

## PARABLE XXV.

## THE UNJUST STEWARD.

LUKE xvi. 1-9.

No one, who has seriously considered, will underrate the difficulties of this parable—difficulties which Cajetan found so insuperable that he gave up the matter in despair, affirming a solution of them impossible. It is nothing wonderful that it should have been the subject of manifold, and those the most singularly diverse, interpretations. The attempt to render a complete account of all of these would be an endless task, and I shall not attempt it;<sup>1</sup> but, as I go through the parable, I shall note what parts of it those interpreters, who have best right to be heard, have considered its key-words, and the meaning which they have made the whole to render up; I shall at the same time briefly note what seem the weak and unsatisfactory points in those explanations which I reject. For myself, I will say at the outset that very many of its interpreters have (to use a familiar expression), in my judgment, overrun their game. We have here, as I am persuaded, simply a parable of Christian prudence,—Christ exhorting us to use the world and the world's goods, so to speak, *against* the world, and *for* God.

Having brought the parable of the Prodigal Son to a close, He did not break off the conversation, but,—probably after a

<sup>1</sup> Schreiter, in a work entirely devoted to this parable (*Explic. Parab. de Improbo Œconomio Descriptio*; Lips. 1803), gives an appalling list of explanations offered, and a brief analysis and judgment of them all; but I have not been able to derive much assistance from the book; not to say that the number of explanations has since his time enormously increased.

short pause allowed, that his words might sink deeper into the hearts of his hearers,—resumed; not now, however, addressing the gainsayers any more, but those who heard Him gladly, ‘*his disciples*,’ as we are (ver. 1) expressly told. We must not restrict this term to the Twelve (see Luke vi. 13); we should as little make it to embrace the whole multitude hanging loosely on the Lord, although up to a certain point well affected to Him. By ‘*his disciples*’ we understand rather all whom his word had found in the deep of their spirit, and who, having left the world’s service, had taken service with Him. To these the parable was addressed; for them too it was meant; <sup>1</sup> since it is little probable that, as some explain, it was spoken *to* them, but *at* the Pharisees. These, last, it is true, were *also hearers* of the Lord’s words (ver. 14), but the very mention of them as such forbids their being those to whom it was primarily addressed. Christ may have intended,—most probably did intend,—some of his shafts to glance off upon them, at whom yet they were not originally aimed. It will prove important, in relation to at least one explanation of the parable, that we keep in mind for whom first of all it was intended. Let us address ourselves without further preface to it.

‘*There was a certain rich man, which had a steward,*’—not a land-bailiff <sup>2</sup> merely, but a ruler over all his goods, such as was Eliezer in the house of Abraham (Gen. xxiv. 2–12), and Joseph in the house of Potiphar (Gen. xxxix. 4). ‘*And the same was accused unto him that he had wasted his goods;*’ or rather, ‘*that he was wasting his goods;*’ for it is no past

<sup>1</sup> So with many others Bengel, who well remarks: ‘These disciples are not the Twelve who left all things, and were rather to be treated as friends, but those who had been publicans.’

<sup>2</sup> Procurator therefore (see Becker, *Gallus*, vol. i. p. 109), and not villicus (Vulg.), as Jerome (*Ep.* 121, qu. 6) justly notes: ‘The *Villicus* is properly the manager of a villa or farm, whence his name. But the *Οικονόμος* or steward has the charge not only of the produce but of the money and of all which his master possesses;’ cf. *ad Eustoch. Ep.* xxii. 35: Greswell, *Exp. of the Par.* vol. iv. p. 3; Becker, *Charicles*, vol. ii. p. 37; and for higher uses of *οικονόμος*, Luke xii. 42; 1 Cor. iv. 1; Tit. i. 7; 1 Pet. iv. 10.

scattering, but a present, which is laid to his charge;<sup>1</sup> and this, as we may certainly conclude, not through mere negligence, but himself deriving an unrighteous gain from the loss and wrong which his master's property suffered under his hands. This of the lord needing that his steward's misconduct should reach his ears through a third party, belongs to the earthly setting forth of the truth; yet finds its parallel, Gen. xviii. 30, 31. There is no warrant whatever for assuming, as some have done, that the steward was calumniously accused; no hint of this conveyed in the word which the Lord employs. Satan is the *accuser* of the brethren (Rev. xii. 9), called therefore by this name; but the things of which he accuses them may be only too true. Certain Chaldeans *accused* the Three Children, malignantly indeed, but not falsely, of refusing to worship the golden image (Dan. iii. 8); Daniel himself is *accused* (still the same word in the Septuagint as here), and not calumniously, of having knelt and prayed to his God, in defiance of the edict of the king (Dan. vi. 24).<sup>2</sup> Those therefore who would clear altogether or in part the character of the steward can derive no assistance here.<sup>3</sup> Indeed his own words (ver. 3) contain an implicit

<sup>1</sup> Not quasi dissipasset, with the Vulgate; but, ut qui dissiparet, as Erasmus has it.

<sup>2</sup> Compare Josephus, *Antt.* vi. 10. 2.

<sup>3</sup> As Schleiermacher, who says: 'The right view of this parable is to be sure very much perverted, if the steward, who, after all, has not committed any breach of trust (?) on his own account, nor was charged with it, is notwithstanding to be termed *οἶκον. τ. ἀδικίας*, and we will not make up our minds to leave *οἶκονόμος* without an epithet, and to refer this *ἀδικίας* to *ἐπήγεσεν*' [against this construction see Winer, *Grammatik*, p. 185]: 'and if the master who treats his servant in so very arbitrary a way, and discharges him, without inquiry, upon a secret information, and who besides discovers no higher measure by which he judges of human actions than prudence, if this character is all along considered a blameless man.' But it is hard to see what would be gained by the altered construction. '*The Lord praised the steward for his injustice,*' comes nearly to the same thing as, '*The Lord praised the unjust steward;*' and with such analogous Hebrew phrases as *μαμωνᾶ τῆς ἀδικίας, κριτῆς τῆς ἀδικίας* (Luke xviii. 6), *ἀκροατῆς ἐπιλησμονῆς* (Jam. i. 25), he will scarcely persuade that the natural collocation of the words is to be abandoned,

acknowledgment of his guilt; he who is so dishonest now will scarcely have been honest before; and assuredly we shall do him no wrong in taking for granted that the accusation, brought against him very probably by some enemy and from malicious motives, was yet founded in truth.

