

PARABLE XIV.

THE TALENTS.

MATTHEW XXV. 14-30.

WHILE the virgins were represented as *waiting* for their Lord, we have here the servants *working* for Him. There the inward spiritual life of the faithful was described, here their external activity. There, by the fate of the foolish virgins, we were warned against negligences and decays in the inner life; here, by the doom of the slothful servant, against indolence in our outward vocation and work. That parable enforced the need of keeping the heart with all diligence; this of putting all diligence also into our outward service, if we would give our account at the last with joy and not with sorrow. Very fitly, therefore, that precedes, and this follows, since the maintenance of the life of God in the heart is the sole condition of a profitable outward activity for the kingdom of God.¹ There is another light in which we may consider severally the virgins and the servants, and the distinction between them; namely, that those represent the more contemplative, these the more active labouring members of the Church. It is true that every member should partake of both, of contemplation and action; so that even when thus regarded, both parables will retain their application to all: but at the same time one element of the Christian life may predominate in one member, the other in another. Each

¹ Or they may be coördinated with one another. Thus Gerhard (*Harm. Evang.* 164): 'The shining lamp is the talent devoted to use; the extinguished lamp is the talent unemployed and hidden away in the earth.'

must endeavour in his own case to adjust these, to give larger development to the one or to the other, according to the gifts which he finds in himself, and the needs which he beholds in others around him.

St. Mark has a briefer recension of this parable (xiii. 34–36), but with important variations, and reminiscences of the Ten Virgins ('lest coming suddenly He find you sleeping,' ver. 36); and blending into one the two parables which with a stricter accuracy St. Matthew keeps apart. St. Luke too has preserved for us a parable, that of the Pounds (xix. 12), having many points of contact with this, yet assuredly not identical with it, as Maldonatus and others would fain have us to believe.¹ That was spoken when Jesus was now drawing near to Jerusalem, but had not yet made his triumphal entry,—this, while He was seated on the Mount of Olives, the third day after his entry into the city. That was addressed to the multitude as well as to his disciples; this to the innermost circle of trusted followers who should carry forward the work which *He* had commenced on the earth. The scope of that, which is the more complex parable, is twofold, and may be thus defined. The multitude, and perhaps many that were following the Lord with true hearts, supposed that He was now about to take his kingdom and to reign (John vi. 15; Acts i. 6). He would make them to understand that any open assumption of his kingdom was yet far distant; that He must go away, and only after a long period return; and that not till then should opposition to his kingdom cease. Meanwhile (and here the two parables run parallel with one another), those who owned allegiance to Him were not indolently to wait the time of his return, but earnestly to set forward his kingdom, each according to the ability given him, confident that He would reward every man's work; in St. Luke's parable this further circumstance appearing, that He at his return would utterly destroy those who had sent after

¹ Their arguments are well disposed of by Gerhard (*Harm. Evang.* 154, ad init.); and no less by C. à Lapide, who says of that other, 'This parable was spoken at another time, with another aim and after another manner.'

Him messages of hate and defiance. The scope of *his* parable then is twofold. It is addressed, in part, to that giddy, light-minded multitude, who were now following Jesus, expecting that He would suffer Himself to be made such a king as they desired; and who, when He refused the royalty which they would have forced upon Him, might, perhaps, turn against Him, and join in the cry, 'Crucify Him.' These are warned that they be not offended though the manifestation of the King and the kingdom should be deferred for long; warned, above all, that they should not be found in the ranks of his foes, whose dreadful doom might tarry long, but would arrive at last. To the disciples also that parable conveys a warning, namely, that the long interval between his going away and his coming again in glory must be no period of sluggish inactivity, but one for the showing of all good fidelity to an absent Lord; which fidelity would by Him be abundantly rewarded, even as sloth and a neglect of his interests would meet also their due recompense of reward.

