

## PARABLE XI.

*THE WICKED HUSBANDMEN.*

MATT. xxi. 33-45; MARK xii. 1-12; LUKE xx. 9-19.

THE Lord's adversaries had by this time so manifestly gotten the worse, that, for this day at least, they would willingly have brought the controversy by them so imprudently provoked (see ver. 23) to a close. But no; He will not let them go: He has begun and will finish; '*Hear another parable;*' as though He would say, 'I have still another word for you of warning and rebuke,' and to that He now summons them to listen. Uttered in the presence at once of the Pharisees and of the multitude, to St. Matthew it seemed rather addressed to the Pharisees, while St. Luke records it as spoken to the people (xx. 9); but there is no real difference here. The opening words, '*There was a certain householder, which planted a vineyard,*' and still more those which immediately follow, suggest, and were intended to suggest, a reference to Isai. v. 1-7. He who came not to destroy, but to fulfil, takes up the prophet's words, connects his own appearing with all which had gone before in the history of the nation, presents it as the crown and consummation of all God's dealings through a thousand years with his people. Nor is it to that passage in Isaiah alone that the Lord links on his teaching here. The image of the kingdom of God as a vine-stock,<sup>1</sup> or as a vineyard,<sup>2</sup> runs through the whole Old

<sup>1</sup> The vine-stock often appears on the Maccabæan coins as the emblem of Palestine: sometimes too the bunch of grapes and the vine-leaf. Deyling (*Obs. Sac.* vol. iii. p. 236): 'The grape-bunch also, the vine-leaf and the palm, as is shown by the mummies, were symbols of Judæa.'

<sup>2</sup> St. Bernard compares the Church with a vineyard at some length

Testament (Deut. xxxii. 32 ; Ps. lxxx. 8-16 ; Isai. xxvii. 1-7 ; Jer. ii. 21 ; Ezek. xv. 1-6 ; xix. 10 ; Hos. x. 1) ; and has many fitnesses to recommend it. The vine, the lowest, is at the same time the noblest of plants. Our Lord appropriates it, among earthly symbols, to Himself ; He is the mystical Vine (John xv. 1) ; had been in prophecy compared to it long before<sup>1</sup> (Gen. xlix. 11). It is a tree which spreads and diffuses itself, casts out its tendrils and branches on every side ;<sup>2</sup> so that of that Vine which the Lord brought out of Egypt the Psalmist could say, ' it *filled* the land ' (lxxx. 9). Nor may we, while drawing out these points of similitude, omit the fact that there was no property so valuable, nor which yielded returns so large, as a vineyard (Cant. viii. 11, 12) ; yet only yielding these in answer to the most unceasing diligence and toil.<sup>3</sup>

(*In Cant. Serm.* 30) : ' Planted in faith, it sends forth its roots in charity, is dug about with the hoe of discipline, manured with the tears of penitents, watered with the words of preachers, and thus truly overflows with a wine in which is gladness but not luxury, a wine of entire sweetness and of no lust. This wine does indeed gladden the heart of man, and we may believe that even angels drink it with gladness.' Compare Augustine, *Serm.* lxxxvii. 1 ; and Ambrose, *Exp. in Luc.* ix. 29.

<sup>1</sup> Grotius : ' The vine boasts in the fable (Judges ix. 13) that God and men are cheered by its liquor, which is most truly said of the blood of Christ.'

<sup>2</sup> Pliny, *Hist. Nat.* xiv. 3.

<sup>3</sup> Cato : ' No possession is more precious, none requires more toil.' Virgil presses the same in words well worthy to be kept in mind by all to whom a spiritual vineyard has been committed (*Georg.* ii. 397-419) :

Est etiam ille labor curandis vitibus alter,  
Cui nunquam exhausti satis est : namque omne quotannis  
Terque quaterque solum scindendum, glebaque versis  
Æternum frangenda bidentibus : omne levandum  
Fronde nemus. Redit agricolis labor actus in orbem  
Atque in se sua per vestigia volvitur annus.

( ' This further task again to dress the vine  
Hath needs beyond exhausting ; the whole soil  
Thrice, four times yearly must be cleft, the sod  
With hoes reversed be crushed continually,  
The whole plantation lightened of its leaves.  
Round on the labourer spins the wheel of toil  
As on its own track rolls the circling year.'—JAMES RHOADES.)

In Isaiah, the vineyard and the Jewish Church are one; 'The vineyard of the Lord of Hosts is the house of Israel, and the men of Judah his pleasant plant.' It is therefore described, not as transferred to others, but as laid waste (v. 5, 6; Mic. i. 6). Here, where the vineyard is not laid waste, but handed over to more faithful husbandmen, and the judgment lights not on it, but on those who so guiltily sought to seize it for their own, we must regard it rather as the kingdom of God in its idea, which idea Jew and Gentile have been successively placed in the condition to realize;<sup>1</sup> a failure in this involving for both alike a forfeiture of the tenure. Inasmuch, indeed, as Israel according to the flesh was the first called to realize the heavenly kingdom, it may be said that for a time the vineyard *was* the Jewish Church; but this arrangement was accidental and temporary, not necessary and permanent, as the sequel abundantly proved. It was the fatal mistake of the Jews, witnessed against in vain by the prophets of old (Jer. vii. 4), by the Baptist (Matt. iii. 9), and now and often by the Lord Jesus Himself (Matt. viii. 12; Luke xiii. 29), that they and the kingdom were so identified, that it could never be separated from them.

