THE PREACHER'S COMMENTARY

ON

ST. LUKE

THE

Preacher's Complete Homiletical

COMMENTARY

ON THE

NEW TESTAMENT

(ON AN ORIGINAL PLAN)

With Critical and Explanatory Notes, Indices, &c., &c.

BY

VARIOUS AUTHORS

New York
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A

HOMILETICAL COMMENTARY

ON THE

GOSPEL ACCORDING TO ST. LUKE

BY

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S T. L U K E.

INTRODUCTION.

The writer of the Gospel.—The author to whom the primitive Church ascribes the composition of the third Gospel was called Luke—a name which is an abbreviation of Lucanus or Lucilius, but has no connection with Lucius (Acts xiii. 1; Rom. xvi. 21). In the well-known Muratorian fragment (*c.* A.D. 170) the fact that he was the author is distinctly asserted; and even Renan admits that there is no grave reason to question the truth of the statement. Though he is not mentioned either in the Gospel or in the Acts, his name occurs in three other passages of the New Testament (Col. iv. 14; Philem. 24; 2 Tim. iv. 11). In the first of these he is described as "the beloved physician," and appears as a friend and companion of the apostle Paul. Further, in the same passage he is distinguished from "those of the circumcision," as one of Gentile extraction. It is interesting to notice that, as far as known to us, he is the only Gentile who took part in the composition of any of the books of Holy Scripture. Eusebius (*c.* A.D. 315) says that he was a native of Antioch, the capital of Syria. As physicians then were very frequently slaves or freedmen, it is not at all improbable that Luke belonged to that class. It may be that he was a member of the household of the Theophilus to whom he dedicates his Gospel, that he had received his freedom, and practised independently as a physician. It has been pointed out by Mr. Smith, of Jordanhill, in his work on the voyage of St. Paul, that the historian's allusions to nautical matters are very accurate, and yet are unprofessional in tone. He suggests that Luke may have sometimes practised as a physician on board one of the merchantmen, which sailed from port to port on the Mediterranean Sea. These vessels were sometimes of great size, and carried a large number of passengers—as many as two hundred and seventy-six were in the ship which was wrecked at Melita

(Acts xxvii. 37); and as voyages in those days were of uncertain length, it is not unreasonable to suppose that in some cases at any rate it was usual to have a medical attendant on board. From his intimate acquaintance with Jewish customs, it would seem that Luke had been a Jewish proselyte before he was converted to Christianity. If so, he was one who accepted the moral law and the Messianic hopes of Judaism without conforming to the ceremonial law or undergoing the rite of circumcision. In chap. i. 2 he distinguishes himself from those who "from the beginning were eyewitnesses" of the life of Christ; but this does not necessarily preclude his having seen and heard the Saviour. There is no ground, however, for the conjectures that he was one of the seventy, or one of those Greeks who visited Jesus shortly before His crucifixion (John xii. 20), or one of the two disciples of Emmaus. The fact that he was a Gentile is fatal to the first of these conjectures, while the Aramaic colouring of the narrative of the journey to Emmaus shows that the author is drawing his information from some foreign source rather than from his own reminiscences. It is interesting to trace Luke's connection with the labours and journeyings of the apostle Paul. He appears first in connection with that apostle at Troas (Acts xvi. 10), for the most natural interpretation of the sudden use of the first person plural is that the author of the Acts is there beginning to take part in the history which he records. He journeys with the apostle as far as Philippi, and on the departure of St. Paul from that city he was apparently left behind. He takes no further part in the second missionary journey of that apostle, for in xvii. 1 the third person is resumed. But he again joins St. Paul on the occasion of his second visit to Philippi, and journeys with him through Miletus, Tyre, and Cæsarea to Jerusalem (xx. 5—xxi. 18). Seven years had elapsed between these two visits (A.D. 51—A.D. 58), and during this time Luke probably preached the gospel in Philippi and its neighbourhood. An incidental notice of his activity during that period is probably given in 2 Cor. viii. 18, in the allusion to "the brother whose praise is in the gospel throughout all the Churches." During St. Paul's three months' stay at Philippi he sent Titus and this "brother" on a mission to Corinth; and many critics hold that the unnamed emissary on this occasion was the Evangelist, as indicated in the subscription appended to 2 Corinthians. If so, the fame he had acquired was due to his activity as a preacher, and not, as Jerome supposed, in consequence of his having then already published his Gospel. As already said, he accompanied St. Paul on his last journey to Jerusalem (Acts xxi. 17), and there would have many opportunities of personal intercourse with the first witnesses of the life and death and resurrection of Christ. During the apostle's two years' imprisonment in Cæsarea Luke probably remained in Palestine. He afterwards accompanied St. Paul to Rome, undergoing the perils of shipwreck and sharing his imprisonment. According to 2 Tim. iv. 11, he remained faithful when others forsook the apostle; and no doubt this fidelity remained unshaken to the last. After the death of St. Paul, the life of his beloved companion is wrapped in hopeless obscurity. Epiphanius (*c.* A.D. 367) says that he preached the gospel in Dalmatia, Gallia, Italy, and Macedonia. Gregory Nazianzen (A.D. 361) is

the first to rank him among the martyrs. Nicephorus (*c.* A.D. 1100) relates that whilst ministering in Greece he was condemned to death by the unbelievers without even the form of a trial, and was hanged upon an olive tree, in the eightieth or eighty-fourth year of his age. These traditions are, however, of but slight value. The last-named author states that Luke was also a painter of no mean skill, and painted portraits of our Lord, of the Virgin, and of the chief apostles; but probably he confused the Evangelist with some later Christian painter of the same name to whom works of the kind were ascribed.

Time and place of writing.—According to Acts i. 1, the Gospel was written before the Acts of the Apostles; so that if the date of the latter can be fixed, a reasonable conjecture as to that of the former may be hazarded. The latest time mentioned in the Acts is the end of the second year of the apostle's imprisonment (xxviii. 30, 31), *i.e.* about A.D. 63. The most probable explanation of the abrupt conclusion of the Acts is that the historian had no more to tell at the time when he published his work; in other words, that the date to which the history is brought down is that of the publication of the book. How much earlier "the former treatise" was written is of course uncertain; but there is strong probability that it dates from the period of St. Paul's imprisonment at Cæsarea, A.D. 58-60, when the Evangelist was, as we can almost with certainty conclude, in Palestine. This date would allow abundant time for the growth of that voluminous literature to which the Evangelist alludes in chap. i. 1. There are other suppositions as to the place where the Gospel was written. Jerome says that it was written in Achaia and the region of Bœotia; the Syriac Version of the Gospel contains a note to the effect that it was written in Alexandria. In later times Rome, Achaia, Macedonia, and Asia Minor have been named as the place of composition. But there are no definite grounds for coming to a decision on this point.

The object with which the Gospel was written.—The Evangelist himself in the preface to the Gospel (i. 3) states the aim he had in view in writing it—viz. that his friend (or patron) Theophilus, and it is to be presumed others who were like him converts to Christianity, might know the certainty of those things in which they had received oral instruction as catechumens. "He tells us that many had already attempted a written history of the life of Jesus. They had endeavoured to take for their guidance the statements made by the first witnesses for Jesus, the apostles, from whom Luke distinguishes both himself and them. It seems very improbable that he is here alluding to the Gospels of Matthew and Mark. He seems rather to have in view certain literary efforts of Christian antiquity, of which some might be better than others, but among which not one was, in his opinion, quite satisfactory. He at least considers them inadequate for the '*certainty*' of the faith of Theophilus; and having weighed and examined the various documents to which he had access, he felt himself powerfully impelled to undertake such a work also, and, as far as in him lay, to improve upon the accounts of his predecessors" (*Van Oosterzee*).

The style and character of the third Gospel.—The style of the third Evangelist is marked by a striking peculiarity. The prologue of the Gospel is written in pure classical Greek, but is succeeded by a long section, extending down to the close of the second chapter, in which there is a large number of Aramaic idioms. This plainly indicates that the author in the one case writes in his own person, and in the other translates somewhat literally from Aramaic documents before him. The same phenomenon is noticeable in other parts of the Gospel, though nowhere else in it is the contrast so marked. At times the Evangelist writes freely in the elegant Greek of which he was a master, and at other times he translates or paraphrases the material, either written or oral, which had come to him in an Aramaic form.

He is careful to give chronological notices which connect the Gospel facts with ancient history in general; but he does not adhere strictly to the order of time in the events he records. *E.g.* the visit of Jesus to Nazareth related in chap. iv. is made to follow immediately upon the temptation in the wilderness, while ver. 23 of the same chapter clearly states that it had been preceded by a ministry in Capernaum, in the course of which several miracles had been wrought. The great section also (ix. 51—xviii. 14) contains a large number of separate incidents which the Evangelist himself does not profess to give in anything like a direct chronological order. The connecting words in many parts of it seem to disclaim any attempt at such order (see ix. 57, x. 1, 25, 38, etc.).

In the matter of completeness St. Luke surpasses the other synoptical writers: his Gospel contains three-fourths of all the recorded events in the life of Christ, and fully one-fourth of the whole is peculiar to him. Thus we may divide all the matter contained in the first three Gospels into one hundred and sixty-nine sections. Of these, fifty-eight are common to the three, twenty are peculiar to St. Matthew, five to St. Mark, and forty-five to St. Luke. Of the rest, twenty are common to St. Luke and St. Matthew, six to St. Luke and St. Mark, and fifteen to St. Matthew and St. Mark.

The miracles peculiar to St. Luke are: (1) The miraculous draught of fishes, v. 4-11; (2) the raising of the widow's son at Nain, vii. 11-18; (3) the woman with the spirit of infirmity, xiii. 11-17; (4) the man with the dropsy, xiv. 1-6; (5) the ten lepers, xvii. 11-19; (6) the healing of Malchus, xxii. 50, 51.

The parables peculiar to St. Luke are: (1) The two debtors, vii. 41-43; (2) the good Samaritan, x. 30-37; (3) the importunate friend, xi. 5-8; (4) the rich fool, xii. 16-21; (5) the barren fig tree, xiii. 6-9; (6) the lost piece of silver, xv. 8-10; (7) the prodigal son, xv. 11-32; (8) the unjust steward, xvi. 1-9; (9) Dives and Lazarus, xvi. 19-31; (10) the unjust judge, xviii. 1-8; (11) the Pharisee and the publican, xviii. 10-14.

Other remarkable incidents which are only recorded by him are: John the Baptist's answers to the people (iii. 10-14); the story of the penitent woman in the house of Simon (vii. 36-50); the conversation with Moses and Elijah on the Mount of Transfiguration (ix. 31); the visit to the house of Martha and Mary

(x. 38-42); the weeping over Jerusalem (xix. 41-44); the bloody sweat (xxii. 44); the sending of Jesus to Herod (xxiii. 6-12); the address to the daughters of Jerusalem (*ibid.* 27-31); the prayer, "Father, forgive them" (*ibid.* 34); the penitent thief (*ibid.* 40-43); the journey to Emmaus (xxiv. 13-35); and the particulars connected with the Ascension (*ibid.* 50-53). He seems to have special pleasure in relating instances of our Lord's tender mercy and compassion; and his Gospel brings into full prominence the great fact that Christ offers salvation to *all* men as a *free gift.* The tradition was early current that St. Luke's Gospel contained the substance of the teaching of the apostle Paul; but perhaps too great stress has been laid upon the analogies between the third Gospel and the Pauline Epistles, which seem to prove this. The note of *universality*, which is undoubtedly to be found in them both, is not wanting in the Gospels of St. Matthew and St. John.

Analysis of the Gospel.

I. THE PROLOGUE (i. 1-4).

II. NARRATIVES OF THE INFANCY (i. 5—ii. 52): (1) The annunciation of the birth of the forerunner, i. 5-25; (2) the annunciation of the birth of Jesus, i. 26-38; (3) the visit of Mary to Elisabeth, i. 39-56; (4) the birth of John the Baptist, i. 57-80; (5) the birth of Jesus, ii. 1-20; (6) the circumcision of Jesus and the presentation in the Temple, ii. 21-40; (7) the first journey of Jesus to Jerusalem, ii. 41-52.

III. THE ADVENT OF THE MESSIAH (iii. 1—iv. 13): (1) The ministry of John the Baptist, iii. 1-20; (2) the baptism of Jesus, ii. 21, 22; (3) His genealogy, iii. 23-38; (4) the temptation in the wilderness, iv. 1-13.

IV. THE MINISTRY OF JESUS IN GALILEE (iv. 14—ix. 50): (1) The visit to Nazareth, iv. 14-30; (2) a short sojourn at Capernaum, iv. 31-44; (3) the calling of the four disciples, v. 1-11; (4) the healing of the leper and of the paralytic, v. 12-26; (5) the calling of Levi, with attendant circumstances, v 27-39; (6) two controversies relative to Sabbath-keeping, vi. 1-11; (7) the choice of the twelve apostles, vi. 12-16; (8) the Sermon on the Mount, vi. 17-49; (9) the healing of the centurion's servant, vii. 1-10; (10) the widow's son raised from the dead, vii. 11-17; (11) the message from the Baptist, vii. 18-23; (12) the testimony of Jesus to the Baptist, vii. 24-35; (13) the penitent woman in the house of Simon, vii. 36-50; (14) the women who ministered to Jesus, viii. 1-3; (15) the parable of the sower, viii. 4-18; (16) the visit of His mother and brethren, viii. 19-21; (17) the stilling of the tempest, viii. 22-25; (18) the healing of the demoniac, viii. 26-39; (19) the raising of Jairus' daughter, and the healing of the woman with an issue of blood, viii. 40-56; (20) the mission of the twelve, ix. 1-6; (21) the alarm of Herod, ix. 7-9; (22) the feeding of the five thousand, ix. 10-17; (23) the *first* announcement of the Passion, ix. 18-27; (24) the Transfiguration, ix. 28-36; (25) the healing of the epileptic boy, ix. 37-43*a*; (26) the *second* announcement of the Passion, ix. 43*b*-45; (27) the close of the Galilæan ministry—counsels to the apostles, ix. 46-50.

V. THE JOURNEY FROM GALILEE TO JERUSALEM (ix. 51—xix. 28): (1) The inhospitality of the Samaritans, ix. 51-56; (2) the three disciples, ix. 57-62; (3) the mission of the seventy, x. 1-24; (4) the parable of the good Samaritan, x. 25-37; (5) Martha and Mary, x. 38-42; (6) lessons concerning prayer, xi. 1-13; (7) the blasphemous charges of the Pharisees, xi. 14-36; (8) open rupture with the Pharisees, xi. 37—xii. 1-12; (9) teaching concerning the relations between the believer and the world, xii. 13-59; (10) words of warning, parable of the barren fig tree, xiii. 1-9; (11) the healing of the impotent woman, xiii. 10-17; (12) the parables of the mustard seed and leaven, xiii. 18-21; (13) the answer to the question, "Are there few that be saved?" xiii. 22-30; (14) the message to Herod Antipas, xiii. 31-35; (15) Jesus in the Pharisee's house, healing of the man with the dropsy, conversation with guests and host, parable of the great supper, xiv. 1-24; (16) warnings against unwise enthusiasm, xiv. 25-35; (17) parables of the lost sheep, the lost piece of silver, and the prodigal son, xv.; (18) two parables on the use to be made of earthly goods, the unjust steward, Dives and Lazarus, xvi.; (19) teaching concerning offences, forgiveness, faith and service, xvii. 1-10; (20) the healing of the ten lepers, xvii. 11-19; (21) teaching concerning the coming of the kingdom of God, xvii. 20-37; (22) parable of the unjust judge, xviii. 1-8; (23) parable of the Pharisee and the publican, xviii. 9-14; (24) children brought to Jesus, xviii. 15-17; (25) the interview with the young ruler, xviii. 18-30; (26) the *third* announcement of the Passion, xviii. 31-34; (27) the healing of Bartimæus, xviii. 35-43; (28) Jesus in the house of Zacchæus, xix. 1-10; (29) the parable of the pounds, xix. 11-28.

VI. THE SOJOURN IN JERUSALEM (xix. 29—xxi. 38): (1) The triumphal entry into Jerusalem, xix. 29-44; (2) the cleansing of the Temple, xix. 45-48; (3) the question of authority, xx. 1-8; (4) the parable of the vineyard, xx. 9-19; (5) the question about tribute-money, xx. 20-26; (6) the question of the Sadducees, xx. 27-40; (7) the question of Jesus, xx. 41-44; (8) Jesus denounces the scribes, xx. 45-47; (9) the widow's mite, xxi. 1-4; (10) the great discourse concerning the destruction of the Temple and the signs of the end, xxi. 5-38.

VII. THE PASSION OF JESUS (xxii., xxiii.): (1) The treachery of Judas, xxii. 1-6; (2) the last supper, xxii. 7-38; (3) the agony in the garden, xxii. 39-46; (4) the betrayal, xxii. 47, 48; (5) the arrest, xxii. 49-53; (6) the trial before the Sanhedrim, the denials of Peter, xxii. 54-71; (7) the trial before Pilate, Jesus sent to Herod, fruitless expedients of Pilate to secure the release of Jesus, the sentence of death, xxiii. 1-25; (8) the journey to Calvary, xxiii. 26-32; (9) the crucifixion, xxiii. 33-38; (10) the penitent thief, xxiii. 39-43; (11) the Saviour's death, xxiii. 44-49; (12) the burial, xxiii. 50-56.

VIII. THE RESURRECTION AND ASCENSION (xxiv.): (1) The visit of the women and of Peter to the tomb, xxiv. 1-12; (2) the appearance of Jesus to the disciples at Emmaus, xxiv. 13-35; (3) the appearance to the assembled apostles, xxiv. 36-43; (4) the last instructions of the risen Saviour, xxiv. 44-49; (5) the ascension, xxiv. 50-53.

CHAPTER I.

CRITICAL NOTES.

Ver. 1. **Many.**—St. Luke cannot here refer exclusively to the works of the other evangelists. He alludes to narratives drawn up by writers who derived their information from the testimony of "eye-witnesses and ministers of the word." The first and fourth Gospels, written by "eye-witnesses and ministers of the word," are necessarily excluded from this category. This would only leave *one* Gospel, St. Mark's, as a representative of the "*many*" incomplete narratives. Neither can St. Luke refer to apocryphal gospels, which are of a very much later date and of no historical value. "He had in view rather the very earliest literary attempts, made by persons more or less authorised, at the beginning of the apostolic age; and it may be reasonably concluded from this preface, that, during the composition of his Gospel, he had before him many written documents and records, which, when they seemed worthy of acceptation, he incorporated in its pages. The relative coincidence between this and the two former Gospels is certainly most simply accounted for by supposing them to have been freely drawn from common sources" (*Lange*). **Taken in hand.**—*I.e.* attempted; as ver. 3 implies, the attempts had not been very successful. The narratives were fragmentary and ill-arranged, but not necessarily erroneous. **Which are most surely believed among us.** R.V. "which have been fulfilled among us." A rendering favoured by many critics, and which seems to yield a better sense, is, "which have been full accredited," or "established by sure evidence."

Ver. 2. **Even as they.**—*I.e.* the apostles and original disciples. The English rendering is at first a little misleading. **From the beginning.**—*I.e.* from the time Jesus began His public ministry. To have associated with the Saviour from the time of the baptism of John was a necessary qualification for apostleship (Acts i. 21, 22).

Ver. 3. **It seemed good to me also.**—"St. Luke by this classes himself with these πολλοί, and shows that he intended no disparagement nor blame to them, and was going to construct his own history from similar sources. The words that follow imply, however, a conscious superiority of his own qualification for the work" (*Alford*). **Having had perfect understanding, etc.**—Rather, "having traced the course of all things accurately" (R.V.). **From the very first.**—Reference is made here to the contents of the first two chapters of the Gospel. The fragmentary narratives in question dealt solely or chiefly with the *official* life of the Lord. **In order.**—*I.e.* "to narrate the events consecutively in a connected series, and methodical, but not necessarily chronological, order" (*Wordsworth*). **Most excellent.**—A title formally applied to officials of high rank (Acts xxiii. 26, xxiv. 3, xxvi. 25). **Theophilus.**—Probably like St. Luke himself, a Gentile convert. Nothing whatever is known of the person here addressed. The name was a very common one. The idea that it is not a proper name, but is to be taken as a designation of a believer—"one who loves God," or "is loved by God"—is far-fetched and highly improbable. The official title—"most excellent"—is a conclusive argument against it.

Ver. 4. **Instructed.**—Lit. "catechised"; reference being made to the oral teaching imparted to candidates for baptism (catechumens). The section from i. 5 to ii. 52 is Hebraistic in style, and hence many have supposed that the Evangelist here makes use of Aramaic documents.

Ver. 5. **Herod, the king of Judæa.**—He also ruled over Galilee, Samaria, and the greater part of Peræa. He was the son of Antipater, an *Edomite*, and had been imposed upon the Jewish nation by the Romans. The sovereignty of Herod and the enrolment under Cæsar Augustus (ii. 1) are indications of the fact that the sceptre had departed from Judah (Gen. xlix. 10), and that the appearance of the Messiah might now be looked for. **A certain priest.**—Not the high priest. **Of the course of Abia.**—The priests descended from Eleazar and Ithamar, the sons of Aaron, were divided by David into twenty-four courses, each of which ministered in the Temple for one week (1 Chron. xxiv. 1-19). Only four of the twenty-four returned from exile in Babylon; these were again divided into twenty-four classes, and the original names were assigned to them. This is alluded to in Neh. xiii. 30. **Course.**—Ἐφημερία is properly a *daily* service, but came to denote the *class* which served in the Temple for a week.

Ver. 6. **Commandments and ordinances.**—It seems arbitrary to distinguish between these. as some do, and to understand them to denote moral and ceremonial precepts respectively,

Ver. 7.—Childlessness was regarded among the Jews as a great misfortune. It is several times spoken of in the Old Testament as a punishment for sin (see ver. 25).

Ver. 9. **His lot.**—The various offices were distributed among the priests by lot: the most honourable was this of burning incense, the act being a symbol of acceptable prayer rising to God, no priest was allowed to perform it more than once. This day, therefore, would have been a most memorable one in the life of Zacharias, even apart from the vision. **The temple.** —*I.e.* the sanctuary, in which was the altar of incense, as distinguished from the outer court, in which the people were praying.

Ver. 10. **The time of incense.**—Probably at the time of the morning sacrifice.

Ver. 11. **An angel.**—St. Luke both in this Gospel and in the Acts dwells frequently on the ministry of angels. **The right side.**—A circumstance which seems to have no more significance than as marking the definiteness of the vision.

Ver. 13. **Thy prayer.**—For a son; a prayer formerly offered, but to which he had now ceased to expect an answer. **John.**—Jehochanan—"the favour of Jehovah."

Ver. 15. **Shall drink neither wine nor strong drink.**—He shall be a Nazarite (Num. vi. 3), *separate from* the world to God like Samson and Samuel. Cf. Eph. v. 18 for a similar contrast between the false excitement of drunkenness and spiritual fervour.

Ver. 17. **Before Him.**—*I.e.* before the Lord their God, manifest in the flesh. A very clear testimony to the divinity of Christ. "The angel making no express mention of Christ in this passage, but declaring John to be the usher or standard-bearer of the eternal God, we learn from it the eternal divinity of Christ" (*Calvin*). **Spirit.**—Disposition. **Power.**—Zeal and energy, or mighty endowments. There is one point of difference between Elijah and John Baptist—John did no miracle.

Ver. 18.—"Grotius here remarks on the difference in the cases of Abraham (Gen. xv. 8) and Zacharias, as to the *same action.* The former did not ask for a sign from *distrust* in the promise of God, but for *confirmation of his faith*; whereas the latter had no true faith at all, and did not as the former turn from natural causes to the great First Cause. Hence, though a sign was given to him, it was a *judicial* infliction likewise, for not believing; though wisely ordained to be such as should fix the attention of the Jews on the promised child" (*Bloomfield*).

Ver. 19. **Gabriel.**—Name means "man of God"; appeared to Daniel (Dan. viii. 16, ix. 21), and to the blessed Virgin (ver. 26). Only two angels are mentioned by name in Scripture: Gabriel and Michael (Dan. ix. 21; Jude 9)—the one announces God's purposes, the other executes God's decrees. **Stand in the presence of God.**—*I.e.* in attendance, or ministering to: a figure derived from the customs of Oriental courts. He says this to accredit himself as a Divine messenger, and to assure Zacharias that the promise would be performed. **To shew glad tidings.**—Or, "to preach the gospel." St. Luke uses the word more than twenty times in his Gospel and in the Acts, and it is common in the Pauline writings; but it is only found elsewhere in the New Testament in 1 Pet. i. 12; Matt. xi. 5.

Ver. 21. **He tarried so long.**—It was customary for the priest at the time of prayer not to remain long in the holy place, for fear the people who were without might imagine that any vengeance had been inflicted on him for some informality, as he was considered the *representative of the people.*

Ver. 22. **He beckoned unto them.**—R.V. "he continued making signs unto them."

Ver. 26. **The sixth month.**—*I.e.* not of the year: the reference is to the time indicated in ver. 24. **Nazareth.**—St. Luke alone informs us that this village was the place of Mary's residence before the birth of Jesus; from St. Matthew's narrative we might have inferred that it was Bethlehem. The two Gospels are thus shown to be independent of each other, though there is no contradiction between them. Nazareth was an obscure village; it is not mentioned in the Old Testament, the Talmud, or the writings of Josephus. "This is important in its bearing on the originality of our Lord's teaching. In Nazareth the only instruction He would receive would be in His own family and in the synagogue; there He would not be under the influence of Grecian culture, nor that of Rabbinical teachers, with whose whole spirit and system His own was most strongly contrasted" (*Speaker's Commentary*).

Ver. 27. **Espoused.**—Rather, "betrothed," "contracted": a ceremony which among many nations has always preceded marriage, and to which great importance has been attached. **House of David.**—Mary's own descent from David is nowhere asserted, though it seems to be taken for granted in vers. 32, 69. The two genealogies are those of Joseph; it is most probable that Joseph and Mary were first cousins, so that her genealogy would be involved in his. **Mary.**—The same name as Miriam.

Ver. 28. **Highly favoured.**—One on whom grace or favour has been conferred. **The Lord *is* with thee.**—Perhaps should be, "The Lord be with thee": a frequent form of salutation

in the Old Testament. **Blessed art thou among women.**—Omitted in the best critical editions; probably taken from ver. 42.

Ver. 31. **Jesus.**—This is the Greek form of the name Joshua, which means "the salvation of Jehovah," or "Jehovah the Saviour." In two passages of the New Testament the name Jesus occurs when the reference is to Joshua: Acts vii. 45; Heb. iv. 8.

Ver. 32. **Shall be called.**—Shall be publicly recognised as what He really is, the Son of God (2 Sam. vii. 14; Ps. ii. 7, lxxxix. 27). **The throne of His father David.**—A clear revelation of His Messiahship. The prophecy of the physical descent of the Messiah from David is found in Ps. cxxxii. 11.

Ver. 33. **There shall be no end.**—A universal and supernatural kingdom. Cf. Isa. ix. 7; Dan. vii. 14.

Ver. 34. **How.**—"The question of Mary expresses, not unbelief, or even doubt, but innocent surprise" (*Speaker's Commentary*).

Ver. 36. **Thy cousin Elisabeth.**—Rather, "kinswoman"; the exact nature of the relationship is unknown. It does not follow from this that Mary was also of the tribe of Levi; as intermarriage between members of different tribes was allowed, except in the case of heiresses. Reference is made to the pregnancy of Elisabeth as an example of the power of God's creative word.

Ver. 37. **Nothing.**—Rather, "no word." R.V. "no word of God shall be devoid of power."

Ver. 38. **Be it unto me.**—The words reveal not only obedient submission, but patient, longing expectation.

Ver. 39. **City of Judah.**—The city is not named. Probably it was not Hebron, as a place so well known would most likely have been named. The conjecture that Judah is a corruption of Juttah, a priestly city (Josh. xxi. 16), is unsupported by MS. authority. Probably the place referred to was to the south of Jerusalem and to the west of the Dead Sea.

Ver. 41. **The salutation of Mary.**—*I.e.* her salutation as she entered, and not the salutation addressed to her by the angel Gabriel, and now repeated to Elisabeth. **The babe leaped in her womb.**—This movement of the unborn child was evidently regarded by the Evangelist and by Elisabeth as something extraordinary; she took it as a recognition of the unborn Messiah on the part of His kinsman and forerunner.

Ver. 42. **Spake out, etc.**—R.V. "she lifted up her voice with a loud cry." **Blessed art thou among women.**—This might mean (1) Blessed [or highly privileged] art thou beyond all other women, or (2) Thou art blessed [praised] by other women (cf. xi. 27). The former rendering is the better of the two. The phrase used is indeed the Hebrew form of the superlative, as in Jer. xlix. 15; Cant. i. 8.

Ver. 43. **The mother of my Lord.**—This appellation "my Lord" as applied to the unborn babe is an acknowledgment of the Divine nature of Jesus. The title "mother of God" which came into use in the fifth century, is open to obvious objections.

Ver. 45.—This may be rendered either, **Blessed is she that believed, for, etc.**, or, "Blessed is she that believed that there shall be," etc. The former is preferable. Elisabeth no doubt contrasts the faith of Mary with the unbelief of Zacharias.

Ver. 46.—It is interesting to observe the close resemblance between the Magnificat and the song of Hannah in similar circumstances (1 Sam. ii. 1-10). **Soul.**—The natural life with all its affections and emotions.

Ver. 47. **Spirit.**—"The diviner and loftier region of our being" (1 Thess. v. 23) (*Farrar*). **My Saviour.**—Not merely as the Deliverer from a state of degradation, but the Author of the salvation, for which His people were looking.

Ver. 48. **Low estate.**—Lowly condition, not humility; there is a contrast between the present humiliation and the former glories of the house of David.

Ver. 51.—The sense of the passage is, "He scatters their imaginations, frustrates their schemes, and brings their counsels to nought" (*Bloomfield*).

Ver. 54. **He hath holpen.**—*I.e.* helped: the word properly means to lay hold of anything by the hand in order to support it when it is likely to fall.

Ver. 55. **As He spake unto our fathers.**—These words are parenthetical; the sentence runs, "In remembrance of His mercy to Abraham, and to his seed for ever" (cf. Mic. vii. 20; Gal. iii. 16).

Ver. 56. **About three months.**—That is, until Elisabeth's delivery or until shortly before it. It seems probable that on Mary's return to Nazareth the events narrated in Matt. i. 18-24 took place.

Ver. 58. **Cousins.**—Rather, "kinsfolk," which was the original meaning of "cousins." **How the Lord.**—Rather, "that the Lord" (R.V.).

Ver. 59. **On the eighth day.**—The stated time for administering the rite of circumcision (Gen. xxi. 4; Luke ii. 21; Phil. iii. 5). The custom from the first was to give the name to the child at the time of circumcision (cf. Gen. xxi. 3, 4); perhaps it originated in the change of names from Abram to Abraham, and from Sarai to Sarah, at the institution of

the rite (Gen. xvii. 5, 15). **They called him.**—Lit. "they were calling"; the imperfect tense being used idiomatically to denote an unfulfilled attempt—"they were for calling him." **After the name of his father.**—We do not find traces of this custom in the earlier history of the Jews.

Ver. 62. **Made signs.**—This seems to imply that Zacharias was deaf as well as dumb.

Ver. 63. **A writing table.**—*I.e.* a tablet: a board smeared with wax, on which they wrote with a style, a sharp instrument used for the purpose. **Marvelled.**—At the agreement of the parents on the unusual name.

Ver. 66. **And the hand of the Lord.**—A better reading is, "for the hand of the Lord" (R.V.): a remark of the Evangelist's, which sums up the history of John's childhood.

Ver. 68. **Blessed.**—Hence this song of praise has been called the *Benedictus.*

Ver. 69. **Horn of salvation.**—*I.e.* a powerful deliverer and helper. The figure alludes to the horns of beasts as used in defence of themselves or of their offspring.

Ver. 71. **Saved from our enemies.**—"Salvation from our enemies" (R.V.). A political element was undoubtedly present in the anticipation of the deliverance which Christ was to accomplish; but we see from vers. 74, 75 that Zacharias prized this as a means to a higher end, viz. a more complete consecration of the Jewish people to the service and worship of God.

Ver. 72. **To perform the mercy.**—Rather, "to shew mercy toward our fathers" (R.V.).

Ver. 73. **The oath.**—This is recorded in Gen. xxii. 16-18.

Ver. 75. **Holiness and righteousness.**—As generally interpreted, "holiness" denotes the observance of all duties towards *God*; "righteousness," the performance of all duties we owe to *men.* Godet, however, regards "holiness" as negative, and "righteousness" as positive—freedom from defilement, and actual goodness, respectively. **All the days of our life.**—Rather, "all our days" (R.V.).

Ver. 76. **To prepare His ways.**—Cf. Isa. xl. 3; Mal. iii. 1. The same passages are combined in the same way in Mark i. 2.

Ver. 78. **Tender mercy.**—Lit. "bowels of mercy"; the phrase is often found in the Scriptures (Prov. xii. 10; 2 Cor. vii. 15, etc.). **The dayspring.**—The word thus translated is used by the LXX. for both "the dawn" (Jer. xxxi. 40), and for "the branch," as a title of the Messiah (Zech. iii. 8, etc.). The former of these is evidently the meaning of the word here. **On high.**—These words, which convey the thought of the Messiah as coming from heaven, are slightly inconsistent with the figure of the dawn. **Hath visited us.**—A better reading is, "shall visit us" (R.V.).

Ver. 80. **In spirit.**—That is, in mind and wisdom as contrasted with bodily growth Compare the description given of the childhood of Samuel (1 Sam. ii. 26), and of our Lord (ii. 40, 52). **In the deserts.**—The wilderness of Judah (see Matt. iii. 1), not far from his home in the hill country: a rocky tract in the eastern part of Judæa towards the Red Sea. There is no evidence of John's having come in contact with, or having been influenced by, the Essenes—the mystical and ascetical sect of the Jews that lived in the same neighbourhood. "In every point John the Baptist was at variance with the teaching of the Essenes. They had given up Messianic hopes; while that which inspired his soul and ministry was an anticipation of Christ's coming, and the belief that he (John) was to prepare the way before Him. The Essenes taught that matter was the seat of evil; while John, by his emphatic preaching of the necessity of conversion, plainly showed that he considered that evil lay in a depraved will. The Essenes withdrew from society, and gave themselves up to mystical contemplation; John at the appointed time casts himself boldly into the midst of society, and henceforward to the very end of his life takes a most active and zealous interest in his country's affairs" (*Godet*). **The day of his shewing.**—*I.e.* of his manifestation or of his entrance upon his official life as the forerunner of Christ. The passage implies that on receiving a definite signal from God he withdrew from retirement and began his great work. We are not told what this signal was, nor how it was conveyed to him.

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 1—4.

The Relation of Believers to the Written Word.

I. **Faith in Christ and personal devotion to Him are the sources of religious life, and not merely faith in a book.**—Many early disciples had very imperfect knowledge of Jesus, and had to draw upon materials of information very much inferior to those in our Gospels, and yet manifested a love to their Saviour which puts us to shame. The Christian Church, indeed, existed for several centuries before the canon of the New Testament was fully formed. In the age in which St. Luke wrote, and long afterwards, multitudes became Christians who never saw a copy of any of the Gospels, but relied upon the teaching imparted by

evangelists and preachers. This explains the words of St. Paul: "How shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard? *and how shall they hear without a preacher?*" (Rom. x. 14). Specimens of this oral teaching are to be found in Acts x. 36-43, xiii. 23-41. The fact that there may be vital religion of the most genuine kind in the cases of individuals who have not very abundant knowledge is a very significant one. We need to remember, too, that there may be abundant knowledge and very little of the religious spirit.