A modern assailant¹ of the historical accuracy of the record which in the four Gospels we have of our Lord's words and works believes that he detects in that parable of St. Luke, just as in St. Matthew's record of the Marriage of the King's Son (Matt. xxii. 1), a blending together, through loose and floating oral tradition, of heterogeneous materials;—that in fact we have there what should have been two parables, but these joined in one; and this so awkwardly, that the points of juncture are plainly discernible. He urges that 'servants' (ver. 13) and 'citizens' (ver. 14) stand in no relation to one another, that with slightest alterations, verses 12, 14, 15, 27 would form a complete whole, and might be entitled the parable of the Rebellious Citizens; the remaining verses constituting the parable of the Pounds, which would then be free from all admixture of foreign elements.² But let it only be

¹ Strauss, *Leben Jesu*, vol. i. p. 675.

² Unger, on the same ground of the lack of unity in this parable, had anticipated this objection (*De Par. Jes. Nat.* p. 130): 'When therefore I call to mind the simplicity of the parable as told by Matthew, and the simplicity and unity of all the parables of Christ,

kept in mind, that there were two groups of hearers in different moral conditions and needing different admonishments to whom the Lord addressed the parable of St. Luke, and it will at once be perceived how He divided to all, to his own disciples and to the multitude, according to their several necessities. In St. Luke the parable is more complex, as having a more complex purpose to fulfil. In St. Matthew it is simpler; being addressed to the disciples alone; the parts intended for the multitude would have been superfluous here, and are accordingly not introduced.

I reserve then the parable of the Pounds to be dealt with by itself and in its own place; for the present we have to do with this of the Talents alone; though gladly profiting by those cross lights which this and that mutually throw one upon the other. ‘*The kingdom of heaven is as a man travelling into a far country, who called his own servants, and delivered unto them his goods.*’ It will be well to keep in mind here the relation of masters and *slaves* in antiquity; and not to confound this with that between masters and *servants*, as now existing among us. The master of a household going from home does not leave with his servants,—it would be foreign to all the relations between them,—moneys wherewith to trade in his absence; nor, if he did, could he punish them on his return for neglect of his interests, as the slothful servant is punished here. But slaves in antiquity were often artisans, as was lately the case with serfs in Russia and slaves in America; and paying some fixed yearly tax to their master: or money was committed to them wherewith to trade on his account, or with which to enlarge their business, bringing in to him a share of their profits.¹ Some such arrangement as this we may here assume. The ‘*man travelling into a far country*’ is the Lord Jesus Himself; who, as He had come

Luke seems to me to have here joined on to this simple parable another, similar indeed, but which was put forth on another occasion and in another way.’

¹ See Greswell, *Exp. of the Parables*, vol. v. part ii. p. 27, seq.; and the *Dict. of Gr. and Rom. Antt.* s. v. Servus, pp. 867, 873.

from the Father, was about to return to the Father ;¹ and who, that his servants might be furnished in his absence, was about to entrust them, and all their successors whose representatives they were, with many excellent gifts. The day of Pentecost was the time when the ‘*goods*,’ that is, spiritual powers and capacities, were by Him most manifestly and most largely communicated to his servants, that they might profit withal (John xvi. 7–10; Ephes. iv. 8–12). Yet not for the first time then. Much the Lord had imparted during his sojourn with them upon earth (John xv. 3), much before his Ascension (John xx. 22); and from that day forth He has been evermore delivering his goods to each successive generation of his servants (1 Cor. xii. 4–11). This being so, the parable is good for all times and for all persons. As primarily addressed to the Apostles, the ‘*goods*’ are those spiritual gifts which they needed; yet since all are called in their measure to edify one another, and are entrusted with gifts, more or few, for which they must render an account, the application of the parable stops not with them, but is rather of universal application. Nor, because it relates first to *spiritual* gifts, has it therefore no relation to other means and opportunities of serving God, as wealth, reputation, abilities, learning; which, though not in themselves spiritual, are yet given to men that they may be turned to spiritual ends,—are capable of being consecrated to his service; for the use or abuse of which the possessors will have therefore to render an account. Our wide use of the word talent in English, growing as it does altogether out of this parable, is a remarkable evidence of the extent to which this conviction has wrought itself into the thoughts and language of men.²

¹ *Auct. Oper. Imperf. Hom.* 53: ‘About to go to the Father, He speaks of himself as going into a far country, because of his love for the saints whom He was leaving on earth, since really He was rather in a far country when in the world.’