The householder is more than possessor of this vineyard: he has himself '*planted*' it (Exod. xv. 17; Ps. xlv. 2). This planting dates back to the times of Moses and Joshua, to the founding of a divine polity in the land of Canaan; and is described, Deut. xxxii. 12-14; cf. Ezek. xvi. 9-14; Neh. ix. 23-25. But this was not all. Having planted, he also '*hedged it round about, and digged a wine-press*<sup>2</sup> *in it, and*

<sup>1</sup> See Origen, *Comm. in Matt.* in loc.

<sup>2</sup> *Ληνός* = torcular; in St. Mark *ὄπολήμιον* = lacus; which last can alone be properly said to have been dug; being afterwards lined with masonry, as Chardin mentions that he found them in Persia. Sometimes they were hewn out of the solid rock; Nonnus (*Dionys.* xii. 330) describes in some spirited lines how Bacchus hollowed out such a receptacle from thence. In the *ληνός*, or press, the grapes were placed and were there crushed, commonly by the feet of men (Judg. ix. 27; Neh. xiii. 15; Isai. lxiii. 3); while at the bottom of this press was a closely-grated hole, through which the juice being expressed, ran into

*built a tower.*' This hedge might be either a stone wall<sup>1</sup> (Prov. xxiv. 31 ; Num. xxii. 24 ; Isai. v. 5 ; Mic. i. 6), or a fence of thorns or other quickset ; this last, if formed, as is common in the East, of the prickly wild aloe, or of some other briars with which Judæa abounds, would more effectually exclude the enemies of the vineyard, the fox (Cant. ii. 15 ; Neh. iv. 3), and the wild boar (Ps. lxxx. 13), than any wall of stone.<sup>2</sup> The vineyard of Isaiah v. 5 is furnished with both. That it should possess a '*wine-press*' would be a matter of course. Not less needful would be the '*tower* ;'<sup>3</sup> by which we understand not so much the kiosk, or ornamental building,

the *ὑπολήμιον* (or *προλήμιον*, Isai. v. 3, LXX), the vat prepared beneath for its reception, the *lacus vinarius* of Columella. See the *Dictionary of the Bible*, s. v. Wine-press ; Robinson, *Later Biblical Researches*, p. 137 ; and Tristram, *Natural History of the Bible*, p. 409. 'The ancient wine-presses,' the last observes, 'are among the most interesting remains of the Holy Land, perhaps the only relics still existing of the actual handiwork of Israel, prior to the first Captivity. The hills of southern Judæa abound with them.'

<sup>1</sup> See Greswell, *Exposition of the Parables*, vol. v. p. 4.

<sup>2</sup> Homer, *Il.* xviii. 564 : so too Virgil (*Georg.* ii. 371) : 'Hedges also must be woven ;' Tristram, *Natural History of the Bible*, p. 430.

<sup>3</sup> Πύργος = ὄπαιοφυλάκιον, Isai. i. 8 ; xxiv. 20 ; 'the watch-towers, which the guardians of the crops used to occupy' (Jerome) ; 'a booth that the keeper maketh' (Job xxvii. 18, Cant. i. 6). Such temporary towers I have seen often in Spain, at the season when the ripening grapes might tempt the passers-by : the more necessary, as the vineyard commonly lies open to the road without any protection whatever. A scaffolding is raised high with planks and poles, and with matting above to protect from the sun ; and on this, commanding an extensive view all around, a watcher, with a long gun, is planted. The elder Niebur (*Beschreib. v. Arab.* p. 138) says : 'In the mountainous district of Yemen I saw here and there as it were nests in the trees, in which the Arabs perched themselves to watch their cornfields. In Tehama, where the trees were scarcer, they built for this purpose a high and light scaffold.' Ward (*View of the Hindoos*, vol. ii. p. 327) observes : 'The wild hogs and buffaloes [*silvestres uri*, *Georg.* ii. 374] make sad havoc in the fields and orchards of the Hindoos ; to keep them out, men are placed on elevated covered stages in the fields ;'—sometimes on mounds built with sods of earth ; and the watchers are frequently armed with slings, which they use with great dexterity and effect, to drive away invaders of every description.

servicing mainly for delight, as a place of shelter for the watchmen who should guard the fruits of the vineyard, and a receptacle for the fruits themselves.

