

Him are the only words that have been able to create a conscious Divine sonship in the race.

Round this centre the varied elements of his teaching beautifully crystallize. Out of his twofold relation, to God and man, springs what He has to say of both. The Son who is in the bosom of the Father declares Him, shews Him mindful of sinful man, seeking him, receiving him with a weeping joy that makes all heaven glad. The "Son of man" reveals man to himself, shews the transcendent worth of the soul He loves to save, makes man conscious of the infinite possibilities of good within him, of the Divine affinities that sleep in his nature. The Person that manifests the Divine and the human in beautiful and holy unity fitly shews how God and man can sweetly meet, and rejoice in each other with exceeding great joy. He who is, as it were, our virtues incorporated, is the fit teacher of duty, a voice gentle where most authoritative, making its most imperative commands as sweet as reasonable. And so person and word combine to bring round the fulfilment of his grand prayer: "That they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they they also may be one in us: that the world may believe that thou hast sent me."¹

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THE PRODIGAL AND HIS BROTHER.

ST. LUKE XV. 11-32.

There are, I suppose, very few readers of the New Testament who have not wished at times that this parable had closed with Verse 24, and left us rejoicing in the joy of the father over his regained and penitent

¹ John xvii. 21.

son. The second part of the parable seems to jar with the first. The "elder brother" is a mere discord in its music, and robs it of its natural and happy close. We could very cheerfully dispense with him. We do virtually dispense with him by naming the parable the Parable of the Prodigal Son, as though there were only one son in it, and not two. The prudent and thrifty brother, always in his father's house, but with so little of his father's spirit, only perplexes and distresses us. We cannot tell what to make of him. We feel that the story would have gained in unity and force if he had been left out of it.

And the commentators are no less perplexed, though they are less free to confess it. They have invented countless theories to explain him—I have myself invented one or two; but, as any one may see who can read between the lines, they are satisfied with none of them, not even their own. The man remains an enigma to this day, raising many questions to which we cannot reply. But, at last, I have an interpretation of him to propose which I am disposed to think is the true interpretation, in part because it is so simple that I wonder how, at least so far as I have read, it should have been missed so long; and, in part, because it is only a modification, only an extension or amplification, of the oldest interpretation of all, and that which has found the widest acceptance.

The oldest interpretation is that which sees in the Younger Son a type of the publicans and sinners, and in his Elder Brother a type of the scribes and Pharisees. It was naturally suggested by Verses 1 and 2 of the Chapter, in which we read that "all the *publicans and sinners* were drawing near to hear him," and that

"*the Pharisees and scribes* murmured, saying, This man receiveth sinners, and eateth with them." We know that our Lord commonly suited his word to his audience, that He spoke what St. Peter calls "the *present* truth." And as, on this occasion, his audience was composed of publicans and sinners on the one hand, and of Pharisees and their scribes on the other, we may well believe that the parable was specially addressed and adapted to them.

The main objection to this interpretation is, that it is not wide enough. We all feel that the story of the Younger Son is the story of humanity at large; that its scope is as wide as the world; that in him every man, Jew or Gentile, may recognize himself. And, therefore, just as we cannot consent to take him as a type of the publican only, so neither can we consent to take the elder son as a type of the Pharisee only. We feel that our Lord is dealing, not with *men*, but with *man*; not with classes or nationalities, but with the entire race: and hence we demand an interpretation of his words that shall cover all classes and include the whole family of man.

But what is to hinder us from so widening and extending the most ancient interpretation of his words as to make them cover the whole world? If the earliest commentators saw in the Younger Son a type of the publicans, why may not we see in the publicans a type of all sinful but penitent men of every race? If they saw in the Elder Brother a type of the Pharisees, why may not we see in the Pharisees a type of all who trust in themselves that they are righteous, and despise others? Nay, more: *if we can each of us find in ourselves that which identifies us with the prodigal but*

penitent son, may we not also each one of us find in ourselves some traces of his narrow and self-righteous and unloving brother?

It is simply by thus extending the scope of the parable, and not by any more recondite process, that I believe we shall reach an interpretation of it in which we can rest. For, as in all ages and in every race, there are men who are deeply conscious of sin, so in all ages and in every race there are men who have no deep consciousness of sin, and that mainly because their sins are not of an open and flagrant kind, or because they are veiled from them by a careful observance of religious punctilios and forms. As, moreover, every man may find in himself some touch of the publican, so also every man may find in himself some touch of the Pharisee: not unfrequently, indeed, "the vilest sinner" is transformed into the hardest and narrowest "saint," and thinks all the more of himself because he has so many sins to repent and is so very conscious of them.

