

Notes on the Parables
by
Archbishop R. C. Trench D.D.

PUBLISHERS' NOTE. (1902AD.)

THE present popular edition of the PARABLES, *with a translation of the notes*, carries out an intention which had long been in the Author's mind, but which want of leisure—and, when leisure at last was granted, failing health prevented him from accomplishing.

The text has received the Author's latest emendations, as made by him in his own copy during the last years of his life.

The notes are translated so as to bring them within the reach of general readers. In the few cases in which there existed any recognized versions of the original works quoted, these have been followed, so far as was compatible with correctness; but more often, no such version existing, a new translation has been made. The whole of the work, which has been valued by the Church and by scholars for nearly fifty years, is now brought in its entirety within the reach of all, and takes for the first time its final form. The Author never allowed his books to be stereotyped, in order that he might constantly improve them, and permanence has only become possible when his diligent hand can touch the work no more.

PARABLE XXX.

THE POUNDS.

LUKE xix. 11 27.

MUCH that might have been fitly said upon this parable has been anticipated in treating that of the Talents. The reasons for affirming them to be, not different reports of the same parable, but parables altogether distinct from one another, were then given; nor shall I, save very briefly, repeat them here.¹ The words with which St. Luke introduces the parable are important for its right understanding: '*He added and spake a parable, because he was nigh to Jerusalem, and because they thought that the kingdom of God should immediately appear.*' It was uttered then to repress impatience, to teach the need of a patient waiting for Christ; and, as we further find, of an active working for Him till the time of his return.² Such was its aim as regarded those who had yielded themselves

¹ Chrysostom (*In Matth. Hom. 78*) distinctly affirms them to be different: and had not Augustine believed them so, we may confidently assume that in his work *De Consensu Evangelistarum* he would have sought to bring them into harmony.

² Godet: 'The dominant idea of this parable is of a time of trial which must needs come between the departure and return of the Lord to prepare the judgment which shall fix the position of every man in the state of things which shall follow the Coming.'

without reserve to Him, as servants to their Lord. But He had also other hearers on this occasion, such as had not indeed thus attached themselves to Him, but a multitude drawn together by wonder, by curiosity, and by other mingled motives. These, with a certain good will toward Him and his doctrine, and so long as in his presence acknowledging his influence, were not the less exposed to all the evil influences of their age, and in danger of being drawn into the great stream of hostility now running so fiercely and so fast against Him. To this danger they would be exposed still more when his immediate presence should be withdrawn from them, when his ignominious death should have seemed to give the lie to all his lofty pretensions. For them is meant that part of the parable (ver. 14, 27) concerning the citizens, who would not have one of their fellows set over them as their king, followed him with their hate, disclaimed obedience to him even while it was yet uncertain whether he should be set over them or not; but who at his return payed the fearful penalties of their guilt.

‘*He said therefore, certain nobleman went into a far country to receive for himself a kingdom, and to return*’ (cf. Mark xiii. 34). In the great Roman empire, where the senate of Rome, and afterwards its emperors, though not kings themselves, yet made and unmade kings, such a circumstance as this must have been of frequent occurrence. Thus Herod the Great was at first no more than a subordinate officer in Judæa; flying to Rome before Antigonus, he was there declared by the senate, through the influence of Antony, king of the Jews.³ In like manner his son Archelaus must personally wait upon Augustus, before inheriting the dominions left him by his father; and even then did not inherit them as king but only as ethnarch. Spoken as this parable was at or in the neighbourhood of Jericho, where stood the magnificent palace which Archelaus built, his example may very easily have presented itself to the Lord. History furnishes many other examples, for it was felt over the civilized world, in the striking words of the historian of the Maccabees;—‘whom they [the Romans] would help to a kingdom, those reign; and whom again they would, they displace’ (1 Macc. viii. 13).—That this claimant of a crown was one well born, a ‘*nobleman*,’⁴ is only what we might naturally expect. No other would be likely to lift his hopes so high; or would give sufficient promise of maintaining himself on his throne, to render the higher authority willing to install him there. The epithet has its highest fitness; for who was of such noble birth as He who, even accord-

³ First, procurator (Josephus, *Antt.* xiv. 9. 2) ; afterwards, (xiv. 11. 4); then (xiv. 14. 5, 6; of xv. 6. 7).

⁴ . On the distinction between and see Aristotle, *Rhet.* ii. 15. The first is well-born, the second undegenerate.

ing to the flesh, came of earth's first blood,—was the Son of Abraham, the Son of David (Matt. i. 1); who, besides all this, was the eternal and only-begotten Son of God?