The question, which to an interpreter of the parables must so often recur, presents itself here. Shall we attach any special signification to these several details? do they thus belong to the very substance of the parable, or are they drapery only, and, if expressing anything, yet only in a general way the care of the heavenly householder for his Church, that provision of all things necessary for life and godliness which He made for his people? Many in this as in other like cases will allow nothing more than this last. But, whatever may be said of the wine-press and the tower,<sup>1</sup> it is difficult, with Ephes. ii. 14 before us, where the law is described as 'the middle wall of partition'<sup>2</sup> between the Jew and Gentile, to refuse to the hedging round of the vineyard a spiritual significance. By their circumscription through the law, the Jews became a people dwelling alone, and not reckoned among the nations (Num. xxiii. 9); that law being at once a hedge of separation and of defence,<sup>3</sup> 'a wall of fire' (Zech. ii. 5; cf. Ps. cxxv. 2; Isai. xxvii. 3), which, preserving them distinct from the idolatrous nations round them and from their abominations, was for them the pledge and assurance of the continued protection of God. Add to this that not inwardly only, but outwardly as well, Judæa, through its geographical position, was hedged round; by the bounty of nature on every side circumscribed and defended; being

<sup>1</sup> Delitzsch, in the parallel passage of Isaiah, does not hesitate to interpret these: 'The tower for protection and ornament in the midst of the vineyard is Jerusalem as the royal city, with Sion as the royal citadel (Mic. iv. 8): the winepress is the temple, where, according to Ps. xxxvi. 8, the heavenly wine of joy flows in streams, and where, according to Ps. xlii., all the thirst of the soul is directed.'

<sup>2</sup> Μεσότοιχον τοῦ φραγμοῦ there, as φραγμός here.

<sup>3</sup> Ambrose (*Exp. in Luc.* ix. 24) explains it: 'He walled it about with the protection of the divine guardianship, lest it should lie too easy a prey to the attacks of the spiritual wild beasts;' and *Hexæm.* iii. 12: 'He surrounded it as with a kind of wall of celestial precepts, and with the guardianship of angels.'

guarded on the east by the river Jordan and the two lakes, on the south by the desert and mountainous country of Idumæa, on the west by the sea, and by Anti-Libanus on the north: for so, observes Vitranga, had God in his counsels determined, who willed that Israel should dwell alone. It is not so easy to point out distinct spiritual benefits shadowed forth by the wine-press<sup>1</sup> and the tower.<sup>2</sup> Many attempts to discover such have been made; but they all have something fanciful and arbitrary about them; and, though often ingenious, yet fail to command an unreserved assent.

The householder, who might now say, 'What could have been done more to my vineyard, that I have not done?' '*let it out to husbandmen*' (Cant. viii. 11); '*and went into a far country*;' and as St. Luke adds, '*for a long while.*' What the terms of his agreement with the husbandmen were, we are not expressly told, but, as the sequel clearly implies, having made a covenant with them to receive a fixed proportion of the fruits in their season. Since, as is evident, the '*husbandmen*' must be distinguished from the vineyard they were set to cultivate and keep, we must understand by them the spiritual chiefs of the nation, to whom God, in the very constitution of the Jewish polity, had given authority to sit in Moses' chair, and from it to teach the people (Mal. ii. 7; Ezek. xxxiv. 2; Matt. xxiii. 2, 3). By the vineyard itself will then naturally be signified the great body of the nation, who, instructed and taught by these, should have brought forth

<sup>1</sup> Generally the wine-press is taken to signify the prophetic institution. Thus Irenæus (*Con. Hær.* iv. 36): 'In digging a wine-press he prepared a lodging-place for the spirit of prophecy.' Hilary: 'Upon whom [the prophets] an abundance of the fire of the Holy Spirit was to flow after the manner of new wine.' So Ambrose, *Exp. in Luc.* ix. 24.

<sup>2</sup> In Isaiah two other principal benefits are recorded,—that the vineyard was on a fruitful hill (*apertos Bacchus amat colles*, Virgil), sloping towards the rays of the sun, and that the stones were gathered out from it (2 Kin. iii. 19), the last an allusion to the casting out of the Canaanites, who else might have proved stumbling-blocks for God's people (Ps. cxxv. 3). With the whole parable Ezek. xvi. will form an instructive parallel.

fruits of righteousness unto God.<sup>1</sup> In the miracles which went along with the deliverance from Egypt, the giving of the law from Sinai, and the planting in Canaan, God openly dealt with his people, made, as we know, an express covenant with them ; but this done, withdrew for a while, not speaking any more to them face to face (Deut. xxxiv. 10–12), but waiting in patience to see what the law would effect, and what manner of works they, under the teaching of their appointed guides, would bring forth.<sup>2</sup>

*‘And when the time of the fruit drew near, he sent his servants to the husbandmen, that they might receive the fruits of it,’* his share of the produce, whatever that might be (Cant. viii. 12). There was, of course, no time when God did not demand obedience, gratitude, love from his people ; all times therefore are in one sense *‘times of the fruit’* (Isai. v. 7). But the conditions of the parable demand this language ; and moreover, in the history of souls and of nations, there are seasons which even more than all other are *‘times of fruit ;’* when God requires such with more than usual earnestness, when it will fare most ill with a soul or nation, if these be not found. But the *‘servants’* who should receive this fruit, how, it may be asked, should these be distinguished from the *‘husbandmen’* ? Exactly in this, that the *‘servants,’* that is,

<sup>1</sup> Frederick Maurice, looking over these pages before their publication, appended here this note, which every reader will be glad I have preserved : ‘I do not absolutely question the truth of this interpretation, but it seems to me rather an escape from a difficulty which does not exist more in the parable than in all our customary language about the Church. The Church is both *teacher* and *taught* ; but the teachers are not merely the ministers ; the whole Church of one generation teaches the whole Church of another, by its history, acts, words, mistakes, &c. The Church existing out of time an unchangeable body teaches the members of the Church existing in every particular time.’