² οὔτοι τὰ χρήματ' ἴδια κέκτηνται βροτοί,
τὰ τῶν θεῶν δ' ἔχοντες ἐπιμελούμεθα.

(‘Not as their own do men possess their goods:
The gods are owners, we but hold and guard.’)

Euripides, *Phœnissæ*, 555.

But different men receive these gifts in very different proportions: 'Unto one he gave five talents, to another two, and to another one.'¹ Not that the talents, as Theophylact explains it, were to each 'according to the measure of his faith and purity,' for the faith which purifies is itself one of the chiefest of these gifts; but he gave 'to every man according to his several ability,' inasmuch as the natural is the ground upon which the spiritual is superinduced, and grace does not dissolve the groundwork of the individual character, nor abolish all its peculiarities, nor bring all that are subject to it to a common standard (see 1 Cor. xii. 4-31; Ephes. iv. 16). The natural gifts are as the vessel, which may be large or may be small, and which receives according to its capacity (Rom. xii. 6);² but which in each case is, or may be, *filled*. We should not therefore think of him who had received the two talents as incompletely furnished by comparison with him who had received five, any more than a small circle is imperfect as compared with a large. Unfitted he might be for so wide a sphere of labour, but altogether as perfectly equipped for that to which he was destined; for 'there are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit:' and as the body is not all eye, nor all ear, nor are all in an army captains or commanders,³ so neither in the Church are all furnished to be leaders and governors. Yet while we speak of natural capacity being as the vessel for receiving the wine of the Spirit, we must not leave out of account, that comparative unfaithfulness, stopping very short of that which would cause

¹ Cajetan: 'God orders all things sweetly in the Church. He burdens no man beyond his strength, and refuses no man a gift fitted to his strength.' On this distribution of the *possibilities* of service, Leo the Great, *De Voc. Omn. Gent.* i. 8, has some excellent remarks. Thus, as he reminds us well, 'it is one thing to work, another to have the ability to work.'

² Jerome: 'In delivering the Gospel doctrine Christ gave more to one and less to another, not by way of generosity or economy, but according to the strength of the receiver; like as also the Apostle says of himself that those who could not take solid food he fed with milk.'

³ See Clement of Rome, 1 *Ep.* § 37, where this comparison at some length is used.

the gift to be quite withdrawn, will narrow the vessel: even as fidelity has the tendency to dilate it; so that one with far inferior natural gifts will often bring in a more abundant return than another with superior powers, who yet does bring in something. Certain broad cases are mentioned in the parable; but they do not exclude other combinations of the talents committed and the talents gained. There may be cases where he of the two, or even of the one talent, as that of James Davies, the Welsh schoolmaster, will have gained five; there will be other where he of the five will have added to them but two.

Having thus committed the talents to his servants, and divided severally unto each according to his powers, the lord '*straightway took his journey.*' In the things earthly the householder's distribution of the gifts naturally and of necessity *precedes* his departure; in the heavenly it is not altogether so; the Ascension, or departure, goes before Pentecost, the chief day of the distribution of gifts; yet the '*straightway*' still remains in force; the interval between them was the smallest, one following hard upon the other, however the order was reversed.

We are next told what the servants did with the talents thus committed to them; how they spent that time, so full of temptations to sloth and indolence, during which their lord was away. '*Then he that had received the five talents went and traded with the same, and made them other five talents. And likewise he that had received two, he also gained other two.*' There is this variation between the present parable and St. Luke's, that here the faithful servants multiply their unequal sums in the same proportions; while there they multiply their equal sums in different proportions; all had alike received a pound, but one gained with that pound ten pounds and another five (Luke xix. 16, 18). Two most important truths are thus brought out, as could scarcely have been done if only one parable had been spoken; first by St. Matthew this, that according as we have received will it be required from us: and then by St. Luke this other, that as

