

THE PLACE AND FUNCTION OF THE LAMP.

ST. MARK iv. 21, 22; ST. LUKE viii. 16;

ST. MATTHEW v. 15, 16.

THERE can be no doubt that our Lord, like most great teachers, had a knot, or cluster, of favourite sayings—maxims, or even axioms, we may call them—which were so congenial to his mind, so expressive of his most characteristic thoughts, that He habitually repeated them in connections which threw new light upon them, and thus impressed them very deeply on the minds of his disciples. For even in the four brief memoirs which we possess of Him, in which every line was precious, we meet with them again and again; and we may be sure that neither would the Evangelists have recorded, nor would the Spirit who inspired them have moved them to record, these sayings of his so often had they not been of the very first importance. “If all the things which Jesus said and did were written every one,” says St. John, “I suppose that even the world itself could not contain the books that should be written.” The Gospels that were written, or at least those which have been handed down to us, can contain therefore only the merest sample of what He said and did; and if in a selection so small we find the same maxims recorded three or four times over, we may fairly conclude them to be of paramount importance and value.

These favourite sayings—most of which take the form of proverbs, parables, or paradoxes—are such as these: “He that hath ears to hear, let him hear”; “With what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again”; “The disciple is not above his master, nor the servant above his lord”; “Fear not them that are able to kill the body, and after that have no more that they can do, but fear Him who is able to

kill both body and soul"; "Whosoever hath, to him shall be given, but from him that hath not, even that which he hath shall be taken away"; and the charming parable, "*Doth the lamp come to be put under the bushel or under the couch, and not to be set on the lampstand?*" with the great generalization on which it is based, "*For there is nothing hid save that it may be manifested, neither was anything kept secret save that it might come abroad.*"

To one or two of these maxims attention has already been called in these pages;¹ to others of them I hope to call attention before long: but for the present let us confine our attention to the two last cited, which *are* two, since at times they are used separately, and yet one, since at other times they are blended together.

I have just affirmed that most of these sayings take the form of proverbs, or parables, or paradoxes. An illustration of that assertion lies close at hand. For St. Mark gives us first the parable, "*Doth the lamp come to be put under the bushel or under the couch, and not to be set on the lampstand?*" then the paradox: "*For there is nothing hid save that it may be manifested, neither was anything kept secret save that it might come abroad*"; and then the proverb: "*If any man have ears to hear, let him hear.*" Now this proverb conveys in a brief and telling form the general truth that *Capacity involves Responsibility*. A man who *can* hear *ought* to hear. And if a man who can hear *ought* to hear, so also whatever we can do for God and our fellows we *ought* to do. Our gifts indicate our service, and bind us to it. But this proverb, although it carries so great a meaning of its own, was commonly used by our Lord, like the hand figured in the margin of some old folios, to call special attention to sentences still greater than itself, and on which He desired to lay the gravest emphasis. Wherever we meet it we may be sure that there immediately precedes it some

¹ See THE EXPOSITOR, *First Series*, vol. ii. p. 472; vol. xi. p. 178.

large, noble, and precious thought which it will be our wisdom to make our own.

So, no doubt, it is used here. And surely it was never used to better purpose. For, as we shall see, the paradox which precedes it conveys nothing less than the very charter of science; while the parable which precedes the paradox is one of the most picturesque and instructive that ever fell even from the lips of Him who spake as none other ever spake. Let us look at each of these in turn.

I. THE PARABLE.

Of all the parables uttered by our Lord few convey their meaning more instantly and forcibly than this simple and pretty saying on the place and function of the Lamp. It is itself a lamp to us, so transparent is its form, so clearly and brightly does the light shine through it. Both the paradox and the proverb which follow it refuse to yield up the secret with which they are fraught until we search for it carefully and with toil; but *this* saying is one that cannot be hidden from us; it shines in its own light; and the moment we glance at it we understand that Christ is inviting us to *teach* what we have learned, to *give* to our neighbours the truth we have received from Him.

Clear and obvious as the main intention of the Parable is, there is nevertheless much in it, much which either contributes to its beauty or swells the volume of its meaning, at which we can only arrive by diligent thought and research. We must recover and study its original form, we must replace it in its original relations, and ask ourselves what it conveyed to those who first heard it, if we would really and fully possess ourselves of it.