Suppose, then, that it were our Lord's intention to convict the self-righteous of sin as well as to assure the penitent of forgiveness; suppose, moreover, that He so held the mirror up to human nature as to shew every man a double reflection of himself in it, one in the prodigal and one in his brother, and we reach an interpretation of the parable as wide as the world, while yet it satisfies all the historical conditions under which He spake. He spoke to the publicans and the Pharisees; and in speaking to them He shewed every man the publican and the Pharisee in his own breast.

The great aim of our Lord's ministry was to convince men that they were the sons of God; or, as St. John phrases it, "to give them power to become the

sons of God ;” or, as St. Paul phrases it, “because they were sons,” He sought to send forth his Spirit into their hearts, that they might look up to God, and cry, “O Father, Father!” Now that which makes a man a son is a filial spirit. And the true son, the man who has a really filial spirit, accounts it his true freedom to obey his father, and his true happiness and reward to serve him. If we were set to define a good son, on what more essential and characteristic points could we fix than these—that his father’s service was his delight ; that, on the mere prompting of love, he at all times kept his father’s commandments ; and that, under all changes and temptations to distrust, he confided in his father’s wisdom and care ? Loving dependence, free obedience, cheerful and affectionate service, enter into our very conception of a son, and distinguish it from our conception of a servant or a slave. The man who can say,

The service and the loyalty I owe,
In doing it, pays itself,

has, it will be admitted, a genuinely filial spirit, and is worthy to be called a son.

In all these essential and distinctive characteristics of sonship—of which we find a perfect example only in our Lord Himself—the Prodigal was for a time frankly and glaringly deficient. So far from affectionately depending on his father’s bounty and love, he claimed what he called “*his own* portion of goods,” that he might expend it as he would. So far from rendering his father a free and willing obedience, he felt that he should never be free until he had escaped from his father’s control. So far from taking delight in service, and finding no place so dear as home and no society

so congenial as that of the inmates of his home, he was persuaded that he should never taste real pleasure till he could break away from the restraints of his father's service and follow the impulses of his own will.

Here, then, we have the open and jovial sinner depicted to the very life. The Younger Son is animated by the very motives and bent on the very same course which still exert a pernicious attraction on young men who want what they call their "fling," and do not reflect how much they may fling away. They have so little of the filial spirit in them, that they hate to be dependent whether on their earthly father or their Father in heaven, and to submit to his control. It is *independence* which they crave, not dependence—forgetting that no man can be independent even of his fellows, much less of God; and that, if a man must be dependent, it is at least better to depend on those who love him than on those who are indifferent to his welfare. And so, many a young fellow, thinking himself very brave and manly all the while, gives up home, gives up God, to become the slave, first, of his own foolish passions, and, then, of an alien and inimical power which exacts hard service of him, and, as likely as not, leaves him to starve in it.

Like the Prodigal, too, they look for freedom, not in obedience, but in disobedience, to the commands which yet express the wisdom of God and are confirmed by the universal experience of man. Forgetting that

As surfeit is the father of much fast,
So every scope by its immoderate use
Turns to restraint,

they give such immoderate scope to their cravings and lusts, that they soon find themselves reduced to want and bondage.

And, once more like the Younger Son, they so misconceive of happiness as to assume that they can reach it only through transgression, only by breaking the laws of health and social well-being, although every such transgression inevitably brings its own penalty with it, and these penalties accumulate so rapidly that their life is soon all crossed and vexed with loss and pain.

In short, they forget that a son is never so rich as when he possesses his father's love, never so free and happy as when he is lord of his father's heart and in sympathy with his father's aims. And so they are ill at ease even in their father's house; his yoke is too hard for their unfilial spirit, his burden is too heavy: and to escape them, they rush out into the world, to assume the hardest of all yokes and a burden which no man was ever yet able to bear.

But is the Elder Son, who thinks so ill of his brother and so well of himself, in any way a better son? Does he shew a more filial spirit? Not a whit. For he who "shuts out love" is himself "from love shut out." Apply to him the tests we have just applied to the Prodigal, and the result is no less decisive. Loving dependence, free obedience, glad and disinterested service, are the distinctive marks of sonship. Has *he* these marks? Not one of them. On his own shewing, he is a servant rather than a son; his father is much more a master to him than a father. He dislikes the constraints to which he has submitted at least as much as the Prodigal who would not submit to them. His obedience is not free, but servile. His service is not willing and glad. So far from being able to say, "The service and the loyalty I owe, in

doing it, pays itself," he shews that he has been serving for wages, for reward, by complaining that his wages have been calculated on far too low a scale, that he has earned far more than he has received.

