

What remains of the *Διδαχή* does not contain much that he could have made use of. But he does write as he must have written if he had the latter part of it (chaps. vii.–xvi.) also before him. He is impressed by its most striking ideas; he explains the very sayings in it which were least transparent; and he altogether omits little or nothing except what it might have been safely predicted that he would omit.

Thus far it does not appear why Barnabas should not have drawn from the *Διδαχή* in its entirety. Something might be said on extraneous grounds in favour of a hypothetical common original to which both were indebted; but as against the view of the earlier editors of the *Teaching of the Twelve Apostles*, I am disposed to go a step further than to hold it “kaum für glaublich” that one of its main sources should have been the *Epistle of Barnabas*.

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A MISUNDERSTOOD PARABLE.

OUR Saviour's parables are not chance similitudes gleaned from the surface of things; they are living analogies, drawn from the core of nature. This stamp of Divine authorship belongs to the figurative language of Scripture generally; but it pre-eminently characterises our Lord's symbolic lessons. Such images, for example, as the Sower and the Seed, the Shepherd and the Sheep, the Vine and its Branches, do not flash a momentary lustre and then vanish. They are fixed stars of wisdom, by whose light we may always guide our thoughts. The mere poetic simile is a picture, which must not be touched or taken from its frame. The true parable is an instrument which yields to the familiar touch ever fresh music.

Hence the canon, that in order to interpret our Lord's parables, the first step is to make sure of an accurate knowledge of the natural fact or facts on which they are based. We may have this, and yet miss His meaning; but if we neglect this, we are sure to go astray. Thus, for instance, no one is prepared to expound the tenth chapter of St. John's Gospel who is ignorant of the actual relations of a Syrian shepherd and his flock. The beauty and aptness, if not the meaning, of the great parable of the Sower will be missed, if we do not come to it with such a vivid picture before our minds of the labours of the Galilæan husbandman as Dr. Thomson or Dean Stanley may furnish to those who have not been so happy as to visit the Holy Land. The parable of the Tares will be misread, if we are not aware that under this name is intended a plant closely resembling wheat in its earlier growth—of the same genus, but poisonous.

Of all our Lord's parables, there is none regarding which this canon of interpretation has been so signally neglected as the PARABLE OF THE LEAVEN. The difficulty of the parable is obvious. Alone among our Lord's parables it presents a similitude which seems in the nature of things unsuitable, as well as inconsistent with the prevailing use of the same image in Scripture. Leaven is *sour dough*—a piece of dough in that initial stage of decomposition or putrefaction in which it is capable (like yeast, and some other substances) of setting up the wonderful chemical process called "fermentation" in the fresh dough into which it is kneaded. Hence, in itself it is an image of corruption and death. Nothing could seem less fit to stand as a symbol of the purifying, life-giving power of the gospel, or of the kingdom of Christ.

Accordingly, in every other instance in which leaven is symbolically used, either in the Old or New Testament, it is in an evil sense. The law of Moses contains repeated

prohibitions of the use of leaven in any sacrifice, whether of animal life or of food (Lev. ii. 11). The exceptions (Lev. xxiii. 17; vii. 13) were (a) the two *wave-loaves*, presented at the Feast of Harvest (Pentecost), as representing the ordinary daily bread of which God's harvest-bounty had provided another year's supply; and (b) the leavened cakes presented with peace-offerings, as part of the feast which was to follow the sacrifice. But no leaven must be laid on the altar. The profane disregard of this law is rebuked by the prophet Amos (iv. 5).

Our Saviour symbolises under this image the hypocrisy of the Pharisees. St. Paul warns us that "a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump," and bids the Corinthians "purge out the old leaven," and "keep the feast, not with old leaven, neither with the leaven of malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth."

We can therefore scarcely be surprised if some able and learned students of Scripture have maintained that what is represented in this parable is the corruption, not the growth, of the kingdom of Christ; the spread, not of life-giving truth, but of deadly error, through Christendom. This view, plausible as it may seem, is refuted by the fatal objection pointed out by Trench, Stier, and other writers, that in this case the parable would foretell the *entire corruption* of the whole kingdom of Christ; for "*the whole was leavened.*" This would be in flat contradiction to the teaching of the other parables.

