

## Hebrew Prophecy and Modern Criticism.

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### IV.

“Ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.”—JOHN viii. 32.

IN my previous papers I have made two things my special aim. The first was to lay stress on the intrinsic merit of the prophetic books not merely as beautiful literary compositions, but as moulding the religious ideas and character of the Jewish people. In the second place I endeavoured to show, that while the prophetic faculty claims and proves itself to be divine, it cannot be regarded as absolutely infallible; that, as a fact, the details of prophecy were not always fulfilled at the time or in the manner which the prophets themselves evidently anticipated. In arguing this I naturally confined myself to prophecies concerned with well-known historical events, such as the Great Captivity and the fall of Babylon. If we are bound by the evidence to make these admissions in the historical prophecies, surely we should be prepared to make them in those which presumably look beyond the prophet's immediate horizon. It is with these that the apologist has necessarily most to do, and they must engage our attention in this and the following papers.

With some reluctance, following the common practice of writers on prophecy, I shall call such prophecies Messianic. For, try as we will, it seems almost impossible to find a name for them which does not seem to prejudge, in one or other direction, the very questions which we have to discuss. The term, if strictly applied, is also too narrow, as I shall naturally wish to speak of many prophecies in which there is no mention of a Messiah, and no reason to suppose that the personal Messianic idea is latent in the prophet's mind. It is necessary therefore to premise that by Messianic prophecies I mean especially, but not exclusively, those which produced among the Jews that unique hope of national glory and greatness usually associated in their view with an anointed prince. The expression will also of necessity include prophecies which we should now call eschatological, for these are in fact closely connected with the Messianic hope.

That such a hope existed among the Jews needs no elaborate proof; it not only shows itself

in the great bulk of Jewish literature of all ages, but the fact that it took a different form among Jews from that current among Christians makes it clear that the one did not derive it from the other. Indeed it cannot reasonably be doubted, that of the two the Jewish conception of the Messiah springs more naturally and directly out of the Old Testament prophecies.

But how are these Messianic prophecies connected with what again, for want of a better name, I shall call the historical? We can hardly overestimate the importance of this question; for on our answer depends our whole method of treating prophecy. As is usually the case, we find among expositors two diametrically opposite tendencies, each influenced, it can hardly be doubted, by a separate theological bias, and depending upon distinctly different principles of interpretation. The first is to find Christ everywhere in the Old Testament, especially in the prophets; the other, to find Him nowhere.

The principle which underlies the first is to take Christ and Christianity as the starting-point, and to search for predictions of these scattered about in the pages of the prophets and elsewhere. The historical allusions appear as at most the mere setting for such predictions, and as having no real organic connexion with them. Very frequently they have been regarded as bearing themselves a typical reference to Christ and Christianity. Thus in the burden of Moab, Isa. xv. and xvi., and the prophecy of the judgment on Edom in Isa. lxiii. 1-6, these two powers are referred in the headings of the chapters as they stand in our ordinary English Bibles—the one implicitly, the other explicitly—to the enemies of Christ.

This symbolical interpretation of prophecy has taken two forms, which cannot always be clearly distinguished. In the first, the historical sense is completely ignored or, perhaps it would be fairer to say, is not practically realised, as when, with the Fathers, Lucifer or Leviathan were often regarded merely as names of Satan. Still more singular is the application of the latter term by Rufinus to

