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It is well to be on our guard concerning these powerless substitutes for edge, for, however little *we* may be likely to use them, the spirit of evasion is in the air, and may as easily attack us as others.

The most perfect protection is *to be* what we seem, to rely on God-given weapons, to sharpen the edge of our souls until they cut clean and true, and to be so fully in the hands of our God that He may be able to use us for His own glory.

The Parable of the Unjust Steward.

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THE so-called Parable of the Unjust Steward has always seemed one of the most difficult of our Lord's parables. As to many features of the story, commentators have been more than usually emphatic in reminding us that we must not expect to find an application of every detail. But not only are particular points obscure in themselves, as well as in their interpretation, but there is such a strong apparent contrast between the conduct of an unfaithful steward and the lesson of faithfulness which seems to be based upon it, that doubt has been felt even as to the main lesson suggested, and the kind of Divine prudence inculcated has been taken in a very different way from what might at first be supposed.[1] A good deal of uncertainty may arise from our ignorance of the exact powers and responsibilities of a steward (*οἰκονόμος*), and of how much might be left to his discretion in fixing terms and conditions. In default of clearer knowledge, we must follow the leadings of the story as we find it. Perhaps the difficulties are partly of our own making. In trying to shake ourselves free from assumptions, we are not ready to go far enough. Perhaps it is a mistake to suppose that the steward was unjust after all!

[1] *E.g.*, by Latham in "Pastor Pastorum."

To begin at the beginning, the story opens with the master. As to whether he was himself good or bad, just or unjust, there is very slight indication; but the nearness of the other parable, beginning "There was a certain rich man," is at least suggestive, and gives the words a somewhat ominous sound. The kings of the parables, as such, are generally representatives of authority and justice, but in view of other words about riches and rich men, there is nothing in this description to prepossess us in the master's favour. Then, passing to the steward, the first statement about him appears significant: he was "*slandered*" to his master, as making too free with his goods. This at least is the literal and natural meaning of διεβλήθη. Of course, it has been explained away, and instances are adduced where the verb is used of a charge which was not in fact untrue, though maliciously brought, as in the LXX of Dan. iii. 8 (where, however, conduct prompted by reverence for God was unfairly put in the light of disloyalty to the king). Sometimes it is used apart from any personal accusation, as in Herodotus viii. 110, 111, of the insincere statement of motives and objects by which Themistocles imposed on the Athenians (διέβαλλε); and here falseness seems to be the prominent idea. There seems always to hang about it some suggestion of falseness or unfairness, and it could hardly be applied to a straightforward honest accusation. It does not occur elsewhere in the New Testament; but the noun διάβολος, where it does not refer to the arch-slanderer, the devil (thirty-three times), or as applied to Judas (John vi. 70), is, it is needless to say, always used in a bad sense (1 Tim. iii. 11; 2 Tim. iii. 3; Titus ii. 3). Then, as to the charge itself, the word translated "wasting" is far less definite in the original (διασκορπίζων, lit. = scattering abroad), and might apply to any kind of lavishness, whether criminal or otherwise. The simple verb ἐσκόρπισεν is used in 2 Cor. ix. 9 (quoting Ps. cxii. 9) of the liberal man who distributes to the poor. We start, then, if we start fairly, with the idea of a master whose justice and liberality are doubtful, and of a steward (apparently unfairly) accused of a too free use of his goods. It

would not be at all out of keeping with these indications to suppose a master who thought only of how much he could exact from his dependents, and a steward who, having some latitude allowed him, insisted on treating them in a fairer and more liberal manner than his master would have approved. It has been said that he does not answer the charge; but if it were based on some such grounds as these, there would be no matter for argument. His subsequent conduct may well seem more questionable, but its actual injustice would depend on the kind of control he had over the estimates which he altered in favour of the debtors, and the way in which agreements had been previously made.

The real difficulty in taking quite a favourable view of his conduct is that later he seems to be plainly called the "unjust steward." Yet it is not precisely so. He is really called the "steward of injustice,"[1] which is explained as a Hebraism; but this does not show why the roundabout phrase should be used, if ἄδικος would do as well. Even in Hebrew אהלי רשע is not precisely "wicked tents," nor לחם רשע "wicked bread." And instances of such characterizing genitives in the New Testament hardly occur where a simple adjective might have been just as easily used. In Luke iv. 22, the force of λόγοις τῆς χάριτος is hardly sufficiently expressed by "gracious words." So in τὸ σῶμα τῆς ἁμαρτίας (Rom. vi. 6) and τοῦ σώματος τοῦ θανάτου τούτου (Rom. vii. 24) the phrases seem labouring to express ideas which mere adjectives would hardly give. So in πάθη ἀτιμίας (Rom. i. 26), ἐπιθυμίᾳ μιασμοῦ (2 Pet. ii. 10), where both substantives are abstract; and again in τοῦ υἱοῦ τῆς ἀγάπης αὐτοῦ (Col. i. 13) and τῷ ῥήματι τῆς δυνάμεως αὐτοῦ (Heb. i. 3), where something seems due to Hebrew associations as well as to the exigencies of language in expressing Divine attributes and relations. In Jas. i. 25 ἀκροατὴς ἐπιλησμονῆς may be merely equivalent to "forgetful hearer" (though ἀκροατὴς seems to

[1] Some have taken the genitive as dependent, not on the noun, but on the verb, which is grammatically possible, but very unlikely, in view of the parallel phrases "judge of injustice" in chap. xviii. and "mammon of injustice" here.

require some object). This, in a very Hebraistic epistle, seems the most plausible instance of equivalence to a simple adjective.