<sup>2</sup> Ambrose (*Exp. in Luc. ix. 23*) : ‘At many seasons He withdrew from them, lest his demand should seem over-hasty ; for the indulgence of liberality makes stubbornness all the more inexcusable.’ Theophylact : ‘The sojourning of God afar off is his patience.’ Bengel : ‘A season of divine silence is indicated, when men act as they please.’ See Ezek. viii. 12 ; Ps. x. 5.

the prophets and other more eminent ministers and messengers of God, *were sent*; being raised up at critical epochs, each with his own direct mission and message; the '*husbandmen*,' on the other hand, are the more permanent ecclesiastical authorities, whose authority lay in the very constitution of the theocracy itself.<sup>1</sup> On this receiving of the fruits Olshausen<sup>2</sup> says well, 'These fruits which are demanded, are in nowise to be explained as particular works, nor yet as a condition of honesty and uprightness, but much rather as the repentance and the inward longing after true inward righteousness, which the law was unable to bring about. It is by no means implied that the law had not an influence in producing uprightness; it cuts off the grosser manifestations of sin, and reveals its hidden abomination; so that a righteousness according to the law can even under the law come forth as fruit; while yet, to be sufficing, this must have a sense of the need of a redemption for its basis (Rom. iii. 20). The servants therefore here appear as those who seek for these spiritual needs, that they may link to them the promises concerning a coming Redeemer; but the unfaithful husbandmen who had abused their own

<sup>1</sup> Bengel: 'The servants are the extraordinary and more eminent ministers; the husbandmen the ordinary ones.'

<sup>2</sup> 'Ἀπὸ τοῦ καρποῦ—according to the well-known *métayer* system still largely practised in parts of France and in Italy: see Fawcett's *Political Economy*, 4th ed. p. 202. Pliny (*Ep.* ix. 37) writes that the only way in which he could obtain any returns from some estates of his, hitherto badly managed, was by letting them on this system: 'The one means of improvement is for me to let them, not for a money rent, but for a share in the produce.' He was to appoint some guardians (exactores and custodes), differing only from these servants, that they were to be constantly on the spot to see that he obtained his just share of the produce. Chardin (*Voy. en Perse*, vol. v. p. 384, Langlès' ed.) has much on the *métayer* system as he found it in Persia, and illustrates our parable well, showing what a constant source it proved of violence and fraud: 'This agreement, which appears, and which ought to be, an honest bargain, nevertheless proves an inexhaustible source of fraud, controversy, and violence, in which justice is hardly ever observed, and, what is very remarkable, it is the lord who always has the worse, and is the sufferer;' all which is exactly what here we find. See Du Cange, s. vv. *Medietarius* and *Medietas*.



position, denied and slew these messengers of grace.' This 'time of the fruit' would not, according to the Levitical law, have arrived till the fifth year after the planting of the vineyard. For three years the fruit was to be uncircumcised, and therefore ungathered; in the fourth, it was 'holy to praise the Lord withal;' and only in the fifth could those who tended the vineyard either themselves enjoy the fruit or render of the same to others (Lev. xix. 23-25). During this long period the husbandmen may have managed to forget that they were tenants at all, and not possessors in fee; and this may help to explain what follows.

*'And the husbandmen took his servants, and beat one, and killed another, and stoned another. Again, he sent other servants more than the first, and they did unto them likewise.'* The two later Evangelists record the wickedness of these wicked husbandmen more in detail than the first, St. Luke tracing very distinctly their advance under the sense of impunity from bad to worse. When the first servant came, they '*beat him, and sent him away empty.*' The next they '*entreated shamefully;*' or according to St. Mark, who defines the very nature of the outrage, '*at him they cast stones, and wounded him in the head,<sup>1</sup> and sent him away shamefully handled.*'<sup>2</sup> One might almost gather from these last words that in their wanton insolence they devised devices of scorn

<sup>1</sup> Ἐκεφαλαίωσαν (Mark xii. 4). Our Translators have here returned to Wiclif's rendering; that of the intermediate Protestant Versions, '*brake his head,*' probably seeming to them too familiar. It is a singular use of a verb, nowhere else used but as to gather up in one sum, as under one head; of which correcter use we have a good example in the *Epistle* of Barnabas, where of the Son of God it is said that he came in the flesh, ἵνα τὸ τέλειον τῶν ἀμαρτιῶν κεφαλαίωσῃ τοῖς διώξασιν ἐν θανάτῳ τοὺς προφήτας αὐτοῦ (c. v.). Wakefield's suggestion (*Silv. Crit.* ii. p. 76), that ἔκεφαλαίωσαν here is, breviter vel summam egerunt, they made short work of it, or as Lightfoot expresses it, referring to the fact that the servant came to demand payment,—they squared accounts with him (ironically), is quite untenable. The accusative αὐτόν is decisive against it, as against Theophylact's anticipation of this explanation: συνετέλεσαν καὶ ἐκορύφωσαν τὴν ὕβριν.