me five talents : behold, I have gained beside them five talents more.' In the joyful coming forward of the two faithful servants, we have an example of 'boldness in the day of judgment.' They had something to show, as Paul was confident he should have, when to his beloved Thessalonian converts he said, 'What is our hope, or joy, or crown of rejoicing? Are not even ye in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ at his coming?' (1 Thess. ii. 19; 2 Cor. i. 14; Phil. iv. 1). The faithful servant says here, '*Behold, I have gained;*' in St. Luke, '*Thy pound hath gained;*' thus between them they make up the speech of St. Paul, 'I—yet not I, but the grace of God that was with me.' And even this, '*I have gained,*' is introduced by that other word, '*thou deliveredst unto me;*'—it is his lord's money which has so multiplied in his hands.¹ In this parable, as has been observed, the gain is according to the talents, five for five, and two for two. Consistently with this, the commendation of the servants is expressed in exactly the same language, even as the reward to each is precisely the same. Each hears the same '*Well done;*' to each it is said, '*Enter thou into the joy of thy lord;*'² each, that is, is invited to a fellowship in his lord's joy. The image on which this language rests is that of a festival, with which the master celebrates his return, in the joy of which each of the servants,

¹ Grotius: 'He modestly attributes the gain to his lord's money, not to his own industry.'

² Leighton: 'It is but little we can receive here, some drops of joy that enter into us; but there we shall enter into joy, as vessels put into a sea of happiness.' So Gerhard: 'For so great shall be that joy that it may not be contained in man or be comprehended by him, therefore man enters into that incomprehensible joy, but the joy does not enter into man as if by man comprehended.' H. de Sto. Victore (*Erud. Theol.* 3): 'Joy is threefold, the joy of the world, the joy of thyself, the joy of thy Lord. The first springs from worldly affluence, the second from a good conscience, the third from the experience of eternity. Therefore thou must not go forth into the joy of the world, thou must not abide in thine own joy, but thou must enter into the joy of thy Lord. . . . To the first joy man went forth when he fell from Paradise; to the second he begins to attain when through faith reconciled unto God; but at the third he will only arrive, when by seeing him as He is he shall enjoy him eternally.'

so soon as he has rendered his account, and shown that he has been true to his master's interests in his absence, is bidden freely to share. Under certain circumstances a master's invitation of his slave to sit down with him at table did itself constitute the act of manumission; henceforth he was free.¹ Perhaps there may be here allusion to something of the kind—the incorporation in an act of what once He had spoken in words, 'Henceforth I call you not servants, . . . but I have called you friends' (John xv. 15; Luke xii. 37; Rev. iii. 20). It need hardly be observed that since all, when they have done all, are to say of themselves 'We are unprofitable servants' (Luke xvii. 10), in this '*Well done*' there utters itself the indulgence, the ἐπιείκεια, of the Gospel, and not the rigour of the Law.

'*Then he which had received the one talent came and said, Lord, I knew thee that thou art an hard² man, reaping where thou hast not sown, and gathering where thou hast not strawed: and I was afraid, and went and hid thy talent in the earth: lo, there thou hast that is thine.*' We can well understand why he should linger to the last, his heart secretly misgiving him, whatever face he may attempt to put on the matter. It is true that he had not wasted his master's goods like the unjust steward (Luke xvi. 1), nor spent all his portion in riotous living like the prodigal (Luke xv. 13), nor was he ten thousand talents in debt like the unmerciful servant (Matt. xviii. 24); and it is an entire mistake to confound his guilt with theirs, from which it should be kept wholly distinct; for so the very persons whose consciences the parable was meant to reach escape its force. When we weave the meshes of the spiritual net so large, all but the biggest offenders contrive to slip through; and the parable is not for gross sinners,

¹ See the *Dict. of Gr. and Rom. Antt.* s. v. Manumissio, p. 596.

² The σκληρός here is stronger than the ἀστηρός in the parallel passage of St. Luke (xix. 21); see my *Synonyms of the New Testament*, § 14. All English Versions have from the beginning rendered this by 'hard,' on which it would be impossible to improve; but ἀστηρός was 'stern' in Wiclif, 'strait' in the early Reformed Versions, and 'austere' first in the Rheims.