our Lord's body partaken of in the Holy Eucharist.<sup>1</sup> The passage is worth quoting as a remarkable specimen of quaintness and extravagance:—"Sicut ergo hamum esca coniectum si piscis rapiat, non modo escam ab hamo non removet, sed et ipse de profundo, esca aliis futurus, educitur, ita et is qui habebat mortis imperium rapuit quidem in morte corpus Jesu, non sentiens in eo hamum divinitatis inclusum; sed ubi devoravit, hæsit ipse continuo, et diruptis inferni claustris, velut de profundo extractus trahitur ut esca cæteris fiat. Quod ita futurum sub hac eadem figura Ezechiel dudum propheta signaverat, dicens, *Et extraham te in hamo meo, et extendam te super terram: campi implebuntur de te, et constituam super te omnes volucres cæli, et saturabo ex te omnes bestias terræ.*<sup>2</sup> Sed et propheta David dicit. *Tu confregisti capita draconis magni, dedisti eum in escam populis Æthiopum.*<sup>3</sup> Et Job de eodem mysterio similiter protestatur; ait enim, ex persona Domini loquentis ad se. *Aut adduces draconem in hamo, et pones capistrum circa nares ejus?*"<sup>4</sup> Similarly the same writer<sup>5</sup> explains Hos. x. 6, in which that prophet says that the idol calf of Bethel would be sent as a present to king Jareb, as a "presignification" of Christ sent by Pilate to king Herod! This interpretation he justifies by a curious explanation of Jarim, or *Ἰαρείμ* as he found it in the LXX. version.<sup>6</sup>

The second form of symbolical interpretation is that which has received general currency, and until lately has been the usual method of interpreting prophecy. It is what is commonly known as "the double sense." According to it, the historical sense is the primary meaning of the prophet, but beyond this obvious meaning there is a further reference to some more distant future event connected with Christianity or the end of the world. Whether the prophet himself meant or realised this further event, or it was rather the meaning of the Spirit who spoke through the prophet, was a question either not considered at all, or answered differently by different writers. It would be premature to consider whether, under any form or

limitations, a double sense of a prophecy is admissible. I am now using the phrase as it is commonly accepted by theologians, according to which the secondary sense has no connexion with the primary sense except by type or symbol, and even that has not always been considered necessary. Thus understood, this as well as the other form of symbolical interpretation already described weaken very seriously, if they do not practically destroy, the whole argument from prophecy. For, with a little ingenuity, a prophetic prediction may be found for any event whatever, and the argument becomes a proof not so much of the prophet's foresight as of the apologist's cleverness in evolving interpretations.

It might be objected that we get very strange interpretations of prophecy in the New Testament itself. I suppose no commentator of the present day would seriously deny that Hosea by the words, "I called my son out of Egypt" (Hos. xi. 1), meant a reference to the exodus of the Israelites. How then is St. Matthew right in referring them to the return of Joseph and Mary with the infant Saviour? (Matt. ii. 15); or how, again, is he right when he quotes a passage of Jeremiah which speaks poetically of Rachel in her tomb weeping over the Israelites slaughtered by their Babylonian conquerors, and refers it to the massacre of the innocents at Bethlehem? (Jer. xxxi. 15; Matt. ii. 18). How, again, are we to justify those explanations of prophecy in the New Testament which are based upon Greek mistranslations of the Hebrew?<sup>7</sup> If we accept such interpretations, are we logically justified, it may be asked, in rejecting, as forced or unnatural, a whole host of Patriistic interpretations, which are, most of them, hardly more extravagant? To this there can be, it seems to me, only one answer that a fair or wise apologist of the present day can give. All such explanations are part of that system of allegorical interpretation which is at least as old as Christianity itself. The Christians themselves derived it from the Jews, and both parties naturally used it in perfect good faith in arguing for their religious systems. St. Matthew quotes those prophecies in the early chapters of his Gospel because, according to the methods of thought prevalent in his own day, they were a strong argument in favour of the Messianic claims of Jesus. To us they are not a strong argument—on the whole they are rather a stumbling-

<sup>7</sup> See, for example, Acts ii. 31; Heb. x. 5.

<sup>1</sup> Ruf. in *Symb. Apost.* 16.

<sup>2</sup> Ezek. xxix. 4.   <sup>3</sup> Ps. lxxiv. 14.   <sup>4</sup> Job xli. 1.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.* 21.