Hereupon his lord *called him, and said unto him, How is it that I hear this of thee?* or perhaps the question would be better, as in the Revised Version, *What is this that I hear of thee?* This is not examination, but rather the expostulation of indignant surprise,—*of thee,*<sup>1</sup> whom I had trusted so far, to whom I had committed so much.' And then, the man not so much as attempting a defence, his dismissal follows: *'Give an account of thy stewardship; for thou mayest be no longer steward.'* Those who, like Anselm, see in the parable the history of the rise, progress, and fruits of repentance, lay much stress upon this remonstrance, *'How is it that I hear this of thee?'* It is for them the voice of God speaking to the sinner, bringing home to his conscience that he has had a stewardship, and has been abusing it; the threat, *'thou mayest be no longer steward,'* being in like manner a bringing home to him, by sickness or by some other means, that he will soon be removed from his earthly stewardship, and have to render an account. The man feels that he cannot answer God one thing in a thousand; that, once removed hence, there will be no help for him anywhere; he cannot dig, for the night will have come, in which no man can work; and he will be ashamed to beg for that mercy, which he knows will then be refused. Consistently with this view, they see in the even to help out his marvellous interpretation, according to which the rich householder is the Romans, the steward the publicans, and the debtors the Jewish people; the lesson being, *'If the publicans show themselves mild and indulgent towards their nation, the Romans will in their hearts praise them, and they who have now lost all favour with their countrymen will by them be favourably received.'* But how, it may be asked, could a coming into favour with the Jewish people, themselves out of all favour with God, be termed a reception into everlasting habitations?

<sup>1</sup> Wetstein: *'The words express surprise; of thee! whom I made my steward.'*

lowering of the bills, not a further and crowning act of unrighteousness, but the first act of his righteousness, the dealing of one who will now, while he has time, lay out the things in his power with no merely selfish aims, but for the good of others, will scatter for God rather than for himself, seek to lay up in heaven and not on earth. The dishonesty they get over, either by giving this lowering of the bills altogether a mystical meaning, and so refusing to contemplate it in the letter at all, or in a way presently to be noticed. He is still called, they say, the '*unjust steward*' (ver. 8), not because he continues such; but because of his former unrighteousness; and for the encouragement of penitents, who are thus reminded that, unrighteous and ungodly man as he had been beforetime, he obtained now praise and approval from his lord. He retained the title, as Matthew the Apostle retained that of 'the publican' (Matt. x. 3), in perpetual remembrance of the grace of God which had found him in that ignoble employment, and raised him to so high a dignity; as Zenas is still '*the lawyer*' (Tit. iii. 13); Rahab '*the harlot*' (Heb. xi. 31); Simon '*the leper*' (Matt. xxvi. 6); not that such they were when receiving these designations, but that such they formerly had been.<sup>1</sup> To all this it may be replied that there is nothing in the man's counsels with himself that marks the smallest change of mind for the better, no acknowledgment of a trust abused, no desire expressed henceforward to be found faithful, but only an utterance of selfish anxiety concerning his future lot, of fear lest poverty and

<sup>1</sup> So the author of a sermon in the Bened. edit. of St. Bernard (vol. ii. p. 714), who gives this as the sum of the parable: 'He is worthy of much praise, who leaving the error of his former conversation, makes satisfaction to the rich God and returns to favour;' and Anselm (*Hom.* 12), who, however, sees in the steward only an unfaithful ruler in the Church, not every man to whom a dispensation has been committed, which he has been abusing;—he says: 'He deserved to be praised by his lord; and we therefore should praise him, nor should we dare to blame him in aught before he is therein corrected, as by thinking that in this behaviour towards the debtors he defrauded his lord; rather we should believe that therein by prudent counsel he was seeking his lord's profit, and fulfilled his will.'

distress may come upon him; and the explanation from analogous instances, however ingenious, of his being still characterized (ver. 8) as the '*unjust*' steward, is quite unsatisfactory; neither 'publican' nor 'lawyer' conveyed of necessity a sentence of moral reprobation.

But now follow his counsels with himself; and first his implicit acknowledgment that the investigation of his accounts can only have one issue, and that his definitive dismissal. Had he felt that he could clear himself, he might have hoped that a hasty word uttered by his master might be recalled; but he knows too well that any such clearing is impossible. There is nothing but hopeless destitution before him. '*What shall I do?*' he exclaims. For the same phrase compare Luke xii. 17; xx. 13; though in curiously different connexions. He had scattered his Lord's goods, squandered them on himself; but he had made no purse against that evil day which now all of a sudden had come upon him. His past softness of life has unfitted him for labour; '*I cannot dig*;' <sup>1</sup> his pride forbids him to sue for alms; 'better is it,' as the Son of Sirach had long ago exclaimed, 'to die than to beg' (Ecclus. xl. 28): '*to beg I am ashamed.*' <sup>2</sup> Yet this sense of utter helplessness and hopelessness endures not long. He knows what he will do; and has rapidly conceived a plan whereby to make provision against that time of need and destitution which is now so near at hand. If his determination is not honest, it is at any rate promptly taken; and this—that he was not brought to a nonplus, but at once devised a way of escape from his distresses—is a part of the skill for which he gets credit: '*I am resolved what to do, that, when I am put out of the stewardship,*' <sup>3</sup> *they may receive me into their houses,*' as one from whom they

<sup>1</sup> Compare Aristophanes, *Aves*, 1432: 'What has befallen me? To dig I know not how.'

<sup>2</sup> Quesnel: 'To the soul which has lost God and his grace what else remains besides sin and the consequences of sin, a proud poverty and slothful indigence, that is a general inability to labour, to prayer, and to every good work?'

<sup>3</sup> In the Vulgate: *Amotus a villicatione*; but Tertullian in happier Latin: *ab actu summotus*.

have received kindnesses, and who, therefore, may trust to find hospitable entertainment among them,—a miserable prospect (Ecclus. xxix. 22–28 ; xl. 20) ; yet better than utter destitution and want.

‘ *So he called every one of his lord’s debtors unto him.*’ And now follows the collusive and fraudulent transaction between him and them. The two whose cases are instanced, and who must be regarded as representatives of many more,—of those ‘ *all* ’ whom we just heard of, in the same way as elsewhere only *three* servants are named out of ten (Luke xix. 13),—owed to the householder, the one ‘ *an hundred measures of oil,*’ and the other ‘ *an hundred measures of wheat.*’ It is not likely that these were tenants who paid their rents in kind, which rents were now by the steward lowered, and the leases or agreements tampered with : the name ‘ *debtor* ’ seems to point another way. Again, the enormous amount<sup>1</sup> of the oil and the wheat, both costly articles (Prov. xxi. 17), makes it not less unlikely that they were poorer neighbours or dependants, whom the rich householder had supplied with means of living in the shape of food,—not, however, as a gift, but as a loan, taking from them an acknowledgment, and looking to be repaid, when they had the ability. Rather we might assume the foregoing transactions by which these men came into the relation of his debtors, to have been these,—that he, having large possessions, and therefore large incomings from the fruits of the earth, had sold, through his steward, a portion of such upon credit to these debtors,—merchants, or other factors,—who had not as yet made their payments. They had given, however, each his ‘ *bill* ’ or note of hand,—‘ *bond* ’ is the happy rendering of the Revised Version,

<sup>1</sup> ‘ *Measures* ’ in our Translation, which may be small or large, fails to intimate this. Better Tyndale and Cranmer : ‘ *tuns* of oil ’ (the Rhemish, ‘ *pipes* ’), and ‘ *quarters* of wheat.’ Exactly this quantity, one hundred *cors* of wheat, in an apocryphal gospel, where everything is on a gigantic scale, as with those whose only notion of greatness is size, the child Jesus received in return for a single grain of wheat cast by him into the ground (Thilo, *Cod. Apocryph.* p. 302). On these Hebrew measures see Ezek. xlv. 10, 11, 14 ; and Herzog, *Real-Encyclopädie*, vol. ix. p. 148.