II. **Devotion to Christ will lead to our treasuring up everything that we can learn concerning Him**—every incident recorded, and every word that fell from His lips. It was this motive no doubt that led to the writing of the multitudinous narratives to which St. Luke here refers. People naturally desired that history of such immense spiritual importance should be committed to writing, and not merely to the fickle memories of hearers. Very early in the history of the Church Papias endeavoured to gather up all the fragments of oral traditions of the facts of the Saviour's life that were still extant. This interest in everything that concerns Jesus accounts for the extraordinary fascination which the apocryphal gospels have had, in spite of their worthlessness, for many, in every generation of Christian history. As one who has studied them carefully says: "We know before we read them that they are weak, silly, and profitless—that they are despicable monuments even of religious fiction—yet still the secret conviction buoys us up, that, perchance, they may contain a few traces of time-honoured traditions—some faint, feeble glimpses of that blessed childhood, that pensive and secluded youth, over which, in passive moments, we muse with such irrepressible longing to know more—such deep, deep desideration. We think that, though so many have sought amidst all this incoherent tissue for the thin golden thread of true history, and have sought, as they themselves tell us, so utterly, so bitterly in vain—still *our* eyes may descry it—that *we* may see and realise in our souls some few unrecorded words or deeds of our Redeemer that others have failed to appreciate" (*Ellicott*).

III. **Christian belief is not allied to credulity.**—St. Luke writes that Theophilus may know the certainty of those things in which he had been instructed. The basis of fact is essential to faith; and therefore every believer is convinced that, in the New Testament records of the life and ministry of Jesus Christ, he has to do with genuine history, and not with cunningly devised fables. This conviction rests upon reasonable grounds. Two of the evangelists, St. Matthew and St. John, were themselves eyewitnesses of events they describe, and were apostles of the Lord. St. Mark is generally considered to have drawn the greater part of his Gospel from the testimony of another eyewitness—St. Peter. While St. Luke writes as one who had had access to the fullest and most trustworthy materials for the biography he has drawn up, and plainly informs us that he had carefully traced out matters from the very beginning, and had scrupulously adhered to the principles that should guide a historian. The Gospels, therefore, submit to the test by which ordinary historical works are to be tried, and come scatheless out of the ordeal. The general tendency of modern criticism is to assign them to a period well within the time when persons were living who could have exposed their falsity, if they had not been records of fact.

Vers. 1-4. *The True Teacher.*—St. Luke alone, of all the evangelists, writes a personal introduction to his Gospel. The historical is helpful to the doctrinal, and the record of the individual is as necessary as that of the community. Truth passes through one individual to mankind; the few teach the many. This preface is useful as a distinction, an explanation, and a reflection. It distin-

guishes the competent from the inadequate instructors, it explains the immediate design of the Gospel, and it reflects light on the high character of the writer. It has been remarked that St. Luke, in this preface, makes no claim to Divine inspiration. The best men do not, as a rule, claim inspiration in so many words, but evince it in their record. The sacred writers do not parade the supernatural; their words are bright with its lustre. True inspiration is self-revealing, and does not need to speak its presence any more than the star its light or the rose its fragrance. Men who talk much about inspiration often lack it. This preface is full of literary grace. A graceful style has its moral uses. St. Luke was a cultured penman; he could employ either the graceful or the rugged. This preface would be helpful to the circulation of the Gospel. Gospels do not disdain the advantage of secondary aids. Eternal realities make use of transient assistances; little things may sometimes advance redemptive missions. Small prefaces may herald the Christ. But a preface of high periods must never fall into a commonplace record; the kindled fire must glow more intensely as it burns. Thus is it with the Gospel of St. Luke. Here we have a pattern of *the true teacher.*

I. **That he comes under the sacred spell of truth.**—This preface informs us that "many" had taken in hand to write gospels, and that St. Luke was one of a multitude who had commenced a like task. Why so many scribes? Were they mainly animated by a curious desire to investigate the history of the Christ? was their intellectual activity stirred by the strange facts and doctrine they had heard? did they wish to gain fame by literature? Nay! These early writers had come under a mighty influence—the history of the Christ had awakened them to *enthusiasm.* The truths concerning Him burned in their souls, and longed for outlet through the pen. This is the true history of theological literature. It is the outcome of a holy enthusiasm stirred by soul-moving and unique facts. It is the outcome of a living and acting Christ. No other literature is written under such a constraining energy. Science has no such moving power. All truth has a charm for the sincere mind; but the charm of Christian truth is incomparable. Hence the number of written gospels. The enthusiasm is numerically strong as well as intense. Enthusiasm in the teacher awakens enthusiasm in the scholar. Christ has set many pens in motion. He has awakened innumerable teachers. Christianity is the best teaching power in the earth; it inculcates the most powerful knowledge—a knowledge mighty because based on facts. Men write about it only as they come under its sacred charm. The writer ignorant of this spell will never send a gospel to his fellows. The true teacher is not a common man, but a man in whose soul truth has been revealed, who strives to write in a book the inner vision he has seen and the subtle power he has felt. Only such a man can record miracles with grace. Such men *must* write gospels.

II. **That he is not discouraged by the partial failure of others.**—*Many* had taken in hand to write the holy record of the Christ. St. Luke seems to imply that their efforts were praiseworthy; he indeed ranks himself amongst them; he gives no censure; he implies their honesty. Doubtless they were zealous but inadequate scribes; had their histories been satisfactory, he would not have added another. Zeal is not competency. Evidently St. Luke does not include the other inspired evangelists as amongst "the many." "The many" are indicated as outside the apostolic circle. He probably refers to writings which have not reached our age. Many feel the impulse of sacred literature; few only realise its ideal. The multitude write inadequate gospels; few write gospels that live. The numerous writers named by St. Luke indicate the *difficulty* of sacred authorship; in that even a multitude of men cannot accomplish it with success. That in which many fail must be hard to achieve. It indicates the *inexhausti-*

bility of religious truth; though many write about it, none can exhaust its meaning. The moral instructor can never wear out his theme. But inadequate attempts to unfold spiritual truth are not without value; each mind has its own peculiar view of Christ, and adds something to the universal conception of Him. But religious literature must of necessity be inadequate, because eye hath not seen, ear hath not heard, pen cannot describe, these inscrutable things. The artist cannot paint the sun; he cannot even look upon its glory. Imperfect gospels must be superseded; they place truth in undue perspective; they may destroy the due proportion of the faith. The imperfect gospel must perish—time will destroy it; the true only can endure. But the true teacher is not discouraged by the multitude of imperfect gospels about him; he summons all his energy, uses them as far as he can, enlarges and transforms them, and conducts his own to a complete and perfect end. His gospel is immortal.

III. **That his aim is to impart permanency to truth.**—The "most excellent Theophilus" had been *orally* instructed and catechised in the things most surely believed. Rumour of them had reached him, and doubtless he had also enjoyed the privilege of definite verbal teaching. The traditions of the past had been related to him. But tradition was transient and uncertain, liable to corruption and decay. St. Luke was not content with the oral; he wanted "to write" to Theophilus, and through him to all subsequent ages. The true teacher is anxious alike for the adequate and permanent embodiment of the truth. He wants to write it in books, engrave it on immortal souls, embody it in human lives, and associate it with enduring institutions. He would rather commit it to the care of the pen than to the guardianship of the voice. The *written* Gospels keep the facts of Christianity alive in the universal mind. The true teacher does all he can to make the truth vital and permanent, so that when he is gone his gospel may survive and instruct. He builds a temple for the truth, that it may no longer live in a frail tent.

IV. **That he exercises the highest qualities.**—This preface proves that St. Luke gave his best abilities to the writing of his Gospel and to the instruction of Theophilus. He was not content to put forth an inferior effort or to gain a partial success; he engaged his whole being in the task. 1. *Diligence.* He was diligent in the use of existing documents; he did not want to be original where originality would be injurious. He was diligent in research; he traced the history point by point to its commencement. He did not indolently accept conclusions or facts without testing them. He was diligent in personal application and effort, so that he added much to existing information about the Messiah. The true teacher must be diligent; he must be given to original research and fervent endeavour. His mental activity will have a stimulating effect upon the student. 2. *Method.* St. Luke wrote "in order." He was methodical in the arrangement of his materials. Truth is served by arrangement. It is worth arrangement. Arrangement aids the student. God is not the author of confusion. Order is heaven's first law. It is visible in the material universe. The true teacher will have due regard to the advantage of arrangement; he will secure it by industry and skill. The order of the record will inspire order of mental conception and of moral life. 3. *Completeness.* St. Luke had "perfect understanding of *all things*." He investigated facts both small and great; he allowed nothing to escape his observation; all were of meaning in his history. He was not a careless student. He was not a partial thinker. He was not a prejudiced investigator. He was not a sectarian scribe. He had nothing to conceal. All relating to the Christ was interesting and important to him, and would bear the light of day. The true teacher seeks to gather into his instruction all the facts relating to his theme, and so doing he need not fear results; they are in the safe keeping of

truth. Completeness of instruction will lead to fulness of moral conduct. 4. *Fidelity.* St. Luke does not write as an "eyewitness"; the facts he narrates were delivered to him and investigated by him. Testimony is the basis of Christian truth; and in the first instance it is the testimony of eyewitnesses. St. Luke does not claim an authority he did not possess; he presents his authorship in its true light. This gives antecedent credibility to his history: a man true to himself will be true to his facts. He will not be likely to avail himself of seeming advantage in a clandestine manner. He will be characterised by candour and modesty. The true teacher does not claim more than his due, and will not assert an independence that does not belong to him. His fidelity will awaken a love of truth in his students. 5. *Courtesy.* St. Luke in his preface addresses Theophilus in the most courteous manner, both as regards his character and official position. Truth gains by the courtesy of its teacher. The true teacher is never rude; he has in him the wisdom that is gentle and peaceable. The historian of Christianity must approach men on their best side, and seek the advantage of conciliatory address. Courtesy reacts in the favourable disposition of the student.

V. **That he understands the worth of the solitary mind.**—St. Luke wrote his Gospel for the instruction and certitude of the most excellent Theophilus; the instruction and confirmation of one mind were to him an object of desire. He wanted to strengthen faith: how many teachers seem to awaken doubt! 1. *The man was attractive in disposition.* Theophilus was attractive in disposition. He was friendly toward the Divine. He would be likely to receive with meekness the engrafted word. The true teacher is drawn to the receptive scholar. 2. *He was influential in rank.* Not many mighty are called. The poor have the gospel preached to them. But the true teacher is also anxious to bring wealth and rank under the influence of the truth as it is in Jesus. Theophilus will be a helpful disciple in the future. Christ Himself sought the single soul, the woman of Samaria. The good Shepherd goes after *one* lost sheep until He finds it. The true teacher appreciates the value of the individual, and will write a gospel for the one mind. 3. *He was representative in position.* Though St. Luke wrote to one man, yet his Gospel is characterised by universality. The Gospel is sure to travel beyond Theophilus to the world. It will touch all ages. Providence takes our gospels to people we never addressed them to, to ages beyond our own. In St. Luke's Gospel the light dawns upon the Gentile world; the true teacher has words of hope for the outcast, for universal man. He is not exclusive in temper. He delights in wise men from the East, in certain Greeks, as well as in the privileged people. One mind is worth more than a world. The Bible is more concerned about souls than suns and material systems. —*Exell.*

SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS ON VERSES 1—4.

Vers. 1-4. *The Prologue.*—In the Muratorian fragment it is expressly said of Luke that he had not himself seen the Lord in the flesh, but, having drawn his information from as high a source as possible, began his narrative with the birth of John. In his prologue we see the witness, as it were, collecting the materials, and laying the productions of his predecessors, as well as the knowledge of his companions, under contribution, that he may present Theophilus with a reliable history.—*McCheyne Edgar.*

Ver. 1. "*Many have taken in hand.*" —We have here an incidental notice of the sensation created in human society by the mission and work of Jesus Christ. Those who had seen and heard Him could not but be persuaded that His appearance upon

earth was the greatest event in history, and those to whom they spoke of Him could scarcely fail to form the same opinion. As the first generation of believers who had had personal knowledge of the Saviour began to pass away, oral statements concerning His teaching and mighty deeds would naturally be superseded by written documents of a more or less imperfect character. Fragmentary knowledge would lead to the writing and circulation of defective narratives of the life of the Saviour; and no doubt, in some cases, legendary matter would find its way into the record. There was an opening, therefore, for the work of a regular historian like St. Luke, who would by personal labours fill up gaps in the narrative of the life of the Founder of Christianity, and reject all such matter as was from its apocryphal character unworthy of a place in it. The greatness of the task—"to draw up a narrative concerning those matters which have been fulfilled among us" (R.V.), or an adequate account of the life of Jesus—explains why so many had failed in the endeavour. The life of any ordinary man, who has been successful in accomplishing a certain limited piece of work, may with care be satisfactorily written; but that of those who have exercised wide and deep influence upon the society in which they have lived can only be presented in an imperfect and one-sided manner. In many instances the biography utterly fails to explain to a succeeding generation the extraordinary personal influence exercised by the subject of it upon those who came in contact with him. A consideration of this fact convinces us of the enormous, if not insuperable, difficulties in the way of writing the life of One who was Son of God as well as Son of man. Two reasons for the failure that marked the tentative biographies to which St. Luke here alludes may be noted: (1) the incompleteness of the historical material at the command of the authors; and (2) want of adequate spiritual sympathy betwen them and Him of whom they wrote. Hase felicitously compares these early gospels which have now passed into oblivion with the fossil plants which have disappeared to give place to existing vegetation.

"*Among us.*"—Whether we take the latter clause of the verse to mean "the events which have been fulfilled," or "the matters which are most surely believed," the words "among us" imply that St. Luke is writing as a sacred, and not as a secular, historian. The readers whom he has in view are those who are firmly convinced that the kingdom of God has been established on earth by the life and work of Jesus, the Son of God. It is our being convinced of this fact by the living evidence of those who are believers in Christ, and by the existence of His Church in the world, that will enable us to read the Gospels themselves so as to understand them aright, and to receive the testimony concerning Him that they have to give. Faith in Him as the Saviour will then enable us to understand the significance of His teaching and work.

Ver. 2. "*Eyewitnesses and ministers of the word.*"—Though St. Luke hints at the unsatisfactory results of these early attempts to write the life of Jesus, he casts no slur upon the motives which had influenced the authors of them—indeed, he implies that these narratives were in general based upon the oral testimony of persons who had known Jesus. The errors that characterised them were, therefore, more likely to be those arising from defective knowledge than from intentional perversion of fact. *The sources from which St. Luke drew his Gospel were threefold:* (1) the statements of "eyewitnesses and ministers of the word"; (2) the results of the inquiries which he himself had made into events in the life of Christ, which were not usually contained in oral preaching or not prominent in it; and (3) no doubt material in the writings to which he refers which was suitable

for his purpose. Examples of brief narratives of the life of Jesus as given in oral teaching are to be found in Acts x. 36-43, xiii. 23-38. Both of these start from the period of John's preaching and baptism. St. Luke mentions two qualifications which gave weight to the testimony of apostles and original disciples: (1) they were eyewitnesses of the life of the Saviour from the beginning of His public ministry; and (2) they had become, after His ascension, ministers of the word, *i.e.* they had given themselves up to the work of winning disciples by witnessing to the things which they had seen and heard. This second qualification was equally necessary with the first; for there were eyewitnesses who were enemies of the word—the prejudices of scribes, Pharisees, and elders of the Jews, who rejected Jesus, would render it impossible for them to give trustworthy information concerning Him. The kind of "tradition" St. Luke has in view is that of 1 John i. 1: "That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, of the Word of life . . . that which we have seen and heard declare we unto you." Among those who were both eyewitnesses and disciples from whom the Evangelist obtained information were the twelve, the seventy, the Virgin Mary, Lazarus of Bethany and his sisters Martha and Mary, Mary Magdalene, etc. "It is because the Gospels are so primitive and authentic that they bring before us so perfectly, not some visionary ideal that grew up in the mind and soul of Christendom, not some legend of a glorified and saintly figure, but the very picture and image of Jesus Christ as He lived among men."

Ver. 3. "*It seemed good to me also.*"—An interesting light is here thrown incidentally on the nature of the process of inspiration. The Evangelist speaks of the composition of the Gospel as having been a work which he felt at full liberty to undertake or not. He evidently did not regard himself as having been a passive machine moved by the Holy Spirit, but as a man attracted to write upon a subject of absorbing interest, concerning which he was able to give fuller information than had as yet appeared. The method he describes himself as following, too, is that adopted by every conscientious and painstaking historian or biographer. Yet no one can doubt that his work rightly occupies a place in inspired, as distinguished from ordinary, literature. His Gospel has been one of the great means employed by the Holy Spirit for the regeneration of mankind; and all who accept the Christian revelation are firmly convinced that it was composed under the influence of inspiration, however unconscious the author himself may have been of the fact. In this co-operation of the Divine and the human, we have a proof that the Divine sovereignty is exercised without infringement upon the freedom of our will.

"*Having traced the course of all things,*" *etc.* (*R.V.*).—"St. Luke seems to compare himself to a traveller who endeavours to ascend to the very source of a river in order to trace it down again all along its course, and to make a full survey of its banks" (*Godet*). If we might employ the same metaphor, and apply it to the two historical works which we owe to the pen of this Evangelist—the Gospel and the Acts of the Apostles—we could describe him as following the stream of God's mercy as revealed in Christ, from the source in the hills of Nazareth down through many lands until it reaches Rome, the centre of the world's life, from whence its healing waters are to flow again to the nations under its rule.

"*All things.*"—St. Luke's purpose seems to be to omit nothing worthy of notice or of a place in the history. St. John, on the other hand, admits that he has in his Gospel merely selected some incidents from a life

of unparalleled activity: "Many other signs truly did Jesus in the presence of His disciples, which are not written in this book: but these are written that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through His name" (xx. 30, 31). And, again, "And there are also many other things which Jesus did, the which, if they should be written every one, I suppose that even the world itself could not contain the books that should be written" (xxi. 25).

"*The very first.*"—This is an earlier starting-point than "the beginning" of ver. 2. He goes back fully thirty years before the Baptist's preaching, and begins with the announcement by the angel of the birth of him who was to be the forerunner of the Christ. Some idea of the extent to which St. Luke has supplied us with information omitted by the first and second evangelists may be formed from a consideration of the fact that out of the thirteen hundred and ten verses contained in the first three Gospels, five hundred and forty-one are peculiar to him. So that he has actually given us more than one-third of the history which we possess of the words and sayings of Jesus.

"*Most excellent Theophilus.*"—From this form of address, used by an inspired writer, may be fairly deduced the lawfulness and propriety, generally speaking, of giving to men the ordinary titles of respect. They err who think that there is any propriety or religion in assuming a singularity in such things, or in sturdily refusing what are usually considered marks of civility and respect. It is unworthy at once of the Christian and of the man to be guilty of hollow hypocrisy or fawning servility; but it is both dutiful and adorning to be courteous, and to give honour to whom honour is due.—*Foote.*

The Orderliness of Gospel Scripture.—"To write unto thee in order." St. Luke hoped not only to write what was true, but to write it in order. He knew the importance of arrangement, not least in the things of God. "God is not a God of confusion," St. Paul says; and the saying has many applications besides the one which he made of it. It has an important application to God's revelations. The Bible was many books before it was one. The whole volume of the two Testaments was some fifteen hundred years or more in writing; and it was written in order, not casually, and not promiscuously, as regards the Divine Author. There was method, there was system, there was sequence and consequence, in the writing of the Bible. We can trace, too, something of that orderliness of writing which the text speaks of in the acknowledged diversity amongst the three portions of our New Testament. 1. The writings of St. Paul. 2. The first three Gospels. 3. The writings of St. John. Does God write in order, or does "confusion" bewray the no-god, when He bids St. Paul first write down the Saviour in glory—then the three tell us what He was on earth, and then the beloved apostle, survivor of the eleven, spectator of a new age with its troublous fortunes, build the little bridge which shall knit together the two, and say, "He that ascended is the same also that descended: I am He that liveth, and I was dead; and, behold, I am alive for evermore"?—*Vaughan.*

Ver. 4. *Edification.*—It is interesting to notice that St. Luke dedicates his Gospel to a fellow-Christian, to be used by him for edification—that he might know the certainty of those things in which he had been instructed. One might have expected that his purpose would have been to appeal in it to those who were still ignorant of Christian truth, in order to convince them of the reality of those things about which he wrote. But his actual procedure is in perfect harmony with the general character of Holy Scripture.

The word of God is so written as to respond only to those who come to it seeking salvation, or who desire to be established and confirmed in the faith they hold, or to make additional attainments in knowledge with a view to a more perfect and worthy service of God. It is a sealed book to those who do not feel the necessity of salvation, and who do not hunger and thirst after righteousness. In it, as in the teaching of Jesus, which is its choicest part, there are things which are hidden from the wise and prudent, but which babes can read and understand. For its treasures are not the prize won by force of intellect, but the gift of Heaven to the loving, believing heart.

The Believer's Faith confirmed.—We know nothing of Theophilus beyond the facts that he was one who had received certain elementary instruction in the articles of the Christian faith, and that St. Luke wrote his Gospel with the purpose of giving him firm assurance of the truth of the great principles and beliefs on which that faith was founded. In one respect, indeed, he was in different circumstances from those in which we find ourselves: his knowledge of religious truth was not derived from a written revelation, but from the oral teaching of apostles and disciples who had known Christ, or of their immediate successors. We can scarcely make a mistake in saying that, until he received this Gospel from the hands of St. Luke, he had never seen a page of any of the books which now make up the New Testament. But apart from this accidental difference of outward circumstances, his experience as a believer was like that of all who, since his time, have embraced the Christian religion. His religious life was based upon the following beliefs, in which he had been instructed: 1. That God is absolutely holy, and requires holiness in all whom He has made capable of consciously serving Him. 2. That he himself was guilty and depraved, and consequently exposed to the Divine anger against sin, and that he could not by any efforts of his own atone for the evil he had done, nor attain to that holiness which God requires. 3. That Jesus Christ, a perfectly holy being, who was Son of God and Son of man, had made atonement for sin. 4. That in the name of Christ free pardon of sin, and the gift of everlasting life, were now offered to all men, to be received by faith in Him. All these beliefs were fully confirmed by the history St. Luke had to give of the life and teaching of Christ. All through this Gospel Christ claims and exercises the power of forgiving sin; and the record of the mercy shown to the penitent woman, to those who had lived lives like that of the prodigal son, and to the dying robber, abundantly proved that no degree of human guilt need lead to despair of forgiveness. (The incidents referred to, and the parable, are peculiar to this Gospel.) We cannot doubt but that Theophilus derived from his reading of this Gospel a deeper assurance of the love of God revealed to mankind in Christ Jesus than he had had before.

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 5—25.

Human Life at its best.—We see here—

I. **Human life at its best.**—1. A devout and blameless course of conduct. 2. Honourable descent. 3. Sacred calling. 4. The enjoyment of high privilege—that of being chosen to offer the incense which symbolised the prayers of the nation.

II. **Yet at its best human life is compassed about with sorrows and weaknesses.**—Sorrows: 1. The heart of the man is troubled by his own personal affliction, especially as childlessness was regarded in Israel as an indication of

Divine displeasure. 2. The heart of the priest could not but be wrung by the sinful state of the nation of whom he was the representative before God. Weaknesses: 1. He is overcome by fear at the sight of a messenger from the God whom he served so zealously. 2. He is slow of heart to believe the promise made to him, though it was but the fulfilment of his own prayers.

III. **The Divine compassion.**—1. Towards this lonely pair in filling their hearts with joy and gladness. 2. Towards the nation in sending one who would prepare them to receive their Redeemer. 3. In inflicting merely a transitory punishment for unbelief.

SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS ON VERSES 5—25.

Ver. 5. "*A certain priest.*"—One of the special purposes of St. Luke's Gospel is to display the *sacerdotal office* and *sacrificial efficacy* of Christ, the true priest, and victim of the whole human race; and he aptly begins his Gospel by showing that the *Levitical* priesthood and sacrifices were imperfect and transitory, but had a sacred purpose as *preparatory* and ministerial to the priesthood and sacrifice of Christ.—*Wordsworth.*

"*In the days of Herod.*"—It makes a great deal of difference in what times and amid what circumstances and influences a man lives. In godly days it is not remarkable that one should live righteously; but when the prevailing spirit is unrighteous, the life that is holy and devout shines with rare splendour, like a lamp in the darkness. Such were the times and the spirit of "the days of Herod," and such were the lives of the blameless old pair here mentioned. Amid almost universal corruption, they lived in piety and godly simplicity. The lesson is, that it is not necessary for us to be like other people, if other people are not what they ought to be. The darker the night of sin about us, the clearer should be the light that streams from our life and conduct.—*Miller.*

Ver. 6. *A Definition of a Holy Character and Life.*—1. Piety towards God: it is a real and not an apparent goodness, for it is an omniscient Judge who here pronounces sentence of approval: it is manifested in a *habitual* obedience to all the various commandments and ordinances of God (*walking* describes habitual action). 2. Good repute with men: irreproachable or blameless. Both elements are essential to a perfect character, and it is to be noted that righteousness towards God will always, where it is genuine, include blamelessness towards men. A man may win the approval of his fellows, and yet be neglectful of his duties towards God; but no one can be approved of God, and yet fail to deserve the respect of all who know him.

"*Both righteous.*"—The peaceful, pious home of the old priest is beautifully outlined. Somewhere in the hill country, in quiet seclusion, the priestly pair lived in cheerful godliness, and their content marred only by the absence of child voices in their quiet house. They presented a lovely example of Old Testament piety in a time of declension. Inwardly, they were "righteous before God"; outwardly, their lives were blamelessly conformed to His "commandments and ordinances," not in absolute sinless perfection, but in the true spirit of Old Testament religion. Earth shows no fairer sight than where husband and wife dwell as heirs together of the grace of life and fellow-helpers to the truth. The salt of a nation is in its pious home life.—*Maclaren.*

"*Before God.*"—It is not enough to have human commendation. How do we stand before God? How does our life appear to Him? No matter how

men praise and commend, if as God sees us we are wrong. We are in reality just what we are "before God"—nothing less, nothing more. The question always to be asked is, "What will God think of this?"—*Miller.*

A Righteous Life.—Zacharias is the first man of whom the Gospels tell us. He was "righteous before God." This was shown by—1. His blameless life. 2. His faithful service as God's priest. 3. His prayerful spirit. 4. His heartfelt praise.

Ver. 8. "*While he executed the priest's office.*"—How solemnly, how divinely, the holy drama of a new revelation opens! An angel from heaven, a man on earth,—these are invariably the two chief characters in the sacred story; heaven acting upon earth, man brought into contact with the beings of the invisible world. On one hand, an Israelite,—one of the peculiar people to whom the promises belong; more, one of its priests appointed to plead for God to man, and for man to God; one specially chosen out of the chosen nation. On the other, "I, Gabriel, that stand before the presence of God." The scene is the most sacred spot of the whole earth, of the Land of Promise, of the city of the great King—namely, the sanctuary of God's house; and here, in the most holy retirement, an announcement is made, a dialogue held between the two by the altar of incense—type of the worship of the saints—in the hour of public prayer, while Israel is imploring the blessing of Jehovah. Could the opening of the Divine New Testament drama be more solemn, more appropriate, more Israelitish, more sacred, either as regards person, place, time, or action?—*Pfenninger.*

Ver. 10. "*At the time of incense.*"—The offering of incense was simultaneous with the prayer of the people assembled in the court of the Temple. There was a close relation between these two actions. The one was symbolical, ideal, and therefore perfectly holy in its character: the real prayer offered by the people was of necessity imperfect and tainted by sin. The former covered the latter with its holiness: the latter communicated to the former reality and life. The one was, therefore, complementary to the other.—*Godet.*

Vers. 11-79. *The Last Messianic Prophecies.*—The last of the long series of prophecies that foreannounced the Redeemer were in their substance and form unlike any that had preceded, thus marking the advent of a new order of things. St. Luke presents them to us in *three most vivid groups*, ascending in their gradation of tribute offered to the dignity of Christ.

I. **An angel breaks the silence of ages** by predicting the birth of the forerunner, but in such a manner as to make the coming of the Lord Himself the burden of his prophecy (vers. 11-20).

II. Then follows **the central announcement** by an angel to the virgin mother, in which the supremacy of the Saviour's personal dignity and kingly rule is testified in terms that are never surpassed in Holy Scripture (vers. 26-38).

III. Finally, **the Holy Ghost Himself, taking the angel's place,** proclaims by Zacharias, the last of the prophets, the future and eternal dominion of the Christ (vers. 67-79).—*Pope.*

Ver. 11. "*An angel.*"—The third Gospel is throughout a gospel of the holy angels, *i.e.* we read more of their ministry in connection with Jesus than elsewhere. This is especially marked at the outset (i. 11-26, 35; ii. 9, 10-16). Our most complete revelations, whether of the functions of the holy angels towards the Saviour during His life-walk on earth, or of their relation to us, are to be found in St. Luke. His narrative shows us in detail the living and continuous realisation of the most beautiful vision of the Hebrew story—

"the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of man."—*Alexander.*

"*On the right side of the altar.*"—The Temple from which the prayers of the people ascended to God is the place where the first sign is given of the coming fulfilment of the national desire and hope of a Deliverer: here in the presence and message of the angel the first rays of light begin to break through the darkness.

Ver. 12. "*He was troubled.*"—Yet the angel had come on an errand of love. All through the Bible we find that people were afraid of God's angels. Their very glory startled and terrified those to whom they appeared. It is ofttimes the same with us. When God's messengers come to us on errands of grace and peace we are terrified, as if they were messengers of wrath. The things which we call trials and adversities are really God's angels, though they seem terrible to us; and if we will only quiet our hearts and wait, we shall find that they are messengers from heaven, and that they have brought blessings to us from God.—*Miller.*

"*Fear fell upon him.*"—He that had wont to live and serve in presence of the Master was now astonished at the presence of the servant. So much difference is there betwixt our faith and our senses, that the apprehension of the presence of the God of spirits by faith goes down sweetly with us, whereas the sensible apprehension of an angel dismays us. Holy Zachary, that had wont to live by faith, thought he should die when his sense began to be set on work. It was the weakness of him that served at the altar without horror to be daunted with the face of his fellow-servant.—*Hall.*

Ver. 13. "*Fear not.*"—The first recorded words are thus those that banish fear—an appropriate prelude to the gospel of peace. St. Luke's last sentence tells of the apostle's "blessing and praising God" (xxiv. 53).

Soothing Words.—The angel's message begins, as heaven's messages to devout souls ever do, with soothing words—the very signature of Divine appearances both in Old and New Testaments. It is like a mother's whisper to a terrified child, and is made still more caressing and assuring by the use of the name "Zacharias," and by the assurance that his prayer is heard. Note how the names of the whole future family are in this verse, as token of the intimate and loving knowledge which God has of each.—*Maclaren.*

"*Thy wife Elisabeth shall bear thee a son.*"—What other home in Israel could have been the training-ground of the prophet? What more fitting nursery for a personal force, inspired by and steeped in the Scriptures, unindebted and indeed hostile to contemporary urban authority and petrified traditionalism? The prophet did not owe all his originality and unique moral force to himself. His character owed its primary development to the home of a devout priest, blessed by an immediate Divine revelation, and living in the light of a recognised Divine purpose.—*Vallings.*

Prayer granted at last.—"Thy prayer is heard." That this prayer was not one which Zacharias had offered that day is quite evident; for when the angel told him that it was to be granted to him he was surprised, and doubted as to the possibility of its being granted. It was, therefore, a prayer which he had offered years before, and which now perhaps he had forgotten, until the angel brought it to his remembrance. At any rate, for some time, perhaps for a long time past, he had given up all thoughts of receiving an answer. Yet though he may have forgotten it, God had it in remembrance. In a general way we all believe and admit that the omniscient God is acquainted with all our

thoughts, and with the circumstances of our lives; but we can scarcely help being surprised at every new proof we receive of the fact that God knows our individual desires, and the trials and difficulties of our individual lot. Such wonderful acquaintance and sympathy with the sorrow that lay beneath the surface of Zacharias' life is now shown in the message sent to him. From it he might learn, and we may learn, three great lessons :—

I. **That delay is not necessarily refusal.**—There may be delay in answering prayer, which simply means that God is postponing, and not refusing, the gift of those things which we ask from Him. We should, indeed, be prepared for this; but in our actual experience we are often surprised and perplexed by it. The spiritual blessings of pardon and of help in time of need are, we believe, instantly given. God would no more delay giving them than a parent would delay giving food to his hungry child. But other things—things which we believe would be for our present advantage and comfort—His higher wisdom may lead Him to withhold, or to delay giving.

II. **That God is not strict to punish our loss of faith.**—Our ceasing to offer the prayer which has not been granted, and even our becoming incredulous as to the possibility of receiving it, do not necessarily preclude our getting the benefit we desire. God does, indeed, require us to manifest faith in order that we may receive; but He is merciful towards our spiritual infirmities, and is not strict to withhold what we may have become unworthy to receive. The strong faith we once had may receive its reward—a reward which rebukes the unbelief into which we may have fallen, and arouses us out of it.

III. **That the purpose of the delay may have been to give a fuller and more satisfying answer to our prayer.**—Thus was it in the case of Zacharias. The son for whose birth he had longed was predestined to be the forerunner of Christ. It was only now, when the angel appeared to him, that the fulness of time was drawing near for the incarnation of the Son of God, and with this great event the birth of John the Baptist was associated in the counsels of God. Zacharias and Elisabeth were not only blessed with a son, but with a son who was to be the herald of the great King. In this way both the prayer which Zacharias offered this day on behalf to the people that God would hasten the coming of the Messiah, and that which in former years he had offered for himself, were simultaneously granted: both found their fulfilment in what was communicated by the angel. St. Luke elsewhere, in the parables of the selfish neighbour and of the unjust judge, commends *importunate* prayer, as having power to prevail with God. The example of the fulfilment of Zacharias' prayer is full of encouragement for those who cannot, by reason of spiritual infirmity, manifest heroic faith, and take the gate of heaven by storm.

Ver. 15. "*Great in the sight of the Lord.*"—How true this prediction is Christ's eulogium witnesses, who declared that no greater had been born of women. Greatness, prophesied by an angel, and attested by Jesus, is greatness indeed. Greatness "in the sight of the Lord" is measured by very different standards from the world's. It does not lie in the qualities that make the thinker, the artist, or the poet, but such as make the prophet and the saint. The true ambition is to be great after *this* pattern—great in dauntless witness for God, in self-suppression, in yearning towards the Christ, in pointing to Him, and in lowly contentment to fade in His light, and decrease that He may increase.—*Maclaren.*

"*Great in the sight of the Lord.*"—The annunciation of the forerunner by an angel, an honour which he shares with other elect servants of God's will, derived all its meaning from the glory of the Being whose herald he was. The greatest of the children of men

was raised up in this preternatural way, and amidst these circumstantials of dignity, not for His own sake, but that His whole life and mission might proclaim to Israel, "Thy King cometh!"—*Pope.*

"*Great in the sight of the Lord.*"—Truly great, then; for just what a man is in God's eyes that is he indeed, neither more nor less. A silent hint also that no earthly greatness is to be expected; for that which is highly esteemed before men is an abomination in the sight of the Lord.—*Lange.*

"*He shall drink neither wine nor strong drink.*"—The strongly marked features in the habits of the Nazarite should be viewed as typically teaching that not only the ministers, but all the people of God, should abstain from sin, be temperate in all things, be superior to earthly pleasures and cares, and be altogether a peculiar people, distinguished from men of the world.—*Foote.*

"*Filled with the Holy Ghost, even from his mother's womb.*"—As the more plentiful influence of the Spirit was in John an extraordinary gift of God, it ought to be observed that the Spirit is not bestowed on all from their very infancy, but only when it pleases God. John bore from the womb a token of future rank. Saul, while tending the herd, remained long without any mark of royalty, and when at length chosen to be king was suddenly *turned into another man* (1 Sam. x. 6). Let us learn from this example that, from the earliest infancy to the latest old age, the operation of the Spirit in men is free.—*Calvin.*

Ver. 16. "*Many shall he turn to the Lord their God.*"—The word of John was one of preparation and turning men's hearts towards God. It was a concentration of the spirit of the law, whose office it was to convince of sin, and he eminently represented the law and the prophets in their work of preparing the way for Christ.—*Alford.*

Ver. 17. "*The spirit and power of Elias.*"—*I.e.* after the model of that distinguished reformer, and with like success in turning hearts. "Strikingly, indeed, did John resemble Elias: both fell on evil times, both witnessed fearlessly for God; neither was much seen, save in the direct exercise of their ministry; both were at the head of schools of disciples; the result of the ministry of both might be expressed in the same terms—'many of the children of Israel did they turn to the Lord their God'" (*Brown*).