<sup>6</sup> "Et bene addit nomen Jarim, quod est sylvester." He understood it as the Hebrew *עריים*, "woods," the word which we get in Kirjath-jearim, "the city of woods." The Vulgate, on the contrary, has "ultori."

block. To atheists and sceptics they are obviously no argument at all. It is a foolish thing to use antiquated weapons to defend Christian truth. By such means we should neither convince a single unbeliever nor confirm our own faith. And what is the use of apologetics except for the one purpose or the other?

The opposite tendency, not to see Christ at all in the Old Testament, may be called the extreme result of the historical and critical spirit of the age, and of the method of interpretation to which it has given rise. To many minds the result is so repugnant that they are disposed to move the previous question, and to refuse to examine its claims. But this is unfair, and it is certainly unwise. If the reasoning is unsound, its unsoundness ought to be shown up, for it must be dangerous. The apologist is the very last person who can afford to say, "I will have none of that method of arguing, because I do not know what it may lead me to." On the contrary, if he is wise, he will first examine its principles, and then, if they are sound, consider whether they are rightly applied. It is obviously most important to keep these two questions completely separate. It is of course perfectly reasonable and right to say, "The conclusions to which this method has sometimes led commentators are so serious, so upsetting to my rooted convictions, that I am specially bound to satisfy myself of its reasonableness, and will not be led astray by plausible but shallow arguments." But this is a very different thing from refusing to examine the argument. The more important the conclusions, the more important is it that the argument should be weighed with perfect thoroughness and absolute fairness.

Let us then for a moment leave out of consideration the conclusions which seem to follow from this method, or for which it has been sometimes made responsible, and consider the method itself. The principle is briefly this, that the meaning of a prophet is what he himself meant to say. To understand this, we must ascertain, as far as possible, all the circumstances of the prophet,—his political surroundings, the religious ideas and practices of his times, the relation of his people to foreign powers, and so on. The history in fact, instead of being of minor importance, becomes at the very least the foundation, the starting-point of his discourses. To many this will seem so obvious as hardly to have required stating; but, as I have

already pointed out, it has not been in the past the method usually employed. In fact it is only quite lately that the history of the Jews has been either fully appreciated or clearly understood. The discovery of ancient monuments has made historical investigation more and more possible, and has given a new life to prophetic study. This has been combined with a more accurate knowledge of Hebrew philology. And what have been the immediate results? That instead of finding in the prophets, for the most part, strings of conundrums, into which each commentator has read his own meaning, we find language which, as a rule, is intelligible and real—full of life and full of beauty.

Briefly speaking, then, this method is justified both by its transparent reasonableness and by its general results. That it is the right one, the only one that can satisfy an intelligent seeker after truth, can hardly be questioned. If so, our first question is answered—the principle itself is sound. But what are we to say of the second—How about the application of the principle? Are we justified in saying, with some commentators, that the prophets know nothing and say nothing of Christ? Certainly not as an *à priori* statement. To one who believes in a supernatural revelation,—we might say to one who believes in a personal God at all,—it is antecedently possible that God may have revealed beforehand a perfectly clear knowledge of Christ and Christianity, and the prophets may have found occasions when contemporary events justified the foretelling of this more distant future. But it is a thing which cannot be decided by any *à priori* reasoning. We must examine the facts. The question is not what the prophets *might* have been empowered to say and *might* have thought fit to say, but what they *have* said. And to know this we must study the prophets from their own standpoint, and find out what they said and what they meant. If their words bear a natural reference to the known events of their own time, it is not likely that they intended them to be prophetic of future events which were to take place at a far-distant date, and in a way very different from that which they actually describe.

But at this point it would be well to notice a distinction, which must be clearly made if we are to avoid confusion of thought. It is one thing to say that the prophets actually foresaw and foretold Christ; quite another thing to say that they foretold a state of things, which as a fact was fulfilled,

though not precisely as they expected, in Christ and Christianity. And if I was right in what I said of the limits of their temporal predictions, this is all that we have any reason to expect.