—acknowledging the amount in which they were indebted to him. These, which had remained in the steward's keeping, he now returns to them,—‘*Take thy bill,*’<sup>1</sup> bidding them to alter these, or to substitute others in their room, in which they confess themselves to have received much smaller amounts of oil and wheat than was actually the case, and consequently to be so much less in the rich man's debt than they truly were. To one debtor he remits half, to another the fifth, of his debt; by these different proportions teaching us, say those who justify his conduct, and even some who do not, that charity should be no blind profusion, exhibited without respect of the needs, greater or smaller, of those who are its objects, but exercised ever with consideration and discretion,<sup>2</sup> —a sowing of the seed by the hand, and not an emptying of it from the sack's mouth.

In this lowering of the bills, Vitringa<sup>3</sup> finds the key of the parable; his interpretation deserving to be recorded, if only for its rare ingenuity. The rich man is God, the steward the ecclesiastical leaders of the Jewish people, to whom was committed a dispensation of the mysteries of the kingdom. These were accused by the prophets, as by Ezekiel (xxxiv. 2), by Malachi (ii. 8), and lastly by Christ Himself (Matt. ii. 8), that they abused their stewardship, used the powers committed to them, not for the glory of God, but for purposes of self-exaltation and honour,—that they ‘*wasted his goods.*’ They feel the justice of this accusation, that they are not in their Lord's grace, and only outwardly belong to his kingdom. Therefore they now seek to make themselves friends of others, of the debtors of their Lord, of sinful men; acting as though they still possessed authority in the things of his kingdom. And the device by which they seek to win these friends is by

<sup>1</sup> Γράμμα = χειρόγραφον (Col. ii. 14) = ‘a writing acknowledging a debt,’ by the Vulgate happily translated, *cautio*. See the *Dict. of Gr. and Rom. Antt.* s. v. Interest of money, p. 524.

<sup>2</sup> Thus Gregory the Great, who quotes from Gen. iv.: ‘If thou offerest rightly and dividest not rightly, thou hast sinned.’

<sup>3</sup> *Erklär. d. Parab.* p. 921, seq. It is the standing interpretation of the Cocceian school (Deyling, *Obs. Sac.* vol. v. p. 335).



lowering the standard of righteousness and obedience, inventing convenient glosses for the evading of the strictness of God's law, allowing men to say, 'It is a gift' (Matt. xv. 5), suffering them to put away their wives on any slight excuse (Luke xvi. 18), and by various devices, 'indulgences' in the strictest sense of the word, making slack the law of God (Matt. xxiii. 16); thus obtaining for themselves favour and an interest with men, and, however God's grace was withdrawn from them, still keeping their hold on the people, and retaining their advantages, their honours, and their peculiar privileges. In the casuistry of the Jesuits, as denounced by Pascal, we see a precisely similar attempt. This interpretation has one attraction, that it gives a distinct meaning to the lowering of the bills,—'Write fifty, write fourscore;'—which very few others do. The moral will then be no other than is commonly and rightly drawn from the parable: 'Be prudent as are these children of the present world, but provide for yourselves not temporary friends, but everlasting habitations. They use heavenly things for earthly objects and aims; do you reverse all this, and show how earthly things may be used for heavenly.'<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> With the interpretation of these words as a lowering of the standard of obedience very nearly agrees the use of the parable in the *Liber S. Joannis Apocryphus*, a religious book of the Albigenses (Thilo, *Codex Apocryphus*, p. 884). It is with this very question, 'How much owest thou unto my lord?' and with the bidding, 'Write fifty,' 'Write fourscore,' that Satan is introduced tempting and seducing the inferior angels ('flattering the angels of the invisible Father'). An ingenious exposition by Gaudentius, bishop of Brescia, a contemporary of St. Ambrose, is in the same line: 'By the unjust steward we must understand the devil, who has been left in the world that fleeing from the cruelty of such a steward we may hasten as suppliants to the tenderness of God. This steward wastes his lord's substance, when he attacks us who are the Lord's portion. He meditates how he may best not only harass his lord's debtors, *i.e.* those who are entangled in sin, by open warfare, but how under a mask of deceitful kindness he may beguile them by fair pretence, so that, seduced by this fraudulent benignity, they may the more readily receive him into their houses, and share his sentence to all eternity. . . . He guilefully engages to lighten the debts of his fellow servants, while he promises various kinds of indulgence to those

With this interpretation very nearly agrees that of the writer of an elaborate article in a modern German Review.<sup>1</sup> He too conceives the parable intended for the Scribes and Pharisees—but to contain *counsel* for them,—the unjust steward being set forth for them to copy; while Vitringa finds their *condemnation* in it. They were the ministers of a dispensation now drawing to a close; and when in its room the kingdom of Christ was set up, then their much-abused stewardship would be withdrawn from them. The parable exhorts them, in that brief period which should intervene between the announcement and actual execution of this purpose of God's, to cultivate such a spirit as would alone give them an entrance '*into everlasting habitations,*'—the spirit, that is, which they so much lacked, of mildness and love and meekness toward all men, their fellow-sinners. This spirit, and the works which it would prompt, he affirms, are fitly set forth under the image of a remission of debts<sup>2</sup>—and those, debts due to another, since it is against God that primarily every sin is committed. Such a spirit as this flows out of the recognition of our own guilt, which recognition the writer

who are sinning either in faith or work. . . . The Saviour praises the craft of the steward both by way of threat and by way of foresight. By way of threat, since He condemns that most wicked prudence of the devil with the epithet "unjust": by way of foresight, since He strengthens the listening disciples against the counsels of the devil's arguments, in order that they may fight with all wariness and prudence against so cunning and prudent an enemy.'

<sup>1</sup> Zyro (*Theol. Stud. u. Krit.* 1831, p. 776). He is not aware that this had long ago been anticipated by Salmeron (*Serm. in Evang. Par.* p. 231): 'For because the scribes and Pharisees with the law and the priesthood were on the point of failing the Lord exhorts them to be careful not to deal sternly with sinners, that thus they may prepare for themselves friends who will receive them into the Gospel.'

<sup>2</sup> Weisse (*Evang. Gesch.* vol. ii. p. 162, seq.) produces as a great discovery, and as making everything plain, this view, that the lowering of the bills expressed, not acts of bounty and love with the temporal mammon, but the spiritual act of forgiveness of sins. Being unable to bring this into agreement with ver. 9, 'Make to yourselves friends of the *mammon of unrighteousness,*' he includes the words in italics in brackets, being 'convinced that Jesus never spoke them!'

finds in the absence on the steward's part of all attempts to justify or excuse himself. The same temper which would prompt them to these works of love and grace would fit them also for an entrance into the '*everlasting habitations*,' the coming kingdom, which, unlike that dispensation now ready to vanish away, should never be moved. But how, it may be asked, shall this interpretation be reconciled with the words, '*He said also unto his disciples*,' with which the Evangelist introduced the parable? <sup>1</sup> It will then plainly be addressed not to them, but to the Scribes and Pharisees.