"*Turn the hearts of the fathers to the children.*"—The true sense of these words seems to me to be indicated by other prophetic passages, such as Isa. xxix. 22, "Jacob shall not now be ashamed, neither shall his face now wax pale, when he seeth his children [become] the work of Mine hands"; lxiii. 16, "Though Abraham be ignorant of us, and Israel acknowledge us not, thou, O Lord, art our father." Abraham and Jacob, in the place of their rest, blushed at the sight of their guilty descendants, and turned away their faces from them; but now they will return with satisfaction towards them, in consequence of the change produced by the ministry of John. The words of Jesus, "Your father Abraham rejoiced to see My day, and he saw it, and was glad" (John viii. 56), prove that there is some reality beneath these poetic images. In this sense we can easily explain the modification introduced into the latter part of the passage: the children who return to their fathers are the Jews of the time of the Messiah—the children of the obedient, who return to the wisdom of the holy patriarchs.—*Godet.*

"*And the disobedient to the wisdom of the just.*"—The very substitution of this clause for the original of Malachi, "and the hearts of the children to their fathers," seems suggestive at least of the connection between filial estrangement and a general ungodliness—between a heart undutiful and

a heart irreverent, a son alienated from his father and a man alienated from his God. "He shall turn the hearts of the children to their fathers" is, in other words, "he shall turn the disobedient to the wisdom of the just." It is remarkable, in this connection, that we do not find any express mention, in the Baptist's ministry, of a special appeal to parents and children, such as he addressed to the soldiers, the publicans, the Pharisees, or the people at large. Parental and filial discord was not so much one single example, it was a general description rather, of the dislocation and disorganisation of society which the Baptist was sent to remonstrate with and to heal.—*Vaughan.*

Vers. 19, 20. "*I am Gabriel . . . thou shalt be mute.*"—In comparison with the angels man in his present state seems but a feeble creature. He is subject for the time being to their control, and they rule over him. In all their communications with men they show that they mean to be believed and obeyed. They are not to be trifled with, any more than physical nature itself, and cannot leave the authoritative station in which the eternal Word has ranged them.—*Mason.*

Ver. 20. "*Thou believest not.*"—In the words actually employed by Zacharias, and the blessed Virgin Mary, respectively (see ver. 34), there does not seem to be much difference; but the speakers were very diversely affected. While *hers* was the hesitation of faith (see ver. 45), which timidly asked for *explanation*, his was the reluctance of *unbelief*, which required a *sign*. Hence *her* doubt was solved, *his* punished.—*Burgon.*

Ver. 22. "*Remained speechless.*"—Origen, Ambrose, and Isidore see in the speechless priest vainly endeavouring to bless the people a fine image of the law reduced to silence before the first announcement of the gospel.—*Farrar.*

"*Beckoned unto them.*"—The sign given to Zacharias was one that both chastised and humbled him. His infirmity becomes a sign to him of the power of God. In like manner Jacob was lame after he had wrestled with the angel and prevailed: Saul was blind after he had been overcome by the Lord Jesus on the way to Damascus (vers. 24, 25).

Ver. 24. "*Hid herself.*"—The reason for Elisabeth's seclusion is doubtless that given by Godet. From the fifth month the fact of a woman's pregnancy can be recognised. She will remain in seclusion until it becomes evident that God has indeed taken away the reproach of childlessness. As he points out, the combination of womanly pride and of humble gratitude to God is a very natural trait of character, and one not likely to occur to a forger of a later age, who might be supposed to have invented these incidents.

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 26—38.

A Chosen Vessel and an Angelic Declaration.

I. **The chosen vessel of the Divine purpose.**—A village maiden, of whose previous history we know almost nothing, has the quiet tenor of her life in the little belated village of Nazareth strangely broken by the appearance of the angel Gabriel. Of the maiden's birth, parentage, and breeding we are told nothing. An ancient and constant tradition asserts that she was one of the many descendants of David who had sunk into obscurity and penury; and the tradition must be true, if we are to read the title "Son of David," often given to Jesus, in a literal sense. But we may infer from what we are afterwards told

of her that she was (1) *a devout student of the prophetic scriptures*, giving to "hiding" and "pondering in her heart" any Divine word of hidden significance, since her *Magnificat* is a chain of citations from, and allusions to, the Old Testament writings; (2) that *she specially pondered the Messianic prophecies*, as if she cherished the hope, in common with all Jewish women, that Jehovah might "condescend to her low estate," and make *her* to be mother of the "Son of the Highest," since she turns all the texts she cites to a Messianic use; and (3) that *she* was not simply "just" or "righteous" in the Jewish sense, but one of those pure and saintly souls who are *utterly devoted to a Divine life and service.* There must have been eminent spiritual preparedness in this "graced" flower of Israel and humanity. For (4) when she understands the angelic errand and message, and is conscious of all the pain and shame it will bring upon her, even to the loss of her maiden name and honour, *she meekly submits* herself to the Divine will, saying, "Be it unto me according to Thy word." Mary asks no sign, like Zacharias. Her question is one of maidenly simplicity. And "supernatural faith, never so taxed in any earth-born one before or after, is rewarded with the promise of the overshadowing Spirit and power of the Highest."

"Yes, and to her, the beautiful and lowly,
Mary, a maiden, separate from men,
Camest Thou nigh, and didst possess her wholly,
Close to Thy saints, but Thou wast closer then."

II. **The angelic declaration.**—The angelic declaration gives the sum of Divine revelation and the Church's doctrine concerning the person and government of the Redeemer. 1. *His pure and perfect humanity is proclaimed.* Jesus, the Saviour of men, was to be conceived and born of a human mother, and therefore possessed of every essential element of our nature, including its subjection to infirmity and the possibility of death. He entered into the world a true man. 2. But He—the same Jesus—was to be the "*Son of the Highest*," *having no father, but God*, through the power of the Holy Ghost. "The altar of the Virgin's womb was touched with fire *from heaven.*" "Conceived of the Holy Ghost" is an article of faith on a level with "born of the Virgin Mary." In His eternal generation Son of God, in His human birth Son of man, both names are for ever to belong inseparably to His one person, to be used interchangeably in His own Divine majesty. "He shall be great"; not, like His forerunner, "in the sight of God"—"great" as God's equal, and head of humanity. 3. The angel adds the substance of Messianic prediction *concerning the "increase of His government."* Gabriel's words are a text waiting for illustration and expansion by a higher than angelic interpreter. (1) *He is the Messiah, seated on the throne of "His father David."* These words descend from heaven to earth—from the "Son of God," a revealed truth beyond Jewish expectation, to the "Son of David," the current Messianic hope when Jesus appeared. (2) He is *the Messianic King of an eternal kingdom.* The angel does not burden the Virgin's soul with any announcement of the *via dolorosa* by which her Son would reach His Messianic throne. He is predicted to rule over the "house of Jacob," the true spiritual Israel, in a dominion which, unlike the kingdom of visible Israel, is to "have no end." Beyond this the angel's commission does not extend. In due time angels will again take up the theme, and fill the world with its echoes.

III. **The response of faith.**—To such an undreamt-of, sudden, overwhelming call—a call to such a glorious destination, and to such a pinnacle of unearthly and unique greatness—the greatest summons ever sent from heaven to a mortal creature—there is the prompt response of profound and humble obedience: "Be it unto me according to Thy word." What tides of shame and wonder, fear and rapture, swept through the pure heart of this gentle maiden we can not even conceive. Betrothed, and standing on the verge of her new life with Joseph,

there is in the angel's presence neither dejection nor exultation. The humble Virgin, after his departure, remains in her sweet humility the same. With perfect readiness of trust she receives her Divine commission, and surrenders herself in lowly meekness to the Divine will.—*Cox; Pope.*

SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS ON VERSES 26—38.

Ver. 26. "*A city of Galilee.*"—Very different are the circumstances of the two visits of the angel Gabriel to announce the birth of John the Baptist and of Jesus. The first is paid to the priest engaged in sacred duties in the Temple at Jerusalem, the second to an obscure maiden in a humble dwelling in Nazareth. Nazareth, as we know, was held in ill repute by the Jews, and indeed the whole province of Galilee was regarded by them as semi-heathen; yet here it was that one was found whose piety and faith were surpassed by none of whom we read in Holy Scripture—who was counted worthy to be the mother of the Saviour. "This message announced the exaltation of man's nature above angels (Heb. ii. 5, 9, 16); yet an archangel joyfully brings it, and angels celebrate the event (ii. 13). There is no envy in heaven" (*Wordsworth*).

Ver. 27. "*House of David.*"—The royal house of Israel, with which were associated the memories of the past glory of the nation, and the hopes of its future greatness, was now in very humble circumstances. Its representative was now a village carpenter; while the throne was occupied by Herod, who was regarded by the majority of the people as an Edomite and a usurper. The contrast between the two illustrates the saying of Solomon, "I have seen servants upon horses, and princes walking as servants upon the earth" (Eccles. x. 7). It is interesting to notice that the mother of John the Baptist, and his mother of Jesus, bore names associated with the first high priest of Israel: Elisabeth is the same with Elisheba, the wife of Aaron; Mary the same with Miriam, the sister of Aaron.

Ver. 28. "*The angel came in.*"—There seems to have been less to startle Mary in the appearance of the angel to her than in the case of Zacharias. He comes into the house in a natural way; while Zacharias sees him suddenly appear in the sacred precincts of the Temple, from which all were debarred but the priests in the exercise of their office. She seems to have felt more perplexity at the strange salutation that fell on her ears than fear at the presence of the heavenly visitant. There is nothing in the salutation uttered by the angel to justify the offering of anything like worship to the blessed Virgin: she is addressed as one who has received a special blessing from God, which distinguishes her above all ordinary women. The Vulgate rendering, *gratiâ plena*, is ambiguous; it should rather be *gratiâ cumulata*. She is not the fountain of grace, but one who has received grace, from God. Doubtless Mary's daily prayer had been that she might enjoy the favour of God; and now this prayer she learns is fully granted, and, in addition to it, an honour she would never have hoped to possess is bestowed upon her.

Ver. 29. "*She was troubled.*"—In her countenance her astonishment and perplexity are expressed. But she remains silent. "She would rather not answer the angel than speak thoughtlessly of what she could not understand" (*Bernhardt.*)

Ver. 30. "*Fear not.*"—So vast is the distance between us as creatures from our Creator, so deep the gulf that sin has dug between us and Him, that not even the holiest men or women can fail to be affected with fear, whenever

the feeblest ray of the Divine glory bursts upon them. Yet the purpose of God in the revelation of His mercy through Christ is to abolish this fear. Hence the apostle says, "For ye have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear; but ye have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father" (Rom. viii. 15).

"*Found favour.*"—It is the condescension and favour of God, and not any merits of her own, which give Mary her distinction. "By these words the angel witnesses that she is on the same level with all other saints. He does not praise her for her piety, but simply because of the great grace of God by which she is chosen to be the mother of His own Son" (*Luther*).

Ver. 31. "*Thou shalt conceive.*"—Now was the prophecy in Isa. vii. 14 to be fulfilled. And the angel foretells that those other statements given to Israel by messengers from God of Messiah's universal and unending rule will in like manner find accomplishment. The mind of Mary seems to have been imbued with the scriptures of the Old Testament, as is abundantly indicated by the free use she makes of them in her song of praise. To her knowledge of them the angel now appeals, and her firm faith that God would fulfil all the promises He had made to His people must have strengthened her to believe what was now promised to herself personally.

"*Jesus.*"—The reason for this name being given is noted in St. Matthew's Gospel—"for He shall save His people from their sins" (i. 21). It is not a name given by men to Him, after the manner in which grateful nations have bestowed titles of honour upon their deliverers and benefactors, but is given to Him by God. He is our Saviour, not merely because we regard Him as such, but because God has appointed Him to this office: our faith is built not on an earthly but on a heavenly foundation.

Ver. 32. "*He shall be great.*"—In these words Gabriel bows before the majesty and power of Jesus—renders to Him that homage which He is to receive from all in heaven and earth. "At the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth" (Phil. ii. 10). He was great in heaven, where all obeyed His will; but He is to acquire additional glory by His life on earth, where He endures the contradiction of sinners against Himself. His humility and shame, His immeasurable patience and love, His submission to sufferings and death, win for Him an even deeper adoration than was rendered to Him before. Not that He really became greater than He was; but that His inherent greatness became more fully manifested by His condescension and love.

"*Throne of His father David.*"—Jesus is head over all things to His Church. He establishes His gentle sway over the hearts of His people, subduing them to Himself, ruling and defending them, and restraining and conquering all His own and all their enemies.—*Foote.*

Ver. 33. "*Reign over the house of Jacob.*"—But His kingdom is not to be confined to one people. Israel is indeed the centre of His kingdom, but all nations are to become subject to Him. The covenant being made with Abraham and his seed, it was becoming that Christ should belong to the chosen people. But all who manifest the faith of Abraham become his spiritual children, and therefore subjects of Messiah's kingdom. In this way the barrier that divides Jew from Gentile is virtually broken down, and those who had been afar off are brought nigh. Nor is the prophecy annulled by so many of the Jews having rejected Jesus as the Christ; for their history as a nation is not yet concluded, and there is reason to hope that by repentance and faith they will yet

submit themselves to the Saviour (see Rom. xi. 25).

"*For ever.*"—A kingdom that would endure for ever had been promised to David (2 Sam. vii. 16). But as long as it was ruled over by men it was not secure against loss and overthrow. It was only when it came into the hands of Christ that it became eternal and unchangeable (Dan. vii. 14). Nor are the words "for ever" to be taken in any limited sense, as signifying for a great while, or as long as the world endures; but as implying an everlasting rule, to be manifested, indeed, more clearly when this earth shall have passed away.

Ver. 34. "*How shall this be?*"—The fact communicated by the angel Mary accepts with implicit faith. It is the *manner* in which it is to be accomplished that she cannot understand. Her question, therefore, does not manifest unbelief, but a natural wonder as to the method of fulfilment. She indicates her astonishment, and not her distrust. The incredulity of Zacharias on receiving a much less astonishing message is very marked, if we compare it with Mary's attitude on this occasion. The lowly village maiden shows herself possessed of more faith in God than was found in the priest whose duties brought him into constant relations with God.

Ver. 35. "*The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee.*"—Her wonder, not being incredulity, is solved, in so far as the mystery of God's creative power can be made clear to a finite mind; and a sign, for which she had not asked, is given to strengthen her faith.

"*That holy thing.*"—We may notice in this phrase an implied distinction between this child and all others. From the first moment of His earthly existence He is holy in Himself. John the Baptist was to be filled with the Holy Ghost from his mother's womb (ver. 15)—from the first he is to be consecrated and set apart for the great work of his life. In this sense he may be said to have been sanctified; while Jesus is one with that God from whom sanctification proceeds.

"*The Son of God.*"—Not here (as ver. 32) in the Messianic sense, nor essentially by the eternal generation, but because the human nature of Christ was the direct and miraculous production of Divine power.—*Speaker's Commentary.*

The Mystery of the Incarnation.—The words spoken by the angels in the synoptical evangelists are few and brief. We can almost count the syllables, accorded as if penuriously. In particular we owe to St. Luke those angel-uttered words which form so exquisite a shrine for the dogma of the Incarnation. In the angel's answer to Mary's question we have a sentence whose fulness of thought and delicate transparency of expression come to us from the sphere in which the Miracle of miracles was wrought. The whole sentence is packed with thought, and is a Divine mixture of reserve and enthusiasm. It is like a smile of heaven over the glory of the eternal wisdom and love in bringing its most consummate work from the labyrinth of antenatal fatalities through which man passes into the world. It is thus that the purity of an angel speaks to the purity of a virgin. Yet if not a word too much is said for the delicacy of a maiden's ear, not a word too little is employed to indicate even the physiological process by which the Incarnation was effected. It is the 139th Psalm translated into one of the tongues of heaven. Yet not the less really is the material process summarised which had been so nobly prophesied in the psalm of the Incarnation.—*Alexander.*

The Office of the Holy Spirit in the Incarnation.—The Holy Spirit was the immediate agent in the immaculate conception of "that holy thing." Not that He was therefore the Father of

the blessed Son, but He was the vehicle of the paternity. Not again that He so acted that the Son as God had nothing to do with the act of the Incarnation. The Son, in Divine will, willed to assume our nature, and so assumed it; but again the blessed Spirit wrought the process whereby the will was carried out.—*Moule.*

The Beauty of the Narrative of the Annunciation.—I have always felt myself at a loss to say whether the sublimity or the exquisite delicacy of the language here employed is the more to be admired. Calvin seems to have been struck with it, and the best expositors have felt it.—*Brown.*

The Spirit in the Son of Man.

I. **The early beginnings of this wonderful life were implanted in the virgin mother by an act of the Holy Ghost.**—In the annunciation to Mary not only is the supernatural conception declared, but the part of the Spirit in that mystery, about which it is almost impossible to speak, is defined and emphasised. Before the first stage of organic development had dawned He so wrought and ruled that the life fostered in this unique mother was protected against all the frailties of an earthly lineage, and made fit to blend with that Divine consciousness now or hereafter to be infused into it. The Spirit antedated the conception, and was present not as a competing. but as a creative and dominating force in life. So richly was the Spirit given to Christ, that His holy influences were pulsing in those rudimentary stages of life which precede all signs of consciousness and moral responsibility.

II. The part of the Spirit in the conception (as well as in all the after-work of Jesus Christ) seems to suggest **that independence of persons in the holy and blessed Trinity,** about which we know so little, but which clearly preceded all the economies of human redemption. These sacred names of Father, Son, and Spirit do not represent merely latent potentialities in the Divine nature waiting for some crisis in human history before they can awake to consciousness and effective operation. In the eternal Godhead there was a co-relation of life scarcely suggested by the parallels of our rigidly defined human personalities. And the action of the Spirit in the miraculous dawn of Christ's earthly life was the continuation of an influence which penetrated His consciousness and benignly wrought there prior to the Incarnation.—*Selby.*

Ver. 36. "*Thy cousin Elisabeth.*"—The sign given was one of a kind to encourage the faith of Mary in the message of the angel. The creative power of God had been exercised in the case of Elisabeth. Neither her barrenness nor her old age could nullify the promise which had been made her of a son. In the gift of a sign where no sign was asked, we have an example of God's constant procedure. Each day we live we receive fresh testimonies of His goodness by which our faith may be confirmed. The mercy and favour which others receive from Him should enable us to trust all the more firmly in Him at those times when we cannot understand His dealings with ourselves. Notice, "*thy cousin Elisabeth.*" The relationship to Mary, and the name she bore, are mentioned as known to God. There is something wonderful and affecting in this fact, though, after believing that God is omniscient, evidence of His being so may not seem remarkable. But the truth is, that we cannot realise what is meant by omniscience, and therefore find special knowledge of the kind here surprising.

Ver. 37. "*No word of God shall be devoid of power.*"—Nothing that God promises is He unable to perform: all that He says He does. "This affirms not only God's almightiness, but even more fully His absolute faithfulness to His promises, the thought most necessary to Mary. The denial of what

is miraculous is the denial both of almightiness and faithfulness" (*Schaff*).

Ver. 38. *The Humility and Faith of Mary.*—As David (2 Sam. vii. 28), so does David's daughter sink down in child-like humility and faith into the hands of her God, and let His will be her will. It is well for us that the Lord thus found on earth a believing heart, devoted to God, otherwise He could never have become man. "She was no unconscious vessel of the Divine will, but, in humility and faith, a fellow-worker with the purpose of the Father; and therefore her own unity with that purpose was required, and is here recorded" (*Alford*). Mary has restored woman to honour: the faithlessness of Eve brought us to sin and death; the faith of Mary brought us a Saviour from sin and death. "The heart of Mary is now filled with the Holy Spirit, who can also prepare her body to be the temple of the God-man" (*Lange*). "The holy Virgin came to her great perfection and height of piety by a few, and those modest and unattractive, exercises and actions. St. Paul travelled over the world; preached to the Gentiles and disputed against the Jews; wrote epistles; suffered dangers, injuries, affronts, and persecutions to the height of wonder; whereby he won for himself a crown. But the holy Virgin attained perfection by the means of a quiet and silent piety—by internal actions of love, devotion, and contemplation; and instructs us that the silent affections, the splendours of an internal devotion, the union of love, humility, and obedience, the daily offices of prayer and praises sung to God, acts of faith and fear, of patience and meekness, of hope and reverence, repentance and charity, and those graces which walk in a veil and silence, make great ascents to God, and as sure progress to favour and a crown, as the more ostentatious and laborious exercises of a more public religion" (*Taylor*).

Complete Consecration of the Being to God.—"And Mary said, Behold the handmaid of the Lord; be it unto me according to Thy word." So much is said in the word of God concerning the depravity of the human heart, and so familiar is the fact to us from what we know of ourselves, that it strikes us with wonder and admiration when we come across a record of a human life in which we can find no outstanding blemish. Acts of heroic faith, and instances of remarkable integrity in circumstances of temptation, are numerous in the sacred record, but there are only very few examples of persons who have, all through the history that is given of them, lived before God in all good conscience. The Virgin Mary is one of these exceptional cases. And we cannot doubt but that piety like hers is the highest and purest service that can be rendered to God. The devotion that prompts to heroic deeds at great crises in the life, or in special circumstances of trial and difficulty, is admirable; but that which leads to quiet, unostentatious obedience to God, in the unromantic circumstances of every-day life, is surely superior to it, as it is far more difficult to cultivate and maintain. Several points in the history before us are worthy of notice.

I. Though the faith of the Virgin was so mature and strong, **there can be no doubt but that she was young in years.** The piety of the young, when it is spontaneous and deep, has a charm and freshness all its own. Beautiful as is the sight of the prodigal turning from his errors and vices to a life of holiness, a still more attractive charm is associated with the goodness of those who have never strayed from God—whose memories are not sullied with the records of a guilty past, and whose energies have not been wasted in the service of evil. Nor is there any reason in the nature of things why piety like that of the Virgin should not be the rule instead of the exception. For devotion to God, and holy obedience, are not a yoke of bondage, which we can only accustom ourselves to bear by long and laborious effort: they are the very

conditions of our present peace and happiness.

II. **The qualities of mind and heart displayed by the Virgin**—her innocence, integrity, simplicity, humility, and obedience—**prepared her for playing her part well** in the new circumstances in which she found herself. She could not have anticipated the possibility of receiving such a message. For though in the Old Testament Scriptures it had been predicted that Christ would be born of a virgin, the prophecy was veiled and obscure, and it was not until the angel brought this message that the mystery was fully disclosed. But her consecration of herself to God in the ordinary circumstances of daily life enabled her to meet this sudden call upon her faith, and to rise to a high degree of heroic self-devotion in this new emergency in which she found herself. A great lesson is suggested to us all in this fact. How we shall act in some sudden crisis of life is predetermined for us by our habitual conduct, and by the character we build up in quiet times, when there is no strain upon us, and we are simply face to face with plain, every-day duties. The sudden emergency is the test by which the strength or weakness of our characters is brought to light. If, therefore, we wish to be prepared act nobly in special circumstances of trial and difficulty, the only wise course we can take is to do the duties that meet us *now* in a spirit of uprightness and of humble reliance upon God.

III. **The spirit of true self-consecration** shines out in the words, "Behold the handmaid of the Lord; be it unto me according to Thy word." It is not merely that of passive resignation, in which the human will is completely subordinated to the Divine will; but there is also a desire to carry out the Divine will. We are often resigned because we cannot help ourselves. But a higher resignation is that which leads us to yield ourselves to God in the full confidence that He knows what is best for us, and with the strong but humble desire to co-operate with Him in the promotion of His great designs.

"*Be it unto me according to Thy word.*"—Almost the very first word which Scripture records of the mother of our Lord is a word of piety—a word of sweet maiden piety. It is a reverent assent to a Divine revelation, and complete submission to a conviction which has entered her soul as a message from heaven, setting her apart to a consecrated life. The spirit of this noble expression of piety is not too powerful at the present day.—*Roberts.*

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 39—56.

The Communion of Saints with Each Other and with God.—It was not merely to obtain verification of the angel's words that Mary travelled with haste into the hill country, but to hold communion with her kinswoman Elisabeth to whom God's grace had been so signally shown. A common participation in the Divine favour drew them together. This is ever the way with those to whom God makes Himself known. They do not regard what they have received as a private possession of their own, but long to make it known, and they have especial delight in the society of those who share their faith. This communion of saints differs in a marked degree from mere friendly intercourse; for the bond that unites those who enter into it is not similarity of tastes and pursuits, but common allegiance to God. In the case before us we see this communion in its purest and most intense form. We observe—

I. **The elevation of feeling by which it is characterised.**—This is indicated by the holy salutations, the rapt outcry, and the inspired words that flow in rhythmical utterance from the lips of Elisabeth and of Mary. It is not mere excitement of mind that is displayed; but the special and unique

circumstances in which they meet are fully realised by them, and the Holy Spirit prompts the words they speak. Such fervid feelings as theirs can be no example to us, since the experience which prompted them was unique in its character; but something akin to them may be known by us all as we join with our fellow-believers in celebrating the sacrament of the Supper—as we commemorate the most signal proof of the love of that Saviour whose advent to earth filled the hearts of these holy women with such exceeding joy.

II. **The deep humility that distinguished these saints.**—They have been the recipients of marked favour from heaven; future ages are thought of as celebrating their blessedness; and yet both meekly declare their personal unworthiness of the grace that has been shown them. They descend in humility before God, and magnify His name, and praise His loving-kindness and condescension towards them. They clearly recognise, too, that God has mankind in view in the revelation of His mercy that He has made to them, and they are free from every tinge of spiritual pride. This combination of sobriety with intensity of feeling is very remarkable, and distinguishes true elevation of spirit from unwholesome enthusiasm. If those who received such wonderful proofs of God's favour were thus devoid of all spiritual pride and self-complacency, what excuse can we find for ourselves if ever these feelings take possession of our hearts?

III. **A practical result of this communion is seen in the words in which Elisabeth confirms and blesses the faith of Mary** (ver. 45).—The elder encourages the younger, and assures her that her trust in God will be rewarded by the fulfilment of His promises; and her words have weight, as coming from one who had faithfully served God all her life, and who had received undeniable proof of God's power and love. The confirmation of faith, the encouragement of hope, and the awakening of deeper love to God and to each other, are all results for which we should look from the communion of saints. We can scarcely make any mistake in regarding the song of Mary as owing something of its intensity to the thoughts and feelings excited by the words of Elisabeth. As an act of communion with God, it has a character of its own which distinguishes it from those in which we ordinarily engage. In it acknowledgment of sinfulness and weakness, though not absent, is in the background, and the thoughts are fixed upon the glorious attributes of God: in it we see one Divine perfection after another rising into view, and receiving the homage of a devout and grateful heart.

No very rigid marks of division need be looked for as separating the four strophes of which this spontaneous song of praise is composed; but the following may be regarded as the main lines of thought in it: 1. Mary celebrates God's condescension towards her, and the everlasting honour which He has conferred upon her (vers. 46-48). 2. She speaks of God's dealings with her as proofs of His omnipotence, and holiness, and mercy, which He manifests to all who fear Him (vers. 49, 50). 3. She extols the justice of God, as shown in the humiliation of the proud, the powerful, and the self-satisfied, and in the exaltation of the meek, the lowly, and the destitute (vers. 51-53). 4. She praises God for His faithfulness towards His people in fulfilling the promises made to their fathers.

SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS ON VERSES 39—56

Ver. 39. "*Went . . . with haste.*"—The haste with which Mary set out on her journey to Elisabeth shows us that her faith was no transient mood: she is eager (1) to obtain the sign indicated to her as a confirmation of the angel's words, and (2) to celebrate with her kinswoman the love and condescen-

sion of God in the exceptional privileges He had bestowed upon them. In the meeting of these two holy women, as we see from what follows, gratitude to God rises to its highest pitch. As they communed together the grace of God manifested to them would shine forth with double lustre. Mary's example teaches us that it is our duty to use all means within our power for strengthening our faith. "Surely the mountains of that 'hill country'—the forest, and every tree therein—broke forth into singing, and earth was joyful; for the Lord had redeemed Jacob, and comforted His people. 'How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of Him that bringeth good tidings.'"

Ver. 40. *The Salutation.*—Our salutations are often thoughtlessly given and trivial in character: this was a holy and sacramental action—a devout heart invoking God's blessing upon one desirous of it and prepared to receive it. What Jewish salutations were we learn from Ruth ii. 4: "The Lord be with you"; "The Lord bless thee." The mingled joy and ecstasy of this meeting are unique in earthly history. "Only the meeting of saints in heaven can parallel the meeting of these two cousins: the two wonders of the world are met under one roof, and congratulate their mutual happiness." In the intercourse between Mary and Elisabeth we have a beautiful example of the communion of saints. Those who truly love God will draw near to each other in holy fellowship to offer their united thanksgiving for His goodness, and to establish and strengthen each other in the faith by mutual exhortations and counsels. "Come and hear, all ye that fear God, and I will declare what He hath done for my soul" (Ps. lxvi. 16). "Then they that feared the Lord spake often one to another" (Mal. iii. 16)

Ver. 41. "*The babe leaped in her womb.*"—Cf. Matt. xi. 25: "Thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes."

Vers. 42-45. *The Canticle of Elisabeth.*—When read in accordance with its structure, this beautiful canticle is seen to be a celebration of Mary's faith; and, as leading up to this, every part of it takes its proper subordinate place. This faith, astounding in itself, the most supreme example probably of perfect trust in God, and absolute self-devotion to His will, that human flesh has ever given, was all the more striking to Elisabeth on account of its contrast with the unbelief of her own husband under a far less severe trial. No wonder that, when Mary appeared before her Spirit-illuminated eyes (ver. 41), she seemed the embodiment of Faith—that modest virgin with clasped hands, whom Hermas saw in vision, through whom the elect of God are saved, and from whom spring all the Christian graces, as fair daughters of a fair mother. Mary is thus, in Elisabeth's eyes, the most blessed of women, because the most faithful; and it suits well that the first psalm of the New Testament should take the form of a praise of the fundamental evangelical virtue.—*Warfield.*

Ver. 42. "*Blessed art thou.*"—At certain times devout feeling cannot be repressed, but will break forth, sometimes in a way that seems strange and extravagant to those who are not under the same influence. If Elisabeth had been silent, surely the very stones would have cried out. A still higher blessedness fell to the lot of Mary when she became a disciple and follower of Jesus. This is distinctly implied in His own words (see xi. 27, 28).

Ver. 43. "*The mother of my Lord.*"—Note the absence of anything like envy on the part of Elisabeth at the higher honour bestowed upon her kinswoman. She acknowledges the superiority of Mary as the mother of her Lord, and speaks of being unworthy to receive her

under her roof. The more highly God exalts us in favour, the more humble in spirit should we become. Compare as kindred examples of humility, David (2 Sam. vii. 18), John the Baptist (Matt. iii. 14), and the centurion (Luke vii. 6).

"*My Lord.*"—The application of these words, which are equivalent to "Jehovah," to an unborn child, can only be justified or explained by the fact of the divinity of Jesus. They were probably suggested to Elisabeth by Ps. cx. 1.

Ver. 45. "*Blessed is she that believed.*"—Though the faith of Mary was tried in a special way, yet her case is an illustration of the great principle that those who place implicit confidence in God obtain the fulfilment of His promises. The greater the faith displayed, the greater is the reward it receives (cf. John xx. 29; 1 Pet. i. 7, 8). "God offers His benefits indiscriminately to all; but faith, so to speak, holds its lap to receive them; while unbelief allows them to pass away, so as not to reach us."

Vers. 46-55. *The Magnificat.*—The mother of our Lord was a poetess. The beautiful hymn which still has a frequent place in Christian worship is by her, and is another illustration of the meditative, reverential, mystical spirit whose steady fire burned within her. The *Magnificat* is the first Christian hymn—it is a hymn in the exact sense of the word; for a hymn originally means a poem sung in praise of the gods or of heroes. Augustine's definition of a hymn is, "praise to God with a song." The *Magnificat* is a type and model of what our hymns in church should be; its form is the old Hebrew form then passing away; its spirit is that of youth, of freshness of vision, of abounding bright-eyed energy. There is no pessimism in this morning hymn of Christianity.—*Roberts.*

"*My soul doth magnify the Lord.*"—Elisabeth sings the praises of Mary's faith; Mary answers by a praise of God—His grace, might, mercy, justice, and faithfulness. The difference is significant—perhaps characteristic. The *tone* of the *Magnificat* is happy, though solemn—such as befitted one so highly honoured, and yet so unconscious of self. The *ground* of Mary's praise to God is, that, in spite of her low estate, He has selected her as the vessel of His election for bringing the seed of Abraham into the world; and this is the mighty, holy, just, and faithful thing that He has done which commands her song.—*Warfield.*

The Magnificat.—In St. Luke's Gospel the picture of Mary is clothed in flesh and blood. There is breath and there is poetry upon her lips. Her heart beats quicker at the angel's salutation. Maiden modesty and saintly resignation to burning shame fill her brief but pregnant words. The hoarded music of her soul finds measured utterance of its serene and stately joy. The *Magnificat*, chanted in so many churches, is the highest specimen of the subtle influence of the song of purity, so exquisitely described by a great poet. It is the *Pippa Passes* among the liturgies of the world. It is a woman teaching in the Church for ever without usurpation of authority, but with a saintly quietness, that knows no end.

I. **The historical framework in which the Magnificat is set** (vers. 38-41).—Mary was misconstrued by the world. She was bearing a cross heavy to pure souls—a cross of shame. In Nazareth she could not remain. She turned to the spot towards which she seemed to be invited by an angel's lips, and pointed by an angel's finger (ver. 36). There must have been pathos in the quiet word of the gentle maiden as she saluted Elisabeth. Elisabeth, for her part, knew her cousin's voice, even before she saw her pale and suffering face.

II. **The Magnificat itself.**—There is a noble quiet in the one word "said." 1. *The personal traits by which the hymn*

is pervaded. *Humility* is the chief of these. Mary does not profess humility; she practises it. Favoured, indeed, she is. Yet she has no thought of that which she *is*—only of that which, in God's free grace, she has received. In the second line she counts herself among the lost whom God has brought into a state of salvation. Her joy and exultation repose upon that God who is her Saviour. 2. *The religious principles by which the Magnificat is pervaded.* Mary's soul is full of faith in the tenderness and power of God—in the incarnation of our Lord Jesus Christ. She has the clear conviction that all which is sweetest and greatest in the attributes of God meet in the gift of His dear Son. Power, holiness, mercy, faith, and truth are there. And she believes intensely in the victory of that incarnation—in the sure triumph of God. With the instinct of a prophetess she sees an outline of all history, and compresses and crushes it into four strong, rugged words.