who by their whole lives evidently deny that they count Christ to be their Lord and master at all ; who squander their talent, or refuse to acknowledge that they have ever received one. The law and their own hearts tell *them* plainly enough of their sin and danger. But the warning here is for those who *hide* their talent, who, being equipped of God for a sphere of activity in his kingdom, do yet choose, in Lord Bacon's words, ' a goodness solitary and particular, rather than generative and seminal.' Such might only too easily deceive themselves, the temptations being so many to a shrinking from the pains involved in a diligent laying out of this talent. There is a show of humility in the excuses which would palliate this sloth : as for instance, ' The care of my own soul is sufficient to occupy me wholly ; the responsibilities of any spiritual work are so awful, that I dare not undertake them ; while I am employed about the souls of others, I may perhaps be losing my own.' How often we read in the early Church of some who on pleas like these declined charges to which they were called ; and, when they should have been the salt of the earth, thought rather to keep their own saltness by withdrawing from all those active ministries in which they might have served their brethren in love.¹

Very instructive also is the fact that it is the recipient of

¹ Augustine, preaching on the anniversary of his exaltation to the Episcopate (*Serm.* cccxxxix. 3), uses this parable, speaking of a temptation which he felt to withdraw from active labour in the Church, and to cultivate a solitary piety : ' If I am not trading but am hoarding my money, the Gospel terrifies me. For I might say : Why should I weary men, saying unto the wicked : Be it far from you to act wickedly ; act in this way, cease to act in that ? Why should I be burdensome to men ? I have received how I must live, even as I am commanded, as I am instructed : let me deliver as I have received ; why should I give account for others ? But the Gospel terrifies me. For with respect to that most tranquil withdrawal from care, no one would convince me : there is nothing better, nothing sweeter, than, without disturbance from any, to contemplate the Divine treasure : it is sweet, it is good. To preach, to reprove, to chide, to build up, to be busied with everyone, is a great burden, a great weight, a great labour. Who would not shun that labour ? But the gospel terrifies us.' And again (*In Ev. Joh. Tract.* 10) : ' If thou hast become cold, languid, looking only to thyself, sufficing thy-

the one talent who proves the defaulter here. Nothing in the scheme of the parable hindered the attribution of this guilt to him of the five talents, or to him of the ten; for there are only too many of those whom God has gifted the most richly, who altogether fail to turn to his glory the marvellous powers with which He has endowed them. Yet no, it is neither of these; but the servant of the one talent; that so henceforward none may excuse his sloth on a plea like this, 'So little is committed to my charge, that it cannot matter how I administer that little. It is so little that I can do for God, what signifies that little whether it be done or left undone?'¹ Christ will teach us here that it is not the more or the less which has been entrusted, but the fidelity with which this has been administered, which differences now in character, and will difference at the last in doom, one servant from another.

What the root was out of which the sin of this servant grew he himself declares: '*Lord, I knew thee that thou art an hard man;*'—for this is no excuse framed for the occasion; but a true expression of the aspect in which this servant did really contemplate his lord. The churl accounted him churlish, esteemed him such a one as himself. He did not believe in his lord's forgiving love, and in his gracious acceptance of that work, with all its shortcomings, which was done for him out of a true heart, and with a sincere desire to please him. This was his wilful and guilty ignorance concerning the true character of the master whom he was called to serve. But to know the name or, in other words, the true character of

self, as it were, and saying in thy heart: Why should I care for the sins of others? my own soul suffices for me, let me keep this whole unto God—Does not that servant come to thy mind, who hid his talent and would not trade with it? For was he accursed because he lost it, and not rather because he kept it without gain? Cf. *Enarr. in Ps. xcix. 2; De Fide et Oper. 17.*

¹ Grotius: 'Christ took as his example of negligence the case of him to whom least was entrusted, that no one may hope to be excused from every kind of labour because he has not received any distinguished gifts from God.'

God is to trust in Him; and this knowledge will save from any pusillanimous or slothful shrinking from work for Him. They, indeed, who undertake this are only too well aware that they shall commit manifold mistakes in their service, which they might have avoided, if they had declined that service altogether; that they will be guilty of many shortcomings, fall into many faults in the handling of holy things, which they might escape if they held aloof from these altogether. But shall those competently furnished and evidently called be therefore justified or excused in so doing? would they not, so acting, come under the condemnation of this servant? testify that they deemed of God, as *he* deemed of his master, that He was a hard Lord,—extreme to mark what was amiss,—making no allowances,—never accepting the will for the deed, but ever on the watch to take advantage of the least failure or mistake on the part of his servants?