Let us now take the prophets into our hands, and let them speak for themselves. The first result of an independent study is of necessity negative. We cannot, try as we will, forget the interpretations to which we have been accustomed from our childhood. (1) The first thing that inevitably strikes us, is that many prophecies which we have been taught to regard as Messianic have a direct and obvious meaning *in the events of the prophet's time*. We have a typical example of this in the Immanuel prophecy of Isa. vii. 14. This passage was a bone of contention between the Jews and the Christians as early as the time of Justin Martyr, and the arguments on both sides are fully given in his Dialogue with Trypho.<sup>1</sup> The Christians, probably deriving their argument from St. Matthew i. 23, maintained that the words translated, "The virgin shall conceive," etc., were a prophetic announcement of the birth of Christ from His virgin mother. The Jews, on the other hand, maintained that the word עַלְמָה did not necessarily mean a virgin, but only as a young woman—that the prophet intended to refer to Hezekiah. The point was considered to be of such importance that, under the auspices of Aquila or Onkelos, a new Greek translation of the Bible was made, in which the word *νεάνις* was substituted for the *παρθένος* of the pre-Christian LXX. version.<sup>2</sup> Hebrew scholars are now pretty generally agreed that, so far as the word עַלְמָה is concerned, Trypho was right, and that it is hardly conceivable that Isaiah would have used an ambiguous word had he meant the virgin-birth to be the sign intended. And if we study the whole passage without prejudice, we find far more to be said on the same side. It becomes obvious that the point of the sign is not so much anything miraculous in the birth of the child, as the fact that his early years would be marked by two remarkable events—(a) a desolation of the country, which is signified by the simplest food being made necessary through the devastations of a foreign enemy—the child is to eat butter and honey instead of cultivated fruits and cereals; (b) the crushing of the power of Rezin and Pekah by Assyria—"For before the child shall know to refuse the evil

and choose the good, the land, whose two kings thou abhorrest, shall be forsaken." Moreover, the sign is given in wrath. The fulfilment of these prophecies was to be to Ahaz the sign of God's judgment on himself: "Jahweh shall bring upon thee, and upon thy people, and upon thy father's house, days that have not come from the day that Ephraim departed from Judah; even the king of Assyria." And there follows a vivid but highly poetical description of the devastation of the southern kingdom. On the hills once famous for their priceless vines and their crops there was to be nothing but briars and thorns; and men would have to get what scanty subsistence they could by shooting wild animals, or grazing a few cattle and sheep on the scanty pasturage among the thickets. The general line of thought is this:—You and your advisers are secretly seeking an alliance with Assyria to ward off the attacks of Syria and Ephraim. You affect a pious reverence for God, but your whole attitude shows utter distrust and impiety. God will punish you as you deserve. Your plan, as you devise it, will be perfectly successful, but the very power which you have called in to crush your foes will crush yourself. This is the chief line of thought. I am far from saying that it exhausts the whole meaning. But see what life and spirit is given to the whole chapter when so understood! I know of no passage in the Old Testament which more completely vindicates the superiority of the new method of interpretation to the old. If it be asked, Does such an interpretation preclude a Messianic reference? it must be answered, Not necessarily; but this much may certainly be said: That if Isaiah was speaking in ver. 14 of the birth of the Messiah, he must have believed that the Messiah was very shortly to appear. Such is the view to which several of the most able of modern critics actually incline. The opinion of Delitzsch on this point is particularly interesting. In his early Commentary on Isaiah he exhausted his ingenuity in endeavouring very unsatisfactorily to show how the birth of Christ, or rather the prophet's prediction of the birth of Christ, could be a sign to Ahaz. But in later life this great pillar of conservative criticism, without losing one jot of his religious faith or religious earnestness, felt bound to accept the principles of the new critical school, and he accepted them with perfect frankness. The following remark on the passage in question occurs in his lectures on Messianic prophecy delivered in

<sup>1</sup> See *Dial. c. Tryph.* 43. 66. 67. 84.