The kingdom which this nobleman goes to receive can scarcely be, as some understand it, another and a distant kingdom; but rather he goes to receive the investiture of that kingdom, whereof before he was one of the more illustrious citizens, and which after a while he returns to reign over as its king. Either supposition, it is true, would suit *his* case, whom this nobleman represents. He went to be enthroned in his heavenly state, and in heaven to rule over all as the Son of man (Heb ii. 7, 8; Phil. ii. 9-11). But it may with equal truth be affirmed that He went to receive solemn investiture of that earthly kingdom which He had purchased with his blood, and which hereafter He shall return and claim as his own, sitting on the throne of his father David; and the parable itself suggests this last as the kingdom intended here. It is over fellow-citizens that the nobleman departs to obtain a dominion; else would there be no meaning in their message, '*We will not have this man to reign over us.*' It is among fellow-citizens that we find him on his return exercising kingly functions; setting his servants over five cities, and over ten (ver. 17, 19); having power of life and death, and executing extreme judgment on those that had sent messages of hate and defiance after him (ver. 27).

Before, however, he went, '*he called his ten servants,*'—or rather, '*ten servants of his,*'⁵—'*and delivered them ten pounds, and said unto them, Occupy,*'⁶—or, as in the margin, '*Employ in trading,*'—'*till I come.*' The sum which they shall thus '*occupy*' is very much smaller than that which, in St. Matthew, the man travelling into a far country committed to *his* servants there;⁷ though I do not know that we need seek any explanation of this. How remarkable is this *still* ministry, these occupations of peace in which the servants of the future king shall be engaged, and that while a rebellion is raging. A caviller significantly enough demands, '*Why did he not distribute weapons to his servants?*' Such under the circumstances would have been the most natural thing to do.'

⁵ Besides that the original requires this, it would be absurd to suppose that, with the immense households of antiquity, which, as Seneca says, were *nations* rather than *families* (see Becker, *Gallus*, vol. i. p. 196), this nobleman, of consequence enough to be raised to a royal dignity, had but ten servants belonging to him.

⁶ '*Occupy*' is here a Latinism; thus *occupam* pecuniam, because money in business, or put out to interest, does not lie idle. This use of 'to occupy' is sufficiently common in our Elizabethan English; thus in North's *Plutarch*, p. 629, Phocion, refusing Alexander's gift, says, 'If I should take this sum of money and *occupy it not*, it is as much as I had it not;' cf. Judg. xvi. 11; and my *Select Glossary*, s. v.

⁷ A talent was = £243 15s.; a pound (mina) = £4. 1s. 3d. (see the *Dict. of Gr. and Rom. Antt.* s. v. Drachma, p. 360).

Doubtless *the most natural*, as Peter felt, when he cut off the ear of the servant of the high priest; as all have felt, who have sought to fight the world with its own weapons, and by the wrath of man to work the righteousness of God. Such identifying of the Church with a worldly kingdom has been the idea of the Papacy, such of the Anabaptists. Men in either case feeling strongly that there must be a kingdom of God, have supposed that it was immediately to appear (ver. 11), and that they, and not Christ Himself, were to bring it into outward form and subsistence; instead of seeing that their part was, with the diligent but silent occupation of their talent, to lay the rudiments of that kingdom, and so to prepare the world for the outbreaking of it; which yet should only be when the King Himself returned in his glory.

‘But his citizens hated him, and sent a message after him, saying, We will not have this man to reign over us.’ Many understand here that his fellow-citizens, aware of his purpose, give him notice beforehand that they, however he may receive at other hands the dominion over them, will own no allegiance to him. The words describe more probably an embassy which these despatch to the court whither he is gone, to anticipate and counterwork him there, to proclaim how unwelcome his exaltation will be;—‘We do not desire that this man should be made our king.’⁸ It was exactly thus that a faction of the Jews, in the case of Archelaus, sent ambassadors to the court of Augustus to accuse him there, and if possible to hinder his elevation over them.⁹ The Jews were especially Christ’s fellow-‘*citizens*,’ for, according to the flesh, He was of the seed of Abraham, a Jew (Rom. ix. 5; John iv. 22), and a member of the Jewish polity; and they ‘*hated Him*’ not merely in his life, and unto death; but every persecution of his servants, the stoning of Stephen, the beheading of James, the persecutions of Paul, and all the wrongs done to his people because they were his, these each and all were messages of defiance sent after Him, implicit declarations upon their part that they would not have Him for their king. Twice before yet He had gone to receive his kingdom, this very declaration found formal utterance from their lips,—once when they cried to Pilate, ‘We have no king but Caesar;’ and again, when they remonstrated with him, ‘Write not, The King of the Jews’ (John xix. 21; cf. Acts xvii. 7). But the strictest fulfilment of these words is to be found in the demeanour of the Jews after his Ascension, their fierce hostility to Christ in his infant Church (Acts xii 3; xiii. 45; xiv. 18; xvii. 5; xviii. 6; xxii. 22; xxiii. 12; 1 Thess. ii. 15). When we give this parable a wider range, and find

⁸ The speaking of him in the third person, ‘*this man*’ (), seems a strong confirmation of this view; and (see Luke xiv. 32) is an embassy rather than a message.—The word is so rendered in the Revised Version.