III. **Some lessons, ecclesiastical and personal, from the Magnificat.**—1. This poem is retained in the Reformed Prayer Book. There are few Divine songs in the New Testament. But there are *some*; and surely they are there for good reasons. And it is a great thing to have some hymns in public worship whose permanence is ensured by their being *strictly Scriptural.* 2. Not without propriety is the *Magnificat* placed in the public service. It comes after the Old Testament lesson. Mary stood, as her song stands with us, between the two Testaments. 3. By using the *Magnificat*, we fulfil her own prophecy, "All generations shall call me blessed." Some forget this. She *is* blessed—blessed, because consecrated as a temple for the eternal Word. 4. As to personal lessons. We may well apply Mary's words to ourselves as a blessing common to us all. Her blessedness is ours: "For whosoever will do the will of God, the same is My brother, and sister, and mother." Again, *praise* should be our work. Once more, joy and peace are part of our purchased inheritance: "Thou wilt keep him in *perfect peace* whose mind is stayed on Thee." And the more we lean on Him, the more He loves us. When we read or join in the *Magnificat*, let us see to it that that peace is ours which will make its words true for us.—*Alexander.*

Ver. 46. *Compare the Magnificat with the Song of Hannah.*

I. **Points of similarity.**—1. Both express gratitude for God's compassion and condescension. 2. Both rise from particular instances of Divine procedure to the principles that regulate the government of the world. 3. Both anticipate the glories of Christ's kingdom.

II. **Points of difference.**—1. Hannah's words are animated by high-spirited exultation over her enemies, Mary's by profound humility and self-restraint. 2. In the one Christ is "Jehovah's King," to whom He will "give strength"—His anointed, "whose horn He shall exalt"; in the other Christ is the help of Israel.

From Mary's hymn of thanksgiving, which is filled with echoes from the writings of the psalmists and prophets of the Old Testament, we may see how she had delighted in the word of God, and how intimately she was acquainted with it. Perhaps we are even justified in concluding, from vers. 47, 48, that she was acquainted with the Greek Version of the Old Testament, for the words there quoted agree with it rather than with the original Hebrew (cf. Ps. xxxi. 7 with the corresponding passage in the LXX.: Ps. xxx. 7). True piety will ever be found to lead believers to value the Holy Scriptures, and to appropriate for the expression of their devout feelings the words used by saints in old time.

"*Magnify.*"—To make great or to glorify. We cannot, indeed, add to God's dignity or power, but the word "magnify" is an appropriate one for describing our giving God a larger place in our thoughts and feelings, and

our publishing abroad the reasons we have for giving Him praise. "My *soul* doth magnify . . . my *spirit* hath rejoiced." 1. True praise of God, with mind and heart as well as with tongue. 2. Cheerful praise of God in the full employment of every faculty.

Ver. 47. "*God my Saviour.*"—It is the recognition of God in this character that alone dispels doubt and anxiety, and imparts a true and full joy. Mary refers, no doubt, to the name Jesus (*i.e.* Saviour) to be conferred upon her Son. Probably, like others, she anticipated a reign of material prosperity in connection with the coming of Christ, but her deeply religious cast of mind forbids us to suppose that her hopes were limited to it. The satisfaction of spiritual needs was doubtless equally looked for.

Ver. 48. "*Regarded.*"—*I.e.* looked upon. It is a very beautiful fact, that in the Scriptures God's regarding or looking upon is taken to be equivalent with having mercy upon. Cf. Luke ix. 38 with Matt. xvii. 15. And here we see a great difference between God's thoughts and our thoughts: God, who is infinitely holy, is compassionate also; we who are sinful are harsh and unsympathetic in our judgment of our fellows.

"*Low estate.*"—The house of David, to which Mary, as well as Joseph, doubtless belonged, was now in obscurity and poverty; but it can scarcely be to this fact that the Virgin here alludes. In her humility she is unable to recognise any reason why she should be the object of the Divine compassion and condescension. She is convinced that she is unworthy of the high honour bestowed upon her. "All generations shall call me blessed." The insight of Mary is true: it is from the Divine favour that the purest and most lasting fame springs. However the admiration of those in any particular generation may be fixed upon those who are high in rank, distinguished by wealth, learning, beauty, or natural gifts, the general instinct of mankind is true in cherishing the names of those who have been holy, and of those who have received honour from God, as entitled to the highest place on the roll of fame. For by general consent a higher dignity attaches to saintliness than to any other quality that distinguishes a man from his fellows.

Ver. 49. "*His name.*"—In many parts of Scripture the "name" of God practically signifies God Himself. Cf. Ps. xci. 14; 2 Chron. vi. 20. It is that which suggests to us His adorable majesty. Properly speaking, it is God as revealed to us, or as known by us.

Ver. 50. "*That fear Him.*"—All through the word of God true piety is represented as fear of God. By this we are not to understand slavish dread, but that reverence which is due (1) from children to a father, (2) from servants to a master, and (3) from subjects to a king—a reverence which leads (*a*) to obedience to His commandments, and (*b*) to submission to His will. In contrast with this "fear," which is an attitude and state of heart, is hypocrisy, or mere outward pretence of reverence and service.

Ver. 51. "*He hath scattered the proud.*"—With the mercy shown to the lowly is contrasted the severity with which God will chastise the arrogance of the mighty. Mary speaks of this as in the past instead of in the future; but this mode of speech is common in prophetic utterances. In the choice of the lowly (of Mary herself and of Elisabeth) God has already rejected the proud; and this principle of action will be carried through to the very end in the establishment of the Messianic kingdom. "The proud, the powerful, and the rich describe Herod and his court, Pharisees and Sadducees, as well as foreign tyrants, Cæsar and his armies and heathen powers."

"*Scattered.*"—When God has for

a time looked down in silent mockery on their splendid preparations, He unexpectedly scatters the whole mass: just as when a building is overturned, and its parts, which had formerly been bound together by a strong and firm union, are widely scattered in every direction.—*Calvin.*

Ver. 52. "*He hath put down the mighty.*"—The humiliation of the mighty and the exaltation of the humble were facts remarked by the ancients; and the explanation they gave was, that the gods envied those who were too successful in life, and delighted in humbling them, and in raising up others in their place. Sheer caprice, and not moral principle, was supposed to govern the Divine procedure. The figure frequently used to present this capricious interference with human affairs is Fortune's wheel. But in the Scriptures it is impiety and the abuse of power that lead to the degradation of the proud and mighty, while those who are raised to honour have already moral qualifications for the places they are called to occupy. Cf. the cases of Pharaoh, Saul, Nebuchadnezzar, and Belshazzar, and those of Joseph, Moses, David, and Daniel, respectively.

Ver. 53. "*He hath filled the hungry.*"—By the hungry we are to understand mainly those who hunger and thirst after righteousness, for here, as in ver. 48, we have an anticipation of the Beatitudes; but the destitute in the literal sense of the word are also probably kept in view. The latter as a class contained those who longed most eagerly for the blessings of Messiah's kingdom. Just as those who were richly endowed with the world's goods were apt to be self-satisfied and worldly-minded, those who were poor were in many cases prepared to receive the glad tidings of blessings which the world could neither give nor take away. Prosperity is indeed the gift of God; but if it leads to forgetfulness of Him, and if the sense of dependence upon Him is weakened, it becomes a snare.

Two Contrasted Classes.—Mary had here two classes of persons before her—the hungry and the rich; and she employs these words in the spiritual sense in which they are used in the Jewish Scriptures.

I. "**The hungry**" mean those who feel the sense of spiritual needs, who are dissatisfied with present attainments, who long for something beyond themselves, and to be something better than they are as yet. To be humble, to be dissatisfied with self and with our shortcomings, is to be on the road to improvement, and God helps those who know that they need His help. When Mary announces the reward of spiritual hunger, she touches on a principle of wide range, applicable alike to mental, moral, and physical life. If human beings are to benefit by nourishment, there must be appetite. Nothing is more repugnant to the physical nature than forcing food upon a reluctant patient. If knowledge is to do good, there must be an appetite for it. Religious truth forced on the soul when there is no desire for it does not illuminate it. Appetite is the condition for acquiring anything, whether for body, mind, or spirit.

II. "**The rich**" Mary regards as those who regard themselves as being just as they should be—the self-satisfied. To be satisfied with self is to believe that there is no capability of improvement; and God will not help those who have made up their minds that they can do without Him. Self-sufficiency is a fatal bar to spiritual attainment. The distinction between the two classes is seen in illustrative cases—Jacob and Esau, David and Saul. The same clearly marked distinction continues down to our own day. God gives to every man an endowment which creates in the soul a longing after Himself. On the use made of this endowment man's spiritual destiny turns. Cultivate this hunger for spiritual things.

It is strengthened by exercise; it is lost by neglect.—*Liddon.*

Ver. 54. "*He hath holpen his servant Israel.*"—From general statements regarding Divine procedure Mary comes to the particular case of Israel at the time then present. What God had formerly promised He was now granting. He had, as it were, by allowing the nation to fall into disorder and misery, shown His displeasure at their sins; but now He is remembering the mercy towards them which He had pledged His word to bestow upon them. For a time He had seemed forgetful, but now He is mindful of His ancient covenant with Abraham and with his seed.

Ver. 55. "*As He spake . . to Abraham.*"—The promise to Abraham was one that embraced all the nations of the earth (Gen. xxii. 18), so that in the thoughts of Mary far more than Divine mercy towards Israel is now to be revealed—even a blessing for all mankind in connection with the advent of Christ.

Ver. 56. "*About three months.*"—Though it is not distinctly stated, it is probable that Mary stayed with Elisabeth until the birth of John. St. Luke is in the habit of rounding off the narrative without scrupulously adhering to the order of time (see ver. 65, iii. 19, 20), so that we are not bound to take what is recorded here in ver. 56 as having happened before the events recorded in the paragraph beginning with ver. 57.

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 57—80.

The Morning Hymn of the Gospel.—The *Benedictus*, like the *Magnificat*, is charged and surcharged with Old Testament allusions. All the people in this chapter use the Old Testament forms of speech, and pursue Old Testament ideals of conduct. It is difficult to analyse the beauty and the charm of this "morning hymn of the gospel." But we may treat it, throughout, as a *hymn of thanksgiving* that—

I. **The Messiah so long promised to the fathers has come.**—At last, after four hundred dreary years, God has "*visited*" His people. To the Hebrew mind the word has a specially large and benign meaning. And all the Divine visits culminated when He came in the person of His Son to abide with men, to be their Redeemer, to establish a new righteousness, to lift them into the freedom of a glad and willing obedience to the Divine will, and so to turn all their sorrows into joy. Hence the designation of the Messiah as a "horn of salvation." Strength in the ox culminates in the horns. So all the power of deliverance that had ever been diffused throughout the house of David, in kings, prophets, leaders, "saviours," is but a faint and imperfect shadow of "*the* Saviour" just born in David's city. All that they had ever done for Israel is now to be outdone. Yet this was to be no new thing, but only a fulfilment of what "the prophets" had foretold "since the world began." All who had led and saved Israel were figures of Him who was to come; all who had taught Israel had borne witness to Him. Yet how great must He be for whose salvation there had been a preparation so long and great! *His* salvation would be a salvation from "all our enemies," and from "the hand of all that hate us." And whatever the first intention of these words in reference to foreign heathen rulers who oppressed the Jewish people, we are warranted by them in thinking of the salvation of Christ as a perfect salvation, extending to all the forces opposed to us, whether from within or from without. Nay, more, it is a salvation which extends to the dead as well as to the living, to "our fathers," right away back to Abraham, the first of them all, since

these too were waiting in the dim Hadean world for the fulfilment of the promises and covenants vouchsafed to them. And, again, this was to be not simply salvation political, but mainly religious, though involving political deliverance. The end of it was to be to "serve Him without fear in holiness and righteousness." Zacharias, like the prophets, clearly discerns that the Messianic reign is to be founded on personal holiness, that only those can enter the new kingdom who make righteousness their chief aim, and freely serve God in all that they do, consenting to His rule as good, and rejoicing to do His will through every province and the whole extent of their "days" or life.

II. **He thanks God for the distinction conferred on his son.**—It was no small honour to be a "prophet of the Most High," but how much greater to be prophet and forerunner of "the Lord," *i.e.* of the Messiah, the Lord who was to "come suddenly to His Temple"! This was the distinction conferred on John in which his father rejoices by anticipation. But what need for Messiah to have a herald? What need for the Divine Messenger to have a messenger? To prepare His way. The people must be taught that Messiah's salvation was to involve and secure "the remission of their sins." They had misconceived the salvation of the Lord, assuming that He would come to work political deliverance from Roman and Idumæan tyrannies. Before the Saviour could come His "way" must be prepared—gross and carnal misconceptions of His mission must be removed. They must be taught that *sin* was their true enemy, and salvation from sin their true salvation. Zacharias saw what the true bondage of the nation was, and what the work both of the Deliverer and of His herald must be. We need to be reminded that the only salvation and deliverance which can do us any good consists in getting rid, by pardon and by holiness, of the cords of our sins. He who could teach the people this, and only he, would prepare the way of Him who came to accomplish this very salvation, and no other.

III. **Zacharias thanks God for the blessings which were to flow from the Messianic salvation and reign.**—The cause of all these blessings was "the tender mercy of our God": for from what could the "remission of sins" spring save from the Divine compassion, the heart of love in the bosom of God? And having traced them to their heavenly Source, Zacharias sums up these blessings in a figure of rare beauty and force. Isaiah had promised the faithful "remnant" that the "glory of the Lord should rise upon them," and Malachi that the "Sun of righteousness should arise upon them." Basing himself on these images, Zacharias conceives of the men of Israel, if not of men in general, as a vast caravan, which has strayed from the true path, the way of life and peace, and has lost itself amidst the shifting and barren sands of the wilderness. The night falls on them, and they huddle together in the darkness, which seems the very shadow of impending death. But in the Divine mercy a new and unexpected light dawns on them from on high; and as it spreads they take courage, and gather themselves up for a new effort: they find and return to the path, and their souls are filled with peace. In the beautiful figure of the "dayspring from on high," Zacharias sets before us the happy effects of the remission of our sins, of that true salvation wrought by Christ. The shadows which obscured heaven and earth flee away; the path of life becomes plain; and returning to that path, we walk thenceforth in the light, and become children of the day. All Christ's visitation and enlightenment are meant to lead us into the path where we shall find peace with God, and therefore with ourselves and all mankind. We are at rest only when all our relations with God and the outer world are right, and our inner being at harmony with itself.—*Cox.*

SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS ON VERSES 57—80.

Ver. 58. "*Her neighbours and cousins.*"—In these verses we get a pleasing glimpse into the family life of a Jewish household eighteen centuries ago. Natural affections and the courtesies of social life are seen to be hallowed and refined by a devout acknowledgment of God as the giver of blesssing.

"*Rejoiced with her.*"—Not only because of the gift of a son and her safe delivery, but because of the sign of special Divine favour towards her in granting her the boon at an advanced time of life, when all hope of receiving it must have been given up.

Ver. 63. "*His name is John.*"—The emphasis with which the answer was given is no doubt due to the fact that this name was given by Divine command (ver. 13). This sentence on the tablet was the first written sentence of the new covenant; and it contains the word "*grace*" (John = the grace of Jehovah). The last sentence of the old covenant concluded with the word "curse" (Mal. iv. 6). If it had pleased God to preserve any relics connected with holy persons and events of the New Testament, this tablet with its inscription would doubtless have come down to us.—*Bengel.*

"*Marvelled.*"—Probably because the reason for imposing the name was now disclosed to them.

Ver. 64. "*Spake, and praised God.*"—The first use made by Zacharias of his newly recovered faculty of speech was to praise God. A pious heart, in such circumstances, naturally follows this course. It is appropriate (1) to admit the justice of God in correcting us for our sins, (2) to thank Him for the removal of the chastisement which has been the sign of His displeasure, and (3) to acknowledge the benefits derived from the painful discipline to which we have been subjected.

Vers. 65, 66. "*Fear came on all.*"—Wonder and awe filled the souls of those who heard of these things: in some cases, no doubt, it took the form of a guilty fear because of consciousness of sin; in others, that of adoring gratitude at the prospect of the fulfilment of Messianic hopes; and in others, that of mere empty astonishment. Strangely enough all memories of the events of this time seem to have died out in the period that elapsed before John begun his public ministry, as the marvellous circumstances connected with his birth are not again alluded to in the Gospel history. The memory is too often like a river which carries down light and trivial matters, while those that are weighty and valuable sink out of sight.

Ver. 66. "*The hand of the Lord was with him.*"—1. To strengthen. 2. To protect.

The Anxieties of Love.—"What manner of child shall this be?" This question has again and again been asked by all sorts of parents, about all sorts of children, ever since the world began. The best and the worst of mankind have had their time of innocence and beauty—have been welcomed, caressed, talked over, by those who cared more for them, and deserved more from them, than any one else in the world. If in some respects *a useless question*—for *time* is indispensable for a full answer to it, and those who ask it may have disappeared long before the answer is ready—it is a question *full of nature and pathos.* Not to ask it is to be quite unworthy of the blessing of a child.

I. What goes to make a child what Christian parents ought to wish it to be?—1. *Its own personality.* Every

human being is absolutely distinct from every other in mental capacity, tastes and gifts, disposition and physical nature. We must make the best of this separateness. 2. *The home surroundings.* These make an enormous difference to a child's future, whether in material or spiritual things. Comfort or discomfort, abundance or penury, healthiness or squalor, protection from temptation or exposure to it, the suitableness or unsuitableness of social environment, are all powerful factors in moral development, gravely influencing a child's future. 3. *The training.* This is of unspeakable moment. It includes the home atmosphere, the tone of its conversation, the aim of its ambitions, the spirit of its pursuits, the scope of its activities. Ordinary conversation at meal-times or in the home evening hours moulds character more than books. 4. *The grace of God.* Promised at baptism, given again and again to the receptive heart in the opening years, asked for by godly parents to be a continual gift, and coming to the child through the parents as its channels in many unsuspected ways.

II. **What share in the making of a child is within a parent's power?** —Helplessness and presumption are equally fatal here. To know our limitations is the first condition of success. 1. *We cannot make a child to order.* Most of us would like to be able to do so; and if we tried, the result would be a curious creature. God reserves this prerogative to Himself. We cannot repeal the awful law of heredity. We continually suffer from the consequences of our parents' sins. 2. *We cannot, after a certain age, lock up a child in a glass case.* If we try to do so, it is usually bad for the case, but much worse for the child. 3. *Nor can we padlock a child's mind.* Any real or continuous effort to conceal from the growing faculties the laws of the universe, the melancholy facts of the world, the existence of unbelief, will only compel a woeful "Nemesis of faith" when the padlock is forced open. 4. *Much is, however, possible.* Much that we can do, and which God expects us to do. There is no nobler opportunity, no more awful talent, no loftier duty, than that of nurturing and training a Christian child in the love and fear of God. By our own life, example, and conversation we can make a good soil for the young plant to grow in, and set a high ideal of motive, and principle, and duty before the young soul, which sees, admires, loves, absorbs, unknowingly. We can train a child from the earliest to obey and to deny itself. We can make them free of the Church's privileges. We can always give them sympathy and love.—*Thorold.*

Vers. 68-79. *The Benedictus.*—Zacharias, the humble father of the greatest human prophet, closes the strain of Old Testament prediction on the threshold of the New Testament. It is his honour to be the *first* of whom it was said that he was "filled with the Holy Ghost." His prophetic song, uttered over the infant forerunner, keeps steadily in view the coming Christ. It belongs to the old economy in its phraseology and tone, while it is filled with the Spirit of the new dispensation. Zacharias speaks at the outset as one of the old prophets risen again, but his closing words might be an extract from an apostolic epistle. To his prophetic glance the Redeemer's work is already accomplished. The Holy Ghost has raised this prophetic priest from his incredulity into the full assurance of faith; and, like Isaiah at the beginning of his ministry, he sees in clear perspective the full development of the kingdom of grace. The advent of Christ is that of God "looking upon" His creatures, "visiting" them to leave them no more, and "redeeming" them with a spiritual and eternal deliverance. That salvation was to be provided in the "house of David," in performance of the mercy "promised to the fathers." But it was a salvation proclaimed by the prophets "since the world began," and therefore for

the world; it was "the oath sworn to Abraham," and therefore an eternal pledge, now virtually redeemed, to the children of faith; and the blessings of the everlasting covenant are personal redemption from those enemies that make God an object of terror, and strength to serve Him in personal holiness of consecration and righteousness of life all the days of human probation. But whatever Old Testament limitation may have seemed to linger in this last prophecy vanishes before the higher influence under which Zacharias blesses his son's commission. In John he beholds "the prophet of the Highest" (the "Highest" and the "Son of the Highest" are one), and his office would be to herald the Light of the world, coming to pour the dayspring from on high on the nations sitting in darkness, and guide the feet of sinners into the way of peace—to announce deliverance from no other yoke than that of evil, "salvation by the remission of sins." In due time that greater son will take up his father's prophecy and point to Israel's "Lamb of God" as taking away the "sin of the world." But listening to this closing strain of prophecy, we still observe that the Redeemer's *dominion* is alone exalted; and as yet the mystery of the *Passion* is kept veiled. All is victory, redemption, peace. The eve of the Incarnation hears no sound but that of rejoicing; for here the order is inverted, and the sorrow of the night will come after the joy of the morning. —*Pope.*

"*Blessed be the Lord God of Israel.*" —Consider for a moment whether we cannot find evidence in the context of this canticle that it belongs to the time to which it is assigned, and can be referred to no other, without supposing an exquisite literary tact totally alien from apocryphal forgeries. Take this hymn of Zacharias. What should we expect from him? The hope of Jesus Christ and of salvation, rising indeed a little beyond the Psalms, but still in Jewish colours, and under Jewish images. Precisely such is its character. The God whom Zacharias blesses is Israel's God. The mighty salvation is in David's house. It is the fulfilment of prophecy in the pursuance of the promise to Abraham. The whole groundwork of the hymn is Jewish. The time is felt to be a dawn at best, "the dayspring from on high"; but there are vistas which let us behold the broad light upon the great deep.—*Alexander.*

"*Redeemed His people.*"—This utterance of Zacharias is something more than a song or poem—**it is a treatise on salvation.** 1. *Its Author.* "The Lord God of Israel." 2. *Its cause.* "On account of the tender mercy of our God." 3. *Its essence.* "Salvation, consisting in remission of sins." 4. *Its blessedness and privileges.* "Delivered . . . serve without fear." 5. *Its consequence.* "Holiness and righteousness."—*Ibid.*

Thanks to God.—The best expression of joy, when long cherished desires are at last on the eve of accomplishment, is thanks to God. No wonder then that the first words of the hymn are a burst of blessing of "the God of Israel."—*Maclaren.*

The Fervour of the Hymn.—It seems to be implied by ver. 64 that this song was uttered immediately on Zacharias' regaining his speech. "This canticle, which was composed in the heart of the priest during the time of his dumbness, issues solemnly from his lips when they are unsealed, as the molten metal flows from the furnace when an outlet is given to it" (*Godet*).

National Aspirations.—The song of Mary expresses her *individual* feelings, that of Zacharias represents the aspirations and gratitude of the *nation* whom God has visited. Zacharias does not simply express joyous feelings at the birth of a son, or even exultation at the glorious career that lay before

that son. He does not dwell upon his own relationship to the child, and even the child himself is unmentioned, until the mercy of God in Christ has been fully celebrated. As in the case of the *Magnificat*, no very rigid lines of division need be looked for in this lyrical outburst of praise; but the following are the topics contained in it: 1. Vers. 68-70—a Deliverer raised up for Israel in one of David's line. 2. Vers. 71-75—the nature of the work He was to accomplish is described. 3. Vers. 76, 77—the part to be played by John, as the forerunner of Christ. 4. Vers. 78, 79—the source of this fertilising stream of grace is in the compassion of God towards men.

Ver. 68. "*Visited His people.*"—Four centuries had passed since the last direct communication between heaven and earth. During that time God had appeared, as it were, to be absent: no prophet's voice had been heard, no angelic messenger had been seen. In the Old Testament the purpose of God's visiting His people is generally to *judge* them; in the New Testament it is to *show mercy* to them.

Ver. 69. "*A horn of salvation.*"—Cf. Ps. cxxxii. 16. This may be reckoned as one of the titles of Christ. The metaphor, appropriate enough in the language of an agricultural people, is taken from a bull's defending itself and attacking enemies with its horns. In Christ power and authority are given (1) for the deliverance and defence of His people, and (2) for the defeat and overthrow of all His and their enemies. There is no reference to the horns of the altar as a place of refuge.

Ver. 70. "*His holy prophets.*"—*I.e.* as the organs made use of for communicating God's holy will. The prophets did not simply foretell events, they strove to establish and maintain right relations between men and God. Bad men, like Balaam and the old prophet of Bethel (1 Kings xiii. 11), might sometimes be inspired to predict the future, but only holy men could engage in the work of turning the hearts of the people towards God.

Ver. 71. "*Saved from our enemies.*"—In this song of Zacharias there is more than an anticipation of merely temporal prosperity for the Jewish people. "It is the expression of the aspirations and hopes of a pious Jew, waiting for the salvation of the Lord, finding that salvation brought near, and uttering his thankfulness in Old Testament language, with which he was familiar, and at the same time under prophetic influence of the Holy Spirit" (*Alford*).

Ver. 72. "*Promised to our fathers.*"—He bethinks himself of those in the long centuries of the past who had eagerly desired to see the fulfilment of Divine promises of blessedness through Christ, and had died with the desire ungratified; and he speaks of the advent of the Messiah as being an evidence of God's mercy to the dead as well as to the living. This poetical language is not to be interpreted too literally.

Vers. 72, 73. *John, Zacharias, Elisabeth.*—It can scarcely be accidental that the names of the Baptist and of his parents correspond to three successive clauses in these verses. John ("the grace" or "mercy of Jehovah")—to perform the mercy" (ver. 72); Zacharias ("God has remembered")—"to remember His holy covenant" (ver. 72); Elisabeth ("God hath sworn")—"the oath which He sware" (ver. 73).

Vers. 74, 75. "*That we . . . might serve Him.*"—The spiritual element in the aspirations of Zacharias here comes clearly into view: the deliverance of the nation from bondage and oppression is not the great end in view. It is desirable as a means for securing a more perfect service and worship of God.

"*Without fear.*"—*I.e.* fear of enemies, without being distracted by worldly cares.

The Nature of True Service of God.—The great purpose which God has in view in sending Christ for our redemption is here plainly stated. 1. He would lead us to *serve* Him: "that we should serve Him" (ver. 74). 2. He would *free us from all distracting cares*—"without fear" (ver. 74). 3. He would have this service to be *in spirit and in truth*—"in holiness and righteousness before Him"—in the discharge of all the duties we owe to Him and to our fellows. 4. He would have us to serve Him thus "*all our days*" (ver. 75).

Ver. 74. "*Delivered out of the hand of our enemies.*"—As for the prophetic ideal of the kingdom, it is not so simple a matter to determine as one may be at first inclined to think. The general strain of Hebrew prophecy seems, indeed, to point to such a state of things as Zacharias longed for—Israel delivered out of the hands of her enemies, and serving God without fear and amid prevalent prosperity. Yet there are stray utterances here and there which suggest the doubt whether this idyllic picture was ever to find a place in the realm of reality.—*Bruce.*

The Christian's Priestly Service.—The priest-prophet Zacharias views the life of all the emancipated children of God as one continuous worship, one endless priestly service: "That we . . . should continually do Him worship." One word summed up the whole meaning and purpose of the priestly life of Zacharias—to do God *service*, to be *worshipping* Him. This word, this *Ich Dien* of the faithful priesthood, he makes the *Ich Dien* of every child of God. The one true Priest, whose coming is so near, shall enable all the redeemed people to perform the true *service* of priests, to celebrate God's worship in the long festivity of a perpetual freedom. The motto of Christ's kingdom of priests comes fitly from the lips of an inspired priest.—*Alexander.*

A Priest's Thanksgiving.—The prevailing priestly character of Zacharias hymn is somewhat strongly marked. It would have been natural to no one but a priest to cast his Messianic hopes so prevailingly in the moulds of the sanctuary.—*Warfield.*

Ver. 76. "*And thou, child.*"—Zacharias does not say "my son": the relation of John the Baptist to him as son is lost sight of in the higher relationship in which he stands to Christ as His prophet and forerunner. "Child"—lit. "little child": *i.e.* "though now such a little thing, thou shalt be," etc.

"*The Lord.*"—This Divine title is here plainly applied to Christ, as it is for Christ that John is to prepare the way.

"*Prepare His ways.*"—*I.e.* by convincing the people that they stood in need of redemption from sin rather than of political emancipation. The figure used is an allusion to the well-known practice of Eastern monarchs on their progresses.

Vers. 76, 77. "*Salvation.*"—The *Benedictus* brings before us, with marvellous power and fulness, the great gospel doctrine of *salvation.* "Salvation consisting in remission of their sins." It is evident, from the words of Zacharias, that a knowledge of the true nature of salvation was deeply needed. A false notion of the character of this Divine salvation was spread abroad in Israel. A carnal patriotism was fed by a teaching which corresponded to the miserable politics of the pulpit among ourselves. The distant prospect of political deliverance was substituted for the blessed certainty of spiritual salvation. Therefore Zacharias, in his prophecy, gives the true and sufficient account of the essential character of salvation. The

worst slavery is that to evil. Sin is the darkest "badge of conquest." Salvation consists in sins forgiven and its blessed consequences.—*Alexander.*

Ver. 77. "*Salvation by the remission of sins.*"—*I.e.* not by merits of our own, but by betaking ourselves to a free reconciliation with God.

Vers. 78, 79. "*The dayspring from on high.*"—The various metaphors used in these verses seem to be borrowed from the following picture: a caravan has lost its way, and is wandering in the desert; the unfortunate pilgrims, overtaken by the night, cast themselves upon the ground, and in the midst of a darkness which appals them wait for death. Suddenly a bright star rises on the horizon and fills the plain with light. The travellers are encouraged by the sight, and rise to their feet; guided by the light of the star, they find the road which brings them to the place where they desire to be.—*Godet.*

Blessings of Christ's First Coming.

I. **An ideal of life.**
II. **Illumination.**
III. **Redemption from sin.**
IV. **The gift of a new nature.**—*Liddon.*

Ver. 78. "*The tender mercy of our God.*"—What would we ever have done if God had not been merciful? There could never have been a soul saved in this world. Not one of us can ever find a refuge at any door save the door of mercy. But here the vilest sinner can find eternal shelter; and not mere cold shelter only, for God's mercy is "tender." We are inside a sweet home. Our refuge is the very heart of God. No mother's bosom was ever so warm a nest for her own child as is the Divine mercy for all who find refuge in it.—*Miller.*

Christ the Light of the World.—This figure is used of Christ (1) by those who prophesied of His coming (Isa. ix. 2; Mal. iv. 2); (2) by Himself (John viii. 12, ix. 5); and (3) by His apostles (2 Pet. i. 19; Rev. xxi. 23, xxii. 16). Sometimes He is spoken of as the morning star which is the herald and pledge of the coming day, sometimes as the dawn or dayspring, and sometimes as the Sun of righteousness. Just as the sun gives life and warmth to the earth, so Christ creates and nourishes spiritual life in the souls of men.

I. **He reveals truth.**—He shows things as they really are: He makes known what God is and what He requires of man, and puts to flight all the erroneous and superstitious ideas which men in their blindness and ignorance had formed of Him. He also reveals man to himself, and shows him his sinfulness and helplessness and misery, and points out the way by which to pass from sin to holiness, and from death to life.

II. **He gives guidance.**—Not only does He show the way of obedience, but He has Himself walked in it, and calls us to be His followers. By His holy example He reveals to us how we should serve God and man.

III. **He gives strength.**—As life dwindles and grows weak in the absence of the light of the sun, so does it revive and flourish when exposed to its genial influence. In like manner Christ in His own person imparts spiritual vigour to us; by His atonement for sin He banishes the despair which the thought of our past sins is calculated to excite within us, and by the present quickening influence of His Spirit He gives us new supplies of strength that enable us to overcome all difficulties in the way of obedience.

IV. **He gives comfort and joy.**—To those who are downcast and sorrowful He imparts hope, to those that are timid He gives confidence, and to those that are strong in faith He gives help to win even greater victories than any they have yet won. He gives light in virtue of His own Divine nature, and hence it is of a higher kind than that afforded by the teaching and

example of even the wisest and holiest of men. He gives, but we receive: there must be a sense of our own insufficiency and weakness, and of the darkness in which by nature we are, before we can profit by the light He gives. There must be spiritual life to be nourished by His beams, or at any rate a longing for what He has to impart; a spiritual sense—like the natural sense of sight—to take in the light.

Ver. 80. *The Humanity of Christ.*—It is somewhat surprising to find the growth—corporeal and moral—of John the Baptist and of the Holy One of God spoken of, up to a certain point, in the same language (cf. ii. 40). At least it witnesses that the second was as truly human as the first.

"*Was in the deserts.*"—The advantages of this holy retirement: 1. Seclusion from the world, from its errors, defilements, and cares. 2. Nearness to God—away from the noise and tumult of human society the voice of God may be the more clearly heard, communion with Him more perfectly realised. Notice that John's retirement was not like that of an anchoret, a permanent mode of life: he was in the deserts till the day of his showing unto Israel. Similar instances of temporary seclusion from society are to be found in the lives of Moses and St. Paul, and from time to time in the life of our Lord Himself. From retirement they come forth strengthened for a more efficient service of God and man.

CHAPTER II.

CRITICAL NOTES.

Ver. 1. **All the world.**—*I.e.* the Roman world (*orbis terrarum*). **Taxed.**—Rather, "enrolled," something like a modern census, but with a view to taxation.

Ver. 2. **This was the first enrolment made when Quirinius was governor of Syria** (R.V.).—As Quirinius was governor of Syria in A.D. 6, ten years later than this, and then carried out a census, some have supposed that St. Luke made a mistake in referring to him here. This can scarcely be, as St. Luke himself mentions this second "taxing" in Acts v. 37. The most satisfactory explanation of the matter seems to be that Quirinius was *twice* governor of Syria, in B.C. 4 as well as in A.D. 6. This seems to be a well-established fact, though there is no other authority than the Evangelist's for the "taxing" or "enrolment" during his first term of office.

Ver. 3. **Every one into his own city.**—As Judæa was a semi-independent kingdom, the registration ordered by the Roman emperor was carried into effect in accordance with Jewish customs. The Roman custom was to enrol persons at the place of residence.

Ver. 5. **His espoused wife.**—Rather, "who was betrothed to him" (R.V.). "It is uncertain whether her presence was obligatory or voluntary; but it is obvious that, after so trying a time, and after what she had suffered (Matt. i. 19), she would cling to the presence and protection of her husband" (*Farrar*).

Ver. 7. **First-born.**—No inference can be safely drawn from this as to Mary's having other children afterwards. The first-born had a peculiar position assigned to him in the law (Exod. xiii. 2, xxii. 29). **Inn.**—A mere *caravanserai*, affording little else than shelter. The stable may have been an adjoining cave, as reported by Justin Martyr and the apocryphal gospels.

Ver. 8. **Keeping watch, etc.**—This affords no ground for concluding that the nativity cannot have taken place in winter. After the rainy season, at the end of December, shepherds in Palestine are still accustomed to lead out their flocks. The traditional date (December 25th) is of late origin. Christmas was not celebrated in the Church till after A.D. 350, and seems to have been substituted for a heathen festival. **Their flock.**—Dr. Edersheim has shown that sheep needed for the daily sacrifices in the Temple were fed near Bethlehem.