With these new acts of unrighteousness this child of the present world filled up the short interval between his threatened and his actual dismissal from office. There is no hint that he attempted to conceal these fraudulent transactions, or that he called his lord's debtors together *secretly*,—whether it was that he trusted they would keep counsel, being held together by a common interest and by the bands of a common iniquity,—or that he thus falsified the accounts, careless whether the transaction were blown abroad or not; being now a desperate man, with no character to lose; at the same time confident that there would be no redress for his lord, when the written documents testified against him. More probably the thing was thus done openly and in the face of day,<sup>2</sup> the arrangement being one which, from some cause

<sup>1</sup> Similar to this is Tertullian's explanation (*De Fug. in Pers.* 13), only that for him the exhortation is addressed to the entire Jewish people, not to its spiritual chiefs only: 'Make to yourself, then, friends of mammon: how this is to be understood let the foregoing parable teach, which was addressed to the Jewish people, who, when they had badly applied the trust committed to them by the Lord, should have been zealous to make to themselves of the men of mammon, such as were we ourselves, friends rather than enemies, and to relieve us of the obligation of the sins by which we were holden unto God, by conferring upon us of that which was the Lord's, so that when they began to fall away from his favour they might betake themselves to our faith and be received into everlasting habitations.'

<sup>2</sup> His '*Sit down quickly and write*' has been urged by some as characteristic of a man wishing to huddle over the matter as fast as possible, for fear of discovery;—by Bengel: *ταχέως* '*hastily, stealthily*': and

or other, when once completed, could not be disturbed. Were a secret transaction intended, the lord's discovery of the fraud would hardly be passed over; and the steward would scarcely obtain for a contrivance so clumsy that it was at once detected, even the limited praise which actually he does obtain. Least of all would he obtain such praise, if it depended merely on the forbearance of his master, in the case of discovery, which the event will have proved was probable from the beginning, whether the arrangement should stand good or not. Such forbearance could not have been counted on, even though the words<sup>1</sup> of the lord should lead us in the present instance to assume that he did allow the steward to reap the benefits of his dishonest scheming.

But whether the transaction was clandestine or not, that it was fraudulent seems beyond a doubt. Such, on the face of it, it is; and all attempts to mitigate or explain away its dishonesty are hopeless.<sup>2</sup> It may be, and by some has been

Maldonatus: 'This word *quickly* seems to betoken a fraudulent man engaged in an ill action, whose fear is that he may be caught in his crime, and that as the figures are being tampered with, some one may come upon him.' But they may also be explained as words of one who feels that he must act at once—that to-day he has an opportunity, which to-morrow will have passed from his hands. The transaction was evidently not with the debtors each apart from and unknown to the other, as is slightly yet sufficiently indicated by the  $\sigma\upsilon\ \delta\epsilon$  addressed to the second.

<sup>1</sup> Jensen, however, who has an interesting essay on this parable (*Theol. Stud. u. Krit.* 1829, p. 699), sees a spiritual significance in the householder's forbearing to break the arrangement: 'That which is related of the master,—how he regards the dealing of the steward,—does not blame it, nor stand to his rights,—seems to me to be the setting forth of the grace of God, through which, instead of entering into judgment with sinful men, He rather rewards the good in them, which, according to strict right, could not even attain to secure them from punishment. For he leaves the steward to enjoy the fruit of his device; and since, after what has been said above, it cannot be conveniently supposed that he had no right to demand a strict reckoning in the matter, it only remains to consider this conduct as a voluntary forbearance on his part.' There are several other essays on the parable in the same Review, all of them more or less worthy of being consulted; thus 1842, p. 1012 sqq.; 1858, p. 527 sqq.; 1865, p. 725 sqq.

<sup>2</sup> One might say absurd, but that it has been done with so much

said, that this dishonesty is not of the essence of the parable, but an inconvenience arising from the inadequacy of earthly relationships to set forth heavenly. They must fail somewhere, and this is the weak side of the earthly relation between a steward and his lord, rendering it an imperfect type of the relation existing between men and God,—that in this latter relation, to use Hammond's words, 'the man hath liberty to use the wealth put into his hands so as may be most (not only for his master's, but also) for his own advantage, namely, to his endless reward in heaven, which, though it were an injustice and falseness in a servant here on earth, who is altogether to consider his master's profit, not his own, yet it is our duty and that which by the will and command of God we are obliged to do, in the execution of that steward's office which the rich man holds under God: and is the only thing commended to us in this parable; which is so far from denominating him that makes this advantage of the treasure committed to him an unjust or unrighteous steward in the application, that it denominates him *faithful* (*πιστός*) in the latter part of the parable, and him only *false* (*ἄδικος*) that doth it not.' In worldly things there is not, and there never can be, such absolute identity of interests between a master and a servant, that a servant, looking wholly to his own interests, would at the same time forward in the best manner his lord's. But our interests as servants of a heavenly Lord, that is, our true interests, absolutely coincide in all things with his; so

ability by Schulz, in an instructive little treatise (*üb. d. Parabel vom Verwalter*, Breslau, 1821), as to redeem it from such a charge. The ancient *οἰκονόμος*, he says, was one with far greater freedom in the administration of the things committed to him, than any to whom *we* should apply the title of *steward*; and the sum of his statement seems this (though the comparison is not his), that his conduct at this latest moment of his stewardship, however selfish it might be, yet was no more dishonest than it would be dishonest on the part of the minister of a kingdom, who had hitherto oppressed the people under him, and administered the affairs of the kingdom for his own interests and pleasures, yet now, when about to be removed, to seek to win the people's love and a place in their hearts, by remitting or lowering the heavy dues and taxes with which before he had burdened them.

that when we administer the things committed to us for Him, then we lay them out also for ourselves, and when for ourselves, for our lasting and eternal gain, then also for Him.

‘*And the lord commended the unjust steward, because he had done wisely.*’ It need hardly be observed that it is the lord of the steward, twice before in the parable called by this name (ver. 3, 5), who is here intended, and not Christ our Lord, who does not speak directly in his own person till ver. 9, the intermediate verse being the point of transition from the parable to the direct exhortation.<sup>1</sup> The attempt to substitute ‘*cunningly*’ for ‘*wisely*,’ and so by limiting and lowering the commendation given, to evade the moral difficulty of the passage, cannot altogether be justified. ‘*Wisely*’ I cannot regard as the happiest rendering, since wisdom is never in Scripture dissociated from moral goodness.<sup>2</sup> But if more commendation is implied in ‘*wisely*’ than the original warrants, in ‘*cunningly*’ there is less; ‘*prudently*’ would best represent the original, and so in Wiclif’s Version it stood, though the word disappeared from all our subsequent Versions; and, to my regret, has not been restored in the latest Revision.

