the historical indications he loved to give.

Such sayings we probably have in the first ten verses of this Chapter. In all probability St. Luke found them in the MSS. before him, but he had not been able to trace them to their proper occasions, to ascertain when, and under the stress of what circumstances

or motives, they had been uttered; and so he puts them into his narrative, without note or comment, just as he found them. In short, he is here gathering up *the fragments* from his authorities, that nothing may be lost. Even so orthodox and devout a Commentator as Godet says of this passage: "*It is the remnant-scrap at the bottom of the portfolio*, if I may so speak, which St. Luke delivers to us as it was, and without any introduction." And when a Commentator of his spiritual discernment speaks thus of these Verses, it surely becomes us to pause and reflect how this view of them fits in with our theory of Inspiration, and whether or not our theory is wide enough to embrace it. If not, then so much the worse for the theory.

But though *St. Luke* was unable to trace these four sayings to their historical origin, *we* are able, by grace of the other Evangelists, to recover the occasions on which at least three of them were uttered. And if we take an illustration from only one of them, we shall see how much the sayings of our Lord gain by being set in their true historical place. In Verses 5 and 6 we have a fragment of a conversation on the power of faith which took place—St. Luke cannot tell us *when*—between the Master and his disciples. But St. Mark (Chap. xi. Vers. 20–24) reports this conversation more at length, and all that led to it. *He* tells us that during the last week of his earthly ministry, as our Lord went to and fro between Bethany and Jerusalem, He cursed a fig tree by the wayside, which, though covered with leaves, bore no fruit. On the next morning, as they passed by, the disciples were astonished to see that the fig tree had withered to its very roots beneath the ban

of Christ. When they call his attention to the marvel, He answers with the exhortation, "Have faith in God;" and proceeds to assure them that, if they have but the minutest germ of genuine faith, they themselves may do greater things than this,—may even bid the very mountain on which the fig tree grew be removed into the midst of the sea, "and it shall come to pass." Of this great promise, and of the conversation which led up to it, St. Luke had a somewhat different version before him. According to his authority, there was a more personal, and a much severer tone, in this saying of our Lord's. And if we place the fragment preserved by St. Luke in the historical setting provided for us by St. Mark, it gains immensely in significance and power. Then the scene shapes itself thus. Our Lord and the Twelve stand on Olivet, looking down on the withered remnants of the tree which only the day before was full of life and sap. To the profound and somewhat sceptical astonishment with which the Twelve regard this miracle, Christ replies, "Have faith in God." They respond, "Lord, *add* to our faith." And then He turns upon them with the keen retort—"Add to your faith! How can I add to that which barely exists, if it exist at all? If ye *had* faith, even as a grain of mustard-seed, ye might say to this adjacent mulberry tree, Be thou plucked up by the roots, and planted in the sea, and it should obey you." In their prayer the Twelve had assumed that they *had* at least some of that faith in God of which their Master spoke. And, though He does not flatly contradict them, He does affirm their faith to be so small, so unformed, so unsure, that even the very smallest of seeds, the most minute of vital and organic bodies, is too large to

be an emblem of it. In fine, while St. Mark brings out the sweetness of our Lord's saying, St. Luke brings out the severity of it; while the one helps us to see the gracious promise in it, the other compels us to look on its aspect of warning and rebuke.

And if it is impossible to compare these two reports of the same saying without becoming aware that there are variations in our Gospels for which it is difficult to account, without being constrained to admit that two equally inspired men may present us with very different aspects of one and the same fact; yet, on the other hand, it is these very variations which assure us that each of the Evangelists is an honest and an independent witness, that they do not copy the one from the other, but that each of them gives us his own impression—the Gospel *according to* him. And, indeed, these variations in their reports enable us to see so much more in the teaching of Christ than we otherwise could see, that we are again and again tempted to wish that we had a Gospel according to each one of the Twelve.

2. Three of the four sayings, then, which St. Luke could not, we can, trace to their historical origin, and set in their proper framework of circumstance; but the fourth, the parable of the Dutiful Servant, we are as unable as he was to assign to its true place in the life and ministry of Christ, since no one of the other Evangelists gives any report of it. And hence, because we cannot recover the historical antecedents which would charge it with significance, it commands less of our attention, inspires less interest, than it would otherwise do, than it ought to do. This, at least, is one reason,

probably, why it has been left in comparative obscurity, and has so little hold on our memory and thoughts. And another reason is, the unusual and unwelcome severity of its tone. We have just remarked how sharp and keen the previous saying is, how it must have pained and stung the Twelve, when they were praying for more faith, to be reminded that men who ask for *more* should at least be sure that they have *some*, and to be warned that they had so little real faith in God that the prayer was scarcely appropriate on their lips. And that keen retort could hardly have been less welcome to them than the view of human life and duty presented by this parable is to us. We are compared to a slave—to a slave who has been hard at work all day in his master's fields, first driving the plough, and then tending the cattle. When he returns to the house at sundown, new duties, new toils await him. Instead of being permitted to rest, or invited to recruit himself after the fatigues of the day, he has to prepare his master's supper, to gird himself and wait on him. Even when he has discharged these new duties, he gets no thanks for his pains. He has but done his duty. He is only an unprofitable servant.