<sup>2</sup> Ἀπέστειλαν ἠτιμωμένον, or, as in the best texts, ἠτίμησαν.

and wrong, not expressly named, against this servant; such, perhaps, as Hanun did, when he 'took David's servants, and shaved off the one half of their beards, and cut off their garments in the middle, and sent them away' (2 Sam. x. 4). The third they wounded, and cast out of the vineyard with violence; flung him forth, it might be, with hardly any life in him. In the two earlier Evangelists the outrage reaches even to the killing of some of the subordinate messengers; while in St. Luke this extremity of outrage is reserved for the son. The latter thus presents the series of crimes on an ever-ascending scale; but the former are truer to historical fact, seeing that not a few of the prophets were not merely maltreated, but actually put to death. Thus, if we may trust Jewish tradition, Jeremiah was stoned by the exiles in Egypt, Isaiah sawn asunder by king Manasseh. For an abundant historical justification of this description, and as showing that the past ingratitude of the people is not painted here in colours darker than the facts would warrant, see Jer. xx. 1, 2; xxxvii. 15; xxxviii. 6; 1 Kin. xviii. 13; xix. 14; xxii. 24-27; 2 Kin. vi. 31; xxi. 16; 2 Chron. xxiv. 19-22; xxxvi. 15, 16: and also Acts vii. 52; 1 Thess. ii. 15; the whole passage finding its best commentary in the words of the Epistle to the Hebrews: 'And others had trial of cruel mockings and scourgings, yea, moreover, of bonds and imprisonment: they were stoned, they were sawn asunder, were tempted, were slain with the sword; . . . of whom the world was not worthy' (xi. 37, 38).

The patience of the householder under these extraordinary provocations is wonderful, sending as he does messenger after messenger to win back these wicked men to a sense of their duty, instead of resuming at once possession of his vineyard, and inflicting summary vengeance upon them. It needs to be thus magnified, seeing that it represents to us the infinite patience and long-suffering of God: 'Howbeit I sent unto you all my servants the prophets, rising early and sending them, saying, Oh, do not this abominable thing that I hate' (Jer. xlv. 4). 'Nevertheless, they were disobedient,

and rebelled against Thee, and cast thy law behind their backs, and slew thy prophets which testified against them to turn them to Thee, and they wrought great provocations' (Neh. ix. 26). The whole confession of the Levites as here recorded is in itself an admirable commentary on this parable.

'But last of all he sent unto them his son,' or in the still more affecting words of St. Mark, 'Having yet therefore one son, his well-beloved, he sent him also last unto them, saying, They will reverence my son' (cf. Heb. i. 1, 2). When the householder expresses his conviction, that however those wicked men may have outraged and defied his inferior messengers, they will reverence his son, we need not embarrass ourselves, as some have done, with the fact that He whom the householder represents must have fully known from the beginning what treatment *his* Son would meet from those to whom He sent Him. Not that there is not a difficulty, but it is the same which meets us everywhere, that of the reconciliation of man's freedom with God's foreknowledge.<sup>1</sup> That they are reconcilable we know, and that we cannot reconcile them we know; and this is all which can be said upon the matter. The description of this the last of the ambassadors as the son of the householder, as his only one, '*his well-beloved,*' all marks as strongly as possible the difference of rank between Christ and the prophets, the superior dignity of *his* person, who only was a Son in the highest sense of the word<sup>2</sup> (Heb. iii. 5, 6); and some, doubtless, of those who heard, quite understood what He meant, and the honour

<sup>1</sup> Jerome: 'This which he says, "They will reverence my son," is not spoken out of ignorance; for of what can the householder be ignorant, seeing that in this place he must be understood to stand for God? But God is always spoken of as dubitating, in order that the freedom of man's will may be preserved.' Cf. Ambrose, *De Fide*, v. 17, 18.

<sup>2</sup> This is often urged by early Church writers, when proving the divinity of the Son; as by Ambrose (*De Fide*, v. 7): 'Observe that he named the servants first, the son afterwards; that thou mayst know that God the only-begotten Son, in respect of the power of his divinity, has neither a name nor any fellowship in common with the servants.' Cf. Irenæus, *Con. Hær.* iv. 36, 1.

which He thus claimed as peculiarly his own, however unable to turn his words against Himself, and to accuse Him of making Himself, as indeed He did, the Son of God (John v. 18). In this sending of his own Son by the heavenly Father, is the last and crowning effort of divine mercy. If it fail, on the one side all the resources even of heavenly love will have been exhausted; while on the other, those whose sin has caused it to fail will have filled up the measure of their guilt.

*'But when the husbandmen saw the son, they said among themselves, This is the heir; come, let us kill him, and let us seize on his inheritance.'* Compare John xi. 47-53, and the evil counsels of Joseph's brethren against him: 'When they saw him afar off, even before he came near unto them, they conspired against him to slay him, and they said one to another, Behold, this dreamer cometh. Come now, therefore, and let us slay him, . . . and we shall see what will become of his dreams' (Gen. xxxvii. 19, 20). As they, thinking to disappoint the purpose of God concerning their younger brother, help to bring it to pass, so the Jewish rulers were the instruments to fulfil that same purpose concerning Christ, which they meant for ever to defeat<sup>1</sup> (Acts iii. 18; iv. 27, 28).—*'This is the heir;'* the word is not used here in its laxer sense as a synonym for lord, like *heres* for *dominus*; but more accurately, he for whom the inheritance is meant, who is not in present possession, but to whom it will in due course rightfully arrive; not, as in earthly relations, by the death, but by the free appointment of the actual possessor. Christ is 'heir of all things' (Heb. i. 2), not as He is the Son of God, for the Church has always detected Arian tendencies lurking in that interpretation, but as He is the Son of man (Ephes. i. 20-23; Phil. ii. 9-11). So Theodoret: 'The Lord Christ is heir of all things, not as God, but as man; for as God He is maker of all.'