But concerning the praise itself, which cannot be explained away as mere admiration of the man’s cunning, it is true that none but a malignant, such as the apostate Julian, would make here a charge against the morality of the Scripture; or pretend, as he does, to believe that Jesus meant to com-

<sup>1</sup> So Augustine (*Enarr. in Ps. liii. 2*): ‘*His lord commended his judgment, looking not to his own loss but to the man’s wit.*’ Compare Luke xii. 42; xiv. 23, where in like manner  $\delta \kappa \upsilon \rho \iota \circ \varsigma$ , without further qualification, is used of an earthly lord.

<sup>2</sup> In Plato’s words (*Menex. 19*): ‘*All knowledge that is separated from justice and the rest of virtue appears to be cunning rather than wisdom.*’ Rather  $\phi \rho \nu \iota \mu \omega \varsigma$  is a middle term, not bringing out prominently the moral characteristics, either good or evil, of the action to which it is applied, but recognizing in it a skilful adaptation of the means to the end—leaving at the same time the worth both of the one and of the other to be determined by other considerations. The  $\phi \rho \beta \acute{\omicron} \nu \eta \sigma \iota \varsigma$  stands in the same relation to the  $\sigma \acute{\upsilon} \nu \epsilon \sigma \iota \varsigma$  (understanding) as  $\sigma \omicron \phi \acute{\iota} \alpha$  to  $\nu \omicron \upsilon \varsigma$  (reason). See my *Synonyms of the New Testament*, § 75.

mend an unrighteous action, and to propose it, *in its unrighteousness*, as a model for imitation. With all this the praise has something perplexing in it; though more from the liability of the passage to abuse, unguarded as at first sight it appears, though it is not really so (for see ver. 11), than from its not being capable of a fair explanation. The explanation is this: the man's deed has two aspects; one, that of its dishonesty, upon which it is most blameworthy; the other, of its prudence, its foresight, upon which, if not particularly praiseworthy, it yet offers a sufficient *analogon* to a Christian virtue,—one which *should be* abundantly, but *is* only too weakly, found in most followers of Christ,—to draw from it an exhortation and rebuke to these; just as any other deeds of bold bad men have a side, that namely of their boldness and decision, on which they rebuke the doings of the weak and vacillating good. There are 'martyrs of the devil,' who put to shame the saints of God; and running, as they do, with more alacrity to death than these to life,<sup>1</sup> may be proposed to them for their emulation. We may disengage a bad man's energy from his ambition; and, contemplating them apart, may praise the one, and condemn the other. Exactly so our Lord disengages here the steward's dishonesty from his foresight: the one can have only his earnest rebuke; the other may be usefully extolled for the provoking of his people to a like prudence; which yet should be at once a holy prudence, and a

<sup>1</sup> Bernard: 'The martyrs of the devil hasten more eagerly to death than we to life.' A story of one of the Egyptian eremites illustrates the matter in hand. Chancing to see a dancing girl, he was moved to tears; being asked the reason, he replied, 'That she should be at such pains to please men in her sinful vocation; and we in our holy calling use so little diligence to please God.' Compare an incident in the life of Pelagia in Lipomannus, *Acta Sanctorum*, vol. v. p. 226. Thus too St. Louis, when in the East, was moved to jealousy by observing the zeal of the Mahomedans in transcribing and diffusing the books which they counted sacred; and quoting our Lord's words, '*The children of this world are wiser in their generation than the children of light*,' was henceforward stirred up to a more active multiplication of those which would set forward the knowledge of the true God (Neander, *Kirch. Gesch.* vol. v. p. 583).

prudence employed about things of far higher and more lasting importance.<sup>1</sup>

The next verse fully bears out this view of the Lord's meaning: '*For the children of this world are in their generation wiser than the children of light.*' We must find the same fault with '*wiser*' here as with '*wisely*' of the verse preceding; as '*prudently*' should replace it there, so '*more prudent*' here.<sup>2</sup> '*The children of this world*' are the Psalmist's '*men of the earth,*' those whose portion is here, and who look not beyond; who, born of the world's spirit, order their lives by the world's rule. The phrase occurs only here and at Luke xx. 34; '*children of light*' he has in common with St. John (xii. 36) and St. Paul (1 Thess. v. 5; Ephes. v. 8). The faithful are called by this rather than any other of the many names of honour which are theirs; for thus their deeds, which are deeds of light, done in truth and sincerity, even as they are themselves children of the day and of the light, are contrasted with the '*works of darkness,*' the '*hidden things of dishonesty,*' wrought by the children of this present world, and of which he who plays the foremost part here has just given so notable a specimen.

The declaration itself has been differently understood, according as the sentence has been differently completed. Some complete it thus: '*The children of this world are wiser in their generation,*' namely in worldly things, '*than the children of light*' are in those same worldly things; that is, Earthly men are more prudent than spiritual men in earthly matters; these earthly are their element, their world; they are more at home in them; they give them more thought, bestow more labour upon them, and therefore succeed in them

<sup>1</sup> Clarius: 'He praises the wit, he condemns the deed.' Augustine (*Quæst. Evang.* ii. 34) is less satisfactory: 'These similitudes are spoken by way of contrast, for us to understand that if he who was defrauding could be praised by his lord, how much more do those please the Lord God who work according to his commandments.' Cf. Jerome, *Ad Algas. Ep.* 121, qu. 6.

<sup>2</sup> It would seem that exactly thus an elder Latin Version had *astutiores* (Augustine, *Enarr. in Ps.* liii. 2).



better: though it be true that this is only as owls see better than eagles—in the dark.<sup>1</sup> But it is hard to perceive how a general statement of this kind bears on the parable, which most are agreed urges upon the Christian, not prudence in things earthly by the example of the worldling's prudence in the same, but rather, by the example of the worldling's prudence in these things, urges upon him prudence in heavenly.

Others, then, are nearer the truth, who complete the sentence thus: '*The children of this world are wiser in their generation*'—or '*for their own generation,*' as the R. V. has it—'*than the children of light*' for theirs, that is, for heavenly matters; '*the children of light*' being thus rebuked that they bestow less pains to win heaven than '*the children of this world*' bestow to win earth,—that they are less provident in heavenly things than those are in earthly,—that the world is better served by its servants than God is by his. If however we would perfectly seize the meaning, we must see in the words, '*in their generation,*'—or rather, '*toward,*' or '*for their own generation,*'<sup>2</sup>—an allusion, often missed, to the debtors in the parable. They, the ready accomplices in the

<sup>1</sup> So Cajetan: 'The children of this world are more prudent than the children of light, not absolutely, but in a nation that walketh in darkness, just as owls see better in the dark than do the creatures of the day.'