We see at a glance, indeed, that the Parable throws some light on the social customs of the age and land in which it was spoken. It reminds us, for instance, that in Palestine,

as indeed in ancient Greece and Rome, when the darkness fell, little lamps, containing oil and a wick, were brought into the rooms of all classes of the people and placed on slender stands, commonly some two or three feet high, to give light to all who were in the house. But, until we look into it more closely, we do not see that we may gather from the Parable itself what sort or class of house our Lord had in his eye, and in what period of Jewish history this picturesque saying must of necessity have been uttered. And yet so soon as we recover the original form of the sentence it is clear both that the Lord Jesus had an actual scene before his mind's eye as He spoke; and that this scene was drawn, not from some large and wealthy mansion, but from one of the huts in which poor men made their home. For though our Authorized Version speaks only of *a candle, a bushel, a bed, a candlestick*, the Greek lays emphasis on *the lamp, the bushel, the couch, the lampstand*; and this use of the definite article implies that in the household to which our Lord refers there was only *one* lamp, only one measure, only one couch, only one lampstand. It must have been, therefore, a poor man's house the picture of which rose before his mind, and not a large and richly furnished mansion of the opulent or the great.

So again, the words for "bushel" and for "bed" or "couch" indicate that it was while, or after, Judea was under the administration of imperial Rome that our Lord uttered this parable. For the word for "bushel" shews that it was the Roman *modius*, a measure which held more nearly a peck than a bushel, which was to be found in every Jewish house; and this measure could only have come into general use after the Jews had been conquered by the Roman arms. Probably it was more uniform and accurate than most of the Oriental measures, and so won its way into common use. Possibly the Jews were compelled to adopt it in their dealings with the Romans, and so

gradually fell into the way of using it in all their dealings. And this *modius*, or measure, implies our Parable, was to be found in every Jewish household. It was kept in the family apartment, where the lamp was lit; and here, no doubt, in the Oriental dearth of furniture, it was often turned upside down and used as a seat, or a table, as well as a standard measure. Under such a measure, therefore, a lighted lamp might very well be hid.

So too the word for "bed," or "couch," is not that which denotes the Oriental mat, or *mat-tress*, on which the Jews stretched themselves for repose, and under which of course no burning lamp could possibly have been concealed, but the Roman *triclinium*, the divan, or raised couch, on which guests reclined round three sides of a table while they took their meals. This Western convenience early found its way into the East, and was generally adopted by the time of our Lord. And as this couch, or divan, was a bench covered with cushions, and boarded down to the floor, a lamp might easily be slipped under it at either end, and be hidden from those who came into the house.

Obviously, then, the Parable might well have been spoken at the very date to which it is commonly attributed. It could not have been spoken before the Romans had conquered the Jews, and forced or induced them to adopt many Latin customs or words. It could very hardly have been spoken after Jerusalem had been destroyed by Titus. Its natural place is that comparatively brief period in which Judea was a Roman province. So that here we have one of those minute and undesigned coincidences, all the more reliable because undesigned and minute, which go far to prove that our Gospels were really written at or about the date to which they have always been assigned.

In the very wording of this sentence, then, we may find, we have found, an indication of social customs and evidence of its historical date; we have seen what sort of house our

Lord had in his eye, what sort of lamp and lampstand, what sort of measure, and what sort of couch. And now we may gather from it that there *was* a picture before his mind; for as we linger over his words the very impression made on his mind by that picture is reproduced in ours. "Is a candle brought?" should be "Doth a lamp come?" for so it stands in the Greek. "Doth a lamp *come*?" there is something a little ghostly in the words; they seem to imply that the lamp comes *of its own accord*, without being sent for, without being brought. The original verb implies motion, but nothing more; it says nothing of the origin of the motion, or of the person originating it. And, no doubt, this ghostly impression, as of a self-moving lamp, is made upon us because our Lord, as He spoke, was mentally looking at the scene which He described. For when we are sitting in a dark room, and a bright lamp is brought into it, we do not at first see the person who brings it, cannot at first make out who it is; the bright glare of the lamp throws its bearer into shade, and our eyes are too dazzled by the sudden brightness to penetrate that shade. The lamp seems to come, to approach us, of its own accord. The very form of the Parable, therefore, shews that by an effort of imagination our Lord put Himself into the very house, into the very room, of which He spoke, saw the lamp come into it but could not see who carried it; but marked that it made its way to the lampstand, and did not hide itself under the measure or the divan. How much, then, there is both of historical suggestion and of graphic dramatic force in the simple words: *Doth the lamp come to be put under the modius or under the triclinium, and not to be set on the lampstand?*