Now how can any man *like* such a parable, such a description of himself, as this? How can any man listen to it without feeling it to be hard and ungracious in tone, utterly unlike the habitual tone of Christ? *Can* these words have fallen from the lips on which sat the law of kindness?

These are questions which it is natural for us to ask. And yet, the more we consider the words that suggest them, the more fully must we be persuaded that, unless Christ had spoken them, they could not possibly have

found their way into any Gospel, least of all into that of St. Luke, whose mind seems to have caught and reflected most clearly *the grace* of our Lord Jesus Christ. But for him, we should have lost many of Christ's most gracious words, should have lost even such characteristic and divine parables as that of the Good Samaritan or that of the Prodigal Son. No forger would have been at all likely to invent a parable so alien to the habitual tone of our Lord; and of all men St. Luke was the very last to put such a parable into the mouth of Christ, unless he was quite sure that it was his.

The more carefully we consider these words, moreover, the more true we find them to the actual facts of human life, and the more sorry, therefore, we should be to miss them. Has not Nature itself its sterner, as well as its more gentle and benignant, aspects? its severity as well as its beneficence, its storms as well as its calms? And human life—is that always smooth and easy? Is it invariably and unbrokenly gracious—all smiles, and no frowns? Is it a sacred and welcome possession always, and to all men? Are there not myriads to whom it appears a mere succession of ill-rewarded toils, a mere dull round of labour, cheered by no thanks, by no approval, by no applause? And if the Great Teacher were to depict human life fairly, if He was to be a fair and full representative of the God whom we find in nature and in human nature, was it not inevitable that He should pourtray *all* the facts and aspects of our life—inevitable, therefore, that He should utter some such words as these?

Nay, more: is it not well for us that at times we should dwell on these severer, as well as on the more tender and benignant, aspects of human life and duty?

Is not the bitter wholesome for us as well as the sweet, and often more wholesome than the sweet? If we are men, and not babes in Christ, the word *duty* will hardly be less dear to us than the word *love*. If we are wise, we shall see that duty, inspired by love, is the chief good, the supreme joy and blessedness of life. If we are brave, we shall hold the title "dutiful servant" to be hardly less honourable than that of "loving and obedient child;" we shall rejoice that the path to heaven is steep and hard to climb, since only by a severe and bracing discipline can we rise to our full stature and come to our full strength.

We need to be roused and stirred by the clarion call of duty, as well as soothed and comforted by the tender breathings of love. And *here* the call comes to us loud and clear, waxing ever louder as we listen and reflect. "Do your duty; and when you have done it, however laborious and painful it may be, remember that you have *only* done your duty. Do not give yourselves airs of complacency, as though you had achieved some great thing. Do not give yourselves airs of martyrdom, as though some strange thing had happened to you. Neither pity yourselves, nor plume yourselves on what you have done or borne. Do not think of yourselves at all, but of God, and of the duties you owe to Him. That you have done your duty—let this be your comfort, if at least you can honestly take it. And if you are tempted to a dainty and effeminate self-pity for the hardships you have borne, or to a dangerous and degrading self-admiration for the achievements you have wrought, let this be your safeguard, that you have done *no more* than your duty."

It is in this strain that our Lord speaks to us here.

And is it not a most wholesome and invigorating strain, a strain to which all in us that is worthy of the name of man instantly and strongly responds? The very moment we grow complacent over our work, our work spoils in our hands. Our energies relax. We begin to think of ourselves instead of our work, of the wonders we have achieved instead of the toils which yet lie before us and of how we may best discharge them. So soon as we begin to complain of our lot and task, to murmur as though our burden were too heavy, or as though we were called to bear it in our own strength, we unfit ourselves for it; our nerves and courage give way; our task looks even more formidable than it is, and we become incapable even of the little which, but for our repugnances and fears, we should be quite competent to do.

And, then, how bracing is the sense of duty discharged, if only we may indulge in it! And we *may* indulge in it. Does not Christ Himself teach us to say, "We have done that which it was our duty to do"? *He* does not account of our duty as we sometimes account of it. If we are at work in his fields, He does not demand of us that we should plough so many acres, or that we should tend so many head of cattle. All that He demands of us is that, with such capacities and opportunities as we have, we should do our best, or at lowest *try* to do it. Honesty of intention, purity and sincerity of motive, the diligence and cheerfulness with which we address ourselves to his service, count for more with Him than the mere amount of work we get through. The faithful and industrious servant is approved by Him, however feeble his powers, however limited his scope. And He would

have us take pleasure in the industry and fidelity which please Him. He would have us account, as He Himself accounts, that we *have* done our duty when we have sincerely and earnestly endeavoured to do it.