If we run through the narrative, in so far as he appears in it, we see that every stroke, however minute, tells against him—against *him*, and therefore against the Pharisees who stood listening to the parable. When we first meet him, he is returning from the field. As he draws nigh to the house, he sees that it is all astir with the signs of an unwonted festivity. What would have been the natural course of a dutiful and loving son? Surely, to go straight in, and speak with his father, that he might share and enhance his father's joy. But he—he stands without, as though he were a stranger. Instead of hastening to speak with his father, he calls one of the servants, and confers with him. He is not *at home* even in his father's house, and falls at once into an unfilial attitude of suspicion and inquiry. Himself a servant at heart, he is more at his ease with a hired servant than with the father whose love was nothing to him, though his commands were much. So little is he in harmony with his father, that, when he has heard what the servant has to tell, he is "angry," angry with his father, and will not go into the house in which he is a stranger rather than a son. His father has to come out and entreat him—as Christ was at that moment entreating the self-righteous Pharisees, and pleading with them the cause of the publicans and sinners. He even lets him entreat in vain, as the Pharisees let Christ entreat in vain. His anger against his father flashes out in the words, "Lo, these many years do I serve thee".—

calculating the term of his service, and finding it very long—"and never at any time transgressed I thy commandments:" no, and never at any time has he done more than keep a commandment. He has

moved only in command,
Nothing in love.

And, as if to put his servile and mercenary spirit beyond all doubt, he adds the reproach, "Yet thou never gavest me a kid, much less a calf, that I might make merry with my friends."

When the filial spirit came back to him, the Younger Brother had proposed to say to his father words he could not utter when he saw his father's face. With his father's arms about his neck, and his father's kisses upon his cheek, he could not say, "Make me as one of thy hired servants:" *that* would have been a sin against love. But this Elder Brother proclaims himself a mere servant, a *hired* servant, in every word he utters, and even complains that his master has not treated him well. If the Prodigal had once demanded his portion, and set up an interest separate from his father's, what else is his brother doing now? Does not *he* assert that what is his father's is not his, and shew that he too had been longing for a separate portion and a separate enjoyment? If the Prodigal had mistaken license for liberty, does not the Elder Son now prove himself *his very brother*, by speaking of duty as though it were a task, and of riotous living as though it were a pleasure, the charm of which he felt, though, for selfish ends, he had long resisted it?

Obviously, then, the Elder Son was as far away from the father's heart and spirit as the Younger Son had

ever been from his father's house, and had sunk into a bondage from which it was still harder to redeem him.

And to the Pharisees, who were accustomed to interpret parables and dark sayings, and who, no doubt, perceived that Christ spake of them, it must have been strange beyond all telling to learn that they were as far from God, and even farther from Him, than the "sinners" whom they despised. They, too, had just murmured (Verse 2) at Christ's revelation of the love of God, of a love that could stoop to sinners; and their murmurs were the proof that they themselves "moved only in command, nothing in love;" that they had not received the Spirit whereby alone men can look up to God, and cry, "Father, Father!" *They* were as servants who served only for reward. *They* were not at home in their Father's house, but stood outside, conferring with his servant Moses, or even with the rabbis rather than the prophets—the *hired* servants rather than the servants born in the house—instead of speaking with Him face to face. *They* were angry that grace should be shewn to sinners, and grudged them a joy which yet they themselves, not conscious of sin, and therefore not conscious of forgiveness, could not possibly feel. Boasting that they had never transgressed the commandments of God, their very boast confuted them; for it proved that they had violated the very condition of sonship, by cherishing a servile and unloving spirit. The complaint that God was now shewing a tenderness to sinners denied to *them*, did but prove how far they were from any apprehension of the truth that sons abide ever in the great Father's house, and that all He has is theirs.

And what was true of the Pharisees is true of the self-righteous in every age and land. Their dependence on God is not of love, but of need. Their obedience is not free, but servile. Their service is mercenary, not disinterested—rendered for a wage, not its own exceeding great reward. *They* conceive of sin as pleasant, and of virtue as toilsome. They count up their self-denials, and expect to be well paid for them. The kingdom of God is outside them, not within them. If it were not for heaven and hell, it is doubtful if they would not be as other men, and even as that publican. Many of them *are* as he is, and worse. For, under the mask of devotion, they hide a cold selfishness and a refined self-indulgence more hardening and deteriorating and alienating than grosser sins, and which even the grace of God can very hardly penetrate. We all know men whose religion is mainly a thing of creeds and forms which hardly touch their daily life and conduct at a single point; whose very morality is a self-restraint animated, not by the love of God and man, but by a fear of exposure, disgrace, loss, hell; and whose hearts are more cold and bitter than those of the outcasts whom they condemn. And only too easily, every time we look at our spiritual face in the glass, we may all know *one* man in whom at least the germs and rudiments of the Pharisaic character may be recognized without any very searching or protracted inspection.