It is true that, in the parable with which we are dealing, "the mammon of injustice" and "the unjust mammon" both occur, apparently in much the same sense, representing different versions, perhaps, of an Aramaic original. And here a new question arises as to what precisely is meant by the term "mammon" itself. Here, in fact, lies the secondary difficulty of the parable. If ἄδικος be taken in its natural sense, we can hardly think that Christ would apply it to "wealth" except under the name of mammon, and if so, mammon is not merely equivalent to "wealth"; and the history of the term is obscure. There seems no foundation for the idea that it represented a Syrian god of riches, and if derived from אמן (="thing trusted in"), "wealth" must be quite an acquired meaning—as being the ground of worldly confidence[1]; the contrast between God and mammon, in ver. 13 and in Matt. vi. 24, would suggest that the latter stood for the world rather than for money. The words of St. Augustine are often quoted ("De Serm. Dom. in Monte," II., xiv. 47), where (in support of the statement that riches—*divitiæ*—are called mammon among the Hebrews) he says, "Lucrum Punice Mammon dicitur"; but here *lucrum* is not exactly *opes* or *divitiæ*. It is "gain" rather than "wealth" to which the term "mammon" "is applied in Punic." All this may point to its use, not for money in itself, but for resources (large or small) won or used in the service of the world, or in a sphere of personal or business relations whose general principles are limited and selfish, whatever the individual winner may be. Hence it is the "unjust mammon," in contrast to the "true riches"[2]; though the less direct phrase,

[1] It seems that in Ps. xxxvii. (xxxvi.) 3 אמונה is translated πλοῦτος by the LXX. The language of such passages as Ps. xlix. 6, lii. 7, lxii. 10, Job xxxi. 24, may be noticed, though the word for "trust" is different; also in the New Testament, 1 Tim. vi. 17-19, where the conclusion has striking points of similarity with that of the parable, though involving an entirely different metaphor (θεμέλιον καλὸν εἰς τὸ μέλλον).

[2] Some would give to ἄδικος the sense of "false" or "unreal"; but such a use of a simple Greek word seems very improbable here. In many

τῆς ἀδικίας,[1] may have special force as bringing out more clearly that it is the sphere in which the profit is acquired or employed, rather than the thing itself, which is unjust.

And this consideration may help us in other cases. At first sight it might seem that at all events "judge of injustice" (chap. xviii. 6) is practically synonymous with "unjust judge." And yet it is not implied that he was one who would "give wrong judgment, and respect the persons of the wicked."[2] The words which express his indifference to God and man might even suggest a rough sort of impartiality; and, in spite of his want of piety and pity, the persistent widow does not seem to have feared a wrongful verdict, if only he could be roused to action. Is it not the general sphere of feeling and motive, and perhaps the system under which he acted, which are wrong, rather than his decisions as a judge? The phrase τῆς ἀδικίας may rather mark him as one of the unregenerate world than as sullied with definite injustice, in the way the adjective ἄδικος applied to an individual could hardly avoid doing; though, in fact, when St. Paul blames the Corinthian Christians for going to law—ἐπὶ τῶν ἀδίκων (1 Cor. vi. 1; in contrast to ἐπὶ τῶν ἁγίων)—he seems to apply the adjective in a general way to heathen tribunals as such, whether actually just or unjust.

And so, coming back to the steward of injustice, may not the phrase in his case point rather to the sphere in which he was placed, and the principles on which he was supposed to act, than to the character of the man himself? It would have been

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instances of its use by the LXX, for "false" there is no such unnatural divergence of meaning; a "false" witness, *e.g.*, *is* an "unrighteous" witness. Here the epithet "false" applied to wealth does not even give the right idea; the true advantage of material things is often in inverse ratio to the extent of their possession (Luke xii. 15); but here and elsewhere in the New Testament it is the right use, rather than the disregard of them, which is enforced. Compare ver. 10.

[1] It is said by Charles (and others) that the expression "mammon of unrighteousness" occurs in Enoch lxiii. 10, but this is inferential. He admits, *in a note at the end of his book*, that μαμωνᾶς is not transliterated in the Ethiopic. Professor Margoliouth suggests that it is a current Jewish phrase arising from the accidental or intentional alteration of מטמון הון into מטמון און. If so, the general idea would be as taken above.