⁹ Josephus, *Antt.* xvii. 11. 1; *B. J.* xi. 2. 1.

its full and final accomplishment, not at the destruction of Jerusalem, but at the day of judgment,—and it is equally capable of the narrower and the wider interpretation,—then these rebellious citizens will be all, Gentiles and Jews alike, who have denied their relation and subjection to Jesus, as their Lord and King (in this different from the unfaithful Servant, for he allows the relation, and does not openly throw off the subjection, but yet evades the obligation by the false glosses of his evil heart), and this message will embody itself in the great apostasy of the last days, which shall be even as this is, not an evading of the subjection due unto Christ; but a speaking of proud things against Him (Rev. xiii. 5, 6; Dan. vii. 25; 2 Thess. ii. 1-10); not merely disobedience but defiance, such as, not content with resisting his decrees, shall provoke and challenge Him to the conflict (Ps. ii. 2).

On the following verses (15-23) there is little to say which has not been said already (see p. 276). At his return, the nobleman, now a king, distributes praise and rewards to as many as have been faithful to him while he was away,—punishments more or less severe to them who have abused the opportunity and taken advantage of his absence.¹⁰ The rewards are *royal*, and this consistently with the royal dignity wherewith he is now invested; he sets them over cities. In the other parable it is otherwise (Matt. xxv. 14-30); there the master, being but a private man, claims no such power of putting his servants in high places of authority; each parable being thus in perfect keeping and harmony with itself through all its minor details, which is another evidence of their original distinctness. The rewards too, as they are kingly, so are they also proportioned to the fidelity, we may say also to the capacity, of the servants. To him whose pound had made ten pounds it is said, '*Because thou hast been faithful in a very little,*¹¹ *have thou authority over ten cities:*' to him whose pound had made five it is said, '*Be thou also over five:*' to one a Decapolis, to the other a Pentapolis assigned. Surely there is vouchsafed to us here a glimpse of the beneficent *activity* of the glorified saints, a commentary on the μ μ of St. Paul (Rom. viii. 17; 2 Tim. ii. 12; Rev. iii. 21).¹² We hear nothing of the other seven servants, but need not therefore conclude that they had wholly lost or wasted

¹⁰ We may compare the conduct of Alexander, rewarding and punishing after his return from his long Indian expedition, from which so many in Western Asia had believed that he never would come back (see Thirlwall, *Hist. of Greece*, vol. vii. p. 62, seq.).

¹¹ Origen's quotation (*Con. Cels.* viii. 74), 'Thou wast found faithful in a very little city, come thou therefore unto the great one,' sounds like an inexact reminiscence of these words of Christ.

¹² Godet: 'The ten and the live cities represent moral beings who are in a state of lower development, but whom the faithful in glory are commissioned to raise to their divine destination.'

the money entrusted to them.¹³ Three are adduced as representatives of classes (cf. Luke xiv. 18-20), and the rest, since all that we are to learn is learned from these, for brevity's sake are passed over.—‘*Those who stood by,*’ and are bidden to take his pound from the slothful servant,¹⁴ and give it to him that had shown himself the faithfullest, or, at all events, the ablest of all, are the angels, who never fail to appear and take an active part in scenes descriptive of the final judgment (Matt. xiii. 41; xvi. 27; xxiv. 81; 2 Thess. i. 7; Jude 14; Dan. vii. 10). Their wondering remonstrance, ‘*Lord, he hath ten pounds*’ with the manner in which this is at once overruled, so that the lord proceeds without so much as seeming to hear, while yet he refutes it, is intended to fix our attention on the paradox and seeming unfairness of that law of the kingdom, which decrees that the poor should become poorer still, and the rich become ever richer. It is a law which Christ here, by this remonstrance and by the inattention with which it is received, will with all emphasis declare to be the law of highest righteousness, the everlasting law of his kingdom¹⁵ (Prov. ix. 8, 9).