The thin and hard theology which denies all merit to man is alien to the spirit of Christ. *He* would never have called this parable, as certain theologians do, "a parable on *the non-meritoriousness* of works." Is it no merit in a man that he has done his duty, when duty is confessedly so hard? And does not Christ Himself put the words into our mouths, "We have done that which it was our duty to do"? True, He bids us add, "We are unprofitable servants." And no doubt the humility of that sentence is as wholesome for us as the grateful and sustaining pride of the other. For what man of a really manly and generous spirit does not feel, even when he has done his best, that he might have done more? And even when he has done his most, as well as his best, what man of a really Christian spirit does not both lament that he could not do more, and gratefully acknowledge that he could not have done so much, that he could have done nothing good, but for the grace and help of God? what such man but feels that nothing is done till *all* be done?

O, we need not fear to adapt any part of this parable to our own use, if only we take to ourselves the parable as a whole! For, in that case, we shall not only add, "We are unprofitable servants," so often as we say, "We have done that which it was our duty to do;" we shall also confess that every moment brings a fresh duty. We shall not rest when one duty is discharged, as though our service had come to an end;

we shall be content to pass from duty to duty, to *fill* the day of life with labour to its very close. We shall not be content only, but proud and glad, to wait at our Master's table *after* we have ploughed the soil and fed the cattle. And even when at last we eat and drink, we shall do even that to his glory—eating our bread with gladness and singleness of heart, not for enjoyment alone, but that we may gain new strength for serving Him. Instead of lamenting that our work is never done, we shall rejoice that we can never be out of his employ; that, when we have done our most and best, He has still some new service for us to fulfil.

This, at least, is the spirit, this the joy, of the *dutiful* servant. And it should be a very serious question with us all, whether or not we can claim this honourable title; whether or not we are content to be always serving, when we “stand and wait” as well as when we rise to work. Of course, we can hardly claim it if we are always, or often, thinking of how much we are doing, or even of how much more than others we are doing, or how much more than our fair share we are doing, in any Christian enterprise to which we put our hands. It is only when we *love* the service of God, so love it as that we count it our highest honour and pleasure to do as much as we can for Him, and ask for no reward for past service save that we may serve Him still; so love it that we can dispense with thanks, and even with *his* thanks, and serve Him from good will and not for reward—it is only then that we can account ourselves “dutiful servants.” For all this is commanded us. And it is only when we have done “all those things which are commanded us” that we

can say, "We have done that which it was our duty to do."

Finally, let us remember that the whole truth cannot be packed into a single saying, or even into a single parable. Nor does our Lord attempt to compress the whole truth into any of his words. He is content to enforce now one aspect of it, and now another. And hence we do Him wrong, and wrong our own souls, if we attempt to deduce our whole duty from any parable, or saying, however profound or comprehensive it may be. We are bound to compare scripture with scripture, saying with saying, parable with parable. And, obviously, we are the more bound to this comparison when we are studying a disjointed and fragmentary saying such as this. It does not follow because we very justly call ourselves "unprofitable servants"—*i.e.*, as the word means, *unworthy*, or *unnecessary* servants, servants of whom God stands in no need, and who can do but little for Him—that *He* will call us unprofitable. On the contrary, if we do that which it is our duty to do, if we but sincerely try to do it, we know that He will call us "good and faithful servants." And in this very parable it is to be observed that Christ is simply saying how men *do* act, not how they *ought* to act; what they do demand of their servants, not what they ought to demand. Even if we suppose the man in the parable, who taxes his servant to the utmost, and takes all he does without thanks, to be a good master, it by no means follows that God will not prove better and kinder than the best of men. *He* may do, He certainly will do, far more than they do, far more even than they ought to do. And if we would find the true supplement to this parable of the Dutiful Ser-

vant, if we wish to learn how the Divine Master will carry Himself to these who here call themselves "unprofitable servants," we have only to turn to another parable recorded by St. Luke (Chap. xii. 35-37)—the parable of the Kind Master: "Let your loins be girded about, and your lamps burning; and be ye yourselves like unto men that wait for their lord, when he shall return from the wedding; that when he cometh and knocketh, they may open unto him immediately. Blessed are those servants, whom their lord when he cometh shall find watching: verily I say unto you, that *he will*"—not bid them gird themselves and come and wait on him, but he will—"gird himself, and make them to sit down to meat, and will come forth and serve them." For here we come back—not without some benefit, it may be hoped, from the keener and more bracing air we have breathed for a while—to the mild and gracious atmosphere we are accustomed to breathe as we read the Gospels; and learn that, if there is a sense in which *we* can never do enough for our Master, there is also a sense in which *He* can never do enough for us; that, if we serve Him, He also serves us: that, if we wait on Him, He also will come forth and wait on us.

The consideration of this second parable we must, however, defer till next month.

S. E. C. T.