But this is not all. Proceeding still upon the plan of turning the tables on his lord, and anticipating the accusation which shall be made against himself, by first accusing him—in a speech half cowering and half defiant, a wonderful picture of the sinner's bearing towards God, he scruples not to ascribe to him the character of a harsh and unreasonable despot, who requires the bricks, but refuses the straw (Exod. v. 7), who would reap what others have sown, and gather with the rake, where others have winnowed with the fan,¹ thus unrighteously

¹ This is the meaning of the '*strawed*' in our Version, which does not refer to the orderly strewing of the sower's seed (in that case the same thing would be twice said over), but to the scattering of the chaff from the floor (Matt. iii. 12), that the wheat purged from this might be gathered into the barn. The *διασκορπίζειν* of the original shows plainly this; it expresses the dispersing, making to fly in every direction, as a pursuer the routed enemy (Luke i. 51; Acts v. 37); as the wolf the sheep (Matt. xxvi. 31); as the prodigal his goods (Luke xv. 13; xvi. 1); or as here, the husbandman the chaff. Thus rightly Schott: 'It expresses the idea of winnowing the corn stored in the threshing floor.'

entering on the fruits of other men's toil. He declares himself thus as much mistaken in the nature of the work, as in the character of the master for whom that work should have been done.¹ In the darkness of his heart he regards the work as something outward, to be done *for* God, not to be wrought *in* Him, or rather, which He would work in and through his servants; as though God called to a labour, and gave no ability for the labour, imposed a task, and put no joy nor consolation into the hearts of them that fulfilled it. No wonder, therefore, that he should go on to say, '*I was afraid and went and hid thy talent in the earth;*'² justifying the caution and timidity which he had shown, explaining why he would attempt nothing, and venture upon nothing. He feared to trade on that talent, lest in the necessary risks of business, seeking to gain other he might lose that one, and so enrage his master against himself; even as men might profess to fear to lay themselves out for the winning of other souls, lest, so doing, they might endanger their own.—'*Lo, there thou hast that is thine.*'³ As it is not denied that he does give back the talent to his lord, how, it may be asked, could this be? how, that is, can God's gifts be hidden, and yet restored to him entire; since the suffering them to lie idle is in fact one form of wasting them? In reality, they could not be so restored. It is only that men imagine they can be thus given back, when they take for granted that keeping the

¹ Aquinas: 'God requires nothing from man save the good which He himself planted in us;' and Augustine putting the same truth in the form of a prayer: 'Give that which Thou biddest, and bid that which Thou wilt.'

² Hilary (*Comm. in Matt.* in loc.) in the words, '*I was afraid,*' hears the voice of those resolved to abide, like the Jew, in the law and in the spirit of bondage, shrinking from the liberty and activity of Christian service: 'He says "I feared thee," as though it is through reverence and fear of the ancient precepts that he is abstaining from the use of Gospel freedom.'

³ Cocceius: 'The proud boast of the preservation of the talent betokens the confidence and security of the man who easily satisfies himself.' See Suicer, *Theas.* s. v. *τάλαντον*.

negative precepts is all that God requires, that this done they will restore to Him his own.¹

The lord of the parable is at no pains to dispute or deny the character which this recreant servant has drawn of him, but answers him on his own grounds, making his own mouth to condemn him (Job xv. 6; 2 Sam. i. 16): ‘*Thou wicked and slothful servant;—‘wicked,’* in that he defended himself by calumniating his lord, and ‘*slothful,*’ as all which he had left undone declared;—‘*thou knewest that I reap where I sowed not, and gather where I have not strawed: thou oughtest therefore to have put my money to the exchangers’* (or ‘*to the bankers,*’ as in the Revised Version), ‘*and then at my coming I should have received mine own with usury;*’² or, seeing that

¹ There is an instructive Eastern tale, which in its deeper meaning runs remarkably parallel to this parable. It is as follows:

‘There went a man from home: and to his neighbours twain
He gave, to keep for him, two sacks of golden grain.
Deep in his cellar one the precious charge concealed;
And forth the other went and strewed it in his field.
The man returns at last—asks of the first his sack:
“Here, take it; ’tis the same; thou hast it safely back.”
Unharm’d it shows without; but when he would explore
His sack’s recesses, corn there finds he now no more:
One half of all therein proves rotten and decayed,
Upon the other half have worm and mildew preyed.
The putrid heap to him in ire he doth return:
Then of the other asks, “Where is my sack of corn?”
Who answered, “Come with me, behold how it has sped”—
And took, and showed him fields with waving harvests spread.
Then cheerfully the man laughed out and cried, “This one
Had insight, to make up for the other that had none:
The letter *he* observed, but *thou* the precept’s sense:
And thus to thee and me shall profit grow from hence;
In harvest thou shalt fill two sacks of corn for me,
The residue of right remains in full for thee.”’

² *Σύντοκος*, with its ‘produce.’ So *fenus* is explained by Varro, from ‘*fetus*, produce, and from a kind of breeding of the begetting and increasing money.’ Plato, with the same image, calls the original sum *πατήρ* and the interest *τοῦ πατρὸς ἔκγονοι* (*Rep.* ii. 196). To estimate how great the master’s gains even so might have been, how largely the original sum might be made ‘to sweat its miserly eleven per cent.,’ we must keep in mind the high rates of interest paid in antiquity. See the

'usury' is always regarded now as the taking of an unconscionable price for the loan of money, 'with interest' would be better; and so in the Revised Version we read. 'Be it so, grant that I am all which thou sayest, severe, exacting, harsh; and yet thou oughtest to have done me justice still; and this with little or no peril to thyself thou mightest have done; and obtained for me, if not the larger gains possible through some bolder course, yet some small and certain returns for my moneys.' It is hard to find any distinct spiritual signification for this putting the money to the exchangers—to affirm with confidence whether it has such, or is only introduced to add vivacity to the narrative; as the natural exclamation of an offended master. Olshausen ingeniously explains it: 'Those timid natures which are not suited to independent labour in the kingdom of God, are here counselled at least to attach themselves to other stronger characters, under whose leading they may lay out their gifts for the service of the Church.'¹ Perhaps, without pressing the words quite so

Dict. of Gr. and Rom. Antt. s. v. Interest of Money, p. 523; and Becker (*Charicles*, vol. i. p. 237), who has a graphic account of the *τραπεζίται*, the bankers of antiquity.

¹ So Cajetan: 'He means by this that if the servant did not dare to use the gift of God in transactions of much risk, he should yet have used it in transactions in which with a small risk there is yet gain.' Has the saying so often quoted in the early Church as our Lord's, yet nowhere found in the New Testament, *Γίνεσθε δόκιμοι* (or *καλοί*, or *φρόνιμοι*) *τραπεζίται*, 'Be ye notable,' good, or prudent, 'money-changers,' its origin here? Many have thought so (see Suicer, s. v. *τραπεζίτης*); but it is difficult to see why, except for the occurrence here of the word *τραπεζίται*. The point of that exhortation is this: Be as experienced money-changers, who readily distinguish good coin from bad, receiving that, but rejecting this. Now there is no comparing of the disciples with money-changers here, and such an exhortation lies wholly aloof from the scope of the parable. The precept would be more easily deduced from 1 Thess. v. 21, 22; even as we find *Γίνεσθε δόκιμοι τραπεζίται* sometimes called not a *dominical*, but an *apostolic*, saying, or attributed to St. Paul by name, and by some even inserted before that very passage; so Hänsel (*Theol. Stud. und Krit.* 1836, p. 179, sqq.), who discusses the subject well. Cf. Cotelerius, *Patt. Apostol.* vol. i. p. 249, and Annot. in *Euseb.* Oxford, 1842, vol. i. p. 930.—There being mention of interest here, *τραπεζίτης* is the fitter word than *κολλυβιστής*, which, however, rightly finds place at Matt. xxi. 12; Mark xi. 15.

much in detail, we should not err in saying that they mean generally, 'If thou wouldest not do and dare for me in great ventures of faith, yet at all events in humbler paths, in safer and less perilous, thou mightest have shown fidelity, and have preserved me from loss.'¹