<sup>2</sup> See Eusebius, *Eccles. Hist.* v. 8 (quotation from Irenæus).

1887, and published shortly before his death:—“Those who think that Immanuel, because he was a child of the Assyrian time of judgment, could not be the Messiah, fail to recognise the law of perspective shortening, to which all prophecy, even that concerning Jesus Christ Himself in the Gospels, is subject. Isaiah lived to see that the expectation of the parousia of the Messiah in the time of the Assyrian oppression was not fulfilled; nevertheless he was not ashamed of his prophecy, and did not withdraw it.”<sup>1</sup>

Let us take another example in some ways still more striking. We have in Jer. iv. 23–26 a passage which seems to speak in unequivocal language of the end of the world. The earth or land returns to primitive chaos; light disappears; man is no more; and birds fly away. A desolate wilderness takes the place of fruitful vegetation. But after this the passage passes into what is evidently a description of a country ravaged by a foreign enemy. The destruction of cities, the flight of the inhabitants to places of refuge, the desolation of the country,—all are plainly depicted. And interwoven with this, again, is a description, half poetical, half perhaps literal, of the way in which heaven and earth take part in the judgment of God. “For this shall the earth mourn, and the heavens above be black; because I have spoken it. I have purposed it, and I have not repented, neither will I turn back from it.” Now what is the conclusion derived from a careful study of this whole passage? It is clearly this, that however much the language of Jeremiah lends itself to an eschatological sense, what he has directly in view is the invasion of a foreign enemy, which he foretells as a judgment from God. Now if these first few chapters belong, as is commonly supposed, to the early days of Jeremiah, it is most probable that this vision of Jeremiah, so terrible as seeming to predict nothing less than the end of the world, was due to an imminent invasion of the Scythians, which in fact proved so little disastrous to Palestine that, except in this passage and perhaps in the prophet Zephaniah, it left no permanent traces on Jewish literature.<sup>2</sup> We have again a parallel instance in the 24th chapter of Isaiah. There, in the midst of a passage which speaks in the strongest language of what appears to be the desolation of the whole world, there is quite unexpectedly a reference

to the destruction of a particular city (ver. 10), and this is followed by a characteristic prediction of the salvation of a remnant. Now these are no isolated instances. We find the same fact over and over again. What seems at first sight to refer to a state of things utterly unlike the prophet’s own surroundings is frequently found, on examination, to refer directly to events of his own time, and events of which, in the context, he is evidently speaking.

(2) Again, if we study the context of what are more obviously Messianic predictions in the wide sense of the expression, even these we find, in the prophet’s view, to be closely dependent upon some impending historical event. Let us take e.g., the great prophecy of Isa. ix. 1–7. This is perhaps the most remarkable Messianic prophecy in the Old Testament. Now, if we read this in connexion with the two previous chapters, we then see the dark background against which the brilliant picture of the future is evidently drawn. But what is this darkness, in contrast to which the light of chap. ix. suddenly bursts in upon us? It is clearly the condition of the people in the time of the prophet, probably during the reign of Ahaz, when they were given over to the grossest superstitions and idolatry, and the prophet in vain tried to arouse in the people, as a whole, any feeling of religious patriotism. Now let us suppose for a moment that Isaiah distinctly foresaw Christ as He afterwards really was. His prediction would then amount to this:—This gross superstition, these constant political intrigues, must go on for some centuries. Then one will come who will reveal truths which, after a great many centuries, will be so infused into the hearts of all nations that they will recognise Him as their spiritual King, and in the end there will be universal peace under His government. But is this what his language naturally suggests? To think that such was the mind of Isaiah is to rob the prophecy of that present hope which evidently inspired him.