It is the heart which speaks in God's hearing (Ps. liii. 1);

<sup>1</sup> Augustine: 'They killed that they might possess; and, because they killed, they lost.'

the thought of men's heart is their true speech, and is therefore here regarded as the utterance of their lips. We cannot, indeed, imagine the Pharisees, even in their most secret counsels, ever trusting one another so far, or daring to look their own wickedness so directly in the face, as *to say*, in as many words, 'This is the Messiah, therefore let us slay Him.' But they desired that the inheritance might be theirs. What God had willed should only be transient and temporary, enduring till the times of reformation, they would fain have seen permanent;—and this, because they had prerogatives and privileges under that imperfect dispensation, which would cease when that which was perfect had come; or rather which, not ceasing, would yet be transformed into other and higher privileges, for which they had no care. The great Master-builder was about to take down the scaffolding provisionally reared, but which had now served its end; and this his purpose they, the under-builders, were setting themselves to oppose,<sup>1</sup> and were determined, at whatever cost, to resist to the uttermost. What God had founded, they would fain possess without God and against God; and imagined that they could do so; for indeed all self-righteousness what is it but an attempt to kill the heir, and to seize on the divine inheritance, a seeking to comprehend and take down into self that light, which is only light so long as it is recognized as something above self; whereof man is permitted to be a partaker; but which he neither himself originated, nor yet can ever possess in fee, or as his own, or otherwise than as continually receiving from on high; a light too, which, by the very success of the attempt to take it into his own possession, is as inevitably lost and extinguished as would be a ray of our natural light if we succeeded in cutting it off from its luminous source?

<sup>1</sup> Hilary: 'The design of the husbandmen and this expectation of the inheritance through the murder of the heir, is the empty hope that by the death of Christ the glory of the Law could be retained.' Grotius: 'By these words it is shown that the priests and chiefs of the Jewish people acted thus in the fervour of their desire to compel the Divine Law to serve their own ambition and profit.'

‘*And they caught him, and cast him out of the vineyard, and slew him.*’ All three Evangelists describe the son as thus ‘*cast out of the vineyard,*’ reminding us of Him who ‘*suffered without the gate*’ (Heb. xiii. 12, 13; John xix. 27); cut off in the intention of those who put Him to death from the people of God, and from all share in their blessings. Thus when Naboth perished on charges of blasphemy against God and the king, that is, for theocratic sins, ‘*they carried him forth out of the city, and stoned him with stones that he died*’<sup>1</sup> (1 Kin. xxi. 13; cf. Acts vii. 58; xxi. 30). In St. Mark the husbandmen slay the son first, and only afterwards cast out the body (xii. 8; cf. Jer. xxii. 19). They deny it the common rites of sepulture, as Creon to Polynices; fling it forth, as much as to say, *that* is their answer to the householder’s demands. The Lord so little doubts the extremities to which the hatred of his enemies will proceed, that in the parable He holds up to them the crime which they were meditating in their hearts, and in a few days should bring to the birth, as one already accomplished; not indeed thus binding them to this sin, but rather showing to them as in a mirror the hideousness of it, and, if this were possible, terrifying them from its actual consummation.<sup>2</sup>

If, however, this might not be, and if, like the husbandmen in the parable, they were resolved to consummate their crime, what should be their doom? This too they may see reflected in the mirror which Christ holds up before their

<sup>1</sup> Naboth dying for his vineyard has been often adduced as a prophetic type of the death of Christ and the purpose of that death. Thus Ambrose addresses the vineyard of the Lord, purchased with his own blood (*Exp. in Luc. ix. 33*): ‘*Hail, vineyard, worthy of so great a guardian: thou wast consecrated by the blood, not of a single Naboth, but of countless prophets, and (what is more) by the precious blood of the Lord. Naboth defended a temporal vineyard, but thou wast planted for us in perpetuity by the death of many martyrs, and by the cross of the Apostles rivalling the passion of their Lord wast extended to the limits of the whole world.*’

<sup>2</sup> We have a remarkable example of a like prophesying to men their wickedness, as a last endeavour to turn them away from that wickedness, in Elisha’s prophecy to Hazael (2 Kin. viii. 12-15).

eyes. 'When the Lord, therefore, of the vineyard cometh, what will he do unto those husbandmen?' It is very instructive to note the way in which successive generations, which during so many centuries had been filling up the measure of the iniquity of Israel, are contemplated throughout but as one body of husbandmen; God's word being everywhere opposed to that shallow nominalism which would make 'nation' no more than a convenient form of language to express a certain aggregation of individuals. God will deal with nations as living organisms, and as having a moral unity of their own, and this continuing unbroken from age to age. Were it otherwise, all confession of our fathers' sins would be a mockery, and such words as our Lord's at Matt. xxiii. 32-35, without any meaning at all. Neither is there any injustice in this law of God's government, with which He encounters our selfish, self-isolating tendencies; for while there is thus a life of the whole, there is also a life for every part; and thus it is always possible for each individual even of that generation which, having filled up the last drop of the measure, is being chastised for all its own and its fathers' iniquities, by personal faith and repentance to withdraw himself from the general doom; not indeed always possible for him to escape his share in the outward calamity (though often there will be a Pella when Jerusalem is destroyed, an Ark when a world perishes), but always to escape from that which is the woe of the woe, from the wrath of God, of which the outward calamity is but the form and expression (Jer. xxxix. 11; Ezek. xi. 16).