<sup>2</sup> *Εἰς τὴν γενεάν τῶν ἑαυτῶν*, which Theophylact explains, *ἐν τῷ βίῳ τούτῳ*: and the Vulgate renders, *in generatione suâ*. Greswell has well shown (*Exp. of the Par.* vol. iv. p. 52) how untenable such translation is; which, indeed, could never have been entertained, except on the notion so often adopted,—that prepositions in the New Testament have no meaning in particular, that, for instance, *εἰς* and *ἐν* are promiscuously used; on which matter see Winer, *Gramm.* § 54. 4. Storr (*Opusc. Acad.* vol. iii. p. 117) gives rightly the sense: 'They who solely regard earthly things ("the children of this world") influenced like the steward (ver. 1, 3, 4) by prudence towards their own family or "generation," that is, towards those of the same way of thinking, who equally with themselves are "children of this world," towards their brothers, whose regard is as earthly as their own (cf. ver. 5-7), are wont to excel those who long for the light and for everlasting happiness, who often have no such zeal (cf. ver. 4) to bind to themselves by benefits either their own family, that is those who also are longing for the light, who equally with themselves are "children of light" and destined to attain to the "everlasting habitations" (ver. 9), or

steward's fraud, showed themselves children of the same generation as he was; they were all of one race, children of the ungodly world; and the Lord's declaration is, that the men of this world make their intercourse with one another more profitable,—obtain more from it,—manage it better for their interests, such as those are, than do the children of light *their* intercourse with each other.<sup>1</sup> For what opportunities, He would imply, are missed by these last, by those among them to whom a share of the earthly mammon is entrusted,—what opportunities of laying up treasure in heaven, of making to themselves friends for the time to come by showing love to the poor saints, or generally of doing offices of kindness to the household of faith, to those of the same generation as themselves,—whom, notwithstanding this affinity, they yet make not, to the extent they might, receivers of benefits, to be returned hereafter a hundredfold into their own bosoms.

His disciples shall not so miss their opportunities; but, after the example of him who bound to himself by benefits the men of his own generation, bind those to themselves who, like themselves, were '*children of light*:'<sup>2</sup> '*And I say unto*

again the common Lord of the family (Matt. xxv. 40); so that there was all the greater need to press the warning which follows, Luke xvi. 9.' Weisse (*Evang. Gesch.* vol. ii. p. 161) translates εἰς τ. γεν. τ. ἐαυτ. correctly, Im Verkehr mit ihres Gleichen; Neander too vaguely, Von ihrem Standpunkte.

<sup>1</sup> Teelman (p. 133): 'The children of this world are said to be wiser than the children of light, but wiser according to their generations. The truth of this parable is sufficiently proved by comparing it with the desires and actions of the faithful, who in working out their salvation with fear and trembling are often seized with sloth and with languidness in the pursuit of virtue and of good works and generally in the adapting of earthly goods to uses pleasing to God.'

<sup>2</sup> Yet for all this, who could be entirely satisfied with such a summing up of the parable as Calvin's? 'The sum of this parable is that we should deal humanely and kindly with our neighbours, so that when we are come to the tribunal of God we may reap the reward of our liberality.' But if this is all, why an *unjust* steward? So too for the early Church writers the parable is often no more than an exhortation to liberal almsgiving. So Irenæus (*Con. Hær.* iv. 30), Augustine (*De Civ. Dei*, xxi. 27), Athanasius, Theophylact: so also Erasmus, Luther,—who says:

you, *Make to yourselves friends of*—or ‘*out of,*’ or ‘*by means of*’—‘*the mammon of unrighteousness; that, when ye fail, they may receive you into everlasting habitations.*’ This ‘*mammon of unrighteousness*’ has been sometimes explained as wealth unjustly gotten,<sup>1</sup> by fraud or by violence, ‘*treasures of wickedness*’ (Prov. x. 2).<sup>2</sup> The phrase so interpreted would be easily open to abuse, as though a man might compound with his conscience and with God, and by giving some small portion of alms out of unjustly acquired wealth make the rest clean unto him. But plainly the first command to one who finds himself in possession of this would be to restore it to its rightful owners, as Zacchæus, on his conversion, was resolved to do (Luke xix. 8); for ‘*he that sacrificeth of a thing wrongfully gotten, his offering is ridiculous*’ (Eccles. xxxiv. 18; xxxv. 12); and out of such there could never be offered acceptable alms to Him who has said, ‘*I hate robbery for burnt-offering.*’ Only when this restoration is impossible, as must often happen, could it be lawfully bestowed upon the poor. Others understand by ‘*mammon of unrighteousness*’ not so much wealth by the present possessor unjustly acquired, as wealth which in a world like this can hardly have been gotten together without sin somewhere—without something of the defilement of that world from which it was gathered clinging to it;<sup>3</sup>—if not sin in the present possessor,

‘*It is a sermon on good works, and especially against avarice, that men abuse not wealth, but therewith help poor and needy people,*’—and many more.

<sup>1</sup> Augustine affirms (*Serm. cxiii. 2*) that such abuse of the words was actually made: ‘*Some by understanding this amiss plunder the goods of others, and distribute a portion of them to the poor, thinking that thus they are doing that which is commanded. For, say they, to plunder the goods of others is the mammon of unrighteousness, and to distribute some portion of them, especially to the needy saints, is to make to oneself friends of the mammon of unrighteousness. Such an interpretation is to be amended, or rather is altogether to be blotted from your hearts.*’

<sup>2</sup> ὀνόμαυοὶ ἀσεβείας (Theodotion).

<sup>3</sup> Thus Jerome quotes the proverb, *Dives aut iniquus aut iniqui hæres* (‘*A rich man is either a scoundrel or a scoundrel’s heir*’), as illustrating these words. It is ‘*mammon of unrighteousness,*’ Cajetan says, ‘*because*

yet in some of those, nearer or more remote, from or through whom he received it: which being so, he that inherits the wealth inherits also the obligation to make good the wrongs committed in the getting of it together. But the comparison with ver. 12, where '*unrighteous mammon,*' a phrase equivalent to '*mammon of unrighteousness,*' is set against '*true riches*'—these '*true*' being evidently heavenly enduring goods, such as neither fade nor fail,—makes far more like that '*mammon of unrighteousness*' is uncertain, unstable mammon, one man's to-day, and another's to-morrow; which if a man trust in, he is trusting in a lie, in that which sooner or later will betray his confidence<sup>1</sup> (1 Tim. vi. 17),

there are few or no fortunes into the amassing or preservation of which sin has not entered, either on the part of the possessors or of their instruments, or of their fathers or ancestors; with which compare Eccles. xxvi. 29; xxvii. 2: 'As a nail sticketh fast between the joinings of the stones, so doth sin stick close between buying and selling;' and the Italian proverb, *Mai diventò fiume grande, che non v' entrasse acqua torbida*. Augustine (*Quæst. Evang.* ii. qu. 34): 'Because such wealth only belongs to the wicked, who place in it their hope and the abundance of their bliss;' cf. *Serm.* L. 4. Tertullian (*Adv. Marc.* iv. 33): 'For we all know that money is the author of injustice, and the lord of all the world;' Melancthon: 'He calls mammon unrighteous, not as wealth unjustly won, nor as held against the owner's conscience, but because of the manifold abuses which in this weakness of mankind are wont to follow its possession' (Eccles. v. 13).—Could it be proved that 'mammon' (more correctly spelt with a single *m*) was the Plutus of the Syrian mythology, worshipped as presiding over wealth, the antithesis in the words, '*Ye cannot serve God and mammon,*' would be more pointed yet; but the assertion is quite without proof. Neither Augustine (*De Serm. Dom. in Mon.* 2; *Serm.* cxiii. 2) nor Jerome (*Ad Algas.* qu. 6) gives a hint of the kind. All that Augustine says is this: 'What the Phœnicians call mammon in Latin is called *lucrum*; what the Hebrews call *mammona*, in Latin is called *divitiæ* or wealth.' The regarding of mammon as a false god, a most pardonable error, seeing that both Spenser and Milton have turned it to so grand a use, belongs to the Middle Ages. Thus Peter Lombard (ii. dist. 6): 'Riches are called by the name of a devil, namely Mammon. For Mammon is the name of a devil, by which name riches are called according to the Syriac tongue.' Lachmann, strangely enough, on the three occasions upon which it occurs in the N. T., prints it with an initial capital letter.—See a good note by Drusius (*Crit. Sac.* in loc.).