The detailed discussion of this prophecy we must reserve for a future paper; but is it not at least evident that Isaiah foresaw the golden age of his people in the near future?

We find the same thing in the prophet Jeremiah. The most marked Messianic prophecy of that prophet, at least in the narrower sense of the expression, is that which English Churchmen naturally associate with the Sunday before Advent, xxiii. 5: “Behold, the days come, saith Jahweh,

<sup>1</sup> *Messianic Prophecies*, Eng. Trans. p. 141.

<sup>2</sup> See Cheyne, *Jeremiah: His Life and Times*, chap. 4.

that I will raise unto David a righteous Sprout, and He shall reign as king, and deal wisely, and shall execute judgment and justice in the land. In His days Judah shall be saved, and Israel shall dwell safely; and this is His name whereby He shall be called, The Lord is our Righteousness." Now if we examine the context before and after these words, we shall see that Jeremiah has in his mind the Restoration from the Captivity. The prophecy is directed against the shepherds that destroyed and scattered the sheep of God's pasture. By these are meant, according to a common Hebrew metaphor, the rulers and guides of the people, probably in the widest sense of the term,—principally the kings, but also his counsellors, the priests and prophets, and those generally who held an official position in Church or State. These unfaithful shepherds are, in the restored state, to be supplanted by shepherds who shall really feed the flock. The centre of this new government is to be a king distinguished for prudence and righteousness, who stands in contrast to the foolish and selfish kings of Jeremiah's time. In the days to come people will look back with gratitude upon the Restoration as the greatest act of national deliverance. It will take the place formerly occupied in their minds by the deliverance from Egypt. "Therefore behold the days come, saith Jahweh, that they shall no more say, As Jahweh liveth, which brought up the children of Israel out of the land of Egypt; but as Jahweh liveth, which brought up and which led the seed of the house of Israel out of the north country, and from all the countries whither I had driven them; and they shall dwell in their own land." Now supposing that Jeremiah had in his mind a definite conception of the personality of Christ and His work at some distant time, is it likely that he would have so focused his thoughts upon the mere fact of national deliverance? Would he not almost certainly have made some part of that work itself the ground for national gratitude? As it is, the prophecy of the righteous king is inseparably bound up with the return of the exiles.

And now let me recapitulate the results to which this inquiry has led us:—(1) We have found it necessary to reject, honestly and unreservedly, a method of interpreting prophecy which, though it has held the field for many centuries, is now more and more coming to be felt irrational and, for those who feel so dishonest, in any case useless

for apologetic purposes. (2) We have made it more possible to come to terms with those whose principles of interpretation are rational, and therefore so far right, but seem to ignore, or at least fail to appreciate fully, the more spiritual and religious side of the character and utterances of the prophets. For the very first necessity in controversy is to understand what our antagonists mean, and to agree frankly in all in which we feel that they are right. If we have travelled so far on the road with them, we shall better see where, how, and why our paths diverge. The rejection of the Messianic interpretation may be a very serious difference, or it may prove to be little more than a question of words,—in any case, a difference often of degree rather than of kind. If we wish to show that we are right in accepting Messianic interpretations at all, we must do so on those same grounds of sober reason which have led us to reject many which we now know to be false. But if we would be candid inquirers, we must be prepared to be convinced as well as to convince. The opinions of earnest religious thinkers have changed marvellously in the last forty years. Is it reasonable to expect that they will not continue to change in the next forty? Some of my readers will be old enough to remember the storm of indignation that was excited by a book by Rowland Williams, called *Rational Godliness*. One of the passages most objected to was this: "What Bishop Butler conceded hypothetically, that all prophecies of Christ in the Old Testament referred primarily to the Jewish people, kings, or prophets, must, in the present state of biblical criticism, be frankly accepted as a fact." Rowland Williams was many years before his time; but since that day a patient study of the Bible has been gradually influencing the mind of Englishmen, and it will probably not be long before this principle is accepted as an axiom of prophetic study. "But will the study of the Bible be forever the rooting-out and destruction of old ideas?" This is the cry of the timid theologian. Surely not. The elimination of what is untrue, the rectification of what is distorted—this is, in order of time, no doubt, the first work of criticism, but it is not its chief work. If it has first to pull down what is built on insecure foundations, it is that it may build up on surer foundations what is lasting and true. And what is true in a larger sense of criticism generally in its relation to Jewish history, is true in a special sense of the argument from