The necessity of preserving the due probabilities of the narrative makes it impossible that the son himself should execute the final vengeance on these wicked husbandmen. He is slain, and cannot, like Him whom he shadows forth, rise again to exact the penalties of their guilt. This '*the lord of the vineyard*,' now for the first time so called, must do: neither is there anything here inconsistent with the general teaching of Scripture, for it is the Father, revealing Himself in the Son, who both gave the law at Sinai, and who also,

when the time of vengeance had arrived, visited and judged the apostate Church of Israel.

Perhaps the Pharisees, to whom Christ addressed the question, making the same appeal to them which Isaiah had made to their fathers (v. 8), and extorting their condemnation from their own lips,<sup>1</sup> had hitherto missed the scope of the parable, and before they were aware, pronounced sentence against themselves: '*He will miserably destroy those wicked men,*<sup>2</sup> and will let out his vineyard to other husbandmen,

<sup>1</sup> Vitringa: 'The justice of God is so clear that if, putting aside all feeling, a man contemplates in another like to himself that which in the blindness of self-love he does not choose to see in himself, he is compelled by his conscience to recognise the justice of the divine cause. Nay, God condemns no man who is not condemned also by his own conscience. God has in every man his tribunal and his judgment seat, and judges man by means of man.'

<sup>2</sup> Κακὸς κακῶς (= pessimos pessime), a proverbial expression, and, as Grotius observes, taken from the most classical Greek. This parallel, a parallel in much more than those two words, may suffice in place of many that might be adduced:

Τοιγάρ σφ' Ὀλύμπου τοῦδ' ὁ πρεσβέων πατήρ,  
Μνήμων τ' Ἐρινός, καὶ τελεσφόρος Δίκη  
Κακὸς κακῶς φθείρειαν, ὥσπερ ἤθελον  
Τὸν ἄνδρα λάβαις ἐκβαλεῖν ἀναξίως.

Sophocles, *Ajax*, 1361-1364.

Wherefore may he who rules in yon wide heaven,  
And the unforgetting fury-spirit, and she,  
Justice, who crowns the right, so ruin them  
With cruelest destruction, even as they  
Meant heartlessly to rob him of his tomb.

Lewis Campbell.

Similar idioms are frequent in Greek. Thus λαμπρὸς λαμπρῶς, μεγάλοι μεγάλως, καθαρὰ καθαρῶς, σεμνὸς σεμνῶς, καλὸν καλῶς (Lobeck, *Paralipomena*, p. 58). The Authorized Version has not attempted to preserve the paronomasia: which, however, is not very difficult, and has been reproduced in the Revised Version, 'He will *miserably* destroy those *miserable* men.' The same difficulty, such as it is, attends the double φθείρειν at 1 Cor. iii. 17, for which the Authorized Version has equally failed to give an equivalent. How remarkable, as read in the light of these words, is the conviction expressed by Josephus (*B. J.* iv. 5, 2),



*which shall render him the fruits in their seasons ;*’ or it may be that, perceiving well enough, they had yet hitherto pretended not to perceive his drift, and so drew from Him words more explicit still ; such as it was idle any longer to affect to misunderstand : ‘ *Therefore say I unto you, The kingdom of God shall be taken from you, and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof.*’ For then at length Christ and his adversaries stood face to face, as did once before a prophet and a wicked king of Israel, when the prophet, having obtained in his disguise a sentence from the lips of the king against himself, removed the ashes from his face, and the king ‘ discerned him that he was of the prophets,’ and understood that he had unconsciously pronounced his own doom (1 Kin. xx. 41).<sup>1</sup>—The ‘ *God forbid,*’ which the ‘ *people* ’ uttered (Luke xx. 16), —the Pharisees had too much wariness and self-command to allow any such exclamation to escape from their lips—shows plainly that the aim of the parable had not escaped *them*, that they saw the drift of it betimes. The exclamation itself was either an expression of fear, desiring that such evil might be averted ; or else of unbelief, ‘ That shall never be ; we are God’s people, and shall remain such to the end : ’ and this more probably than that, from the spirit and temper of those who utter it (Ezek. xxxiii. 24 ; Matt. iii. 9 ; Rom. ii. 17).

But this truth, so strange and unwelcome to his hearers, rests not on his word alone. The same was long ago fore-announced in those Scriptures to which his adversaries professed to appeal, and from which they condemned Him : ‘ *Did ye never read in the Scriptures, The stone which the builders rejected, the same is become the head of the corner ?*’ The quotation is from Ps. cxviii. 22, 23, a psalm which the Jews acknowledged as applying to the King Messiah (Matt. xix. 38), and of which there is a like application at Acts iv.

that one man’s murder was the cause of the destruction of Jerusalem. This was most true, although Ananus the high-priest was not the man.