So much for the *form* of the parable. And as for its *theme*, that is clear and obvious beyond mistake. Our Lord uttered this parable to teach us that no man is illuminated for his own sake, just as no lamp is lit for its own sake.

Just as the lamp is lit that it may shine, so we are taught that we may teach. No truth is a private possession, just as no truth is of any private interpretation.

Heaven doth with us as we with torches do,
Not light them for themselves; for if our virtues
Did not go forth of us, 'twere all alike
As if we had them not.

No truth is, or can be, dangerous. All that we *can* learn, we *may* learn. All that we *have* learned, we are bound to teach; all that we have received, we are bound to give. To conceal from others any truth which we ourselves have been taught of God is to hide the lamp that has come to us under a bushel or under a couch, instead of setting it on a lampstand. It is to frustrate the very purpose for which it was sent. It is to run counter to the will and intention of God; for, in his intention, "nothing is covered except that it may be uncovered, nothing kept secret except that it may be published abroad."

This is the main theme of the Parable of the Lamp; but if we would see how it is treated, and how many other lessons it is capable of teaching us, we must trace its use through the other Gospels.

In St. Luke viii. 16 we have another report of it: "*No man, when he hath lighted a lamp, covereth it with a vessel or putteth it under a couch, but setteth it on a lampstand, that they who enter in may see the light.*" Here there is comparatively little to detain us. The Parable stands in the same connection of thought as in St. Mark, carries the same great moral with it, and is different only in that it is given in a slightly expanded form. This expansion of form is marked, however, by two characteristic variations. Whereas St. Mark, who wrote mainly for the Romans, speaks of a Roman measure, the *modius*, St. Luke, who wrote for the whole Gentile world, speaks simply of a "vessel," *any* vessel or measure used throughout the habit-

able globe. And whereas St. Matthew, writing mainly for Jews, speaks, as we shall see in a moment, of the lamp as kindled that it may give light "unto all that are *in* the house," St. Luke speaks of it as kindled in order "that they who *enter* into the house" may see the light. For St. Matthew was himself a Jew, and wrote for those who, like himself, were already *in* the household of God; but St. Luke was a Gentile, and wrote for those who, like himself, had a great desire to *enter* into God's house and find themselves at home in it. He and they had, so to speak, long stood outside the Father's house, seeing and desiring the light that shone through its windows; but now Christ had called them into the house, had bidden them enter, had assured them that the house was built and the lamp lit *for them* as well as for the Jews, for all who would *come into* it as well as for all who were already in it.

Beyond these striking and characteristic details there is nothing, I think, to detain us in St. Luke's version of our Parable. But if we turn to St. Matthew's version of it—Chapter v. Verse 15—we see at once that he adds a new thought to it, a new lesson of grave, practical moment. For, after reporting our Lord as saying: "*Neither do men light a lamp, and put it under the bushel, but on the lamp-stand, and it giveth light to all that are in the house,*" St. Matthew makes Him add: "*Even so let your light shine before men, that they may see your good works,*" your good deeds, "*and glorify your Father who is in heaven.*" And in these words, words in which our Lord Himself draws out the moral of his parable, that parable is brought home and applied to every man's conscience in the sight of God. We are taught *how* we are to teach the truths we have learned, *how*, above all, we are to let our light shine before men; we are warned that this duty devolves on us *all*, that it cannot and must not be evaded even by those of us who know the least and are the most slenderly endowed.

