

*Spectator* has but little to say as to the structure of the liturgy, but he gives as his reason for preferring set forms of prayer to extemporaneous utterance, or "conceived prayer," as it was termed, that the worshipper is thus saved from the extravagance of fanaticism and the vagaries of eccentricity.

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(*To be concluded.*)

## STUDIES IN TEXTS.

Suggestions for Sermons from Current Literature.

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### IX. LABOUR PROBLEMS AND THE KINGDOM OF GOD.

*Texts:* "Whatsoever is right I will give."

"Thou hast made them equal unto us" (St. Matt. xx. 4, 12).

[Book of the Month: PARABLES OF THE KINGDOM,<sup>1</sup> by Swete = S. Other reff. Plummer's *St. Matthew* = P. Bruce's *Training of the Twelve* = B. David Smith's *In the Days of His Flesh* = DS. *Expositor's Greek Test.* = EGT.]

Odd to hear labour criticizing an employer for overpayment, and declaring against equality. But unless something bigger than Law and better than contracts animates either employer or employed, there will always be trouble. This was St. Peter's fundamental mistake in xix. 27. It is dealt with in xix. 30; xx. 8, 12, 16. The subject of St. Matthew's Gospel is God's Kingdom as ushered in and made possible by Christ. But this is full of possibilities of misunderstanding. "*The Kingdom of God is the imperium of God, and not the area or the people over which it is exercised*" (S. 6). "It is purely spiritual and ethical, a sovereignty exerted over men's hearts and lives by the Divine Spirit swaying the human spirit and co operating with it" (S. 7). "It is really complex in

<sup>1</sup> Prof. H. B. Swete's *Parables of the Kingdom*, published by Macmillan, 7/6 net. All Dr. Swete's work carries the mark of industry, reverence and insight. This book is excellent, and expository preachers will be glad to have it and to utilize it.

the highest degree, entering into all the departments of human life" (S. 7).

We are considering a single parable, but it forms one of a group, the Judæan Parables. These differ much from the Galilean.

I. THE FRAME-WORK. "It is not the history of the beginning and growth of the Kingdom that we are now to see represented, so much as its relation to the Jewish people, its spirit, its ethical character, its requirements, its issues" (S. 66). "The scenes are taken, not from the outdoor life of nature, or the road-side or lake-side or the cottage home, but from the social life of the time, the relations of the upper classes to the lower, the master to his slaves, the owner to his labourers, the host to his guests" (S. 65). "Jesus is no longer addressing great mixed crowds of peasants and fishermen by the shore of the Lake. His audience consists of the . . . members of His inner group, or His fellow-guests at the tables of the rich, or the scribes and priests of Jerusalem" (S. 65). "In the Galilean parables corn-growing and fishing are the predominant employments. Those on the other hand which were spoken on the way to Jerusalem or at Jerusalem, when they speak of vegetation, make the cultivation of the vine and the fig the chief feature; for the hills of Samaria and Judæa were largely planted with these fruit trees, the hills of Judæa, at least, affording little soil suitable for the growth of cereals" (S. 98-9)

2. THE PICTURE. It is a scene in a vineyard: circumstances varied. "The owner of a vineyard might either work it himself, or let it to a farmer ("husbandman") who paid in kind. The latter case is contemplated in the Parable of the Wicked Husbandmen (Matt. xxi. 33 ff.), the former here" (S. 99).

So the owner begins his day with a visit to the village square, and engages gangs of labour at various periods. "With the first batch who came from sunrise to sunset he made the usual terms—one silver denarius for the day. It was the traditional daily wage of Palestine, for its equivalent, the Greek drachma, is paid by Tobit (Tobit v. 14, [15]), and as such it is accepted without reluctance. With the rest no bargain is made; only that they should receive *whatsoever is right*, which would probably be understood to mean the *aliquot* part of a denarius" (S. 99-100). With some he makes a contract. Others he asks to trust his judgment. At the end of the day he gives the same payment all the way round, and

there is a disturbance from the men who had a contract. "Superficially their complaint was not without reason" (S. 100). Yet when we look deeper we get larger views. For "as to the householder's fairness, there can be no question. He kept faith with those who made an agreement with him, and he was the sole judge of what the work of the others was worth to him. Time was precious, and labour became increasingly valuable as the day went on" (P. 273). He is just in the widest sense without any pettiness of judgment. But his largeness is disconcerting to small men. "How can this somewhat arbitrary proceeding on the part of the master be said to resemble God's dealing with men in the Christian dispensation?" (S. 100).

3. THE INTERPRETATION. It is clear at once that here is no excuse for shirkers. "The parable takes no account of those who deliberately postpone entering God's service. All the labourers came as soon as they were called" (P. 273). This disposes of St. Peter's notion that there must be "some superlative reward in the coming Messianic Kingdom for the first disciples" (S. 102).

(a) *There is something larger than arithmetic.* "The parable was designed, in the first instance, to correct the mercenary spirit of the Twelve. If they worked for wages . . . they would be accounted mere hirelings" (DS. 366). "Its own moral is that God does not love a legal spirit" (EGT. I. 256). "So viewed, it has a manifest connexion with Peter's self-complacent question" (EGT. I. 256). "The great outstanding thought set forth is this, that in estimating the value of work, the divine Lord, whom all serve, takes into account not merely quantity but quality; that is, the spirit in which the work is done" (B. 264). "A small quantity of work done in a right spirit is of greater value than a large quantity done in a wrong spirit. One hour's work done by men who make no bargain is of greater value than twelve hours' work done by men who regard their doings with self-complacency" (B. 266).

(b) *There is no part-possession of God.* "When we turn to the parable we find the last made first by being treated as equal to the first, and the first made last by becoming as the last in regard to the great reward" (S. 102). One reason for this is that "in eternal life there can be neither less nor more, for it is the presence and possession of God. Can it be that, in that day when the great reward is given, there will be found those who murmur against the owner of

the vineyard? Surely not" (S. 102-3). "This part of the parable, then, cannot find an exact counterpart in the Kingdom of God" (S. 103). "That spirit, if it could remain unchecked to the end . . . would produce discontent on the very threshold of Heaven" (S. 103). "No service that we can render deserves the infinite reward" (S. 106). "None will have less than eternal life, and none can have more" (S. 108).

(c) *No man who realizes his own failings will carp at others' success.* "The parable was designed to beat down the arrogance of the disciples. Did that sentence: 'It is my pleasure to give to "this last fellow" even as to thee,' never ring in the ears of 'the men who had been with Jesus' when, because he had been hired late, they denied the apostleship of St. Paul? And did the Jewish Christians never think of this parable when they despised the Gentiles whom the Lord had pitied and received into His service, making no difference between them and the Jews who had been hired at the first hour?" (DS. 366.)

(d) *The contrasts between the two types of labourers are constant and age-long.* "The first are the Jacobs." "The last are Abraham-like men." "The first are the Simons." "The last are the women with alabaster boxes." "The first are the elder brothers." "The last are the prodigals" (B. 267). "Self-esteem is a sin which easily besets men situated as the Twelve" (B. 268).

So it is always true that "wages" alone mean lack of life somewhere. It is the divine principle of the "gift" that means life, always (cf. Rom. vi. 23). The simple, the humble, the meek, these are the true inheritors, not the bargainers and the crafty.

"The meanest man in grey fields gone  
Behind the set of sun,  
Heareth between star and other star,  
Through the door of the darkness fallen ajar,  
The Council, eldest of things that are,  
The talk of the Three in One."

(G. K. Chesterton)