[2] Ps. lxxxii. 2.

quite easy to say "the unjust steward," if that had been intended. If only we may take the description as equivalent to "steward of the world," there is no hindrance to supposing that he lost favour by being better, not worse, than his master—less extortionate, perhaps, than his master could have wished; and that, being unjustly dismissed, and having a free hand, he boldly decided, in the time that remained to him, to go further in the same direction.

If this be the true idea of the story, the application is quite easy. The steward, from prudential motives, it is true, found it wise to proceed on better and more liberal principles than those of his position as the servant of a grasping master. So are the children of light, in their worldly dealings, to act on the higher principles which they profess, and so to make to themselves friends, against the time when earthly things shall fail (*ὅταν ἐκλίπῃ*)—though not in the narrow sense of recipients of personal charity—by their conduct in things too often marred by evil associations, or where they have to take common action with worldly-minded men. Thus do they show themselves not only "prudent," but "faithful"[1] "in the unjust mammon"—*i.e.*, faithful to God in their stewardship of worldly things, where the world would be satisfied with, or even prefer, a lower standard.

And so the parable leads naturally up to the lesson that to be faithful in much involves faithfulness in little, which some have supposed (somewhat harshly) to be introduced by way of contrast. The faithfulness in the unjust mammon, which is a condition of being entrusted with the true riches, answers to the recognition of better principles in the service of the worldly master. And so the next antithesis, even with the at first sight puzzling reading (adopted by Westcott and Hort), "If you do not prove faithful in that which is another's, who will give you that which is *our own?*"[2] comes in quite naturally. For if "that

[1] Notice the combination *ὁ πιστὸς οἰκονόμος, ὁ φρόνιμος* in Luke xii. 42.

[2] Of this, on the usual view, it has been said that "it seems to be impossible to make satisfactory sense" (Plummer in the "International Critical Commentary").

which is another's" refers to the things of this world, "that which is *our own*" may well apply to those higher things which belong to disciples in fellowship with Christ Himself. And, indeed, the connection of the two clauses is more intelligible, if faithfulness in another's is not exactly faithfulness *to* that other, but faithfulness to those higher principles of truth and justice which are required in the management of his and ours alike.

On the view that has been taken, it is, of course, Christ, and not the master, who is referred to in ver. 8 as commending the steward for acting prudently. But this is closely parallel to the conclusion of the other parable, where "the Lord said, Hear what the judge of injustice saith" (Luke xviii. 6). The sudden change from the third person to the first (ver. 9) has been thought to tell against this; but the sudden introduction of the master's sentiments, otherwise supposed, comes in quite as harshly; and the change of person may be paralleled by other striking instances in the third Gospel and the Acts of the Apostles (Luke v. 14; Acts i. 4, xvii. 3, xxiii. 22). Further, the view that it is Christ who commends removes a difficulty; for if it is the master, how did he come to know? or, if he might naturally come to know, where was the wisdom of the steward? The indulgence to the debtors would be defeated, and they would no longer have reason to be grateful.

Finally, this view of the parable might to some extent explain its obscurity. For if it was suggested by the actual case of some exacting rich man who had a steward with more liberal instincts, there might well be reasons for delicately hinting, rather than actually stating, that it was the former who was in the wrong. From this very gospel we know of a steward (ἐπίτροπος) whose wife, if not himself, was a follower of our Lord (Luke viii. 3). May not Chuza have been governed by better principles than Herod? May something arising out of their relations have even suggested the story?

But this is by the way. We may notice, in conclusion, that the general trend of the whole passage, and the subsequent scoffing of the Pharisees, "who were avaricious" (φιλάργυροι,

ver. 14), do not tell in favour of the rich man. Moreover, the setting of the story, connected in ver. 1 ("He said *also* unto the disciples") with the preceding chapter, where it is shown that the publican and the sinner must be considered, as well as the self-righteous Pharisee, all tells in the same direction.

And whatever may be thought of the interpretation of the phrase τῆς ἀδικίας, it is certainly actually applied, in each of the three cases, to something which we are told to use or learn from, not to condemn or despise. Not only worldly resources, but the steward of a worldly régime and the judge of a worldly polity, have their higher aspects and lessons. The worldly steward, if wise, will (as we take it) exemplify better principles than those of his merely worldly master; as the worldly judge, though faulty, will yet embody attributes which have their place in the character of God himself.

A "Hill Difficulty."

By Miss A. E. WOODCOCK.

A BISHOP, in a recent speech, is reported to have spoken disparagingly of "those district visitors who neglect to use their minds as well as their bodies, and who waste valuable time in rushing about their parishes exchanging greetings and platitudes with their poorer neighbours." There is much food for thought in this view of the district visitor, specially to those of us who, being district visitors, desire to see ourselves as others see us. But though some of us still "rush," and even consider our strength lies in anything but in sitting still, yet surely the old type of district visitor is slowly but surely giving way before a newer and, in some cases, wiser dispensation.

To take an instance. An elderly lady said the other day, "I have been a district visitor for sixty years." Her hearer gazed at her in surprise, which she mistook for admiration, and she added in a gratified voice: "Yes, I had a district in this