When we hear that every man who has been taught by Christ is bound to teach what, and all, that he has learned, some of us feel, at least we plead, that that duty cannot be imposed on *us* because we know so little, or because we have no gift, no capacity, for teaching even the little we know. If others were to frame and publish the same low estimate of our powers, we might be hurt or affronted; but men can be very humble when they wish to escape an unwelcome duty, and even those who think in their hearts that they are as well off as most of their neighbours are, nevertheless, apt to plead, when urged to undertake some work for the Church, that they know very little, and really have no faculty for the work, or the teaching, to which they are invited. And there are others who are genuinely humble, who habitually and sincerely underrate their knowledge and capacity, and who dare not undertake a work which seems too high for them. Willing to learn, they are unfit, or afraid, to teach.

Now a good deal of the humility which prompts men to decline any public service, any ministry, in the kingdom of Christ is, as I have hinted, only the self-conceit which apes humility, and springs rather from indolence and self-indulgence than from any deep sense of inability or unfitness. And even where it is genuine and sincere, it is very often a mistake. Those who know but little of the truth can often teach that little more effectively and sympathetically than those who know much, and who have forgotten the difficulty with which they themselves mastered its first rudiments. And men may teach very effectually without once entering a pulpit or a classroom, nay, without so much as once opening their lips. How many opportunities, for instance, we all have of bearing witness to the truth, of making a stand for the Christian faith, as we meet our neighbours in the market place or in public and private gatherings! When we meet men who make light of

religion, or who jest at virtue, or who speak with relish and approval of the smartness which borders on dishonesty or of the selfishness which implies injustice or unkindness to others, might we not even find words, or, if words are beyond us, at least find looks, gestures, actions, in which to shew that we hold it to be our chief good and pleasure, as well as our chief duty, to serve God and to love our neighbour as ourselves? When we attend public meetings, even if we do not speak, may we not, by our approval of all that is just, generous, noble in what we hear, and by our disapproval of all that is base, selfish, frivolous, bear an emphatic testimony to the truths, and to our faith in the truths, we have learned from Christ? Would that for once I could say, with the emphasis it deserves, that *hearing itself is a kind of speaking!* It deeply needs to be said, though there should be no need to say it. For is it not obvious that by our very selection of our place of worship, by merely attaching ourselves to one church rather than to another, we proclaim what those forms of Christian truth are which we value, and what the spirit we approve in those who are called to preach those truths? Is it not clear that by a regular and punctual attendance on any public ministry we are setting our seal to it? that by the interest and sympathy with which we listen to words spoken from the pulpit we give them weight? What harm, what infinite harm, has been wrought by men who continued to attend a ministry long after they had discovered that it did not meet their spiritual wants or breathe a spirit they could admire! What harm, what infinite harm, has been wrought by the listless, inattentive, unconcerned air with which those who believed listened to the very truths they believed! Oh, that good men would but understand that by their attendance on any public teaching they are saying with a power beyond that of words: "*These* are the truths which I believe, and *this* is the spirit in which, as I

conceive, they ought to be urged." If they did but understand, and act on the understanding, that by their eagerness to go to the church of their choice, by their keen attention, by their evident sympathy, by their hearty enjoyment both of the teaching and the worship, they were inviting their neighbours to attend, to listen, to receive the truth and to share in their devotion; if they did but feel, on the other hand, that by suffering themselves to be detained from worship by trifles which would not keep them from business, by their indifferent and perfunctory participation in acts of devotion, by every moment of inattention and flagging sympathy, they are virtually saying to their neighbours, "We don't think *you* would gain much by coming with us, or by being much in earnest if you came," I verily believe that all our churches would soon be full, and every surviving pulpit a power: for this would be so to let our light shine before men that they could not but glorify our Father who is in heaven. It is the Congregation that preaches quite as much as the Minister, though often, alas, they seem to be preaching in very opposite strains. Would that our congregations did but know their power and their duty!

In these indirect ways, then, every man may teach the truths he knows, even though he should fill no public place, nor so much as open his lips. But what we have specially to mark is that St. Matthew points out still another way in which all who have received light from Heaven may let that light shine before men. Let men see your light, he says, in your "good works," in your good *deeds*. Now this is a mode of shining from which no man can excuse himself on the modest plea that he knows but little, and has no gift or faculty for teaching even the little he knows. If a good deed shines like a candle in a dark and naughty world, who may not give his neighbours some little light? To what good man is a good deed impossible? Nay, what

good man can so much as think that no good deed is possible to him?