Ver. 9. **The angel of the Lord.**—Rather, "an angel of the Lord" (R.V.). **Came upon them.**—"Stood by them" (R.V.). **Glory of the Lord.**—"By it we are to understand that extreme splendour in which the Deity is represented as appearing to men, and sometimes called the

Shechinah—an appearance frequently attended, as in this case, by a company of angels" (*Bloomfield*). **Sore afraid.**—Lit. "feared a great fear."

Ver. 10. **To all people.**—Rather, "to all the people" (R.V.), *i.e.* to Israel. The wider import of the advent is foreseen by Simeon (ver. 32).

Ver. 11. **A Saviour.**—The name Jesus is not given, but the title Saviour is equivalent to it. **Christ the Lord.**—Christ is the Greek word corresponding to the Hebrew word Messiah, and both mean the Anointed One. The Lord is the uniform name used in the LXX. as a substitute for the ineffable name Jehovah. It is twice used in ver. 9 of God.

Ver. 12. **The babe.**—Rather, "*a* babe" (R.V.).

Ver. 13. **Heavenly host.**—The army of angels which is represented as surrounding the throne of God (cf. 1 Kings xxii. 19; Ps. ciii. 20, 21, cxlviii. 2). From this the title of Lord of hosts (Sabaoth) is taken.

Ver. 14. **In the highest.**—In the highest places, *i.e.* heaven (Job xvi. 19; Ps. cxlviii. 1). **Good-will toward men.**—Rather, "among men." By the insertion of a single letter the nominative case of the word translated "good-will" is changed to the genitive, and the rendering would be, "among men of [God's] good-will," *i.e.* in whom He is well pleased. This is the reading of the four most ancient MSS. and of the Vulgate (*hominibus bonæ voluntatis*), and is followed by the R.V. It yields, however, a somewhat awkward and unintelligible sense. The great mass of ancient authorities is in favour of the rendering in our A.V., which is more in accordance with the spirit of the passage than the other.

Ver. 16. **Found.**—Lit. "discovered," after search. **Mary and Joseph.**—Her name naturally comes first, in view of the peculiar nature of her motherhood. **A manger.**—Rather, "*the* manger" (R.V.), that spoken of by the angel.

Ver. 19. **Pondered.**—*I.e.* revolved, put together the various circumstances. She had evidently not a full understanding of the matter.

The *order* of events: The flight into Egypt was from Bethlehem, and must have occurred *after* the presentation in the Temple. The forty days of purification (ver. 22) are too short for the journey into Egypt and a return to Jerusalem. The adoration of the Magi must have occurred immediately after the presentation. That it could not have occurred before it is rendered certain from the facts that the revelation of danger to the child Jesus would render a visit to Jerusalem unsafe, and the gifts offered by the Magi would have provided means for a richer sacrifice than that described in ver. 24. The return to Bethlehem after the presentation may indicate that the holy family would have taken up their abode there instead of returning to Nazareth, but for the danger to which they were exposed by the jealousy of Herod. Bethlehem was only six miles from Jerusalem.

Ver. 21. **The child.**—The best MSS. read "Him."

Ver. 22. **Her purification.**—The true reading is, "*their* purification" (R.V.). The mother was ceremonially unclean by child-birth, the others of the household by daily contact. The law of purification is given in Lev. xii. At the conclusion of forty days a lamb was to be offered as a burnt-offering, and a turtle-dove or young pigeon as a sin-offering. In case of poverty two turtle-doves or young pigeons were to be offered instead, one as a burnt-offering and the other as a sin-offering. **To present Him.**—As a first-born male. "The first-born male of every species was sacred to the Lord, in memory of the delivery of the first-born of the Israelites in Egypt (Exod. xii. 29, 30, xiii. 2). But the first-born male child was to be redeemed for money (Exod. xiii. 11-15; Num. xviii. 15, 16), and the whole tribe of Levi was regarded as having been substituted for the first-born (Num. iii. 12, 13)" (*Speaker's Commentary*).

Ver. 23. **That openeth the womb.**—Figurative for "first-born."

Ver. 24. **A pair of turtle-doves, etc.**—As no mention is made of the lamb, it has been reasonably inferred that the holy family were poor.

Ver. 25. **Simeon.**—According to some the son of the famous Rabbi Hillel and the father of Gamaliel. This is scarcely possible, as the Simeon of the text seems to have been in extreme old age (vers. 26-29), while the other was president of the Sanhedrim some seventeen or eighteen years later. The name was at this time very common among the Jews. **Just and devout.**—Cf. i. 6. The one epithet describes external conduct, the other the inward, spiritual character. **The consolation of Israel.**—A beautiful title of Christ or description of the blessings expected from His coming. Cf. Mark xv. 43.

Ver. 26. **The Lord's Christ.**—*I.e.* the Anointed of Jehovah. Cf. Ps. ii. 2.

Ver. 27. **By the Spirit.**—*I.e.* under the influence of the Spirit.

Ver. 29. **Now lettest Thou.**—Death seemed near and sure since he had seen the Lord's Christ.

Ver. 31. **All people.**—Rather, "all peoples" (R.V.), divided in ver. 32 into Gentiles (sitting in darkness, to whom Christ was to be a light) and Jews (whose glory He was to be).

Ver. 32. **To lighten the Gentiles.**—Rather, "for revelation to the Gentiles" (R.V.).

Ver. 34. **Is set.**—Lit. "lies": perhaps the figure is akin to that of the stone lying on the path, which is to some a stone of stumbling, to others a stone of support. **The fall and rising**

again.—Rather, "the fall and rising up" (R.V.), *i.e.* "for the fall of many who now stand, and for the rising of many who now lie prostrate, 'that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed.' The child was to be a touch-stone of character, of faith, and of love. God's true but hidden servants would embrace Him; the hypocrites would reject Him" (*Speaker's Commentary*). The prediction finds fulfilment in the fall of Pharisees and scribes, and the rising of publicans and sinners. **A sign, etc.**—That His life and teaching would provoke violent opposition—a prophecy only too abundantly fulfilled.

Ver. 35. **Yea, a sword.**—Reference having been made to opposition excited by the life and teaching of Christ, it is natural to see here an allusion to the grief this would excite in the heart of His mother; the sword would pierce deepest at the cross. This idea pervades the *Stabat Mater dolorosa.* Any reference to Mary's anguish for sin, or doubts concerning the Messiahship of her Son, seems out of place.

Ver. 36. **Anna.**—The same name as Hannah. **A prophetess.**—Known as such previous to this time. Cf. cases of Miriam, Deborah, and Huldah in the Old Testament, the daughters of Philip in the New (Acts xxi. 9). **Aser.**—*I.e.* Asher. It is interesting to note the presence of one belonging to the ten tribes in the Holy Land at this epoch. **Had lived, etc.**—*I.e.* had been married for seven years, and was now a widow of fourscore and four years of age.

Ver. 37. **Departed not.**—Probably denotes assiduous attendance (cf. Acts ii. 46): it may mean that her home was in the Temple, that as prophetess she lived in one of the chambers of the holy building. **Fastings.**—Only one fast appointed in the law, that on the great Day of Atonement. The Pharisees were in the habit of fasting twice in the week (xviii. 12), on Mondays and Thursdays.

Ver. 38. **Looked for.**—*I.e.* "expected." The readings of the last clause in the verse vary: the R.V. gives it, "looking for the redemption of Jerusalem." Jerusalem regarded as the place where redemption would begin. The expectations of these devout souls would be checked by the flight into Egypt, the withdrawal to Nazareth, and the long years of silence before the prophecies concerning Christ began to find fulfilment in His public ministry.

Ver. 40. **Waxed strong.**—The words "in spirit" are added from i. 80; omitted in R.V. **Filled with wisdom.**—Lit. "becoming full of wisdom." **The grace of God.**—The favour of God. The first point noted is healthy physical growth, the second a proportionate increase of knowledge, and the third an enjoyment of God's favour.

Ver. 41.—The male Israelites were commanded to attend the three yearly feasts (Exod. xxiii. 14-17); but the custom seems to have fallen into abeyance. The attendance of women was not enjoined; but the great Rabbi Hillel had recommended it.

Ver. 42.—At the age of twelve a Jewish boy became "a son of the law," and came under the obligation of obeying all its precepts, including attendance at the Passover. It was probable, if not certain, that this was the first time Jesus had been in Jerusalem at this feast.

Ver. 43. **The days.**—The seven days of the feast (Exod. xii. 15). **Joseph and His mother.**—"His parents" is the reading of the R.V.

Ver. 44. **The company.**—The caravan, made up of those of the same district from which the pilgrims came.

Ver. 46. **After three days.**—According to the Jewish idiom, this would be equivalent to "on the third day." The days are easily accounted for: at the close of the first day Jesus was missed; the second day would be occupied with searching for Him on the way back to Jerusalem; on the third they found Him in the Temple. **In the Temple.**—*I.e.* in the part of it to which Mary could go (ver. 48), probably in one of the porches of the court of the women. **The doctors.**—Teachers of the law, Jewish Rabbis. **Hearing them, and asking them questions.**—The order of the words precludes the idea of Jesus sitting among them as a teacher. He was there rather as a learner, and, according to the custom of Jewish scholars, asking questions.

Ver. 48. **Thy father and I.**—The use of this phrase is natural enough; but it is really inconsistent with the facts of the case. Jesus by implication draws attention to this fact in His reply. "He knew and felt that there was something in Him and in His previous history, which *ought to be known* to Mary and Joseph, that justified His being where He was, and forbade their anxiety about Him" (*Popular Commentary, Schaff*).

Ver. 49. **About My Father's business.**—Rather, "in My Father's house" (R.V.). The phrase in the original might be translated in either way; but the latter rendering is so vivid and so happily suited to the circumstance of the case as to make it seem the more probable of the two.

Ver. 51. **Subject unto them.**—Probably wrought at His reputed father's trade (Mark vi. 3). This is the last notice of Joseph: tradition speaks of him as advanced in age on his marriage with Mary. Probably he died at some time during the eighteen years which elapsed between this time and the beginning of our Lord's public ministry.

Ver. 52. **Increased.**—Rather, "advanced" (R.V.). **Stature.**—Or, "age." The word, if taken in the latter sense, would include the former.

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 1—20.

The Voluntary Self-humiliation of Jesus.—This history, it has been said, begins with great majesty, as it tells of the Emperor Augustus, at whose feet lay the whole known world, and to whose command obedience was rendered in every country, and city, and village. It descends to tell of the humble circumstances in which a child was born in one of the obscurest villages in one of his provinces; but it rises again into majesty as it describes the appearance of angels to celebrate the true glory and greatness of this child. But we may see in the passage a detailed account of that great act of self-renunciation of which the apostle speaks: "Ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that, though He was rich, yet . . . He became poor." The Evangelist first records the lowly circumstances that attended His advent to earth, and reveals the true majesty that clothed Him even then.

I. **There is nothing to distinguish Him to outward appearing** from multitudes of other of His fellow-subjects in the kingdom of Herod, or the empire of Cæsar Augustus. His parents are enrolled with their neighbours in the register at Bethlehem; for though they are of royal descent, their claim to exceptional rank has fallen into abeyance. It is now a mere genealogical curiosity, and the fact that the carpenter of Nazareth can trace up his lineage to David is not likely to trouble the peace of the most jealous of tyrants. It is as the son of an artisan that the name of Jesus would be enrolled.

II. **Poverty and hardship mark His nativity.**—Not even a house to shelter her can His mother find when the time comes for His birth. The inn was full: no friendly roof afforded the comfort and hospitality of which she stood in need, and it was a stable that first covered His head, and a manger that formed His first cradle.

III. **He passed through the stage of helpless and unconscious infancy**—being in all things made like His brethren. No preternatural glory shone about Him: it is by His wearing the first childish swathings, hastily extemporised perhaps by His virgin mother, and by the rude fashion of His resting-place, that the shepherds are to discover Him. Yet even while He lies on His hard bed in poorest guise there are not wanting signs of His great and unapproachable majesty. 1. Heaven opens, and angels descend to proclaim and celebrate His birth; the glorious light that breaks in upon the darkness of earth, the multitude of celestial beings, and the song of praise, bear witness to the greatness and significance of the event that has just taken place in Bethlehem. 2. In no uncertain terms the angel speaks of Jesus as the possessor of a mightier throne than that of Cæsar. He is Lord of angels and of men. He is the Anointed One, whose power, and authority, and dignity are typified and faintly shadowed forth in kingly, priestly, and prophetic offices. 3. He not only deserves but receives homage and worship from men. The shepherds hasten to find the new-born babe, that they may kneel at His feet; and in them He receives the first-fruits of that loyal service which one day will be fully rendered to Him by all created beings.

It is by the eye of faith that the majesty of Christ is discerned; it is the loving heart that believes the heavenly message. If, therefore, we would follow the example of the angels and of the shepherds, and receive Christ in His true character as our God and Saviour, we must have a faith and love like theirs.

SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS ON VERSES 1—20.

Ver. 1. "*A decree from Cæsar Augustus.*"—The providence of God is discovered to us in the Bible, overruling the actions of mankind, and adapting them to ends and purposes of which their authors were little conscious. Thus the present "taxing," whether dictated by the ambition, or the curiosity, or the avarice of the Roman emperor, is shown to have furnished an occasion for drawing this holy pair from their remote home in Nazareth of Galilee to Bethlehem of Judæa—the village which the finger of Providence had long before pointed out as destined to be the place of Messiah's birth; so entirely was Augustus ministering to the Divine pleasure, while in the exercise of imperial power he followed the dictates of his own unfettered will.—*Burgon.*

Cæsar's Unconscious Obedience to God.—The unconscious obedience of Cæsar Augustus to the Divine will illustrates the statement in Prov. xxi. 1: "The king's heart is in the hand of the Lord, as the rivers of water: He turneth it whithersoever He will."

"*The whole world.*"—The whole habitable world is related to Jesus, who was willing to be enrolled in the same catalogue with them, and not with Jews alone.—*Wordsworth.*

A Testimony to Christ's Greatness.—The whole world was moved to bring about the fulfilment of the prophecy: this a testimony to the pre-eminent greatness of Jesus.

"*Should be taxed.*"—Though Judæa was still under the rule of a king of her own, he was subject to Cæsar, and even this semblance of independence was now passing away. This "first enrolment" was but preparatory to the subsequent transformation of Judæa into a Roman province. "The sceptre was just departing from Judah" (Gen. xlix. 10) when Christ was born.

Ver. 4. "*Joseph also went up . . . to Bethlehem.*"—It had been foretold that there Christ was to be born. Yet the fulfilment of the prophecy was not brought about by any human contrivance or plan. Joseph and Mary went up to Bethlehem in obedience to the emperor's decree; and, so far as the fulfilment of the prophecy was concerned, were led like the blind by a Divine hand.

Ver. 7. "*She brought forth her firstborn son.*"—As by a woman death had been conveyed to all mankind, so was now a woman made the blessed instrument whereby He who is our life came into the world.—*Burgon.*

"*Swaddling clothes and . . . a manger.*"—No man will have cause to complain of his coarse robe, if he remembers the swaddling clothes of this Holy Child; nor to be disquieted at his hard bed, when he considers Jesus laid in a manger. The lowly circumstances connected with the birth of Jesus served two purposes: 1. They *concealed* the great event from the eyes of the thoughtless, sinful world. 2. They *revealed* the Divine condescension—the Son of God, who, though rich, for our sakes became poor (2 Cor. viii. 9; Phil. ii. 5-8). The humility of His birth was characteristic of His whole spirit and life. "For our sakes He was born a stranger in an open stable; He lived without a place of His own wherein to lay His head, subsisting by the charity of good people; and He died naked on a cross in the close embraces of holy poverty" (a saying of St. Francis of Assisi). His example rebukes the worldly spirit which prizes outward pomp, and wealth, and rank, and despises things that are unpretentious and lowly—which is captivated by the transitory and blind to the eternal.

Christ in the Manger.—In the manger, where lay the food for cattle,

there now lies the bread of angels, the sacred body, which nourishes us for eternal life.—*Bede.*

"*No room for them in the inn.*"—"He came unto His own, and they that were His own received Him not" (John i. 11). The silent entrance of the Son of God into the world is very striking. "The unfathomable depths of the Divine counsels were moved; the fountains of the great deep were broken up; the healing of the nations was issuing forth; but nothing was seen on the surface of human society but this slight rippling of the water."

The Purpose of Christ's Humiliation.—We see what sort of beginning the Son of God had, and in what cradle He was placed. Such was His condition from His birth, because He had taken upon Him our flesh, that He might "empty Himself" (Phil. ii. 7) on our account. When He was thrown into a stable and placed in a manger, and a lodging refused Him among men, it was that heaven might be opened to us, not as a temporary lodging, but as our eternal country and inheritance, and that angels might receive us into their abode.—*Calvin.*

Vers. 8-20. "*The herald angels sing.*"

I. **The angel is the first evangelist.**—Mark how steadily his words climb up from the cradle to the throne. The full joy and tremendous wonder of the first word are not felt till we read the last. It was much that there was born a Saviour, a Messiah; but the last word "Lord" crowns the wonder and the blessing, while it lays the only possible foundation for the other two names.

II. **The message is for men.**—"To you" first, to Israel; but its proffer stretches far wider, and includes all mankind. The angel speaks as one who has no share in the blessing. There is no envy, but there is the consciousness of non-participation. Yet the blessed life and death which are our salvation are their instruction in depths of Divine love, which could not else be disclosed to them who never fell.

III. **The confirming sign.**—This might rather have seemed fitted to contradict the glad tidings. It is a strange mark by which to identify one born to such lofty tasks and dignities, that He is, like all other infants, wrapped in swaddling clothes, and, unlike the child of the poorest, lies in a manger. Humiliation is the sign of majesty, the depth of lowliness, a witness of the height of glory. The cradle that was too poor for a child of man is fitting for the Son of God.

IV. **The angelic chorus.**—The one angel voice has barely time to tell its message, when, as if unable longer to be silent, "suddenly" the "multitude of the heavenly host pours out its praise." I adhere to the old reading which divides the angel chorus into three clauses, of which the first and second may be regarded as the double result of that birth, while the third describes its deepest nature. The incarnation and work of Christ are the highest revelation of God. The wondrous birth brings harmony to earth.—*Maclaren.*

The First Gospel Preaching.

I. **The message is good news.**—Christianity is not a mere re-enactment of the moral law, but news of salvation to those who have broken that law.

II. **Of great joy.**—Neither conviction of sin, nor admonition of punishment, is the gospel, for these are not messages of great joy; they are the groundwork of preparation for the gospel. Nothing is gospel that is not joy-producing in those receiving it.

III. **To all people.**—To all ages, all nations, all classes, in society. Primarily, to the Jewish people, but the larger meaning is implied in this and in the preceding chapter.

IV. **The cause of this joy.**—The advent of a "Saviour" to save His people from their sins. "Christ" the anointed High Priest of God; "the

Lord," the very incarnation of Jehovah Himself.

V. **The sign.**—The proof of His divinity—the very humility of love; that He should be found cradled in a manger.—*Abbott.*

Ver. 8. "*Shepherds.*"—This employment of tending sheep had been honoured in the earlier times of the Jewish people by its having been that in which Jacob, Moses, and David had been engaged; but now it was a calling that was looked upon by the Jews with contempt. The prophets had often made use of it in figurative descriptions of the work of the Messiah; and our Lord frequently spoke of Himself as having that relation to His people which a shepherd has to his flock.

The Spiritually-minded first hear of the Advent.—It was necessary that, as Christ had been born into the world, the fact should be communicated to men. He must be known in order that men might be drawn unto Him. But the annunciation of His advent was not made, in the first instance, to the rulers of the people or to the priests; for, as far as we can judge, both these classes of men were under the influence of worldly thoughts and ambitions, which blinded them to spiritual things. These shepherds, on the other hand, if we may judge from analogy, belonged to the class of those who were "waiting for the consolation of Israel." The character of the others, to whom the special revelations recorded in these first two chapters of St. Luke's Gospel were given—of Zacharias, Elisabeth, Simeon, and Anna—justifies our coming to this conclusion.

"*Keeping watch over their flock.*"—It was while they were engaged in their calling that they saw the heavenly vision—a privilege denied the hermit-like Essenes, who forsook secular employments, and gave themselves up to mystical contemplations, and to what they regarded as exclusively sacred exercises.

Ver. 9. "*The glory of the Lord.*"—At every period in the humiliation of Christ some notable declaration of His Divine glory is given. In this place, it is by the angel's message; in His circumcision, it is by the name Jesus; in His presentation in the Temple, it is by the testimony of Simeon; in His baptism, it is by the protest of John; and the same fact was manifested in many ways in the course of His passion.—*Bengel.*

"*They were sore afraid.*"—The cause of their fear was a sense of sinfulness and of alienation from God, and a dread of His righteous displeasure. This fear could only be dispelled by an authoritative declaration, such as that now given, of God's compassion towards the sinful, and of His gift of a Saviour. These good tidings were the source of true joy; for until men have peace with God, through Christ, all joy is deceitful and short-lived.

Vers. 10, 11. *The First Christmas Sermon.*—We are justified in calling it a sermon because of the angel's words: "I bring you good tidings"; or, "I preach the gospel" (εὐαγγελίζω).

I. **The preacher.**—"The angel." So great was the message that no less a personage was worthy to bear it. The angels desire to look into the things that concern the salvation of men. God's dealings with men reveal to them the depths of Divine wisdom and love. They are intimately associated with the history of Christ's redeeming work. Angels told beforehand of His birth, and that of His forerunner; here they celebrate and announce His birth; they ministered to Him after His temptation in the wilderness; an angel strengthened Him during His agony in the garden; an angel rolled away the stone from His sepulchre; and angels announce to the disciples the fact that He had risen from the dead, and at His ascension angels prophesy of His second coming.

II. **The audience.**—"Said unto

them," *i.e.* to the shepherds. As the message the angel bore concerned all men, any men might have been selected to hear it first: any on whom he chanced to come would have been qualified to receive it—for he came to tell of the birth of a Saviour of whom all stand in need. But there was special appropriateness in these shepherds being the first to hear of it. For they were Jews, and therefore acquainted with the promises of deliverance and redemption which now were to be fulfilled in Christ: they followed a simple mode of life, and were evidently of a devout frame of mind, so that they were not likely to be biassed by the prejudices and misconceptions which prevented so many from recognising the Divine glory of Christ; and then, too, they were in the immediate neighbourhood of the place where this great event had occurred.

III. **The message.**—"Be not afraid," etc. 1. The first words are to allay their fears—"Fear not"; it is not ill news he brings, but good news: they are to be made partakers of a "great joy"—a joy so great as to gladden the heart of every member of their nation and of the human race. 2. Then the glad tidings are fully unfolded. "To-day," in the village hard by, One has been born who is "a Saviour"—for the sick, the sinful, the lost, and the perishing—who is "Christ," anointed of God to fulfil all the offices of expiation, enlightenment, and rule, prefigured and signified by priests, prophets, and kings—and who is of Divine nature, "the Lord." Others had in some special emergency and for a portion of their lives been deliverers or saviours of God's people from temporal evils; but He is Saviour from the first, and all through His life, and the evils from which He delivers are the worst which assail and destroy the bodies and souls of men.

The duties that rest upon us are to hear the glad tidings as specially concerning us, and as being the best news that could be brought to our knowledge, and to receive the Saviour sent to us from heaven.

Vers. 10-15. *Luke's Narrative of the Incarnation.*—The leading ideas of the narrative of the Incarnation in Luke's Gospel, the aspects from which he regarded it, and from which he wished the Church to regard it, are suggested in a summary form by this glorious passage.

I. **The Incarnation is real.**—The Saviour is no shadowy, unreal being. He is really born, a real babe, wrapped in swaddling clothes, in a definite place, at a definite date in human history. It was a true human birth; it was a true human body. There was with equal truth a true human soul. The reality of the Incarnation, according to Luke, was twofold: 1. *Physiological* (i. 35). It is natural that the physician-evangelist should note the successive stages in the early development of Him who was so wonderfully born. He is "conceived in the womb of Mary"; "the fruit of her womb"; "the Holy Thing to be born"; "the Babe"; "Her Son"; "the Child"; "the Boy"; the Man "about thirty years old." 2. *Historical.* See i. 3. In the present section the reality is emphasised by a date which was intended to fix its place in the domain of history ("the taxing under Cyrenius"). This is supplemented by other chronological marks which touch upon the records of several governments, and which, when compared with the statement of the Saviour's age, materially aid in bringing us to the period of His birth.

II. **The universality of the Incarnation.**—The remedy is not merely for the Jewish race, or for a selected few, the special favourites of Heaven. It is for the whole diseased material of human nature; for all the sinful, the weary, the suffering; for the whole great army of the miserable and guilty in every land. Hence in Luke's Gospel Jesus meets all who cross His path with impartial sympathy. Hence just before He leaves the earth He com-

mands His disciples to preach "repentance and remission of sins in His name among all the nations."

III. **The Incarnation is joy-bringing.**—When the voice of her who had conceived "the Holy Thing which was to be born" reached Elisabeth, the Holy Ghost filled her with a sweet surprise, and "the Babe leaped in her womb for joy." The angel of the Lord upon the first Christmas eve struck the key-note not only of the Incarnation prelude, but of the whole gospel. "Behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy." As it begins, so it ends. "And they worshipped Him, and returned to Jerusalem with great joy."—*Alexander.*

Ver. 10. "*Good tidings of great joy . . . to all people.*"—The word "joy" fills a larger place in Scripture than in ordinary Christian life. In Scripture we find joy not only as a promise, but as a precept, imperative, unconditional, oft-repeated: "Rejoice in the Lord alway." Joy is the overflow of happiness. Before joy in the Christian sense there must be happiness.

I. **The messenger of joy.**—An angel. To a fallen being great joy can only come in the form of tidings *from heaven.* Earth is dark with sin and woe. Happiness is out of reach of the sinner, unless God shall say to him some entirely new thing. "Revelation" is the one hope for all that concerns happiness of the creature that has sinned. "Tidings" then—but what tidings? A new revelation of duty, or a new gospel?

II. **The message of joy.**—A birth. The gospel is a Divine incarnation; the removal not by us, but for us, through the death of the God-man, of human guilt. Believe this, and you have life. Christ born on purpose that He might die—this is the gospel.

III. **The recipients of joy.**—"All people." Joy to the whole of each people. The Jewish people was only the sample of all peoples. "Whosoever will" is the gospel call. It is our bounden duty to present the gospel to the world as good tidings of great joy to all people. The gospel preached as joy for all people, so large and free that it has room for all, unites all, has a voice for all characters, and prevails already with all kinds—this is God's gospel. Let this be the joy of each receptive heart.—*Vaughan.*

"*To all the people*" (R.V.).—While there is a seeming restriction, the word chosen, "to all the people," would in due time bear its largest and most comprehensive application.—*Pope.*

"*Good tidings.*"—The words of the angel to the shepherds fulfil the prophecy of Isaiah (lxi. 1), which Christ afterwards quoted as setting forth the greatest of the blessings He was to bestow: "The poor have good tidings [the gospel] preached to them" (Matt. xi. 5).

"*Great joy.*"—These words show us that until men have peace with God, and are reconciled to Him through the grace of Christ, all the joy they experience is deceitful and of short duration. Ungodly men frequently indulge in frantic and intoxicating mirth; but if there be none to make peace between them and God, the hidden stings of conscience must produce fearful torment. The beginning of solid joy is to perceive the fatherly love of God toward us, which alone gives tranquillity to our minds.—*Calvin.*

"*To all people.*"—The announcement is national in its character, for "the people" here referred to are the descendants of Abraham. Yet the message is sent to Israel in order that it may be communicated by them to all mankind. Both in ver. 14 ("goodwill toward *men*") and in ver. 32 ("a light to lighten the Gentiles") the wider import of Christ's birth is recognised. See how the circle widens: 1. Good tidings to the shepherds ("I bring *you*"). 2. Joy for "*all the people,*"

i.e. the Jewish people. 3. God's mercy and love are for all mankind ("good-will toward men," ver. 14).

Vers. 11, 12. "*Christ the Lord . . . the Babe.*"—The angel of the Lord described Jesus Christ by most remarkable names—the Saviour, Christ the Lord, and the Babe! This marvellous combination of almightiness and helplessness has its counterpart in the whole doctrine and history of Christianity itself. *Viewed in its merely human and literary aspect*, what can be less pretentious than Christianity—expounded in the smallest of books, upheld by unlearned and ignorant men, without a temple, a priesthood, a ritual? On the other hand, *viewed in its spiritual aspects*, what can exceed in grace and glory the idea of subduing, regenerating, and glorifying the whole world?—*Parker.*

Ver. 11. "*Unto you.*"—The words are emphatic, and perhaps may be taken as implying that the anticipation of a coming Saviour had been strong in these men's minds.

"*City of David.*"—It is taken for granted that the shepherds were acquainted with those prophetic passages of Holy Scripture which (1) declared that the coming Deliverer would spring from the house of David, and (2) which pointed out Bethlehem as the place where He would be born.

"*A Saviour.*"—The name Jesus is not given here, but the title of the "Saviour" is equivalent to it.

Salvation.—It is a curious fact that "Saviour" and "salvation," so common in St. Luke and St. Paul (in whose writings they occur forty-four times), are comparatively rare in the rest of the New Testament. "Saviour" only occurs in John iv. 42, 1 John iv. 14, and six times in 2 Peter and Jude; "salvation" only in John iv. 22, and thirteen times in the rest of the New Testament.—*Farrar.*

Ver. 12. "*A sign.*"—Rather, "the sign" (R.V.). A sign is not asked for by them, yet one is given them. God does not always call for the manifestation of a heroic faith, but is sometimes pleased, in His mercy, to strengthen faith when it is subjected to a test that might break it down. It put, indeed, no slight strain upon faith to be asked to believe that an infant, a few hours old, and born in poverty and obscurity, was Christ and Lord. The sign given served a twofold purpose: (1) it enabled the shepherds to identify the child of whom the angel spake, and (2) it confirmed their faith in the good tidings brought to them.

Ver. 13. "*Suddenly.*"—As if eager to break in as soon as the last words of the wonderful tidings had dropped from their fellows' lips.—*Brown.*

"*A multitude.*"—Among men the testimony of "two or three witnesses" (Matt. xviii. 16) is sufficient to remove all doubt. But here is a heavenly host with one consent and one voice bearing testimony to the Son of God.—*Calvin.*

"*Praising God.*"—It was the birthday of the new creation. A new corner-stone was being laid. Well, therefore, may the morning stars have sung together, and all the sons of God have shouted for joy.—*Burgon.*

Ver. 14. "*Glory to God in the highest.*"—The song of the angels expresses the wonder and joy which God's redeeming love towards mankind excites in their hearts (cf. 1 Pet. i. 12). It consists of a twofold prayer: (1) that praise may ascend from earth, and pass through the heavens to the throne of God exalted above them all; (2) that all through the earth there may be that peace that comes from reconciliation with God: and it closes with a statement of the reason for

this praise and of the ground of this peace—God's good-will is now made manifest to men and dwells among them. "Glory [be] to God in the highest, and on earth [let there be] peace, [because of His] good-will toward men."

The Worship of Angels.—The words of the angels present us with an example of the worship rendered to God in heaven, which consists, as we see, of praise and thanksgiving, without petitions or supplications. With it we may fitly compare the adoration rendered in heaven by redeemed souls (Rev. v. 9, 10).

"Glory to God," etc.—The hymn consists of three propositions, which may be taken either as expressions of desire or of actual fact: "Glory [be] to God"; or, "Glory [is] to God." It seems more natural to take the first and second propositions as being of the nature of prayers, and the third as a statement of the fact upon which the devout aspirations which precede it are based. *In the first*—"Glory to God in the highest"—the angels who have come down upon the earth ask that, in the heavens above them up to the very throne of God, the blessed spirits of whom they are but a small company, should begin a song of praise in honour of the Divine perfections which shine forth in the wonderful gift bestowed upon men. *The second*—"on earth peace"—is the complement of the first. The angels ask that on this earth, troubled by sin and disturbed by strife, the Divine peace which they themselves enjoy may descend—a peace which should result from the reconciliation implied in this birth. And then *the third*—"good-will toward men"—affords justification of the two preceding prayers. This is the reason why praise should be rendered to God in heaven, and why peace should henceforth reign on earth. God has manifested in a signal manner His special good-will towards men.—*Godet.*

The Angels' Song.—The whole life of our Saviour was a commentary on these words. His aim was to glorify His Father's name, to establish peace between heaven and earth, and to manifest God's good-will to men.

I. **Glory to God.**—This is the first thought in the angels' minds, and should be our ruling motive in all our conduct. "Whether, therefore, ye eat or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God" (1 Cor. x. 31). In the Lord's Prayer Jesus has taught us to utter prayers and aspirations for the hallowing of God's name, the coming of His kingdom, and the doing of His will, before we offer petitions on our own behalf.

II. **Peace on earth.**—Christ was the ambassador telling us that God was willing to pardon our sins, and to lay aside His just anger against them, and seeking to lead us by repentance and submission to a firm and lasting peace with Him. His object was to abolish all fear, and anxiety, and enmity: to give our disturbed consciences rest; to free us from the cares, and doubts, and perplexities which so often distract our thoughts; and to fill our hearts with love to God and to our brethren.

III. **"Good-will to men."**—God's good-pleasure toward us, and not any merits of our own, forms the ground on which we look for salvation. His pity for us in our helplessness moved Him to send His Son for our redemption. "God commendeth His love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us" (Rom. v. 8). The thought of this great and undeserved love that has been shown to us should fill our hearts with humility, and gratitude, and faith.

The Angelic Doxology.—The angels themselves retire, no more to be seen until the second coming of the Lord—their Lord and ours. But their song of sympathy with man remains, to be studied and echoed in innumerable songs by those whom it most concerned. Their doxology is at once prophecy and hymn. Its strain makes heaven and

earth one. In Christ, on the night beginning His new life in human nature, they behold accomplished redemption. "*Glory*" *redounds to God* in the accomplishment of His eternal counsel for the salvation of men; and that glory is declared by anticipation to be rendered on earth, as it is already rendered in heaven. *As to man*, the prophetic doxology of the angels speaks of "peace"—the peace of a reconciling gospel, proclaiming the Divine reconciliation to the world. We hear in the angels' hymn the most perfect tribute to the finished work of "Christ the Lord."—*Pope.*

Ver. 15. "*Let us now go even unto Bethlehem.*"—The angels withdraw from the scene; the shepherds at once seek the infant Redeemer. That which to the heavenly visitants is a matter of *interest* is to men a matter of *concern*, for He is *their* Saviour.

The Hidden Beauties of Bethlehem.

I. **The darkness that enfolds the wonderful Incarnation by night.**—We would have expected the "Light of the world" to be born in the sunniest hour of the day—the day most full of light in that brilliant Eastern land. Yet it is far otherwise. Does He not love to be born in our souls, now, not in the noontide of sin and passion, but in sad and lonely hours, in dark seasons?

II. **Notice next the stillness around Bethlehem.**—The strange, awful peace reigning in this cavern nursery. The villagers are not thronging the streets in wonder. What a surprise to the shepherds to find the streets empty, and none crowding in before them at the stable door! They look in. Only a poor Jewish maiden, and an old man, bending over a little child. In this silence we learn one of the greatest secrets of our holy religion. Jesus can only come to the silent, waiting, prayerful soul.—*Mellor.*

Ver. 16. *The Manger Scene.*

I. **The scene as a whole.**—It represents pre-eminently the disclosure of Divine love, God's self-disclosure. God's revelation of Himself all through the universe has here reached its culminating point.