prophecy. We must get rid of what is unsound in that argument if it is to have any real convincing power. We must get rid of false or forced interpretations of prophecy before we can get at the true meaning. And from that meaning alone we must draw our arguments. We have seen that the temporal event not merely suggested some

future prediction, but is the root and foundation of all prophecy. To what extent, and under what limitations, we have a right to say that the prophets looked beyond this event and foresaw the more distant future, is a question which demands a dispassionate inquiry. And this is what we shall have to consider in the following papers.

## The Parable of the Labourers in the Vineyard.

MATT. XX. 1-16.

BY PRINCIPAL THE REV. F. W. AVELING, M.A., B.SC., TAUNTON.

PROBABLY few passages of Scripture have puzzled thoughtful people more than the Parable of the Labourers in the Vineyard. And no wonder; for at first sight it seems to exhibit God as unfair in His dealings with men. Against such a thought the Christian's whole soul revolts. However much man may fall short of justice, God must be just, or we could not worship Him. If we did not believe in the ultimate triumph of justice and the infallibility of our heavenly Father, we should despair. If, however, we examine this parable closely, and "scratch beneath the surface," we shall find that the apparent difficulty vanishes, and a beautiful and important lesson is set before us, a lesson scarcely yet properly learned by the Church of Christ.

To comprehend the beauty of this lesson, we must remember that the Jew in our Lord's day was intensely carnal. He had little thought of doing right, irrespective of temporal reward. We train our children at first by rewards and punishments. But when they grow older, we teach them to obey from love to parents, and finally we get them to see that the crowning motive for Christian conduct is neither fear of hell nor hope of heaven, but the constraining love of our Lord. Now the children of Israel were morally very much children, until Christ came. The old dispensation relied largely on rewards and punishments. "Honour thy father and mother, and it shall be well with thee," is a typical motto for the ancient Jews. Even so good a man as Nehemiah repeatedly asks Jehovah to think on him for good. So encrusted with these selfish notions had the Jews become, that when Christ told them the Gentiles, who became Christians, would go into the kingdom of heaven on an

equal footing with the Jews, they were not merely disappointed, but really angry.

1. The first reference in the parable is to the Gentiles called at the eleventh hour, and entering into the Christian religion just the same as the Jews, whose nation had for many centuries been the privileged people, the only holders of the oracles of Jehovah. The Jews, like many others who have special advantages, forgot that *election to privilege means election to responsibility*. Christianity is a marvellous leveller—upwards. And with one word Jesus levelled up the Gentiles to the same privileges as the Jews in the Christian Church. This the Hebrew mind did not relish. It paid but little heed to the glorious prophecies of Isaiah, showing that the heathen would come within the fold through Messiah's influence. And it fostered the carnal spirit of expecting *temporal* blessing for spiritual excellence. The quintessence of this Jewish feeling is expressed in that most Hebrew of all the proverbs, "He that giveth to the poor lendeth to the Lord, and He will repay."

But we should miss the main lesson of the parable if we thought that it simply referred to the admission of the Gentiles to the same privileges as the Jews in the Christian dispensation. It teaches far more than this, though it certainly teaches this.

2. The apparent injustice of giving to those who worked longer no more reward than to those who only came in at the eleventh hour, has been explained by some by pointing out, that often a man called late to a work does more than those who have long been toiling in the field. This explanation holds good as far as it goes. But we must