When the king had thus distributed praise and blame, rewards and penalties, to those who stand in the more immediate relation of servants to him, to his own household, he proceeds to execute vengeance on his enemies, on all who

¹³ Thus Ambrose (*Exp. in Luc.* viii. 95): ‘There is no word as to the others, who, like prodigal debtors, had wasted what they had received.’

¹⁴ It is characteristic that the (sudarium), which, not exerting himself, this lazy servant does not need for its proper use (‘in the *sweat* of thy face shalt thou eat bread,’ Gen. iii. 19), he uses for the wrapping up of his pound. That he had it disengaged, and free to be turned to his purpose, was itself a witness against him.

¹⁵ Dschelaleddin, whom Von Hammer styles ‘the great religious poet of the modern East,’ has this same image of life, with all its powers, opportunities and faculties, as a sum of money to be laid out for God:

‘O thou that art arrived in being’s land,
 Nor knowest how thy coming here was planned;
 From the Shah’s palace to life’s city thou
 On his affairs wast sent, at his command.
 Thee thy Lord gave, thy faithfulness to prove,
 The sum of life, a capital in hand.
 Hast thou forgotten thine entrusted pound?
 Dazed with the market’s hubbub dost thou stand?
 Instead of dreaming, up and purchase good;
 Buy precious stones, exchange not gold for sand.
 Thou at the hour of thy return wilt see
 Thy Monarch set, with open book in hand.
 What thou from Him receivedst He will bring
 To strict account, and reckoning demand:
 And a large blessing, or a curse from Him
 Thy faithfulness or sloth will then command.’

had openly cast off allegiance to him, and denied that they belonged to his house at all (Prov. xx. 8). ‘*But those mine enemies, which would not that I should reign over them, bring hither, and slay them before me.*’ In the Marriage of the King’s Son the vengeance on the open enemies goes before that on the hypocritical friend or servant (Matt. xxii. 7, 11); here it follows after. This slaying of the king’s enemies *in his presence*, is not to be in the interpretation mitigated or explained away, as belonging merely to the outer scheme of the parable, and introduced because such things were done in Eastern courts (1 Sam. x. 27; xi. 12; Jer. lii. 10),¹⁶ and to add an air of truthfulness to the narrative. Rather it belongs also to the innermost kernel of the parable. The words set forth, fearfully indeed, but not so that we need shrink from applying them to the Lord Jesus, his unmitigated wrath against his enemies,—but only *his* enemies exactly as they are enemies of all righteousness,—which shall be revealed in that day when grace shall have come to an end, and judgment without mercy shall have begun¹⁷ (Isai. lxiii. 1-6; Rev. xiv. 10; xix. 11-16; 2 Thess. i. 7-9; Heb. x. 27). All this found its commencing fulfilment in the destruction of Jerusalem, and in the frightful calamities which accompanied that day of doom; then doubtless was *a* coming of Christ to judgment; but it will only obtain its full accomplishment when the wickedness of an apostate world, having drawn to a single head, shall in the destruction of him, the personal Antichrist, and of all that are gathered under his banner, receive its final doom.¹⁸

Some words of Thomas Jackson, the great Arminian divine of the seventeenth century, will form a fitting close: ‘Let others esteem of them as they list, our Saviour’s parables, in that they contain the secret mysteries of the heavenly kingdom, shall ever, as they always have done, seem to me the most sovereign rules for planting faith, and the matters contained in them the most precious objects for a Christian’s choicer thoughts to work upon in his selected hours.’

¹⁶ Compare Suetonius, *Vitellius*, 14.

¹⁷ Augustine often uses this and its parallel, Matt. xxii. 13 (as *Con. Adv. Leg. et Proph.* i. 16; *Con. Faust.* xxii. 14, 19), in argument with the Manichæans, who, contrasting the severity of the God of the Old Testament with the lenity of the God of the New, argued from this that they were not, and could not be, one and the same God. But, he replies, there is no such contrast. As there is love in the Old Testament, so there is fear, and what should awaken fear, in the New; and he urges the terribleness of this doom in proof. The Manichæans could not betake themselves to their ordinary evasion, that the passage was an interpolation or a corruption, as they accepted the parables (see Augustine, *Con. Faust.* xxxii. 7) for part of the uncorrupted doctrine of Christ.— We may compare Heb. i. 13, ‘till I make thine enemies *thy footstool*,’ and we learn from Josh. x. 24 what the image is, that lies under these words.

¹⁸ When therefore Godet says, ‘Verse 27 represents the settling of accounts of the Messiah with the Jewish people, as verses 15-26 his settling of accounts with the Church,’ this statement cannot be regarded as exhaustive.