II. **Each particular figure in the group.**—1. *Jesus in His helpless infancy.* The lesson of humility, the lesson of obedience. Realise the sin of man's claim—utterly false claim—to be independent of God. Jesus teaches that the true worth of human life is just in proportion as men learn to obey. Look at the infant Saviour, and learn this dignity of utter, boundless dependence upon God. 2. *Mary bending over the cradle.* What is the secret of this majestic pattern of womanhood and motherhood? It is the same thing under another form. Eve's disobedience was a demand to be independent of God. Mary reverses the disobedience of Eve. "Be it unto me according to Thy word." Mysterious and majestic was the claim which came upon her. In principle the same claim comes upon us. God needs us, has work for us to do. Our self-surrender, our correspondence with God, makes it possible for God to use us. Will we correspond? Will we take Mary's words into our lips, "Be it unto me according to Thy word"? 3. *Joseph is the third in the group.* We do not think enough of his glory in that he yields himself with such quiet dignity to the strange claims of God upon him. He accepted the extraordinary claim which religion laid upon him. He constituted himself the foster-father, the protector, of Mary and her Divine Child. And there is asked of us all an ordinary thing, which does lay upon men something of the same sort as was laid upon Joseph—the requirement that we should be the protectors of religion, even though it costs us much.—*Gore.*

The Beginning of Christian Worship.—When the shepherds with Joseph and Mary knelt at the manger-cradle, they inaugurated Christian worship, and the communion of saints: by making known "the saying told them

concerning this Child," they became the first preachers of the gospel. They received no commission to spread the glad tidings; but doubtless they felt like Peter and John, "we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard" (Acts iv. 20).

Ver. 17. "*They made known abroad the saying.*"—We see in the shepherds an example (1) of faith in the message from heaven; (2) of obedience to the command to seek the Saviour; (3) of zeal in communicating to others the glad tidings concerning Jesus, and (4) of attention to present duties; for after adoring their Saviour they return (ver. 20), with love to God in their hearts, and with praise to Him on their lips, to the duties of their daily life.

Vers. 18, 19. "*Wondered . . . pondered.*"—The impressions formed upon different hearts by witnessing these great events, or by hearing of them: 1. Mere wonder excited, which soon passed away. 2. A retention of them and meditation upon them.

Ver. 19. *The Grace of Meditation.*—The text gives more than a mere feature of Mary's character: it presents to us her main and distinctive quality.

I. **She kept these things in her heart.**—How marvellous the experience of that one year! The Annunciation, the Birth, the Angelic Choir, the Shepherd Visitors,—well can we understand how she, the blessed and honoured mother, kept all these sayings in her heart; lost not the remembrance by day or by night, but treasured it in her inmost soul as that which could not pass nor be forgotten.

II. **She pondered them in her heart.**—The word denotes putting together, combining and harmonising; that process which is a first condition of all true knowledge. Much, in her case, needed such harmonising. Who was she, to have such a destiny? Who was He of whom she had become the mother? The wonder is, not that she long pondered, but that she ever believed. The very possession of the earthly presence must have impeded rather than facilitated the realisation of the heavenly. Do we, however, follow Mary's example? We have in its full compass, God's revelation—our own individual history—our spiritual condition—our hopes for the future—abundant materials for meditation. But we must first realise such things before we can either keep them or ponder. One great temptation of our age is to neglect reflection. How different our restless modern life from the still, tranquil life of the villages of Palestine. We are in danger of dissipating even religious thoughts, and of drowning the very voice of conscience in the multitude of our professions and the variety of our doings. Let us then cultivate the peculiar grace which shone in the Lord's mother. If we read little, let us *keep* it well: if we read much, let it be because we have time to *ponder*. Haste in Divine things is ever a sign of heartlessness. A moment spent in self-recollection is worth hours of sacred reading without it. The test of true religion lies, for every man, in this self-examination. Without this there cannot be a heart right with God, nor a mind resolutely set on things above. Where there is a want of this pondering, of this musing and meditating, on the things of God, there can be but a feeble hold upon spiritual realities. Mere familiarity with the sound of God's revelation may lead as much to spiritual ignorance as to intellectual knowledge.

III. **There are many ways of practising this grace of meditation.**—Firm, resolute self-examination is one of these; and earnest, steady contemplation of God, and Christ, and the Holy Spirit as revealed to us in the Scriptures is another one of these; and praying over a verse or two of the Bible, on the strength of their being true, and in reference to their spiritual teaching, is another of these. So, too,

a most impressive exercise is the act of Holy Communion. There we ponder His truth in His presence; there in an especial manner is the Master with His disciple, and the Revealer with His word.—*Vaughan.*

Ver. 20. "*Glorifying and praising God.*"—The *greatness* of the work, and the *goodness* of God, as manifested by it, are respectively implied in these two words, "glorifying" and "praising."—*Godet.*

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 21—39.

The Holy Spirit testifies to Christ.—The veil which concealed the glory of Christ had for a moment been drawn aside by the angels, and the shepherds had seen in Him their Lord and Saviour. But after this revelation the veil falls again, and He takes His place among men without anything to distinguish Him from them. He is treated as ordinary Jewish children were; He is circumcised on the eighth day, presented in the Temple on the fortieth day; the Virgin offers sacrifice for her purification, and makes the offering by which He, like other first-born children not of the tribe of Levi, was redeemed from service in the Temple. The only remarkable circumstance is that the name (not in itself an uncommon one) was that appointed by the angel before His conception. But when He appears in the Temple, the veil that conceals His glory is again drawn aside: at the very moment when He is subject to the ordinances of the law, witnesses are raised up and inspired by God to declare that He is the Desired One for whose coming Israel had long waited, and who was to be the Light of the world. Special interest attaches to those who on this occasion were the organs of the Holy Spirit to make this announcement to men. We notice:—

I. **Both Simeon and Anna were persons of holy character.**—They had that purity of heart which enables us to see God—to have understanding of Divine things.

II. **Their faith and hope were strong.**—They waited for the consolation of Israel as those who expected to see it, and God rewarded the confidence they placed in His promises.

III. **They were not of official rank,** yet they received revelations which were denied to priests and doctors of the law. This is in accordance with the Divine procedure in the case of many who were called to be prophets. The majority of the prophets were laymen, whose words had weight from the fact of their being immediately inspired of God, and not because the speakers had a claim to be heard apart from that which their message gave them. Nor can it be without significance that the one of these witnesses was a man and the other a woman, since under the new covenant inaugurated by Christ both sexes are on an equality before God which was before but imperfectly indicated.

SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS ON VERSES 21—39.

Ver. 21. "*The circumcising of the child.*"—By circumcision Jesus entered into the covenant relationship with God in which the Jewish nation stood, and of which that rite was the seal. Henceforth there rested on Him the obligation to keep the law and commandments laid upon the children of Israel. The purification from sin which circumcision symbolised was an element in the rite which had no personal significance for Him. Yet His submission to circumcision, as afterwards to baptism, was necessary to His becoming "like His brethren." "Wherefore in all things it behoved Him to be made like unto His brethren, that He might be a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, to make reconciliation for the sins

of the people" (Heb. ii. 17). "When the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth His Son, *made* [born, R.V.] *of a woman, made* [born, R.V.] *under the law*" (Gal. iv. 4). "God, sending His own Son *in the likeness of sinful flesh*, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh" (Rom. viii. 3).

"*Was called Jesus.*"—Less stress is laid upon the fact of Jesus receiving circumcision than upon that of the significant name bestowed upon Him at the time. His Divine character and His freedom from taint of sin are implied in the title of Saviour: the name given Him by the special appointment of God distinguishes Him from all others born of woman, as One who would save the sinful, and therefore of necessity be Himself free from sin.

"*Before He was conceived.*"—The unique glory of Christ as one in whom the Father was well pleased is delicately implied in the name bestowed upon Him before He was conceived in the womb of the Virgin.

"*When eight days were accomplished.*"—Our celebration of December 25th as the day of Christ's nativity makes the first day of the new year to correspond with the date of His circumcision and of His receiving the name Jesus. The putting away of the sinful nature, and the acceptance of obligation to obey the law of God, which are implied in circumcision, suggest appropriate thoughts for the beginning of the new year; and along with them the name of Jesus should suggest the absolution of our past offences, and the gift of spiritual strength for the time that is to come.

The Circumcision of our Lord.—As man our Lord underwent in infancy the rite which was enjoined by the Jewish law. As God He willed to undergo it. He might have ordered things otherwise. But He freely submitted to this, as to all the humiliations of His earthly life, and to death itself. Notice, in this submission—

I. **Our Lord gave emphatic sanction to the principle that a feature of heathen practice or religion might be occasionally consecrated to serve the purpose of religious truth.**—It is certain that from early times some heathen nations did practise circumcision. Abraham would not regard it as a new rite; for it was common, if not universal, in Egypt. With him, therefore, it was an old rite with a new meaning. The Holy Spirit lays under contribution for His high purposes various words, thoughts, arguments, customs, symbols, rites, associated before with false religions or with none; He invests them with a new and higher meaning, and thus enlists them in a holier service.

II. **Our Lord became obedient to the whole Mosaic law.**—"Made under the law." This was the meaning of circumcision, so far as man was concerned; it was an undertaking to be true to everything in the covenant with God, of which it was the initial rite. Our Lord voluntarily submitted to ordinances which He Himself had instituted, but to ordinances which had no purpose or meaning except as referring to Himself. He could not have done more had He been consciously ignorant or criminal. He could not have done less if He was to represent us, in His life of perfect obedience, as well as on His cross of shame. "Thus it becometh us to fulfil all righteousness." What a lesson of obedience! When do many get into trouble with God? When they make their estimate of their wants, and not God's declared will, the rule of conduct. Our Lord submitted, because the Father so ordered, and because we needed the bright example and moral strength of His submission.

III. **Our Lord submitted to this rite in order to persuade us of the necessity of that spiritual circumcision which was prefigured by it.**—Even the Old Testament teaches a moral and spiritual as well as a literal circumcision. Heart, lips, ears, must be circumcised. For us the literal rite is of no value: the real rite is spiritual. Its essence

is the mortification of earthly desire. Desire no longer centres in God, but is mainly lavished upon objects of sense. Thus the soul is degraded; it becomes animalised. Hence the necessity for spiritual circumcision. The mortification of degraded desire is the most serious business of a true Christian life. "If thy right hand offend thee," etc. Our Lord meant by these searching words the mortification of desire which no longer centres in God.—*Liddon.*

The Name of Jesus.

I. **Why should this importance be attached to a name, even although it be the name of our Lord?**—We think lightly of names. We contrast names with realities, words with things. Not so in the Bible. Names there are significant. The name of God is treated as if it were a living thing. Is this merely an orientalism? No. Is it not better to feel *one* language, as the Hebrews felt theirs, than to use the words of two or three as mere counters. A name is a power. Some names invigorate and illuminate; others darken and depress by reason of their associations. The choice of a child's name is not to be left to chance. Every child possesses in his *surname* a social and moral inheritance; it is decided for him before his birth: but what of his *Christian name*, which you are to fix on him indelibly? Our Lord entering the world as a Jew, His human name was constructed on the Hebrew type. It belongs to a large class of personal titles in which the sacred name of God—Jehovah—is connected with some one of His works or attributes.

II. **We might have expected that our Lord would have chosen a unique name, unshared by any of the sons of men.**—But He willed it otherwise. In His name He had many forerunners, the greatest of whom is Joshua, the "saviour" of Israel, a man of "blood and iron." This greater Joshua is a Saviour in a higher sense. Is He not the Author of all the self-restraint, the truthfulness, the courage, the purity, the disinterestedness, the sacrifice, which save society? Joshua (or Hoshea) was a name borne of old by intellectual deliverers. Jesus Christ it is who has saved the human race from ignorance of the truths which it most concerns man to know. Another Joshua was the high priest of the Restoration, an earthly anticipation of of our ascended King and Priest upon His throne. He is a Saviour who delivers us from sin's guilt by His sufferings, and from sin's power by His grace.—*Ibid.*

Ver. 22. *The Consecration of the Family to God.*—The law of Moses prescribed (1) the purification of the mother, and (2) the presentation of the first-born son to the Lord. So close were the ties by which God and His people were bound together, every mother in the time of her new-found happiness was called to appear before God, to receive purification from the taints inseparably connected with the transmission of a sinful nature, and each first-born son was acknowledged as so specially His that he could only be redeemed from service in the Temple by payment of a fine in money. This consecration of the family to God was one of the noblest features of Judaism.

Ver. 24. *The Sacrifice of Purification.*—Humble circumstances, but not abject poverty, are implied in the offering presented by Mary for the sacrifice of purification; for in the Mosaic law provision was made for those who might be too poor to afford the offering specified in the text. The considerate spirit in which that law was drawn up is manifested, not only in the scale of sacrifices to suit persons in different conditions of life, but also in the alternative of "a pair of turtle-doves or two young pigeons." The turtle-doves being migratory birds might not be procurable at the time when they were needed in any particular place, and it might be difficult

to catch *old* pigeons, so it was allowable to bring *young* pigeons taken from the nest.

An Appropriate Offering.—There is something in the birds themselves—the doves—characteristic of the love, purity, and meekness of Christ, anointed above His fellows with the gifts of the Divine Dove.—*Wordsworth.*

The Lamb of God brought into the Temple.—Mary cannot bring a lamb for an offering; she brings something better, even the true Lamb of God, into the Temple.—*Van Oosterzee.*

Vers. 25, 26. "*A man, whose name was Simeon.*"—His character is described in a few pregnant words. As regards his relation to the spirit of the law, he was "just." In relation to God, he possessed that careful reverential spirit which is ever cautious not to offend. His heart was not wanting in that attitude of sweet expectation, that flower-like unfolding to the dews of promise, characteristic of true holiness under the older dispensation; he waited in hushed expectancy for the "consolation of Israel." And that consolation implies a Consoler. Such influence of the Spirit was upon him as was yet vouchsafed under the first covenant. To this man God's will stood revealed in a way which Luke describes with a sweet and subtle antithesis: "It was revealed unto him that he should not *see* death before he had *seen* the Anointed of the Lord." Just as the Virgin and Child were coming up, Simeon "came in the Spirit into the Temple courts." *God directs the path of His faithful servants, that good may meet them on the way.* We go here and there, and at times seem to ourselves as if we were floating half at random. But there is a guiding purpose. Then the Evangelist tells us with simple emphasis, "And he himself also received Him into his arms." Now he feels that he may and must soon go home. So arises his sentinel-song.—*Alexander.*

"*A man in Jerusalem,*" *etc.*—The description given of Simeon may be resolved into seven distinct statements, proceeding from the general to the particular—seven concentric circles: 1. A man—his dignity consisting not merely in official standing, wealth, notoriety, or gifts, but in his manhood. 2. In Jerusalem—in the possession of special privileges as a Jew. 3. Just—upright in his outward life. 4. Devout—in spirit, as one who loved and obeyed God. 5. Animated by religious hopes—looking for the consolation of Israel. 6. An organ of the Holy Ghost—the Holy Ghost was upon him. 7. One who had received a special revelation and promise (ver. 26).

"*Waiting for the consolation of Israel,*' or rather looking for it as something which was now close at hand, as he was assured by the infallible testimony of the Spirit that it was.

"*It was revealed unto him.*"—Not to the priests, or to a priest, for they as a class were at this time corrupt and unspiritual, as we see from their unsympathetic and even hostile attitude towards Christ during His public ministry. God therefore passes them by, and chooses unofficial persons, such as Simeon and Anna, to be the organs of the Holy Spirit.

Vers. 25-32. *Hope Realised.*—The outward circumstances of the presentation in the Temple are devoid of anything to arrest attention or to appeal to a love of the marvellous. No miracles dazzle the senses of beholders. Nothing is seen but two parents of humble rank of life presenting their child to God and offering the sacrifice of the poor. Simeon, who greets them, is no official of high rank; his only claim to distinction is the beauty and elevation of his character—"just and devout, waiting for the consolation of Israel." It is this last-named circumstance which gives significance to his action and words. He is a type of those who under the old covenant had waited for and longed

for the coming of the Saviour. We see in him the Church of the patriarchs and prophets, which takes the new-born Christ into its failing arms and presents Him to the Church of the future, and says, "As for me, my task is accomplished; here He is whom I have so ardently desired to behold; here He is who is Saviour and King."

Simeon's Hope and Faith.—1. The first remarkable feature in the character of Simeon was the firmness of his hope. He looked forward to the future in the firm conviction inspired by the Holy Spirit that before he saw death he would see the Lord's Christ. The attitude he maintained was not peculiar to him, though the special prophecy in which he trusted was given to him alone—it was that of the devout in Israel in all ages of their history. Their golden age was in the future, and not in the past. And we as Christians look forward to a brighter and happier time than the present, when the kingdom of Christ shall have fully come. Our Master is absent, and we look for His return. 2. The second remarkable feature is the greatness of his faith. What was it that his bodily eyes beheld? A child a few weeks old—the child of poor and obscure parents. What appeared to the eye of his spirit? The Saviour of the world, who was to raise up the fallen nation of Israel to more than its former glory, and give light and hope to the heathen world. And can our faith languish and die when we have before us Christ, not as a helpless child, but as the Redeemer who has made atonement for sin and has ascended to the right hand of God—when we have before us His Divine teaching and holy life, and all the influence which He has exercised upon human society? His hopes realised, his faith assured, he has but one emotion—that of joy; his soul enters into a holy peace. Nothing now can move him to desire to linger longer upon earth; it only remains for him to leave the post he has occupied for so many years, from which he has eagerly looked for the rising of this star, and to enter into his rest.

Ver. 27. "*Came by the Spirit into the Temple.*"—It might seem accidental, but was not so. A secret impulse urged him to go into the sacred precincts at that particular moment; it was one of the great crises of his life, when all depended upon obeying the Divine intimation pointing out his course, but not compelling him to take it. Do not many of our failures and disappointments in life result from ignoring or disobeying what we believe to be good impulses?

A True Priest.—The parents brought in the child Jesus, and Simeon received Him into his arms, as a true priest appointed of God, though not anointed of man.

Ver. 28. "*Then took he Him up in his arms.*"—The aged and righteous Simeon—the good old man of the law—received into his arms the child Jesus presented in the Temple, and signified his desire to depart; and thus represents to us the law, now worn out with age, ready to embrace the gospel, and so to depart in peace.—*Wordsworth.*

Vers. 29-32. *Hope fulfilled.*—As the swan is said to sing just before its death, so does this aged saint break forth into a psalm of thanksgiving as he beholds the Saviour, whom it had been predicted he should see before he should taste of death. With devout gratitude he takes farewell of life, now that he has received the object of his hopes. The anticipation of seeing the Lord's Christ had made him cling to life; but now that the Holy Child is within his arms, he has nothing more to wish for, and is ready to depart. "Now let me die, since I have seen Thy face."

The Sentinel—Simeon represents himself under the figure of a sentinel whom his master has stationed upon an elevated place to watch for the appearance

of a certain star and to give notice to the world of its arrival. He sees the wished-for star, and announces that it has risen, and asks to be set free from the post he has occupied so long. It is thus that, in the opening of the *Agamemnon* of Æschylus, the sentinel stationed to watch for the signal-fire that would tell that Troy had fallen when he at last beholds the long-expected blaze, celebrates in verse both the victory of Greece and his own release.—*Godet.*

A Rebuke to our Unbelief.—The faith in a Saviour who had just appeared which sustained Simeon in the near prospect of death is a rebuke to our unbelief and fears in view of that great change. *We* know Jesus as the conqueror of death and sin.

Ver. 29. *Nunc Dimittis.*—In this apparently unremarkable little group there is something really remarkable in each of these four living souls. We recognise in the words spoken the *Nunc Dimittis* of eighteen centuries of the Church's worship. What is there in these pathetic and beautiful words, suggestive of thoughts which should be our life?

I. **The speaker is an Old Testament saint.**—Just and devout, yet waiting for the consolation of Israel by the actual coming of "the Coming One." He had a revelation common to him with his nation; he had also a private revelation of his own.

II. **The message.**—1. The thought comes to us—Blessed is the man who has the Lord for his God, the man whose life was in the hands of an Owner. Very real and very dear to the heart of Simeon was the relationship of servant and master. It was the chosen title of the apostles; it was the secret of their success, the rest and stay of their anxious and homeless life. Later saints have felt the same thing, and expressed it in the same way. 2. Simeon has still to *see* the Lord's Christ. It is a parable for all time. There are many who say, "Be just, and it shall be counted to you for righteousness." There are many who say, "Be just and devout, fear God and pray to Him alway, and assuredly you shall lack nothing of the fitness for glory." Simeon had both these graces, and yet he must not die till he had seen Jesus. There are many who have all else—every grace of uprightness and devoutness, every characteristic of seriousness and earnestness, of piety and charity; only Christ they have not yet realised. It does not come home to them why "Believe in God" should not suffice for them without the added clause, "Believe also in Me." We must not idly wait for that peradventure of illumination which Simeon's case suggests. Upon us the true Light has already shined; it is ours to see it, and to walk in it. We cannot say the *Nunc Dimittis* till we can say with it, "Mine eyes have seen Thy salvation."

III. **Another thought remains.**—The Divine office of "dismissing." "Thou art letting Thy servant depart." What would these partings be, how sad, how hopeless, without a gospel—without the knowledge, such as we can only get from Jesus Christ, of a life out of sight, in which present and absent are one—of a real heaven, opened and set open to all who are travelling life's journey in the faith of a Father, and Saviour, and Comforter who has us all in His holy keeping! With this gospel in our hearts, we can hear of each other's deaths with no disconsolate sorrow, because in Him, living or dying, we are one. The dismissal Simeon spoke of was dismissal by death. He was ready for it now. He spoke of it as a release, a setting free, a desired change, a transition, all for good. When the great departing comes for each of us, we shall need all Simeon's hope, and all the support of his dismissal. We know not any of us what that departure *is*. It is no lack of courage to confess that it is formidable in the prospect. Let us think of it *now*, earnestly endeavouring so to live that there may be no spectres

and no voices to terrify the act of dying.—*Vaughan.*

Simeon's View of Death.—It is not the removal of a reluctant, unwilling man from the scene of all his joys and all his interests; it is the releasing of a weary man at evening from the toil and heat of a long, fatiguing day; it is the desirable and peaceful dismissal of one who has done his work to a rest which toil has earned and which promise has sweetened. It is worth while so to live as that the *Nunc Dimittis* may express our own true thought when we die.—*Ibid.*

Vers. 29, 30. *Christ and Old Age.*—One of our Lord's epiphanies; His epiphany to old age. A subject of pointed application to the young, for the young expect to be old. The present sowing of youth is for the reaping of age. What is a "good" old age? All old age is not good. There is an old age which mars as well as an old age which makes reputations.

I. **Few men in the abstract desire old age.**—Few men in their experience find it desirable. It needs practising for. A good old age comes to no man by accident. Rare, probably unexampled, is that natural and durable sweetness which could make the trials of protracted age light or enjoyable. It is bitter to feel yourself in the way, and to see no help for it; to be beyond the age of activity, of independence, of importance, of admiration; to be reminded daily that you are the survivor of a past generation; to know that the only prospect is a narrowing of action and interest, to make room for new energies and young self-sufficiencies: this is a severe trial, on the acceptance of which, for good or evil, will depend the real character and complexion of the individual old age. Well-principled and self-controlled patience is one condition of a good old age.

II. **A foremost condition of a good old age is the preservation of a thorough harmony and unity with the young.**—Old age is naturally impatient of the new. But still the old may succeed in being young in feeling; and where this is so they attract the young. The young delight in their experience, their mellowness, their sympathy. This special characteristic cannot be put on; it must be cultivated and lived into. Let each age be in harmony with the age below. Let the continuity never be broken. Lead by going before, help by feeling with, and old age will but complete and crown the work of the manhood and the activity.

III. **There are, however, besides trials and risks, incomparable privileges in old age.**—These should be faithfully treasured and "occupied." An intelligent old age is a storehouse of precious memories, which no chronicles can rival nor libraries supersede. An old man should use his opportunities of testifying to a younger generation the living sights and sounds of his own. It is a debt due to history; it is a debt scarcely less to the verities of Christianity and Christ. And, besides, the influences of old age are incalculable. Let a man give himself to this work, and he may mould the young almost to his will. Let the old make the young feel that they are worth helping, listening to, answering. By a generous, manly interest in the coming generation who *are* what he *was*, by deep, true, noble sympathy with their difficulties, struggles, unavoidable ignorances, the old man may write himself unconsciously upon the young, and keep up the continuity of that work of God on earth which consists in the amelioration, emancipation, and transfiguration of His creatures. But such a work needs for its accomplishment the epiphany of our Lord Jesus Christ to old age. Natural gifts and graces do not suffice for this apostleship of the aged. O miserable spectacle a Christless old age! Pity, yet despise not, the old man whose testimony, rightly read, is all on the side of materialism and infidelity. How different the evidence of him whose

old age has been brightened with the epiphany of Jesus Christ! He, the "Ancient of Days," is still, as ever, young with a perpetual youth: herein lies the virtue of His epiphany to the old. He tells of a world where they reckon not by years, where past and future are not, where the weakness of old age is made strong in the first sight of the Immortal. He draws nigh to the solitude, He comforts the isolation, He calms the irritation, He inspires the languor, He fills the void of old age. He makes its age venerable, its weakness dignified, its deathbed beautiful, its last departure blessed, and its funeral "a door opened in heaven."—*Ibid.*

Vers. 29-35. *Nunc Dimittis.*—Simeon is the reverend type of Old Testament piety, waiting for the consolation of Israel. His inspired words (1) express the perfect homage of his individual soul; (2) expand into a glowing prophecy of the gospel future; (3) through a side glance of benediction on Mary utter the first disguised prediction of the Redeemer's darker, as well as of His brighter, destiny as the Saviour and Judge of mankind.—*Pope.*

The Nunc Dimittis a pre-Christian Hymn.—Our Church uses the song of the blessed Virgin and the song of Simeon as daily psalms, and applies them to Christ. But those who had seen the incarnate Lord, and who had beheld Him risen and ascending, would have spoken far more strongly. Their songs would have been more like "Rock of Ages," or "When I survey the wondrous cross." They would not have been echoes of the harp of David, so much as of the harps of heaven. "Thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God *by Thy blood.*" Such silence as to the *details* of redemption could only belong to the thin border-line of a period which was neither quite Jewish nor quite Christian. A little less, and these songs would be purely Jewish; a little more, and they would be purely Christian.—*Alexander.*

Vers. 29, 30. *Simeon.*

I. **Simeon himself.**—1. *His character.* He was just and devout, upright in his relations to men, pious towards God. And he lived in faith, "waiting for the consolation of Israel." Doubtless the blessed prophecies of Isaiah, "Comfort ye, comfort ye, My people, saith your God," were dear to the old man's heart. He was one of those who were "looking for the redemption of Jerusalem." He lived in the faith of the Messiah who was to come, who was to bear our griefs and carry our sorrows, who was to make intercession for the transgressors, to justify many, who should see of the travail of His soul and should be satisfied. 2. *His privileges.* (1) The promise. The Holy Ghost was upon him. That gracious Presence which is vouchsafed in a greater or less measure to all true believers rested on the faithful Simeon. Special revelations were granted to him: he was not to see death till he had seen the Lord's Christ; he was to see in this earthly life the Messiah of whom the prophets had spoken, the Lord's Anointed, who was to be, in the highest sense of the words, the Prophet, Priest, and King of His people—the Prophet like unto Moses, but greater far than Moses (Heb. iii. 3), of whom Moses spake; the great High Priest, who "is able to save to the uttermost all who come unto God by Him, seeing He ever liveth to make intercession for them"; the King of kings and Lord of lords, whose kingdom shall have no end. (2) The fulfilment of the promise. The time was come: the Spirit led the holy man to the Temple of the Lord; "he came by the Spirit into the Temple." So we should now come to the church by the guidance of the Spirit, led thither by the Spirit, that there we may find the Lord, and worship Him in spirit and in truth, "praying in the Holy Ghost" (Jude 20). They who thus come in faith and prayer ever find the Lord. Simeon found Him now. It was not perhaps what he had looked for; it was but a little Babe lying in His

mother's arms. But Simeon doubted not; the Spirit taught him that that little Babe was indeed the Christ of God, who was come into this world to save sinners, to conquer back the world from the dominion of the wicked one. He took Him up in his arms; he blessed God, and poured forth his thankfulness in the words so familiar to us all.

II. **The utterance of Simeon.**—1. *His view of life.* It is not a prayer. We may well pray for a happy, holy death; it is the greatest of earthly blessings, the crown of a holy life. But these words are not words of prayer: it is an utterance of recognition and assent. He says (to translate the words literally), "Master, now Thou art releasing Thy slave." He recognises the fulfilment of the Divine promise: he has seen the Lord's Christ. That sight means that the end is close at hand: he is about to die. He recognises the intimation of the Divine will; he receives the solemn announcement with cheerful acquiescence—he is ready to depart. "Master," he says, "now Thou art releasing Thy servant." Life, he means, is a time of service, work to be done for God. He calls God his Master; he speaks of himself as the slave of God. Indeed, Almighty God has permitted us to address Him by another name: He bids us call Him "Father," "our Father in heaven." We are not worthy to be called His children, but He is our Father still. He gave His blessed Son to die for us, that through His atoning blood we might be restored to the privileges of sonship; He gives us His Holy Spirit. "He hath sent the Spirit of His Son into our hearts, whereby we cry, Abba, Father." But while we thank Him for His gracious condescension, and claim His holy promises, we must not forget that He is our Master too. The word here translated "Lord" means properly Master—a Master in relation to slaves. God is our Master; we are the slaves of God. We are not our own; we are bought with a price (1 Cor. vi. 19, 20); our souls and bodies are God's, not our own. We are His by creation: He made us. We are also His by redemption: He bought us to be His own, not with corruptible things such as silver and gold, but with the precious blood of Christ (1 Pet. i. 18). And because we are His, we have work to do for Him. He teaches us that solemn lesson in the awful parable of the talents. He "giveth to all men liberally" (Jas. i. 5); He worketh in us both to will and to do; therefore we must work out our own salvation with fear and trembling. All that we have comes from Him—life, health, worldly means, intellectual gifts. All these are talents intrusted to our keeping for a while. But spiritual gifts must be chiefly signified by the talents distributed among the servants; for spiritual gifts are the only coin current in the kingdom of heaven. Without the grace of the Spirit we are helpless, we can do nothing good; we cannot become "approved money-changers" (a saying attributed to our Lord by several of the Fathers), unless we have from God a portion of the heavenly treasure. All the servants in the household of the great Master receive their portion from Him; they have to use it to His glory and their own good, to work out their own salvation, to beware lest they receive the grace of God in vain (2 Cor. vi. 1). Two servants were faithful. Outwardly there was a great difference between them. One was far more highly gifted than the other; his gains were far greater; he was a man of great energy, great resources—like St. Paul, who laboured more abundantly than all the rest (1 Cor. xv. 10). But the second servant also did his best, his very best according to his power; his gains were much less than those of his fellow-servant, but they were in the same proportion to his endowments; and he received the same reward. The Lord judgeth not according to the outward appearance; he looketh on the heart. He regards not the outward work, not the amount of work done, but the

inward temper of heart and mind—the faithfulness, the love with which the work is done. He saith, "Well done, good and faithful servant," to the humblest Christian who in faith and self-denial has done his little best. The slothful servant had done nothing for his Lord; he may have worked hard for himself, but he let his Lord's money lie unused and uncared for; he neglected the precious means of grace; he lived as if he had no Master—as if he was his own master, as if his time was his own, to waste it or to use it as he pleased; therefore he was cast into the great outer darkness, where is weeping and gnashing of teeth. Simeon had been a good and faithful servant; he was just and devout; the Holy Ghost was upon him. Now his life-work was over; the Master was releasing him from his labours; he was ready, cheerful, and happy. We may well long to be like him, to share his faithfulness and his peace. 2. *Simeon's view of death.* It was not to be dreaded: it was to be welcomed; it was a release from the labours of life. Simeon's life, we may be sure, had not been miserable. Doubtless he had had his troubles, perhaps great troubles, for God's holiest servants are sometimes most severely tried. But the Holy Ghost was upon him; and "the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace." The faithful servant has an inner source of joy even amid tears; he is, like St. Paul, "sorrowing, yet always rejoicing." Nevertheless, death was a release. Sometimes death is very thoughtlessly described as "a happy release": people think only of the cessation of bodily pain; they do not think of what comes after death. Simeon looked forward to the rest that remaineth for the people of God. To the faithful servant, who has striven to work out his own salvation with fear and trembling, death is a release; for life is full of work, bodily, intellectual, spiritual work, sometimes very hard and exhausting. And that spiritual work which is of all work the most momentously important is sometimes full of fear and trembling: our past sins affright the conscience, the old temptations which once seemed overcome reassert their power, Satan is strong, we are weak, we seem to have no strength, we are tempted to fear, sometimes in very agony of soul, lest we ourselves may be castaways at the last. Therefore, to the faithful, death is a true release: it sets them free from anxiety and fear, from toil and labour. "Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord. Yea, saith the Spirit, for they rest from their labours, and their works do follow them."

III. **The ground of Simeon's confidence.**—1. *The promise.* He was to depart, according to God's word, in peace. He is faithful that promised. He that hath begun the good work in His people will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ (Phil. i. 6). We might well despair if we were left to ourselves; but we have the blessed promises, and we must trust. "He that spared not His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things?" We must trust, and not be afraid. 2. *The earnest, the pledge of fulfilment.* "Mine eyes have seen Thy salvation." Simeon had seen the Lord's Christ, the Saviour Jesus, whose blessed name means the salvation of Jehovah. That was his hope; and that is the hope of the faithful Christian now. We see not the Holy Babe with our outward eyes; but we may see Him still with the eye of faith, we may embrace Him with the embrace of faith, and cling to Him with our whole heart as our only Saviour and Redeemer. We have His blessed promise: "The world seeth Me no more, but ye see Me"; "I am with you all the days, even to the end of the world." We must pray, "Lord, increase our faith"; we must pray for a strong, living, earnest faith, that seeing Christ now by faith, and living in spiritual communion with Him, we may at last, through His grace and the power of His atoning blood, depart

in peace, and rest with Him for ever.—*Caffin.*

Ver. 30. "*Salvation.*"—To see Christ is to see salvation—to see Him, as Simeon saw Him, with the eye of faith. If Simeon had not seen Him thus, he would not have seen in Him God's salvation; for everything to the outward eye was against His being so. "Every one," our Lord says, "who seeth the Son, and believeth on Him hath everlasting life." We who have not "seen" may yet believe. Is this our idea of salvation—Christ Himself? If it be, are we looking for Him? When we can see Christ by faith, then we shall be fit to die.—*Vaughan.*

Assurance of Salvation.—This is one chord of Simeon's swan-song. Does it not remind us that—

I. **The great aim of Jesus Christ is to bring salvation?**—Not simply mental light, or national renewal, or even spiritual comfort, but salvation from sin as a ruling principle, as a terrific power, and as entailing an awful penalty.

II. **This salvation can be clearly realised?**—Not dreamed of, talked about, expected, hoped for only, but "seen": its purpose, method, and result "seen."

III. **This salvation should be realised in its personal relation?**—1. As saving the individual—"mine eyes." 2. As wrought by God—"Thy salvation."

IV. **This clear consciousness prepares for death?**—He who can make these words his own can sing *Nunc Dimittis.*—*Thomas.*

Preparation for Death.—No one is ready to die in peace until he has seen Christ; but when he has seen Him, he needs no further preparation for dying. He may not have carried out one of his own ambitious plans in life, nor have achieved anything great or beautiful; but no matter, the one essential achievement in life is to see Jesus.—*Miller.*

Vers. 29-35. *Simeon's Twofold Prophecy.*—Simeon is not expressly said to have been an old man; but he probably was so. How striking is the picture of the aged, worn face bending over the unconscious Child, whom he clasped in his withered arms! His two short prophetic songs are singularly contrasted in tone—the one all sunny and hopeful, the other charged with sad forebodings.