His doom, who had neither on a large scale, nor yet on a small, set forward his master's interests, is now pronounced. It has two aspects: it is first, the forfeiture of the neglected talent; and secondly, the casting of him who possessed that talent, but would not use it, into '*the outer darkness.*' And first, he forfeits what he had, and sees it transferred to another: '*Take therefore the talent from him*'²—(we have here an important limitation of Rom. xi. 29), '*and give it unto him which hath ten talents.*' This deprivation, in part the directly *penal*, is in part the *natural*, consequence of his sloth. For there is this analogy between things natural and spiritual, that as a limb, never called into exercise, loses its strength by degrees, its muscles and sinews disappearing, even so the powers which God gives us, unexercised, fade and fail from us: '*From him that hath not shall be taken away even that which he hath.*' And, on the other hand, as the limb is not wasted by strenuous exertion, but rather nerved and strengthened more, so fares it with the gifts of God; they are multiplied by being laid out; a truth we recognize in our proverb, 'Drawn wells are seldom dry;'³ and thus, *Unto*

¹ Godet here observes: 'The Christian to whom the sweet experience of grace is lacking must be the most anxious of labourers.'

² Augustine (*Enarr. in Ps. xxxviii. 4*): 'What must they expect who have squandered in luxury, if those who have been slothful in keeping are condemned? The punishment of the embezzler must be gathered from the punishment of the sluggard.'

³ Exactly so Chrysostom (*De Christi Prec., Con. Anom. 10*): 'As a fountain from which water is continually drawn forth is thereby rather purified, and bubbles up the more, but being staunched fails altogether, so the spiritual gift and word of doctrine, if it be continually drawn forth, and if he who will has liberty to share it, rises up the more, but if restrained by envy and a grudging spirit, diminishes, and at last perishes altogether.' Augustine too (or Cæsarius, as the Benedictine editors affirm, *Augustini Opp. vol. v. p. 81, Appendix*) admirably dis-

And now the sentence of the forfeiture of his unused talent is pronounced;—the forfeiture itself had in some sort taken place already. Nor is this all. It is further said to those that stand by (see Luke xix. 24), ‘*And cast ye the unprofitable servant into outer darkness: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth*’ (Matt. xiii. 42; xxii. 13). Olshausen would fain distinguish between the ‘*outer darkness*’ of this passage and of Matt. xxii. 13, and ‘*the furnace of fire*’ of Matt. xiii. 42, that while the latter is the expression of total and final loss, the former, though punitive, is also remedial. But not to urge other objections against a scheme which has no Scriptural warrant, namely, that for those who have been brought within the sphere of the Gospel, the present dispensation is not decisive, the words which in each case follow, ‘*There shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth,*’ set the two dooms on the same awful level, however one may have a more dreadful sound than the other.

A comparison of the causes which led to this servant’s exclusion, and those which led to the exclusion of the foolish virgins, is full of warning and instruction for all. Those virgins erred through a vain *over*-confidence, this servant through an *under*-confidence, that was equally vain and sinful. They were overbold, he was not bold enough. Thus two wrong aspects under which we might be tempted to regard the service of God, two rocks upon opposite sides on which faith is in danger of making shipwreck, are laid down for us, as in a chart, that we may avoid them both. Those virgins counted it too easy a thing to serve the Lord; this servant counted it too hard. They esteemed it but as the going forth to a festival which should presently begin; he as a hard, dreary, insupportable work for a thankless master. In them we behold the perils which beset the *sanguine*, in him the *melancholic*, complexion. *They* represent a class needing such warnings as this: ‘*Strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, that leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it*’ (Matt. vii. 14); ‘*Work out your own salvation*

with fear and trembling' (Phil. ii. 12); 'If any man will come after me, let him deny himself' (Matt. xvi. 24). *He* is representative of a class which should need to be reminded: 'Ye have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear' (Rom. viii. 15); 'Ye are not come unto the mount that might be touched, and that burned with fire, nor unto blackness, and darkness, and tempest; . . . but ye are come unto mount Sion, and unto the city of the living God, . . . and to Jesus the mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling, that speaketh better things than that of Abel' (Heb. xii. 18, 22, 24).