We all know what stress our Lord lays on good works, how He teaches that no knowledge of Christian doctrine, no splendid achievements wrought in his name, no homage rendered to his person, will bring us into his kingdom. We know how He makes our very knowledge dependent on our obedience, assuring us that we can only come to know his doctrine as we keep his commandments. And yet how constantly is the plain meaning of his words evaded, both in theory and in practice. In theory, men have substituted "faith" for obedience, and have held that to believe certain dogmas was a surer way of salvation than to love and serve God and man. In practice, some substitute worship for obedience, *getting* light for *giving* light; while others substitute good resolutions for good works, or assume that sorrow for having done amiss is equivalent to an endeavour to do well.

How many a man, for example, thinks, or acts as if he thought, that the chief end of religion is going to church; that if he is regular and attentive in his place of worship, and learns all he can of God's will, God will not expect much more of him than that: quite forgetting that he goes to church on Sundays to learn the Will which he is to *do* all the week; to get the lamp lit, or replenished, or at the lowest trimmed, which is to shine through the good deeds of his daily life. His excuse is his condemnation. If a clerk in a public office, or a workman in a factory, were to go to work late day after day, and were to plead in palliation that he made a point of reading the official rules every week, and above all the rule which forbad him to come late, *he* would be in the very position of the man who pleads that he reads his Bible and attends public worship as an excuse for any neglect or violation of God's commandments in the daily round of life. So far from being any better, we are the

worse for merely knowing God's will, if we do not *do* it. The light that is in us is our condemnation and our shame if it does not shine out through the good deeds of a life at one with the will of God.

How many, again, think, or act as if they thought, that speaking eloquently about the light, or a quick sensibility to its beauty, were a fair and acceptable equivalent for letting their light shine before men. They are easily moved to admire goodness; they grow eloquent in its praise; they say fine things about it, and say these fine things with so much emotion, or they listen to what others say in its praise, and feel so much the better and happier for what they hear, that, without further ado, they take it for granted that they are good and have discharged their main duty as religious men. To all who thus deceive themselves with mere words, all who are hearers or speakers, but not doers, our Parable says, "Let your light *shine*, shine in and through your good works. It is not enough to praise the light; you must walk in it, if you would prove that you are children of the light and the day."

Others are for ever repenting of the wrongs or sins into which they have fallen, but their repentance does not stop them from doing wrong again; or they are deeply touched as they hear of the wrongs or miseries of their neighbours, but they take no thought or pains to redress the wrongs or to relieve the miseries they bemoan. They are very sorry that God's will is not done on earth as it is done in heaven; but they forget that doing God's will is one thing, and being sorry that it is not done is another; or, for all their sorrow, they will undertake no troublesome duty, practise no great self-denial, attempt no unwelcome or difficult task, in order to get a little more of God's will done in this unregarded corner of the earth or that.

And still others are for ever framing good resolutions and purposing amendment, and too often assume that their good

intentions will count for good works. Like the son in the parable, they say, "I go, sir," and yet go not. "I will do better," they say; and yet they do no better, but fall back into their old course of careless negligence. And so the lamp, which has been lit in order that it might give light, is hidden under a bushel of good intentions, or under the couch on which they weep over their past offences, and the world is none the brighter for them, none the better.

Let us understand that we must *do* the will of God, not *intend* to do it merely, nor merely regret that we have not done it, nor be content either with feeling beautifully about it or speaking eloquently in its praise. That high Will has to be *done*, done in the good deeds of a good daily life, before men can really see what it is and how fair it is, and glorify our Father who is in heaven by an obedience like our own.

And let us remember that the lamp that would shine must *burn*; that to do good we must deny and sacrifice ourselves, sacrificing at least all that is evil, and denying ourselves in much that might be very good and pleasant for us did it not impede us in our service of God and man.

S. Cox.

THE HISTORICAL CHRIST OF ST. PAUL.

1. THE EPISTLE TO THE ROMANS (*Continued*).

ROMANS vi. 23.—"For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord." There are two distinct conceptions in this Verse; one of them is decidedly Jewish, the other as decidedly not Jewish. The Jewish conception is the connection between sin and destruction, "the wages of sin is death"; it bears so manifestly the stamp of the Old Testament that no one can have