I. **The one tells what Christ is sent to be.**—The joyful welcome of the new by the expiring old. Simeon lives in the forward-looking attitude proper to Old Testament saints. Is not the ideal for us the same? We too have to base our morality on religion, and to nourish both by hope, which burns the clearer the nearer we come to the end of earthly life. When he actually touched the long-promised Hope of Israel, an infant of six weeks old, no wonder he broke into praise. But the course of his thoughts is noteworthy. His first thought—and it is a glad thought to him—is, "Here is the order for my release." Is there not a tone of relief and of hailing a long-wished blessing in the "now"—as if he had said, "At last, after weary waiting, it has come"? He speaks as a servant getting escape from toil. The words are not a prayer, though this is the application often made of them. He teaches us what death may be to us if we hold Christ in our hearts. It may be the crowning act of obedience. Death is to Simeon the sweet rest after the day of toil, and the satisfied close of long expectancy. Life can give nothing more than the sight of the Christ. The latter part of the song tells us what the eyes of faith see in the Child in whom the eyes of sense see only weakness. This feeble suckling is the God-appointed means of salvation for all the world. The precedence given to Messiah's work among the Gentiles is very remarkable. Simeon rejoices over a "salvation prepared" for "all peoples." No shadows darken the glad picture. The Divine ideal and purpose are painted in unshaded colours.

II. **What men's sin will make of God's salvation.**—Can it be that the salvation prepared by God is a salvation not accepted by men? Who could suppose that in the very Israel of which Messiah was meant to be "the glory" there would be found tongues to speak against Him and hearts to reject Him? But the wonder is true, and that Child is charged with the terrible power of being ruin as well as blessing. There is no more mournful nor mysterious thought than that of man's power to turn the means of life into the occasion of death, and that power is never so strangely and mournfully displayed as in men's relations to "this Child." Christ may be either of two things. One or other of them He must be to all who come in contact with Him. They can never be quite the same as before. How do we fall by contact with Christ? By the increase of self-conscious opposition, by the hardening following rejection, by the deeper condemnation which necessarily dogs the greater light with its blacker shadow. How do we rise by Christ? In all ways and to all heights to which humanity can soar. From the depth of sin and condemnation to the height of likeness to Himself, and finally to the glory of participation in His throne. He is life to those who take Him for their all, and death to those who turn from Him. Simeon further forecasts the fate of the Child as a "sign that shall be spoken against." A sign from heaven, yet spoken against, is a paradox which only too accurately forebodes the history of the gospel in all ages. How strange to the virgin mother, in all the wonder and joy of those blissful early days, must that prediction of the sorrows that were to pierce her heart have sounded! Mary's grief at her Son's rejection culminated when she stood by Calvary's cross. Her heart was to be pierced, the thoughts of many hearts to be laid open. A man's attitude to Jesus Christ is the revelation of his deepest self. It is the outcome of his inmost nature, and betrays his whole character. Christ is the test of what we are, and our reception or rejection of Him determines what we shall be.—*Maclaren.*

Ver. 32. "*A light to lighten the Gentiles.*"—The Gentiles are represented as enveloped in darkness, the Jews as abased and down-trodden. Christ, therefore, appears in two aspects corresponding to the conditions in which the two great divisions of the human race are placed: 1. He gives *light* to those in darkness. 2. He gives the promised *glory* to the chosen people; they derive from Him an imperishable renown, for the great claim of the Jew to honour among men is that Christ was one of His blood.

"*The Gentiles . . . Israel.*"—There seems to be some significance in the Gentiles being named before the Jews, as though Simeon had some prophetic intimation of the fact that the Jews as a nation would reject Christ. His words might be taken to imply that the conversion of the Gentiles would precede and bring about that of God's ancient people to faith in Jesus. This seems to be the tenor of the teaching in some parts of Scripture, *e.g.* in Rom. xi. 25, 26.

Ver. 33. "*Marvelled.*"—Doubtless the surprise was due to testimony thus coming from all quarters to the greatness of the destiny in store for the Holy Child: the angels, the shepherds, Elisabeth, and Zacharias had all hailed His advent; and now in the Temple aged saints of prophetic rank bear witness to Him. Already the wise men from the East are on their way, as representatives of the Gentile world, to do Him honour.

Ver. 34. "*And Simeon blessed them.*"—It is noticeable that Simeon pronounces a benediction on Joseph and Mary, as distinguished from Jesus, of whom he proceeds to speak. On the principle that "the less is blessed of the better" (Heb. vii. 7), he would naturally

abstain from even the appearance of superiority to the Child whom he held in his arms. He addresses Mary with special emphasis, as though acquainted with the fact of the miraculous conception.

"*Sign which shall be spoken against.*" —The allusion is evidently to Isa. viii. 14, 15, where the Messiah is represented as a rock on which the believing find a refuge, but against which the rebellious dash themselves. In many parts of the Gospels we read of violent opposition excited by the teaching and actions of Christ, and He Himself frequently speaks of divisions and conflicts arising in consequence of the proclamation of the truth—*e.g.* xii. 49-53. He is appointed to try men's hearts and tempers, whether they will humbly and carefully examine the truth, and receive it with joy, and bring forth its fruits in their lives; and according to the result of this moral probation, He will be for their weal or woe (John iii. 19; 2 Cor. ii. 16). As Greg. Nyssen says, the *fall* will be to those who are scandalised by the lowliness of His humanity; the *rising* will be to those who acknowledge the truth of God's promises in Him, and adore the glory of His divinity. Other passages in which this testing of human character is described are: 1 Cor. i. 18 *et seq.*, ii. 14; John ix. 39; 1 Pet. ii. 7, 8; Heb. iv. 12; John xii. 48.

Ver. 34. *The Blessedness of the Virgin* is proclaimed over and over again in the early chapter of this Gospel. The angel Gabriel salutes her as "blessed among women"; Elisabeth repeats the phrase; she says of herself, "All generations shall call me blessed"; and here the aged Simon bestows his benediction on her and on Joseph. Yet it is instructive to notice that this blessedness did not imply a life of unmixed happiness. Here, indeed, her future sorrows are spoken of in no uncertain manner: "Yea, a sword shall pierce through thine own soul also." The prophecy was not long in finding fulfilment. The jealousy and malice of Herod expose the life of her Son to great danger, and she is obliged to find safety for Him in flight. The fatigues and anxieties of a journey into Egypt have to be encountered by her. Then some years after she undergoes the agony of losing Him for three days at the Passover feast in Jerusalem. Nor were her sorrows at an end when He reached the years of manhood. She had the grief of seeing that He was despised and rejected of men, hated even by His own townsmen, and in risk of being murdered by them. She saw Him weary with labours for the good of others, and yet treated with ingratitude, contempt, and contumely. And finally she was witness of His death at the hands of His enemies, after an unjust and shameful trial; she saw Him expire upon the cross after hours of pain and suffering. Scarcely any griefs could be more poignant than hers, and the name by which she is frequently described—*Mater dolorosa*—commemorates her pre-eminence in sorrow. One great lesson we may learn from her history is that immunity from suffering is not necessarily enjoyed by those who are truly blessed of God; and the thought is one that should console us in times of trial and suffering. Outward troubles may not be a sign of God's displeasure with us: they may be a form of discipline to which in His wisdom and love He subjects us.

Ver. 35. "*Yea, a sword shall pierce.*" —Undue elation on the part of the parents, and especially of the virgin mother, must have been repressed by the ominous tone of Simeon's words, and still more by the special reference to the sorrow which was to pierce her heart like a sword. The full meaning of this latter prophecy she must have realised as she stood beside the cross. No lamentation of hers is recorded as having been uttered in the hour of her greatest grief; but

her silence is that of ineffable anguish, and not of insensibility.

"*The thoughts . . . revealed.*"—In and by Christ's sufferings it was shown what the temper and thoughts of men were. Then Judas despairs, Peter repents, Joseph of Arimathæa becomes courageous, Nicodemus comes by day, the centurion confesses, one thief blasphemes, the other prays; men faint, and women become strong.

Vers. 36-38. *Anna the Prophetess.*—God's book is a book for all. The aged are not forgotten. They need support and comfort. This history of Anna, with many a word besides, is proof that they are not passed over by God. In the life of Anna we have—

I. **The grace of God sustaining a believer in the midst of affliction.**—She had met with trials—widowed in her youth; but she had learned to look beyond the blow to the Hand that had inflicted it. She had found in Him the widow's stay through long years of sad memories; her heart renewed many a time all its grief, but she ever found fresh comfort in God. So may every aged Christian in like trying experiences. Bereavements will come, even though long delayed. The effect of trial to Anna was doubtless most blessed. One great affliction at the beginning of life may bless the sufferer to the close of it.

II. **The grace of God supporting a believer in privation.**—Anna had to face the world's struggles all alone. We know not if she had relatives to advise or aid, or outward means of sustenance to depend on. If so, God's grace was as much manifested in providing and continuing these as it would have been in maintaining her without them. It is not only those who are ever on the verge of want who illustrate God's care. So do those who have what is called a competency. They are as surely dependent on God. They are exhorted to trust not in uncertain riches, but in the living God. In this humble trust rich and poor meet together. Anna had been thus divinely helped. So is every aged Christian. Each is a living monument of God's faithfulness, of God's perpetual providence. A life of fourscore years bears manifold inscriptions of the grace of God. At this advanced age He writes on her briefly told history *Jehovah-Jireh*, "Let thy widows trust in Me."

III. **The grace of God strengthening a believer in duty.**—"Anna . . . served God . . . night and day." A long course, but not dreary or monotonous. The spectator sees only the outward form of service, not the inward life and love that animate it. The freshness and constancy of aged Christians in the performance of duty is one of the most delightful proofs of the unfailing power of gospel truth, and of the faithfulness of the renewing Spirit. Their activity, though it differ from that of youth, will continue. "They shall still bring forth fruit in old age." None of God's children becomes sated with prayer or praise, with the exercise of trust and hope. In a higher sense than that of Moses "their eye is not dim nor their natural force abated."

IV. **The grace of God consoling a believer in the decline of life.**—There is much externally to make the last years of life cheerless and comfortless. The bodily powers decline. The old familiar faces disappear. The sense of solitude deepens. Still the setting sun has more glorious hues than at his dawning, and autumn has a beauty which spring knows nothing of. So God's saints may have their brightest hours at the close of life, and "the day of death be better than the day of birth." So it was with Abraham, Jacob, Moses, Paul, and John. As the world faded their eyes saw "the King in His beauty."

V. **The grace of God sealing a believer's parting testimony.**—This aged saint gives thanks for herself, and speaks of Christ to others. God makes her useful to the latest close, and dismisses her bearing testimony to

His faithfulness and mercy in the gift of His Son. It is a happy thing to be willing to serve God to the end. Aged sufferers serve by waiting. Thus, certainly, "they also do His will." To bear, to submit meekly, to praise God in fainting and decay—this is the prerogative of earth. Let none think the time of trial too long, when the time of triumph shall be eternal. The aged Christian should be concerned to make his closing days a testimony for his Lord.—*Ker.*

Ver. 37. "*A widow.*"—Perhaps it was in allusion to her that St. Paul depicted the manner of life of one who was a widow indeed, and desolate—"she trusteth in God, and continueth in supplications and prayers night and day" (1 Tim. v. 5).

Asceticism commended.—It is impossible to overlook the fact that the Evangelist speaks with emphatic approval of the ascetic mode of life followed by Anna—her abstinence from second marriage, her residence in the Temple, and her fastings and prayers night and day. Perhaps our recoil from the abuses of a monastic life has carried us too far in the opposite direction, and blinded us to the beauty and worth of a type of piety which may have its home in a cloister. It aims at a complete and single-hearted service of God, and it is lacking in the important element of religion which concerns service of man. In our philanthropical forms of religion we are specially in danger of losing sight of the service of God in serving our fellow-men.

Ver. 38. *A Small Congregation.*—But one old man and one old woman recognised the Lord when He came to His Temple. Priests and wise men and the world knew Him not. They two alone witnessed the fulfilment of Malachi's prophecy (iii. 1); so it may be with other prophecies yet to be fulfilled.

Ver. 39. "*Returned into Galilee.*"—The evangelists constantly speak of Galilee as a different country from Judæa. The fact that there were considerable differences between the two needs to be kept in mind, if we would understand many parts of the gospel history. The inhabitants of Galilee were despised by those of Judæa as rude, illiterate, lax in religious practices, and almost semi-heathen. The people of Judæa were more cultured, strict in religious observances, under the rule of custom, and priest-ridden. The ministry of Jesus was more successful in Galilee than in Judæa, and it is plainly indicated that the enthusiasm manifested on the day of His triumphal entrance into Jerusalem was largely owing to the pride of Galilæan pilgrims in the greatness of their fellow-countryman. Of the twelve apostles, eleven evidently were from Galilee, and only one—Judas Iscariot—from Judæa.

Respect for the Law.—It is significant that St. Luke, who in so many parts of his Gospel reflects the Pauline teaching, gives no indication of any contempt for the ceremonial laws of Judaism. It is only after his parents had "performed all things according to the law of the Lord" that they returned to Nazareth. The antagonism between adherents of the Old Testament economy and those of the New belongs to a later generation, and finds no justification in the inspired documents on which Christianity is based.

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 40—52.

Growth in Strength, Wisdom, and Grace.—The fact that Jesus passed through various stages of development in bodily, mental, and spiritual life is one of great significance and importance, though we may find it impossible to reconcile it with our thoughts of Him as a Divine Being clothed with our nature. The

assertion, however, that such was the case is made here, and in other parts of the New Testament we have testimonies of a similar kind. Thus in Heb. ii. 10 we read of His "being *made perfect* through sufferings," and in v. 8, "though He were a Son, yet *learned He obedience.*" Three stages of growth seem to be indicated in this brief record of His infancy and youth.

I. **There is that of childish innocence.**—No instances of supernatural knowledge or of miraculous deeds are recorded in connection with His early years. The idea is conveyed to our minds that He lived a simple, blameless life, unconscious of the high calling that lay before Him, subject to His parents in the same way that ordinary children are while they are too young to think and act for themselves, and that neither His parents nor fellow-townsmen saw anything in Him to prepare them for the claims He put forward when He grew to manhood and entered public life.

II. **There is that in which He first began to realise and manifest a sense of personal responsibility to God.**—This is indicated by His action in leaving His parents on the occasion of His first visit to Jerusalem to keep the Passover, and by His words in reply to their questions, in which He places His duty to God as an obligation superior even to that of ordinary filial obedience. He begins to distinguish between duties, and to give those which have paramount claims their due place. This stage is marked by the awakening of new and strange thoughts, and by His making inquiry concerning spiritual things from those who were qualified to teach them.

III. **The third stage is that in which He finds the way in which to reconcile higher and lower obligations, so as to render perfect obedience to the law of God as it touches the duties we owe to Him and to our fellow-men.**—He returns to Nazareth, and is subject to His parents; but His obedience to them is of a higher cast than that which He had formerly rendered. It is intelligent, voluntary acceptance and discharge of duty, such as can only come with maturity of age. In all these stages of growth Christ has afforded a perfect example for all to follow.

SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS ON VERSES 40—52.

Ver. 40. *A Picture of an Ideal Life.*—1. Physical health—"grew and waxed strong." 2. Intellectual and moral development—"filled with wisdom"; acquiring true ideas (1) concerning God, and (2) concerning men and the world. 3. Having intimate relations with God: (1) the object of His favour, and (2) serving Him and loving Him perfectly and constantly.

Various Stages of Physical Growth.—St. Luke mentions in order all the stages of life through which Jesus passed—an unborn infant (i. 42), a babe (ii. 12), a boy (ver. 40), a youth (v. 43), a man (xxiv. 19). He did not, like Adam, first appear of full stature; but sanctified every stage of life from infancy to manhood. Old age became Him not.—*Bengel*

"*Filled with wisdom.*"—Lit. "becoming full of wisdom." The peculiar phrase here used implies both growth from less to greater and perfection at every point in the process; just as, if we could imagine it, a vessel increasing in dimensions and always remaining equally full, yet containing far more at the end than at the beginning.

Ver. 41. "*Went to Jerusalem every year.*"—A hint is given of the pious atmosphere of the home in which Jesus grew up by the mention of the careful attendance of His parents year by year at the Passover feast in Jerusalem. His mother, like Hannah in earlier times, accompanied her husband, though the law did not prescribe her presence on the occasion. The fact of the cor-

rupt and degenerate condition of religion and of the priestly order did not lead them to the disuse of public worship; and their example is a rebuke to those who become separatists on the ground of being unable to find that ideal purity in the Church which they desire.

Ver. 42. *The First Pilgrim-journey of Jesus.*—This was apparently the first time Jesus had attended the Passover feast or been in Jerusalem since He was presented as a babe in the Temple. No doubt He came up regularly to the feast every year after this. "Every one who can remember his own first journey from a village home to the capital of his country will understand the joy and excitement with which Jesus set out. He travelled over eighty miles of a country where nearly every mile teemed with historical and inspiring memories. He mingled with the constantly growing caravan of pilgrims who were filled with the religious enthusiasm of the great ecclesiastical event of the year. His destination was a city which was loved by every Jewish heart with a strength of affection that has never been given to any other capital—a city full of objects and memories fitted to touch the deepest springs of interest and emotion in His breast. He went to take part for the first time in an ancient solemnity, suggestive of countless patriotic and sacred memories. It was no wonder that when the day came to return home He was so excited with the new objects of interest that He failed to join His party at the appointed place and time" (*Stalker*).

"*When He was twelve years old.*"—The age of twelve is no doubt specified as marking a new epoch in the life of Jesus, and a new attitude towards the law of God; for now, as having arrived at years of discretion, He, like other Jewish children, took upon Him the moral responsibilities of an adult. This corresponds to the action of joining the Church with us, an occasion when, in many Christian communities, the rite of confirmation is administered.

Ver. 43. *The Child Jesus.*—The silence of Scripture is as eloquent as its speech. Here, as so often, the veil is the picture. There is a profound lesson in the fact that only one of the four evangelists has anything to tell us of the still unfolding of that perfect life before Christ's entrance on His public ministry. The contrast between the one paragraph given to His childhood and youth, and the fulness of the narrative of His works, and still more the minute particulars of His death, ought to teach us that the true centre of His worth to the world lies in His "ministering," and the vital point of it all in His giving His "life a ransom for many."—*Maclaren.*

The Education of Jesus.—That Jesus was a solitary child seems unnatural to suppose. Compulsory education was the law of the land. If the law was in force in Galilee, He must have attended the national synagogue school, and formed one of a circle of children around the minister of the synagogue; joining, too, in childish sports with His school-fellows, as well as in childish lessons.—*Vallings.*

The Boyhood of Jesus.—This is the one only passage that speaks of the *boyhood* of Jesus, and I think all lovers of the graphic and picturesque touches of Holy Scripture will rejoice to find in the Revised Version the plain and very human expression "the *boy* Jesus" (ver. 43). What a text that will furnish for the school-chapels of England, what a storehouse of exhortation and doctrine for the struggling and weary and heavy-laden (and there are many) among the young soldiers of Jesus Christ—that large part of the human family which has all life before it, with its boundless capacities of use and abuse, of happiness and misery, of good and evil!—*Vaughan.*

"*Jesus tarried behind in Jerusalem.*"

—His tarrying behind in Jerusalem was an act which was only to be justified by the higher relationship of which He afterwards spoke to His parents (ver. 49). His whole course of procedure on this occasion is an illustration of that wisdom which He possessed in ever-increasing measure, under the guidance of which He diverged from the course of conduct towards His parents to which He had hitherto adhered.

Ver. 44. "*Supposing Him to have been in the company.*"—It is an indication of the confidence which His parents had in His discretion that they did not immediately seek Him when they discovered that He was absent. He evidently had been allowed a more than usual amount of liberty of action as a child by parents who had never known Him to transgress their commandments or be guilty of a sinful or foolish deed.

Vers. 45, 46. *The Lord Jesus a Learner.*—The only record of the interval between the Lord's infancy and ripe manhood. No warrant for the gossiping stories of the early life and miracles of Jesus. An instructive incident, as showing how early the Lord began to display the inquiring and critical spirit which afterwards bore such precious fruits of knowledge and wisdom. The astonishment of the rabbis shows how different a student they found Him from such as were wont to sit at their feet. He asked no stock questions, and was to be put off with no stock answers. Not that He put Himself forward as a teacher under the guise of a learner. He questioned the doctors with a genuine desire to learn. Some of them were, as older men, in one sense wiser than Himself. It was possibly the acuteness with which He chose out and addressed Himself to such that chiefly raised the astonishment of the bystanders.—*Markby.*

"*In the midst of the doctors.*"—The picture powerfully affects the imagination and stimulates the heart, of the sweet, serious Boy, with His fresh child-face, touched with awe and eagerness, sitting at the feet of the grey-bearded rabbis, and bringing their so-called wisdom to the sharp test which so much learned lumber can ill endure —the questioning of a child's heart. How sharp the contrast between the cumbrous doctrines of the teachers and the way of thinking of such a Child! His purpose was not to put the doctors to confusion; but no doubt these questions of the Boy would be the germ of those later questions of the Man which so often silenced the Pharisee and the Sadducee, and made their elaborate wisdom look like folly by the side of His deep and simple words.—*Maclaren.*

Ver. 46. "*After three days.*"—Just as afterwards His friends and disciples lost Him for three days, and mourned for Him as for one dead, though their knowledge of Him should have prepared them to expect to see Him again. Even now a certain blame in like manner attaches to His parents for not knowing where at once to find Him. When He was left alone in Jerusalem, what other asylum could He seek but His Father's house?

"*Both hearing them.*"—He who would teach must himself be a learner—must have the docile spirit. Those who have made it their object to study and expound the word of God are sure, whatever may be their faults and failings, to have something worth imparting. The example of Jesus on this occasion teaches that due honour is to be paid to those who in the name of the Church teach sacred truth.

"*Sitting in the midst.*"—This seems to imply a place of honour—as though these doctors willingly received Him into their order, though He professed Himself but a learner, because of the wisdom He manifested. It is, as noted (see critical remarks), quite evident that

He did not do more than put questions and answer questions; but none the less even the teacher of most authority there must have instinctively felt that this was no common pupil. The idea of a child lecturing or teaching in a formal or authoritative way is a repellent one, and utterly contrary to the Divine order according to which all things are ruled.

Ver. 47. "*Astonished.*"—He brought with Him a clear knowledge of God's word, in which no doubt He had been versed from earliest years, and a mind and spirit undisturbed and unclouded by the errors and fantastical interpretations that prevailed in rabbinical schools. He might say with the psalmist: "I have more understanding than my teachers; for Thy testimonies are my study" (Ps. cxix. 99). "The Rabbins themselves said that the word of God out of the mouth of childhood is to be received as from the mouth of the Sanhedrim, of Moses, yea, of the blessed God Himself" (*Stier*). Cf. Ps. viii. 2.

Ver. 48. "*Why hast thou thus dealt with us?*"—The first reproof which Jesus had ever received from His mother; yet in it there is quite as much of astonishment at His conduct as of implied blame. The way is still left open for Him to justify His action and approve Himself free from fault.

"*Sorrowing.*"—No doubt often during those three days the ominous words of Simeon, spoken nearly twelve years before, had recurred to the Virgin's mind (ver. 35): "Yea, a sword shall pierce through thine own soul also."

A Parent's Complaint.—The Lord's mother was seriously disappointed with Him. We might indeed say she was vexed. But He defends Himself with warmth, as if injustice has been done Him. The incident is full of interest and importance, displaying Jesus as the type and ideal for opening youth.

I. **There are stages, epochs, crises of growth in the spirit to be expected, appreciated, recognised.**—The laws of our moral as well as of our physical nature are inexorable and benignant. We must neither lament, resent, ignore, nor resist them; but face, accept, and use them as they manifest themselves in opening years.

II. **Occasionally there will be apparent suddenness in their manifestation.**—Ripeness will seem to come all at once. The will has been maturing while the parent knew it not. It seems as if a mine had been sprung on him, and a sense of unfairness goes with it. This is natural, but unreasonable. Nature cannot wait for us till we are ready. When the blossom sets the fruit appears. There is no sin in this. It cannot be otherwise.

III. **That surprise, disappointment, or pain results is no fault of the child.**—Mary probably soon regretted her momentary heat. On the part of sons and daughters there is often abruptness, wilfulness, and audacity towards parents. This is the accident of the case, resulting from human infirmity. That the parent feels pain is inevitable. But love, good sense, and an instinct of justice soon heal the wound.

IV. **For with patience and tolerance** on the part of parents will come gratitude on the part of youth, and appreciation of our large-heartedness. Youth, with all its disdains, and caprices, and conceits, is still the world's leverage, and the most lovable thing in it.

V. **A real love of knowledge is a noble thing.**—We are not to frown at it in the young, or be frightened, but encourage it, and judiciously direct it. The pursuit of knowledge has risks, but these are less dangerous than those which are concerned with the indulgence of the senses. Reason is a Divine gift, and is to be trained and cultivated for God.

VI. **In the end our self-restraint and kindness, and faith in God's holy will shall have their reward.**—"Jesus went down to Nazareth, and was subject." So it will be in the end between us and our children. We shall lose nothing by granting what belongs to them, but we shall gain more. They must be helped, not hindered, at this difficult stage in life's journey. We, too, have been as they are. Let us not forget our own youth. Let us try to make friends with our children, and encourage them to confide in us.—*Thorold.*

Ver. 49. *Jesus in the Temple* (for boys and girls).—The Boy in the Temple hallows the lessons of youth. The story that Luke tells should be full of interest and help to lads and maidens. Though only twelve, we should think of Him as we should among ourselves think of a youth of sixteen or seventeen. He was no longer a child. Those entering on the untried future of manhood or womanhood are standing just where Jesus stood. Learn then of Him. Follow in His footsteps. Find in His words—

I. **His trust.**—"Wist ye not?" It is a sad surprise to find that His mother had been in doubt as to where He was or what He was doing. He fully trusted in His mother's understanding of the thoughts of her child. You who are beginning to live a life of your own must often be misunderstood. Do you show the same trust in the knowledge and sympathy of your parents? You, too, may be feeling, like our Lord, that there is an inner life into which even the nearest and dearest cannot enter. Do not, as He did not, on that account, by suspicion and discontent strain the bond of unity of thought and feeling until it snaps.

II. **His task.**—Even now He has an overmastering sense of duty. "I must be." He began life with no thought of self-pleasing, but with the single aim to please His Father in heaven. He knew nothing of a divided heart or of a wavering will. As child, youth, man, there was whole-hearted, steadfast surrender to God. Have you the single aim? Or is your desire only to be free—to do as you like? Do you wish to please yourself or God? Own His claim over you.

III. **His thought.**—"My Father's house." "My Father's business." He knew and felt God to be near in the place where He was, in the task that He did. He was doing God's will in learning about the law. In the Temple-worship and teaching God was making Himself known to Him. He lived with and for God. Of Him He thought, Him He served as Father. Have you thus known God as near to you? Have you acknowledged Him in your humblest duty? When you pray to and praise Him you are in His house. In your lowly daily work, if you do it because you know it is God's will for you, you are about His business.—*Garvie.*

"*My Father's business.*"—The first recorded words of Jesus. His calm repose is in strong contrast to Mary's not unnatural excitement. In one sentence, like a sudden beam of light shooting into some profound gulf, He shows the depths of His child-heart.

I. **The consciousness of sonship.**—There is an evident reference to Mary's words, "Thy father and I." She had carefully guarded from Him, hitherto, the mystery of His birth. His question is an appeal to her secret. There is no material given for deciding whether this consciousness was now felt or expressed for the first time. The words point to a distinct and unique consciousness of sonship, apprehended in childish fashion. This is the first note to which the after-life is so true.

II. **The consciousness of a Divine vocation.**—Here is the first expression of that solemn "must" of which we hear the echoes all through His subsequent life. Sonship implies obedience; the sense of sonship implies filial sub-

mission. His childish recognition of this necessity grew in depth and solemnity with His growing years; but here we have it clearly discerned as the guiding star of the Child's life. The parallel in youthful lines is when the sense of duty and responsibility becomes more active. It is a solemn time when young shoulders first begin to feel the burden of personal responsibility. Happy they who feel not only the pressure of a law, but the hand of a Lawgiver—who say not reluctantly but gladly, "I must"!

III. **The subordination of all human ties to this solemn necessity.**—The incident itself illustrates this. The call to the Father's business was more imperative than the call to Mary's side. It was the first breaking away from the seclusion and peace of Nazareth, the first time that His conduct had shown that anything was to Him more sacred. than a mother's love or than a mother's sorrow. The dawning on the soul of that consciousness of supreme duty does not extinguish the light of filial duty to parents, nor darken the brightness of any of the sweet charities of family and kindred. But it decisively puts them second, and opens the possibility, so dreadful to exacting human love, of apparent conflict between two duties, in which the lower may have to give place to the higher. It is a great moment in every life when the young soul discerns a law more imperative, because he has become aware of a love more tender than the commandment of a father or the law of a mother. The recognition of the will of a Father in heaven, to whose "business" all earthly ties must yield, lies at the foundation of every holy and noble life.—*Maclaren.*

"*I must.*"—It is interesting to observe that it is the sterner view of duty that seems to influence the child—"I *must.*" In other parts of Scripture we have indications that this was not His only view—that doing God's will was a joy to Him. But, strange to say, at the early age of twelve, we find Him rather girding Himself for what is trying and irksome to human nature; bringing His young soul to face it, like one breasting a hill or buffeting the waves. The lesson is obvious. Nothing is more salutary or more promising than this early grappling with labour: no flinching, but the stern, steady "I must."—*Blaikie.*

"*My Father's business.*" — The "Father's business" on which He entered at twelve was not preaching, and working miracles, and going about doing good in a public manner, but for the time remaining at home, a dutiful child, a glad, helpful youth, and an industrious, growing man.—*Miller.*

The First Words of Jesus.—These are the first recorded words of Jesus, and are instinct with the Spirit that guided and animated His whole life—that of devotion to His Father in heaven. The quiet repose, and serenity, and self-possession of this reply are highly characteristic of Him.

Christ's Testimony to Himself.—It is distinctly noticeable that to the "thy father" of Mary He opposes "My Father," and that by His artless wonder that they sought for Him anywhere but in the Temple He claimed that special relationship with God which had been announced to Mary and Joseph before His birth (i. 35; Matt. i. 20). "Hitherto pious Jews and lowly shepherds, waiting for the salvation of Israel, have borne testimony to the infant Messiah: He now bears testimony to Himself" (*Lange*).

Jesus Lost and Found.—The loss and recovery of Jesus may be taken to symbolise experiences in our own spiritual life. "Certain it is that we also, if *we* would find Christ, must seek Him where He is ever to be found, in His holy Temple" (*Burgon*).

Vers. 49 50 *The Idea of our Life-work.*

I. **We have to pass through the**

period of necessary unconsciousness.—There was a period in our Lord's life of pure sensation. So it is with ourselves, with even the most intellectual and most spiritual—a time when there is scarcely *any* thought of God or knowledge of duty.

II. **Then comes a time when the light of life dawns upon the soul.**—Before Jesus was "twelve years old" He had pondered the great thoughts with which the Scriptures deal. The loftiest truths ask early admission to the soul. The little child has ideas immeasurably above the reach of the cleverest and best-trained animal.

III. **The hour arrives when the idea of our life-work is recognised by the soul.**—In our Lord's case this life-work was exceptional, unique. Even now He did not understand all that it meant. As He "increased in wisdom" He became more fully conscious of His mission, and the shadow of the cross deepened. Still, in the Temple He had a very definite idea that His Father had chosen Him to do some great work. In our case the life-work of following Christ is binding upon all—the particular career varies, in which this following is to be carried out. It may not be a distinctively religious calling.

IV. **At this momentous crisis we have to decide alone.**—His parents "understood not the saying." We might have thought His mother would have been sympathetic and intelligent. So Jesus was alone in all the critical hours of His career. We may be thankful for parental encouragement and human sympathy in every crisis; but with or without these, aided, unaccompanied, or opposed, we must for ourselves be about "the Father's business" when His summons falls on our ear.—*Clarkson.*

Ver. 50. *The Idea of Divine Sonship.*—It is, therefore, evident that the special relationship with God of which He spoke had not been a fact communicated to Him by His parents; nor was the idea of Messiah's being Son of God as well as Son of man taught by the doctors amongst whom He had been sitting. It was a truth which had just dawned upon Him and led Him to act as He did.

A Flower from an Enclosed Garden.—This incident is the only one recorded in the life of Jesus between His presentation in the Temple when forty days old, and His appearance on the bank of the Jordan at the age of thirty when He received baptism from John. "It is a solitary floweret out of the wonderful enclosed garden of the thirty years, plucked precisely there where the swollen bud, at a distinctive crisis, bursts into flower" (*Stier*).

Ver. 51. "*Went down with them.*"—The statement as to His obedience to His parents is almost necessary to correct misapprehensions we might have formed from the above incident. He did not henceforth act habitually in a manner they would be forced to consider wayward, on impulses which they could not understand. He did not allow His feelings to prevail over His duties as a son and as a member of a household; if His affections attracted Him to the Temple, the voice of duty called Him back to Galilee, and to that voice He rendered implicit obedience. The veil that concealed His higher nature, after being for a moment lifted, was allowed to fall again, and His normal human life passed back into its former course.

"*Subject unto them.*"—There is something wonderful beyond measure in the thought of Him unto whom all things are subject submitting to earthly parents. No such honour was ever done to men or to angels as was now done to Joseph and Mary. The calm of home-life, the healthy occupation of manual labour, and the seclusion of Nazareth were a better preparation for Christ's public ministry than the Temple with its ritualism and the schools of the Rabbis would have been.

The Lesson of Patience.—What a lesson of patient waiting for the wider sphere is here! Young people, conscious of power, or often only stung by restlessness, are apt to think home a very contracted field, and to despise its quiet monotony, and chafe at its imposition of petty obedience. Jesus Christ lived till He was thirty in a poor little village buried among the hills, worked as a carpenter, did what His mother bade Him, and was content till His "hour" came. Vanity, selfish ambition, proud independence, are always in a hurry to get away from the modest shelter of a mother's house and make a mark in the world. The prodigal, who wants riotous living, is in a hurry too. But the true Son is the more a Son of Mary because He feels Himself the Son of God, and nourishes His pure spirit in sweet seclusion, which yet is not solitude, till the time comes for larger service in a wider sphere. The wider work is quietly postponed for the narrower tasks.

"Thy soul was like a star, and dwelt apart,
* * * * *
And yet thy heart
The lowliest duties on herself did lay."
—*Maclaren.*

Willing Dependence.—You do not read of any ambition in Jesus Christ to be independent; you do not find Him remonstrating or murmuring against the restraints of home, and beginning to remind Himself or others that the time had come for self-management and self-concern. Shall not the son, the daughter, in a Christian home deem that good enough and great enough which a Saviour, who was also the Creator, thought happy enough and honourable enough for Him?—*Vaughan.*

The Silent Years of Christ's Life.—In these quiet and simple words years of meek submission are condensed, as a thin film of imperishable stone represents the growth and leafage of a forest that waved green through geological cycles. For eighteen uneventful years the story of His life lies in these few words that we may learn how the spirit of a son makes every place the Father's house and every meanest task the Father's business.—*Maclaren.*

"*Kept all these sayings in her heart.*"—The Virgin did not merely keep these sayings in her *memory*; she kept them in her *heart.* This is the true way in which to store up spiritual knowledge. That which is committed to the tablets of the memory may fade away, and may not, of necessity, be much of an influence upon our feelings, and thoughts, and lives. But the things that are kept in the heart lose none of their freshness with the lapse of time, and are a perpetual stimulus to holy life and action. The things we store up in the heart are things we love; and in them we have a motive to service of God, which yields to none in strength—a ground of assurance that will overcome all our doubts and fears—a means for understanding God's dealings with us more perfectly, and for recognising things that are hidden from natural vision and from intellectual research.