<sup>1</sup> Compare the rules which Cicero (*De Invent.* i. 32) gives for this bringing of an adversary unconsciously to convict himself.

11 ; 1 Pet. ii. 7 ; with an allusion somewhat more remote, at Ephes. ii. 20.<sup>1</sup> The passage quoted forms an exact parallel with this parable ; all which the Lord threatens here, being implicitly threatened there. ‘ *The builders* ’ there correspond to ‘ *the husbandmen* ’ here ; as those were appointed of God to carry up the spiritual temple, so these to cultivate the spiritual vineyard ; the rejection of the chief corner-stone corresponds to the denying and murdering of the heir. There is another motive for abandoning the image of the vineyard ; I mean its inadequacy to set forth one important moment of the truth, which yet must by no means be passed over ; namely this, that the malice of men should not defeat the purpose of God, that the Son should yet be the heir ; and that not merely vengeance should be taken, but that He should take it. Now all this is distinctly involved in the Lord’s concluding words : ‘ *Whosoever shall fall on this stone shall be broken ; but on whomsoever it shall fall, it will grind him to powder.* ’ The rejected stone, having become the head of the corner, is itself the instrument of their punishment who have set it at nought.<sup>2</sup> *They* fall on the stone who are offended at Christ in his low estate (Isai. viii. 14 ; liii. 2 ; Luke ii. 34 ; iv. 22–29 ; John iv. 44) ; of this sin his hearers were already guilty. There was a worse sin which they were on the point of committing, which He warns them would be followed by a more tremendous punishment ; they on whom the stone falls are those who set

<sup>1</sup> The ‘ chief corner stone ’ there = ‘ the corner stone,’ Job. xxxviii. 6 ; ‘ the stone became the head of the corner ’ here : ‘ the head stone,’ Zech. iv. 7 (see 1 Kin. v. 17). Christ is this corner-stone, as uniting Jew and Gentile, making both one ; thus Augustine (*Serm.* lxxxviii. 11) : ‘ An angle joins together two walls coming from opposite sides. What is so opposite as the circumcision and the uncircumcision, which have the one wall on the side of the Jews, the other on the side of the Gentiles ? But by the corner-stone they are joined together.’

<sup>2</sup> Cajetan : ‘ He adds something more than would have been revealed by the parable : for the parable brought us as far as the punishment : but by this addition it is further stated that the murder of the son did not deprive the son of the inheritance : for it is this that is signified by the addition of the prophecy concerning the Messiah under the metaphor of the stone.’

themselves in self-conscious opposition against the Lord ; who, knowing who He is, do yet to the end oppose themselves to Him and to his kingdom ;<sup>1</sup> and these shall not merely fall and be broken ; for one might recover himself, though with some present harm, from such a fall as this ; but on them the stone shall fall as from heaven, and shall grind<sup>2</sup> them to powder,—in the words of Daniel (ii. 35), ‘ like the chaff of the summer threshing-floors,’—crushing and destroying them for ever.<sup>3</sup>

All three Evangelists note the exasperation of the Chief Priests and Pharisees, when they perceived, as all did at last, though some sooner than others, that the parable was spoken against *them* (cf. Jer. xviii. 18). They no longer kept any terms with the Lord, and, only that ‘ *they feared the multitude,*’ would have laid violent hands on Him at once. Yet not even so does He give them up ; but having, in this parable, set forth their relation to God as a relation of *duty*, shown them that a *charge* was laid upon them, with the

<sup>1</sup> So Tertullian (*Adv. Marc.* iii. 7) ; and Augustine (*Enarr. in Ps.* cix. 5) : ‘ Christ the true stone lies in this world as if fastened to the earth, but in the judgment to be He shall come as from on high, and shall grind the wicked to powder : of that stone it was said, “ Whosoever shall fall on this stone shall be broken ; but on whomsoever it shall fall, it will grind him to powder : ” to be broken is different from to be ground to powder : to be broken is the less of the two.’

<sup>2</sup> Λικμήσει, from λικμός (= πτόον, Matt. iii. 12), the fan with which the chaff, which in the act of threshing had been broken into minute fragments, is scattered and driven away upon the wind (Isai. xvii. 13 ; ςli. 2, 15, 16 ; Ps. i. 4). In the New Testament it occurs only here ; in the parallel passage, Dan. ii. 44, λικμήσει πάσας τὰς βασιλείας.

<sup>3</sup> H. de Sto. Victore (*Annot. in Luc.*) : ‘ According to the moral meaning a vineyard is let out, when the mystery of baptism is entrusted to the faithful for them to labour in. Three servants are sent to receive of the fruits, when the Law, the Psalms, and the Prophets respectively exhort to a good life : they are received with insults or beaten and cast out, when men scorn or blaspheme the word they hear. The heir, who is sent last of all, is killed by him who scorns the Son of God, and casts insult upon the Spirit, by whom he was sanctified. The vineyard is given to another, when the humble is enriched by the grace which the proud casts from him.’

guilt they incurred in neglecting to fulfil it, so in that which follows, He sets forth to them the same in a yet more inviting light, as a relation of *privilege*. He presents to them their work not any more as a burden laid upon them, but as a grace imparted to them;—which, therefore, they incurred an equal guilt, or indeed a greater, in counting light of or despising. If this is a more legal, that is a more evangelical, parable.