<sup>1</sup> The use of *ἀδικος* for 'false' runs through the whole Septuagint.

which he must leave (Eccles. ii. 18, 19; v. 15), or which must leave him (Prov. xxiii. 5). And '*mammon of unrighteousness*' it may in a deeper sense be justly called, seeing that in all property a principle of evil is implied; for in a perfect state of society, in a realized kingdom of God upon earth, there would be no such thing as property belonging to one man more than another. In the moment of the Church's first love, when that kingdom was for an instant realized, 'all that believed were together, and had all things common' (Acts iv. 32-35);<sup>1</sup> and this existence of property has ever been so strongly felt as a witness for the selfishness of man, that in all schemes of a perfect commonwealth,—which, if perfect, must of course be a Church and a State in one,—from Plato's down to the Socialists', this community of goods has entered as a necessary condition. And thus, however the present owner of the wealth, or those who transmitted it to him, may have fairly acquired it, yet it is not less this '*unrighteous mammon*,' witnessing in its very existence as one man's, and not every man's, for the selfishness of man,—for the absence of that highest love, which would make each man feel that whatever was his was every one's, and would leave no room for a *mine* and *thine* in the world. With all this, we must not forget that the attempt prematurely to realize this or any other little fragment of the kingdom of God, apart from the rest,—the corruption and evil of man's heart remaining unremoved, and being either overlooked or denied,—has ever proved a fruitful source of some of the worst mischiefs in the world.

Thus *μάρτυς ἄδικος*, a false witness (Deut. xix. 16; cf. ver. 18): *ιατροὶ ἄδικοι*, 'physicians of no value' (Job xiii. 4; cf. Prov. vi. 19; xii. 17; Jer. v. 31).

<sup>1</sup> Augustine: 'Men fused by the fire of charity into one soul and one heart, of whom none would call anything his own;' and *Enarr. in Ps. lxxviii.* he explains '*mammon of unrighteousness*': 'Perhaps the unrighteousness consists even in this, that thou hast and another hath not, that thou aboundest and another lacks;' as elsewhere in the same spirit: 'We possess that which is another's, when we possess aught that is superfluous.' Thus Aquinas: 'The riches of unrighteousness, *i.e.* of inequality;' of which one has so much and another so little.

The words, 'that when ye fail,' are an euphemistic way of saying, 'that when ye die.' But indeed there is another reading, 'that when it fails,' that is, the mammon (cf. Luke xii. 33); which is to be preferred.<sup>1</sup> Many have shrunk from referring what follows, 'they may receive you,' to the friends who shall have been secured by the aid of the unrighteous mammon; such reference seeming to them to ascribe too much to men and to their intercession, to imply a right on their parts who have received the benefits, to introduce their benefactors 'into everlasting habitations,' and so to be trenching on the prerogative which is God's alone. For some who have entertained these misgivings 'they' are the angels, as we find angels (ver. 22) carrying Lazarus into Abraham's bosom; others understand that it is God and Christ who will 'receive;' while for others the phrase is impersonal (cf. xii. 11, 20; xxiii. 31); 'they may receive you' being equivalent to 'you may be received.' But if we regard this verse, not as containing an isolated doctrine, but in vital connexion with the parable of which it gives the moral, we shall at once perceive why this language is used, and the justification of its use. The reference to the debtors is plain; they, being made

<sup>1</sup> "ἵνα ὅταν ἐκλείπῃ. Many older Versions attest that reading; which Lachmann has allowed; and Tischendorf (ἐκλείπῃ); and now the Codex Sinaiticus; yet not the Vulgate (cum defeceritis), nor yet the earlier Latin (Irenæus, *Con. Hær.* iv. 49, quando fugati fueritis). Compare θησαυρὸς ἀνεκλειπτός (Luke xii. 33), ἀνεκλιπῆς θησαυρός (Wisd. vii. 14), πλοῦτος ἀνεκλιπῆς (viii. 16). Some words of Seneca (*De Benef.* vi. 3) afford a striking parallel: 'M. Antonius seems to me to have behaved nobly when, according to the poet Rabirius, on seeing his fortune passing to another and nothing left for himself . . . he exclaimed: "At least I have all that I have given away." Oh how much he might have had, had he chosen! These are the assured riches, destined to abide steadfast amid all the fickleness of human fortune, and the greater they grow the less envy will they excite. Why sparest thou thy wealth as though it were thine own? Thou art a steward . . . Dost thou ask how thou mayst make these things thine own? By giving them away. Take counsel then for thy estate, and prepare for thyself its assured and indisputable possession: thou wilt make it not only more honourable, but more secure.' Augustine quotes here the Virgilian line (*Æn.* vi. 664): *Quique sui memores alios fecere merendo.*

friends, were to receive the deposed steward into temporary habitations; and the phrase before us is an echo from the parable, the employment of which throws back light upon it, and at once fixes attention on, and explains its most important part. It is idle to press the words further, and against all analogy of faith to assert, on the strength of this single phrase, that even with God's glorified saints, with any except Himself, will reside power of their own to admit into the kingdom of heaven; but idle also to affirm that '*they may receive you,*' in the second clause of the sentence, can refer to any other but the friends mentioned in the first—which no one, unless alarmed by the consequences which others might draw from the words, could for an instant call in question.<sup>1</sup> The true parallel to this statement, at once explaining and guarding it, is evidently Matt. xxv. 34-40. The heavenly habitations, being '*everlasting,*'<sup>2</sup> are tacitly contrasted with

<sup>1</sup> Cocceius: 'Δέξονται might be understood impersonally, but the thread of the parable demands its reference to the friends. Not because by their own merits men may receive others into everlasting habitations, but because amid the joy of the sons of God and their applause and goodwill in God and his Spirit, such are received by God as have wished to be their friends. The will of the just and blessed ones is efficacious, because it is the "mind of the Spirit," Rom. viii. 27.' Cf. Augustine, *Quæst. Evang.* ii. qu. 38; and Gerhard (*Loc. Theoll.* loc. xxvii. 8. 3): 'They receive us not so much by their prayers in this life, as by their witness and suffrage in the day of judgment.'