Is it then a satisfactory explanation to say, with Dean Plumtre (in Bishop Ellicott's Commentary), that the leaven "here becomes, in the mode of teaching which does not confine itself within the limits of a traditional and conventional symbolism, the type of influence for good as well as evil"? Or to say, with Stier and Alford, that the key to the meaning is in what the latter calls "*the power which it possesses of penetrating and assimilating a foreign mass,*"

till all be taken up into it"? "Penetrating"? Yes. "Assimilating"? No. This word shows we are on a wrong tack. If the action of the leaven were to transform the mass into its own likeness, the result would be a large lump, instead of a small morsel, of sour dough. The process of fermentation which the leaven sets up consists in a chemical action by which the sugar in the flour is converted into alcohol and carbonic acid, both of which pass away invisibly in the heat of the oven. The notable thing is, that the leaven, in doing its work, perishes. If the bread "*rises*" well (as housewives term it), and is well baked, it comes out of the oven light, wholesome, and palatable, but with no trace of alcohol, carbonic acid, or sour leaven. The bitter taste of yeast may sometimes be discerned in bread; but if so, it is because so far the process has failed. If the leaven has done its work well it vanishes into that invisible realm which underlies phenomena.

Does not this give us the key to the true and deep meaning of the parable? The corruptible leaven, perishing and vanishing, but doing a work which outlasts it, is the means of satisfying hunger and sustaining life. Even thus, the AGENCY by which God carries on the great work of meeting the spiritual hunger and feeding the spiritual life of mankind, is the ministry of frail men, whose work is perishable, yet immortal. "We have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellency of the power may be of God and not of us."

In this, as in all else, our Saviour is the great Exemplar. It was of His own work that He said, "Except a grain of wheat fall into the earth and die, it abideth alone; but if it die, it beareth much fruit." Because those He was to redeem were partakers of flesh and blood, He took the same dying nature—"made in the likeness of sinful flesh." What appeared to friends and foes alike, as they stood round the Cross, His complete and ignominious failure, was

His supreme victory. By death He became the Author of life. He disappeared from our world that He might carry on His work upon earth more effectively than if He had remained. He vanished from men's eyes that He might be enshrined and enthroned in their hearts.

Human ministry obeys the same law, but with the additional stamp of moral frailty—error, inconstancy, and sin. Men die, but their work endures; men err, but they hand on the torch of truth. Their formulas of thoughts grow obsolete. Their theology becomes unintelligible. Their church systems break to pieces, or stiffen into hindrances to church life and work. The controversies, in which their own side seemed to them identical with the cause of Christ, are painfully studied by a handful of students in dead languages, or in volumes long out of print. Their fiery watchwords are cold and meaningless to their successors. But did they live and toil and fight in vain? A thousand times, No! They sowed the harvest that still feeds the world. They contended earnestly for the faith once delivered to the saints; and that faith cannot perish, though helm and hauberk, crossbow and matchlock—the weapons of their warfare—have long been hung up to rust. It is but the perishing of the corruptible leaven when its work is done.

We hear much and often of the failure of Christianity; the decline of faith, zeal, love, piety; the decay of religion. It has always been so. The law of Christ's kingdom on earth is, Divine truth brought to bear on men's hearts and lives by human ministry. Just because the ministry is human it bears the stamp of narrowness and defect, and carries in it the seeds of failure. But so far as it is a ministry of Christ's word, "it liveth and abideth for ever." We need not turn for illustration to the religious movements of our own day, or of the last century, or of the Reformation, though these supply it in abundance. Take

a wider range. The most astounding fact in the history of the kingdom of Christ on earth is the apostasy of the Catholic Church, which casts its colossal shadow over long centuries—dimly and feebly apprehended, for lack of study, by the mass of modern Christians. More significant and instructive still, because so close to the fountain-head of Christianity, is the failure of the Apostolic Churches. Those who had run well were hindered. Those before whose eyes Jesus Christ had been evidently set forth, were bewitched that they should not obey the truth. Paul lived to write of the scene of his most devoted and successful labours, "All they who are in Asia are turned away from me." Peter and Jude denounce the incoming flood of heresy, immorality, and ungodliness, whose rising waves were already breaking over the Church. The Beloved Apostle survived to see the evil rapidly and, as it seemed, irresistibly developing, and to be the amanuensis of those terrible epistles from the Head of the Church to the Churches of Sardis and Laodicea, which disclose a state of things we might else have well deemed incredible before the close of the Apostolic age.

Christianity a failure? Christ's Church a failure? Christ's kingdom a failure? Christian missions a failure? Yes; in the same sense in which the Apostolic Churches were a failure, Nicene Christianity a failure, mediæval Catholicity a failure, the Reformation a failure. Man fails. God, working through man, cannot fail. Forms change. Truth abides. The corruptible leaven perishes. The incorruptible Bread of Life is as ready and able to-day, as when Jesus multiplied the loaves, to meet the deepest craving of souls that pray, "Lord, evermore give us this bread!"

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