We must remember, then, that in this parable we have the story of *two* prodigals, rather than of one; of two men, that is, who wandered away from God, who lost their standing as sons by losing the spirit of sons; and that the self-righteous censor of his brother, the cold and insolent critic of his Father, although he had

never left his home, had strayed even farther from God than the reckless prodigal who, under all his sins and sinful impulses, had a son's heart in him, and was at last drawn back by it to his Father's arms. We must remember that we ourselves may be far less like sons of God than the "sinners" for whom we have little hope, because little sympathy. For it seems to have been the intention of Christ, in uttering this parable, to teach us that those who esteem themselves "saints," because they busy themselves with religious dogmas and rules, may be as deeply alienated from God, as lacking in dependence and obedience and service, as mistaken in their conception of freedom and happiness—that they may even be made of harder and more impenetrable stuff than the transgressors whom they eye with sour suspicion and disdain. "The daw is not a religious bird because it keeps caw-cawing from the steeple;" and the Pharisee is not a religious man because he goes regularly to church and is immaculate in all the orthodoxies and observances of his sect.

But the parable teaches us a lesson still more surprising than this. For it teaches us that, let men be as bad as they may, and whether they shew a wild, wilful, and wanton spirit, or a cautious, selfish, and mercenary spirit, whether they are the slaves of impulse or of conventionalism, God is always a good Father to them all. If one intention of the parable be to set forth the various ways in which men fall short of the filial spirit and power, its other and greater intention is to shew that God is never wanting in the paternal spirit. How often have we been touched to the very heart by the Father's grace to the returning prodigal, and felt that none but Christ, who was Him-

self "the Friend of publicans and sinners," would have dared to conceive of a God so tender and fatherly, so full of compassion and lovingkindness! And how often, as we have read on, have we been surprised—and even perhaps a little vexed and sorry—to find the Father just as tender and forgiving to his hard, self-righteous, and unloving son! Which of us has not grudged, or at least been perplexed by, the love shewn to *him*? We are charmed, enchanted, as we hear that when the Younger Son was yet a great way off, "his father ran, and fell on his neck, and kissed him." But when we come to that far more difficult, and therefore far more noble, outburst of love, "Son, thou art ever with me, and all that I have is thine," we feel somehow as if a wrong note had been touched, as if the Father were a great deal too good to his surly self-complacent child. And yet, why should we feel like that? how can we dare to feel like that? Is not, here at least, the "saint" by far the greater "sinner" of the two, and therefore in greater need of love and compassion? If we every one of us have some sense of sin, and therefore identify ourselves with the Penitent, and rejoice in the grace shewn to him, have we not also every one of us some taint of self-righteousness and self-complacency which should lead us to identify ourselves with the servile and impenitent Formalist, and to be glad that even for him there was a place in the Father's heart?

The truth is that we may each one of us only too easily find both these men, both these brothers, in himself. And, therefore, God's grace to the one should be as welcome and as pathetic as his grace to the other. As there is some hope that even the Pharisee may become a penitent, so there is much danger that even

the penitent may become a Pharisee ; that when he is "converted" he may become as narrow and hard and bigoted as ever his brother was, and sit in judgment and condemn those who were "in Christ" long before he was, and who have done far more to serve Him ?

Yes, this Elder Brother's blood runs in all our veins no less than that of the Younger. And we may well rejoice, therefore, that our Father in heaven is good to both,—most tender to us when we confess our sins, and no less tender when we convert our very righteousness into a sin ; that when we return to Him, He has compassion on us ; and that even when we are angry with Him, and will not go in, He is not angry with us, but comes out and entreats us, rekindling a filial and fraternal spirit in us by his fatherly generosity and love.

S. E. C. T.

PARDON AND PUNISHMENT.

PSALM xcix. 8 ; ISAIAH xliii. 25—28.

THE idea of the forgiveness of sin, and the idea of the punishment of sin, are generally thought to be contradictory and inconsistent. The ordinary idea of forgiveness is, that it is a remission of the penalty of sin ; and if that be the true conception, it certainly makes the idea of punishment impossible. But there are many passages in the Old Testament, no less than the New, in which the two thoughts of Pardon and Punishment are closely conjoined. Such, for example, are the two passages cited above, in the latter of which, indeed, we have the most absolute declaration of forgiveness, and then, immediately following, a recital of the punishment which Jehovah had inflicted upon the Jews in their