<sup>2</sup> These αἰώνιοι, those πρόσκαιροι. Σκηνή, the tent pitched at evening and struck in the morning, or the temporary booth (Lev. xxiii. 40-43) formed of planks and branches, itself implies anything but a lasting habitation; is directly contrasted with such at Heb. xi. 9, 10, where of Abraham we are told that he dwelt in tabernacles (σκηναῖς), because he looked for a city with foundations. Compare Isai. xxxviii. 12: 'Mine age is departed, and is removed from me as a shepherd's tent;' Job xxvii. 18; 2 Cor. v. 1. But these σκηναὶ are αἰώνιοι, they are μοναὶ (John xiv. 2), or mansions, being pitched by God, 'a tabernacle that shall not be taken down' (σκηναὶ αἱ οὐ μὴ σεισθῶσιν, Isai. xxxiii. 20). Godet: 'The poetical expression "the everlasting tents," or "habitations," is borrowed from the history of the patriarchs. The tents of Abraham and of Isaac under the oaks of Mamre are transported by thought into this life to come, which is represented under the image of a glorified Canaan.'

the temporary shelter which was all that the steward, the child of the present world, procured for himself with all his plotting and planning, his cunning and dishonesty,—also, it may be, with the temporary stewardship which every man exercises on earth, from which it is not long before he fails and is removed:—how important therefore, the word will imply, that he should make sure his entrance into a kingdom that shall not be moved (cf. Eccles. xi. 2).<sup>1</sup>

In the verses which follow (10–13), and which stand in vital coherence with the parable, it is very noteworthy that not prudence, but fidelity, in the dispensation of things earthly is urged; putting far away any such perversion of the parable, as that the unfaithfulness of the steward could have found a shadow of favour with the Lord. The things earthly in which men may show their faithfulness and their fitness to be entrusted with a higher stewardship, are slightingly called ‘*that which is least*,’ as compared with those spiritual gifts and talents which are ‘*much* ;’ they are termed ‘*unrighteous*,’ or deceitful ‘*mammon*,’ as set over against the heavenly riches of faith and love, which are ‘*true*’ and durable ‘*riches* ;’ they are ‘*that which is another man’s*,’<sup>2</sup> by comparison with the heavenly goods, which when possessed are our own, a part of our very selves, being akin to our truest life. Thus the Lord at once casts a slight on the things worldly and temporal, and at the same time magnifies the importance of a right administration of them; since in the dispensing of these,—which He declares to be the least,—to be false and with no intrinsic worth,—to be alien from man’s essential being, He at the same time announces that a man may prove his fidelity, show what is in him, and whether he can fitly be entrusted with a steward-

<sup>1</sup> Profane literature does not often offer so happy a parallel to the words of Scripture as is furnished here in a beautiful passage from the *Dyscolus* of Menander. This also dwells on the fleeting character of wealth, which only becomes immortal when it is turned to the nobler uses of beneficence; and may be found in Meineke, *Fragm. Comic. Græc.* p. 892.

<sup>2</sup> ‘Neither true riches, nor your riches,’ as Augustine terms them.



ship of durable riches in the kingdom of God.<sup>1</sup> And in ver. 13 He further states what the fidelity is, which in this stewardship is required : it is a choosing of God instead of mammon for our Lord. For in this world we are as servants from whom two masters are claiming allegiance : one is God, man's rightful lord ; the other is this unrighteous mammon, given to be our servant, to be wielded by us in God's interests, and in itself to be considered as slight, transient, and another's ; but which, in a sinful world, has erected itself into a lord, and now challenges obedience from us. Thus if we yield, we shall not any longer lay out according to God's will that which He lent us to be merely a thing beneath us, but which we shall then have allowed a will and a voice of its own, and to speak to us in accents of command. We shall not any longer be stewards and servants of God ; for that usurping lord has a will so different from his will, gives commands so opposite to his commands, that occasions must speedily arise when one will have to be despised and disobeyed, if the other be honoured and served ;<sup>2</sup> God, for instance, will command a scattering, when mammon will urge to a further heaping and gathering ; God will require a laying out upon others, when mammon, or the world, a laying out upon ourselves. Therefore, these two lords having characters so different, and giving commands so contrary, it will be impossible to reconcile their services (Jam. iv. 4) ; one must be despised, if the other is held to ; the only faithfulness to the one is to break

<sup>1</sup> The Jews have various sayings and parables on the ways in which God proves men in little, to try whether they are worthy to be entrusted with much. Thus David He tried first with 'those few sheep in the wilderness,' which because he faithfully and boldly kept (1 Sam. xvii. 34-36), therefore God 'took him from the sheepfolds to feed Jacob his people, and Israel his inheritance' (Ps. lxxviii. 70, 71). See Schoettgen, *Hor. Heb.* vol. i. p. 300.

<sup>2</sup> Stella has here a lively comparison : 'If a dog is following two men who are walking along a road, it is not easy to decide which of them is its master. But if one of the men parts from the other, it is immediately shown clearly enough which is the master. For the dog leaves the stranger and follows the one he knows, thereby clearly showing that this is its master.'

with the other : ‘ *Ye cannot serve<sup>1</sup> God and mammon.*’ Such appears to me the connexion between ver. 13 and the two which go before, and between all these and the parable of which they are intended to supply the moral.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Δουλεύειν, to which word its full force is to be given. Abraham and Job and other of God’s saints have been rich ; but of each of these, in Chrysostom’s excellent words here, it could be said, ‘ He did not serve Mammon, but possessed it and ruled it, he was its master, not its slave.’ See Suicer, *Thes. s. v. δουλεύω*.

<sup>2</sup> Of strange explanations of this parable one of the strangest is quoted by Jerome (*Ad Algas. Ep. 121, qu. 6*), from the *Commentaries* of Theophilus, bishop of Antioch ; if indeed these *Commentaries* are genuine, which Jerome himself elsewhere (*De Script. Eccles.*) calls in doubt. The unjust steward is the Apostle Paul, who being forcibly thrust out by God from his Judaism, afterwards made himself a place in many hearts, through declaring the remission of sins and the Gospel of the grace of God, and for this was praised, being ‘ changed from the austerity of the Law to the clemency of the Gospel.’ See for the same Abelard’s noble hymn, *De S. Paulo Apostolo* ; it is quoted in my *Sacred Latin Poetry*, 3rd edit. p. 209. This is only outdone by a modern writer (see Unger, *De Par. Jes. Nat.* p. 85), who will have it that the Lord meant himself by the unjust steward ! After this we need not marvel that Pontius Pilate, Judas Iscariot, and the Devil (see Gieseler, *Kirch. Gesch.* vol. ii. pt. 2, p. 606) have all been suggested. But the meanest of all expositions is Hartmann’s (*Comm. de Econ. Improbo*, Lips. 1830), of which it will suffice to say that he explains ver. 16 thus : ‘ Make to yourselves friends of those that are rich in this world (this is his interpretation of ἐκ τ. μαμ. τ. ἀδικ.), that, should you wax low in the world, you may be sure of a retreat for the remainder of your days.’ In Wolf’s *Cura* and Köcher’s *Analecta* other foolish and futile interpretations may be found.