Ver. 52. "*In favour with God and man.*"—Innocence grew into holiness, and did so in such an artless, natural manner that it won the approval of men as well as the favour of God. The world did not as yet hate Him, for He did not, except by unconscious example, testify against it that its deeds are evil (cf. John vii. 7).

The Growth in Wisdom of the Divine Boy.

I. **His growth was real.**—His human nature must have had the inexperience and ignorance of childhood, and must have passed, in a normal manner, to wider knowledge and clearer self-consciousness. There is nothing to startle in this. Growth does not imply imperfection. It only implies finiteness, and therefore development in time. The capacity of His human

spirit increased, and therefore His wisdom increased.

II. **His growth was uninterrupted, unstained, symmetrical, universal.**—He alone fulfilled His own law of growth—"first the blade," etc. The best of us grow by fits and starts, and in the wrong direction. In His growth there were no pauses, no sinful elements mingled, no powers unduly developed or deformed. His childhood had no failings, and all in it that could be retained abode with Him in His manhood.

III. **His growth in wisdom was by the use of means.**—Life taught Him. Scripture taught Him. Communion with His Father taught Him. The heavens and the earth taught Him. His own heart taught Him. But the result of all those, and whatsoever other forces shaped His human growth, was a human character which had so perfectly assimilated them all that no trace of any particular influence appears in it. So, in lower fashion, genius uses all the outward means available, but is their master, not their servant, and is not made by them, but only finds in them stimulus and an occasion for development of its inborn power. Jesus is not the product of any or all of these outward means. He grew by their help, but was not shaped by them. A perfect man must be more than man. A sinless Jesus cannot be the son of Joseph and Mary. —*Maclaren.*

CHAPTER III.

CRITICAL NOTES.

Ver. 1.—This may be regarded as the formal opening of St. Luke's history. **Tiberius Cæsar.**—Augustus died A.U.C. 767, and fifteen years added to this would make the time here noted, A.U.C. 782, when Jesus would be thirty-two years of age, having been born before the death of Herod the Great (A.U.C. 750). As this would be inconsistent with ver. 23, we must assume that Luke is reckoning from the time when Tiberius was associated with Augustus in the imperial dignity, *i.e.* in A.U.C. 765. This would make the date of Christ's baptism A.U.C. 780 or A.D. 26. **Pontius Pilate.**—Procurator of Judæa, under the Proconsul of Syria, from A.D. 26—36. **Herod.**—Herod Antipas, son of Herod the Great and Malthace; he was full brother of Archelaus, and was tetrarch from B.C. 4 to A.D. 39. He had the title of "king" by courtesy (Mark vi. 14, etc.). It was by him that John the Baptist was imprisoned and put to death. **Tetrarch.**—Means originally, the ruler of a *fourth* part of a country; afterwards used for any tributary prince. **Philip.**—Half-brother of Herod Antipas; son of Herod the Great and Cleopatra. Reigned from B.C. 4 to A.D. 32. The town of Cæsarea Philippi named after him. He was not the Philip spoken of in Mark vi. 17, who was another son of Herod the Great (by Mariamne, daughter of Simon). This last-named Philip was disinherited by his father, and lived in Rome as a private citizen. The districts named in this verse are those within which our Lord's ministry was confined.

Ver. 2. **Annas and Caiaphas being the high priests.**—In theory there could be but one high priest. A better reading is followed by the R.V. "in the high-priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas." Annas had been deprived of office by Valerius Gratus, Pilate's predecessor. He was probably regarded by the people as the *legitimate* high priest, while Joseph Caiaphas, his son-in-law, was accepted as high priest *de facto*. This would account for the singular expression here used. He had certainly great influence during the priesthood of Caiaphas (*v.* John xviii. 13, 24). **The word of God came.**—The usual Old Testament formula for prophetic inspiration. **The wilderness.**—As indicated in ver. 3, the desert country about the mouth of the Jordan on the north of the Dead Sea.

Ver. 3. **Baptism of repentance, etc.**—"A baptism requiring and representing an inward, spiritual change; the pledge of remission of sins to those who were truly penitent" (*Speaker's Commentary*).

Ver. 4.—The passage quoted from Isaiah is understood to refer primarily to the return of the Jews from captivity, and to have only a secondary fulfilment in the preaching of John. But the glowing words find their only adequate fulfilment in the mission of the Baptist.

Ver. 5. **Every valley, etc.**—"The metaphor is derived from pioneers who go before the

march of a king. The general meaning of the prophecy is that no obstacles, whether they arose from depression, or power, or pride, or cunning perversity, or menacing difficulties, should be able to resist the labours of the pioneers and heralds of the kingdom of God" (*Farrar*).

Ver. 7. **The multitude.**—Rather, "the multitudes" (R.V.)—different classes of men from different quarters. **O generation of vipers.**—Rather, "ye offspring of vipers" (R.V.). These stern words are addressed specially to Pharisees and Sadducees (Matt. iii. 7). Our Lord Himself uses the same figure (Matt. xxiii. 33). Notice that the Baptist employs figures suggested by the desert—vipers, stones, barren trees.

Ver. 9.—"The notion is that of a woodman touching a tree with the edge of his axe to measure his blow before he lifts his arm for the sweep which fells it" (*Farrar*).

Vers. 10-14 are peculiar to St. Luke.

Ver. 11.—John says nothing of faith and love, but like Christ lays down self-denial as a first condition of admission into the kingdom of God (Matt. v. 40-42). **Meat.**—*I.e.* food: the word now usually means "flesh"; but this use of the word is unknown in our A.V.

Ver. 12. **Publicans.**—*I.e.* tax-gatherers; owing to the system of farming taxes which prevailed at this time, the office gave many facilities for dishonesty and extortion, and those who filled it were both despised and hated. A special stigma attached to them among the Jews as agents of a heathen and oppressive power. **Master.**—*I.e.* teacher.

Ver. 14. **Soldiers.**—The Greek word used means literally, "soldiers on the march." **Do violence to no man.**—The word implies, "Do not extort money by threats of violence." **Neither accuse any falsely.**—*I.e.* "do not extort money by false accusation, or the threatening of it." **Be content, etc.**—Mutinies on account of pay were frequent.

Ver. 15. **Mused.**—Rather, "reasoned, debated." The absence of outward splendour occasioned doubts as to whether John could be the promised Messiah; the holiness of his life and the authority with which he spoke suggested to some that he might be the Sent of God. This verse is peculiar to St. Luke but is equivalent to what is said in John i. 19-25.

Ver. 16. **Latchet.**—*I.e.* thong or lace. **Shoes.**—Rather, "sandals."

Ver. 17. **Fan.**—"The Latin *vannus*, a great shovel with which corn was thrown up against the wind to separate it from the chaff" (*Farrar*). **Floor.**—*I.e.* "threshing-floor" (R.V.).

Ver. 18. **Preached.**—Lit. "evangelised the people"—proclaimed good tidings to them. "With many other exhortations, therefore, preached he good tidings unto the people" (R.V.). The allusion seems to be to the announcement of Christ's coming or to references of Him, which underlay the Baptist's teaching.

Ver. 19.—The imprisonment of John is mentioned by anticipation. Cf. this passage with the fuller notices in Matt. xiv. 3-5; Mark vi. 17-20. **Philip's.**—Omit Philip (R.V.), "his brother's wife." The first husband of Herodias was named Herod, and was a private citizen living in Rome. He was probably called Philip to distinguish him from Herod Antipas (cf. Mark vi. 17).

Ver. 20.—It is interesting to find the same estimate of Herod's conduct towards John in the history of Josephus (*Antt.*, XVIII. v. 1-4). **Prison.**—The Jewish historian tells us that the scene of John's imprisonment was the fortress of Machærus, on the north of the Dead Sea.

Ver. 21.—This verse seems to imply that the baptism of Jesus was in a measure private—that He was the last to receive the rite on the particular day when He came to John. The reason why He submitted to the rite is given by Himself in Matt. iii. 15, viz. that He judged it fitting for Him to conform to all the requirements of the law of Moses. **Praying.**—This circumstance is mentioned by St. Luke only. It is an illustration of the necessity of prayer to make any external rites effectual.

Ver. 22. **In a bodily shape.**—Added by St. Luke. The dove was from early times a symbol of the Holy Spirit. "The Talmudic comment on Gen. i. 2 is that the 'the Spirit of God moved on the face of the waters *like a dove*.' We are probably to understand a dovelike, hovering, lambent flame descending on the head of Jesus; and this may account for the unanimous early legend that a fire or light was kindled in the Jordan" (*Farrar*). **A voice.**—This voice out of heaven was heard also on the Mount of Transfiguration (ix. 35), and shortly before the Passion (John xii. 28-30). This appearance of the Holy Spirit, and voice of the Father, seen and heard on the occasion of the baptism of Jesus, distinctly imply the doctrine of the Trinity of the Godhead.

Ver. 23.—The phraseology of the beginning of this verse is very rugged; and commentators have been much perplexed by it. The R.V. is, "And Jesus Himself, when He began *to teach*, was about thirty years of age." The substitution of the words in italics—"to teach"—seems somewhat arbitrary. The evident intention of the Evangelist is to give the age of Jesus at His baptism. Perhaps the simplest and most natural rendering of the passage would be, "And Jesus was beginning to be [a man] of about thirty years of age"—*i.e.* had nearly completed his thirtieth year.

Vers. 23-38.—The genealogy of Jesus. For a full discussion of the many interesting and

complicated questions connected with the genealogies given in the first and third Gospels, we must refer the reader to works specially dealing with that subject. Lord A. C. Hervey, Bishop of Bath and Wells, has written a very able monograph entitled *The Genealogies of our Lord Jesus Christ*, and is also the author of the article on the subject in Smith's *Dictionary of the Bible*. From the latter we make the following extracts: 1. They are both the genealogies of Joseph—*i.e.* of Jesus Christ, as the reputed and legal son of Joseph and Mary. 2. The genealogy of St. Matthew is Joseph's genealogy as legal successor to the throne of David—*i.e.* it exhibits the successive heirs of the kingdom, ending with Christ, as Joseph's reputed son. St. Luke's is Joseph's private genealogy, exhibiting his real birth, as David's son, and thus showing why he was heir to Solomon's crown. 3. There can be no doubt that Mary also was of David's descent (i. 32; Acts ii. 30, xiii. 23; Rom. i. 3, etc.). It is probable that she was the daughter of Jacob, and first cousin to Joseph, her husband; so that in point of *fact*, though not of *form*, both the genealogies are as much hers as her husband's. In St. Matthew's Gospel Joseph is said to have been the son of Jacob, the son of Matthan; in St. Luke's, the son of Heli, the son of Matthat. There seems to be no reason to doubt that Matthan and Matthat are one and the same person. The state of matters then would be that Matthan had two sons, Jacob and Heli; that Jacob had no son (but according to the above conjecture, a daughter Mary), and that consequently Joseph, the son of the younger brother Heli, became heir to his uncle and to the throne of David. It is quite evident that, in spite of all difficulties which may now be connected with these genealogies, they are trustworthy; not a doubt was thrown out by the bitterest of the early enemies of Christianity as to our Lord's real descent from David.

Ver. 27.—Probably the original text had "the son of the *Rhesa* Zerubbabel." Rhesa is not a proper name, but a Chaldæan word signifying "prince."

Ver. 36.—The Cainan mentioned in this verse is perhaps introduced by mistake. The name is to be found in the LXX. Version of Gen. xi. 12, but not in any Hebrew MS. of the Old Testament.

Ver. 38. **Adam, which was the Son of God.**—"The Evangelist here asserts at once the community of nature which subsists between all mankind (cf. Acts xvii. 26-28), and the filial relation in which all men stand to God, not merely as being the creatures of His hand, but also as being made in His image" (*Speaker's Commentary*).

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 1—14.

A Call to Repentance.—St. Luke here makes a fresh beginning. What he has hitherto related has been of a more or less private character—incidents affecting the lives and thoughts of individuals and the narrow circles in which they moved. But now he has to tell of the revelation of God in Christ to mankind. He has shown us the source of the stream, and now he points out with special emphasis where it begins to gather strength and flow in a broader, deeper channel. First the forerunner of the Messiah, and then the Messiah Himself, come forth from the seclusion in which they had been buried, and the foundation of the kingdom of heaven is laid in the spiritual movement begun by the preaching of repentance and of baptism for the remission of sins. St. Luke marks the importance of the crisis by his mention of the date at which it occurred, and of the men who bore rule at the time in the world at large, in the land of God's chosen people, and in the Jewish Church. The great work intrusted to John the Baptist was to prepare the way for Christ, and this he did by summoning the nation to whom He was to be specially revealed to repentance, and by giving assurance that true repentance would be accepted of God. With regard to this call to repentance we notice—

I. **That it comes from God.**—In as literal a sense as in times of old prophets received messages from God to deliver in His name to men, did "the word of God come to John in the wilderness." Nor is this Divine interposition exceptional. In every case it is a Divine voice, speaking either through the written word, or through conscience, or through the workings of Providence, that summons the sinner to repentance. It is always God who takes the initiative. He reveals the law that has been transgressed and the penalties that wait upon transgression, awakens godly sorrow for sin, and gives strength

to amend the life. He is not an austere man, reaping where He has not sown; but in summoning us to repentance He gives us strength to obey. He asks for nothing which He does not give.

II. **It was addressed to all.**—Israel is not treated as already in such relations with God as to render repentance unnecessary. The fact of descent from Abraham, on which many prided themselves, is spoken of as being of no value where a faith and a holiness like Abraham's are not found. Pharisees and Sadducees, rabbis and priests, publicans and soldiers and common people, both those who prided themselves upon their holiness and those who were almost in despair because of their sinfulness, were called to repentance. A purer and more spiritual form of righteousness than any had yet attained to must distinguish those who belong to the kingdom of heaven.

III. **This repentance was to be manifested in confession of sins, in submission to the rite which symbolised spiritual cleansing, in amendment of life, and in faith in the Messiah who was shortly to be revealed.**—Both sorrow for the past and a change of life in the future were required from those who received the rite of baptism; and it is to be specially noticed that while John the Baptist was able to arouse the consciences of men and excite the feeling of regret for evil done, he had no power to effect the change in conduct which he recommended to his hearers. In this way he turned the attention of the people to One mightier than himself, who would baptize with the Holy Ghost and with fire—who would impart the power needed for true and complete service of God. He fastened upon the characteristic sins of the various classes who came before him, and exhorted his hearers to break them off. The attempt to do so would awaken a sense of helplessness that would lead them to seek for a Divine Helper to aid them in overcoming evil.

IV. **Refusal to obey the call to repentance would be followed by chastisement.**—The wrath of God against evil-doers was imminent—already the fruitless tree was marked for destruction, and the axe was in the avenger's hand. But a short delay in the execution of the sentence had been granted, and by the immediate bringing forth of fruits meet for repentance the sentence itself might be averted. In no obscure terms does John announce that the exceptional position and privileges of the Jewish nation were in danger of being forfeited by disobedience, and that a spiritual seed might be raised up to Abraham among those who were not his by natural descent. This warning as to the taking away of blessings and mercies which have been abused and neglected is one we all need to lay to heart in the present day. The overthrow of Christianity in the countries where it was first established is a striking parallel to the rejection of the Jewish people.

SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS ON VERSES 1—14.

Vers. 1, 2. *Four Names.*—Could any irony be keener or any sarcasm more withering than that which writes these four names—Pontius Pilate, Herod, Annas, and Caiaphas—on the frontispiece of the Gospel, and then adds—"While these were reigning and ruling, while these were offering bullocks and goats in propitiation, the word of God came," etc.—*Vaughan.*

Flies in amber.—What a contrast between the exalted rank and the notoriety of these princes and rulers and the obscurity of the men who were so soon to appear on the stage of the world and to inaugurate a movement destined to affect and change the whole of human society! Yet, if we except the name of the Roman emperor, we should probably never have heard of any of these per-

sonages but for their connection with the gospel history. In it their names are preserved like the flies and bits of straw sometimes seen in amber.

"*The word of God came unto John.*" —This expression, which is constantly used of prophets, is never used of Christ. The reason is that the word of God came to them as something foreign to them and from without, whereas Christ was Himself the Word incarnate.

Vers. 2, 3. *The Weakness of Mere Asceticism.*—The wilderness in which John lived was not altogether a solitary place. There were many there living an ascetic life, protesting against the luxurious and vicious habits of the society from which they had separated themselves, and seeking to attain by holy meditation, by self-denial, and by prayer to a vision of God which the Temple worship could not give them. John the Baptist had much in common with these ascetics, so far as the outward conditions of his life were concerned. But great differences existed between him and them.

I. **They had no mission to help and save the world.**—They were bent upon the salvation of their own souls, and attempted no reformation of the evils of society. They feared to endanger their own purity by mixing with other men, and so the world at large was little the better for their self-denial and uprightness. John, on the contrary, came forth from the wilderness to do battle with the sins that were ruining men, and to announce the coming of a new era for Israel and for mankind.

II. **The ascetics were hopeless of the salvation of those from whom they had separated themselves.**—All that they thought possible was their own escape from degradation and ruin. But John did not despair even of those who were sunk in vice, and apparently indifferent to the claims of holiness. His words were full of hope. To all who would listen he spoke of repentance as possible —a fresh start might be made, new habits of righteousness might be cultivated, even by those who were in the lowest depth of degradation. The almighty power of God, which was able to give a heart of flesh in place of the stony heart of unbelief, was a fact on which he laid great stress in all his preaching.

III. **John did not substitute one set of outward religious forms for another.** —Ascetics think the only remedy for evils is in adopting a manner of life like that which they themselves follow. They attach great importance to matters of dress, and food, and outward observance. But John did not call upon his hearers to leave their homes and occupations for a life of contemplation and devotion in the wilderness, or to copy himself in outward habits. He sought to effect an inward, spiritual change in the hearts of men; and the outward acts to which he exhorted them were not of a formal or ritualistic kind, but such as indicated virtues of kindliness, generosity, compassion, and justice.

Ver. 2. *The Desert Preacher.*—A great religious revival is stirring the heart of the nation, and summoning the people, high and low, from the remotest regions of Galilee into the wilderness of Judæa and to the banks of the Jordan. A baptism of repentance is being preached by a young prophet —suddenly, after four hundred years of Divine silence, manifested to Israel —avowedly in preparation for a higher revelation which is to have for its characteristic a baptism of the Holy Ghost and of fire. For the moment this mission of the Baptist has become the Divine dispensation for Israel.—*Vaughan.*

A Good Preacher.

I. **His doctrine is good for us.**
II. **His rules of life are good for us.**
III. **His warnings are good for us.**
—*Taylor.*

The Characteristics of John's Preaching.—1. It was *stern*, like that of Elijah;

the wind, and earthquake, and fire that preceded the "still small voice." 2. It was absolutely dauntless. 3. It shows remarkable insight into human nature —into the needs and temptations of every class. 4. It was intensely practical. 5. It prophesies of the dawn of the kingdom of Christ. (1) His first message was, "Repent"; (2) his second message was, "The kingdom of heaven is at hand"; (3) his final message was, "Behold the Lamb of God." 6. It does not claim the credentials of a single miracle. 7. It had only a partial and temporary popularity: he was like the lamp which burns but for a time, and for which there is no need when the sun rises.—*Farrar.*

"*Baptism of repentance.*"—This baptism differed from the ceremonial washings prescribed in the Jewish law in that it had direct reference to the immediate coming of the Messiah, who would grant the remission of sins. Those who were baptized (1) acknowledged their sorrow for past sins, (2) promised to amend their lives in time to come, and (3) declared their faith in the Christ, whose forerunner John was.

Ver. 4. "*The voice.*"—The prophecy draws attention to the work rather than to the worker: the message, and not the remarkable personality of John, is that on which stress is laid. It is a voice rather than a man. "Are we to content ourselves with a general application of the details of John's work as a pioneer, or is it allowable to see in the bringing low of mountains and hills the humiliation of Pharisaic pride, in the filling up of valleys the overcoming of Sadducean indifference, in making straight the crooked the correction of the guile and falsehood of others (say of the publicans), and in making smooth the rough ways a removal of the evil habits that are found even in the best of men? However it may be, the general intention of the quotation is to represent repentance as the one distinguishing feature of John's baptism" (*Godet*).

Ver. 6. "*All flesh.*"—In the preceding verse stress is laid upon the obstacles in the way of those who preach the gospel—the difficulties arising from human pride, indifference, unbelief, and evil passions; in this verse the universality of the salvation offered to mankind is plainly set forth.

Vers. 7-9. *The Preacher of Repentance and Righteousness.*

I. **His first sledge-hammer blow shatters one false trust**—namely, that in external ceremonial as cleansing. What moved John's anger was the very fact that they had come to be "baptized," as if that was to do them any good, and was sufficient for escaping the coming wrath.

II. **Another swing of his mace crushes another**—namely, that in natural descent from the heir of promise. Messiah was to be *their* Messiah, the people thought. John tells them that God can admit "these stones"—the water-worn rocks littering the channel of the Jordan—to the privileges in which they trusted. Surely this points, however dimly, to the transference of the promises to the Gentiles.

III. **The third turn in the hot stream of indignant rebuke goes deeper.**—Still in opposition to his hearers' baseless confidences, he attacks their whole conception of the mission of the Messiah, and declares it to be an immediately impending work of judgment. The negative character of not bearing good fruit is fatal.—*Maclaren.*

The Baptist's Message.—When Messiah was near, John was appointed—

I. **To give warning,** and to tell them that the Saviour whom they had long looked for was at last nigh.

II. He had to tell them, further, **that they were not ready for His coming.** Their life, unreal and sinful, must be thoroughly reformed before they could meet the King with wel-

come. "Repent!" was the message of this stern prophet—a message to all—a message that urged a reform that went much deeper than the outside, and involved an entire revolution of the inner nature. But though he could indicate the disease, and make it felt—

III. **He could not cure it.**—He could not reach down to the inmost defilement and take it away. The water was a fit symbol of the cold, unsatisfying, intellectual character of his ministry, just as the fire with which Jesus Christ baptized was an emblem of the warming, searching character of His ministry.—*Nicoll.*

Ver. 7. "*Vipers.*"—*I.e.* both malicious and cunning. The comparison is justified (1) by the corrupt condition of the nation, which showed itself in formalism, hypocrisy, and unbelief; and (2) by the desire to receive the baptism of John as a precautionary measure against coming wrath, without conforming to the spiritual requirements which alone gave the rite its true value. This cunning was evidence that, though they were descended from Abraham, they were not animated by his faith and devotion. Cf. with this passage John viii. 37-44, in which Jesus speaks of "their father the devil."

"*Wrath to come.*"—The connection of John's ministry with the prophecy concerning Elias (Mal. iii. 1, iv. 5) would naturally suggest to men's mind "the wrath to come" there also foretold. It was the general expectation of the Jews that troublous times would accompany the appearance of the Messiah. John is now speaking in the true character of a prophet, foretelling the wrath soon to be poured out on the Jewish nation. Mere fear of the wrath of God is not an adequate foundation for a religious life. It is negative in its character, and like all feelings it is liable to be transitory and to vary in degree from time to time. The true motive to a holy life is "love of the Father" (cf. 1 John ii. 15-17). The warnings in the word of God *do* appeal to a sense of fear, but they are rather calculated to deter the impenitent than to inspire the holy emotions which go to make up a religious life and character.

The Wrath to Come.—A good many people want to flee from the wrath, but are not willing to give up that which draws the wrath down upon them. There is often terror without penitence. If many were asked, "Who warned you to flee?" the answer could only be, "Fear—the terrors of death and eternity." John's question is therefore a very proper one. The only flight that saves from coming wrath is away from sin to Christ. No man is saved who carries his sins with him in his flight. The door of the refuge is wide enough to admit the penitent, but not wide enough to admit any cherished sin.—*Miller.*

Righteous Anger.—The severity of John's language may shock us, but we must keep in view (1) that his was righteous anger against hypocrisy, such as prophets in all times and Jesus Himself manifested—that in it there were no personal feelings of irritation and malice; and (2) that his rebukes were calculated to remove the evils that excited his anger. The judgments of which he spoke were not inevitable, but might be averted by repentance and sincere faith.

The Pertinacity of Hypocrites.—Those whose habits of uttering falsehoods to God, and of deceiving themselves, lead them to hold out hypocrisy and pretension, instead of the reality, ought to be urged, with greater sharpness than other men, to true repentance. There is an astonishing pertinacity in hypocrites; and until they have been flayed by violence, they obstinately keep their skin.—*Calvin.*

Who may rebuke with severity?—

Severity in reproof of sin is only becoming in the mouths of those of inflexible integrity, and is detestable when shown by those who are in heart inclined to the very sins they condemn with their lips. Frequently those who are intemperate and unchaste are the severest critics of those who give way to these vices. Our objection to severity of rebuke and denunciatory language is, it is to be feared, in many cases the result of indifference to holiness and not of a charitable disposition.

Ver. 8. "*Bring forth fruits.*"—Insincerity is the great charge brought by John against his nation: neither multiplied professions of devotion nor submission to new religious rites could work a cure. The only adequate evidence of a radical change would be a change of life. The preaching of John illustrates the operation of the law upon the heart and conscience. He (1) demands holiness of character and righteousness of life, but (2) imparts no power by which this great change may be effected. And so the law (1) awakens and stimulates the conscience, and (2) by creating within us a sense of our helplessness creates a longing after that salvation which is the gift of God through Jesus Christ.

"*Begin not.*"—The natural impulse of the unregenerate heart is to seek out excuses and subterfuges when the conscience is touched.

"*Abraham to our father.*"—But descent from Abraham was not (1) a mere privilege, securing for all who could claim it inalienable advantages; it was (2) a relationship that imposed obligations: if it did not lead to a cultivation of Abraham's faith, it would only draw down a heavier condemnation. Cf. St. Paul's reasoning in Rom. iv. that the privileges and blessings conferred upon Abraham belong to all who manifest his faith. See also Gal. iii. 7-9.

"*God is able,*" *etc.*—He is not dependent upon us for the maintenance of His honour or for the existence of His Church in the world. If we are faithless, He will raise up those who will serve Him with sincerity (cf. Mal. i. 9-11). It is to be feared that many regard the Church as an institution which they keep up, and which would suffer perceptibly if they withdrew their support.

"*Of these stones.*"—As He formed Adam of the dust of the earth.—*Bengel.*

"*Of these stones.*"—And so God did. For, as Joshua, the type of Jesus, took up twelve *stones* from the bed of the same river Jordan (Josh. iv. 1-9), and set them upon the western bank there for a memorial, so Jesus, the true Joshua, after His baptism in the same river, began to choose His twelve apostles from obscure and unlearned men, like rude and unhewn stones of the wilderness, and to make them to be the foundation-stones of His Church (Rev. xxi. 14), which is the true family of Abraham, the Israel of God, the heavenly Jerusalem, the city that hath foundations, whose builder is God (Heb. xi. 10).—*Wordsworth.*

Fruits Worthy of Repentance.—There is only one way to prove that we have truly repented—not saying that we have, but showing the evidence in our lives. Repentance is worthless if it only produces a few tears, a spasm of regret, a little fright, and then a return to the old wicked ways. Leaving the sins we repent of, and walking in the clean new ways of holiness—these are "works worthy of repentance."—*Miller.*

Ver. 9. "*The axe is laid unto the root.*"—From a statement of what God might *possibly* do, *i.e.* raise up from among the Gentiles spiritual children of Abraham, John passes to a statement of what God will *certainly* do, *i.e.* execute judgment speedily upon the hypocritical and unbeliev-

ing. There is mercy mingled even with this Divine anger against sin: (1) a warning is given beforehand by this prophet of what may be expected; and (2) there is a delay in the execution of judgment. None, therefore, on whom the judgment comes can plead ignorance or not having had an opportunity of amendment. The figure of cutting down barren trees is connected with the phrase already used (ver. 8)—"fruits worthy of repentance": it is a figure frequently used in the New Testament.

The Divine Patience.—The picture is a very suggestive one. Judgment is impending. The tree may be cut down at any moment. The axe still lying unused shows patience in the husbandman: he is waiting to see if the fruitless tree will yet bear fruit. The meaning is very plain. God waits long for impenitent sinners to return to Him. He is slow to punish or to close the day of opportunity. He desires all to repent and be saved. Yet we must not trifle with the Divine patience and forbearance. Though not yet lifted to strike, the axe is lying close at hand, ready to be used. *God has two axes*: 1. One for pruning, removing fruitless branches from fruitful trees. 2. One which He uses only in judgment, cutting down fruitless trees. The whole of life is very critical. On any moment may hang the destinies of eternity.—*Miller.*

Vers. 10-14. *Our Every-day Life.*—From John's several answers we see that religion is not something entirely apart from our every-day life. The inquirers were to begin at once to do their several every-day works religiously. Not to give up their callings, but to do their duty as good and true men in their callings, to carry the principles of true religion into all their actions—this was the Baptist's counsel. It is well for all of us to seize and apply the lesson. Religion is living out the principles of Christianity in one's ordinary weekday life.—*Ibid.*

The Rudiments of Morality.—The A B C of morality—justice, charity, abstinence from class vices—is all that John requires. These homely pieces of goodness would be the best "fruits" of repentance. Not to do what everybody in the same calling does, and I used to do, is a great proof of a changed man, though the thing itself may be very lowly virtue. We need the lesson quite as much as the multitudes, or the publicans and soldiers.—*Maclaren.*

Ver. 10. "*What shall we do then?*"—Cf. Acts ii. 37, and notice the very different reply given by St. Peter. John the Baptist says nothing of faith: "the fruits" were acts of kindliness, equity, and humanity, as described in the following verses. These were preparatory to faith (cf. Acts x. 35); they are the "honest and good heart" in which the seed of the word of Christ takes root and grows (chap. viii. 15). Three classes of inquirers are spoken of: 1. The multitudes (ver. 10); 2. Publicans (ver. 12); 3. Soldiers (ver. 14). John does not summon them to give up their callings and adopt his mode of life, but to remain in their callings, and there to resist the special temptations that might beset them and to serve God with sincerity. It is interesting to notice the special acquaintance with human nature and with the peculiar circumstances of different modes of life which John displays. Though he had lived a recluse, he had not divested himself of interest in human society, and his knowledge of his own heart and of the word of God had taught him the weaknesses and temptations which beset human nature. It often happens that shrewder and truer judgments are formed by those who live apart from society and are accustomed to reading and meditation than by those who are absorbed in the business and active life of the world.

Ver. 11. "*Impart to him that hath none.*"—Cf. Jas. ii. 15; 1 John iii. 17.

How quickly would the inequalities in society disappear if this spirit of kindliness and generosity were generally manifested! And yet there is nothing revolutionary in it: the rich and prosperous are told to impart to their less fortunate brethren; the poor are not told to demand a portion of their neighbours' property.

Vers. 12, 13. "*Then came also publicans.*—It is remarkable that John does not tell the publicans to abandon their profession, which was regarded by the stricter Jews as an unholy one. And in so far as he does not condemn their calling, he seems to pronounce the opinion afterwards expressed by Jesus that it was lawful to pay tribute to Cæsar (xx. 25).

Ver. 14. "*The soldiers likewise.*"—"He did not say, Cast away your arms, quit the camp; for he knew that soldiers are not homicides, but ministers of law—not avengers of personal injuries, but defenders of the public safety" (*Wordsworth*). "The desire of injury, the savageness of revenge, the lust of power, etc.—these are sins which are justly condemned in wars, which are, however, sometimes undertaken by good men for the sake of punishing the violence of others, either by command of God, or of some lawful human authority" (*Augustine*).

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 15—20.

Acceptance and Rejection of the Divine Message.—The work of separating the wheat from the chaff and of bringing to light the hidden thoughts of men is done by every true messenger of God to men. Some receive the Divine word gladly, others harden their hearts against it. This twofold result was very marked in the case of John the Baptist.

I. **The Divine message he brought awakened the attention of the nation and excited eager questionings and expectations.**—The people as a whole accepted John as a prophet sent from God, received his rebukes of their sins without resentment, and believed on his testimony that great events were near at hand. Some thought that he must himself be the Christ; nor was their idea altogether ill-founded, for in the person of John, Christ was indeed standing and knocking at the door of their hearts. But John with the humility which is characteristic of true greatness shrank from accepting the honour paid him, and directed the thoughts of the people again to One mightier than himself. He spoke of the greater power, and majesty, and authority with which the Anointed of God would be clothed, and to his previous warnings and threatenings added words that were good tidings of salvation. And in this subordination of the Baptist to the Saviour we have an illustration of the fact, which we ever need to keep in mind, that mere repentance is not enough—that it is but a state of preparation for that holy life which springs from faith in Christ and communion with Christ.

II. **The call to repentance and amendment of life was in some instances rejected, and John, like so many other of the prophets, had to endure persecution on account of the faithfulness with which he discharged his duty.**—The ruling classes of the nation were disposed to deny his Divine mission, and were only kept from openly opposing him by the strong feeling in his favour on the part of the nation at large. The deepest disgrace, however, attaches to Herod for the part he played in laying violent hands upon the Baptist. Ecclesiastical authorities might be divided upon the question whether John was a prophet sent from God or not; but there could be no doubt that the conduct of Herod which drew upon him the Baptist's rebuke and exhortation, was without excuse. Both his own conscience and the plain teaching of the law of

Moses, which he professed to reverence, must have convinced the Jewish prince that John's words of blame were amply deserved. In other parts of his conduct Herod seems to have been disposed to obey the admonitions of the Baptist; but this sin he would not renounce. A solemn warning for all of us lies in this fact. The sin we will not give up must lead us into utter antagonism to God; and no amendment we may effect in other departments of our conduct will atone for the evil that we retain. The thought, too, is suggested by the case before us that rejection of revelation is, in some instances at any rate, due to corruption of heart; and those who are under the impression that the barriers in their way are intellectual difficulties would do well to consider whether the real explanation is not to be found in a depraved nature and a perverse will. The "evil heart of unbelief" may not in all cases be the cause why revelation is rejected; but few who are acquainted with the word of God and with the facts of human nature can doubt that in most cases it is.

SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS ON VERSES 15–20.

Vers. 15-17. *John as a Herald.*

I. His clear conception of his own limits.

II. The bowing down of the strong, stern spirit before the Coming One.

III. The profound insight into Christ's work.—*Maclaren.*

Preacher and Witness.

I. A great preacher.

II. A plain teacher.

III. A faithful witness to Christ.—*Taylor.*

Ver. 15. "*Whether he were the Christ.*"—The people had not as yet so carnal a notion of the Messiah, for there was nothing of outward splendour about John; nevertheless they entertained these thoughts about him.—*Bengel.*

Ver. 16. *The Spirit's Fire.*—The two mean but one, the fire being the emblem of the Spirit. Selected to express the work of the Spirit of God—

I. By reason of its leaping, triumphant, and transforming energy.—This fire of God, if it falls on you, will burn up all your coldness, and will make you glow with enthusiasm: (1) *working your intellectual convictions in fire, not in frost;* (2) *making your creed a living power in your lives;* (3) *kindling you into a flame of earnest consecration in life-work.* Christians are to be set on fire of God. We have more than enough of cold icebergs. The metaphor of fire also suggests—

II. Purifying.—"The spirit of burning" will burn the filth out of us. Foul clay must be thrust into the fire to have its blackness burned out of it. This too is the way in which a soul is cleansed. No washing will ever clear sin. Get the love of God into your hearts, and the fire of the Divine Spirit into your spirits to melt you down, as it were, and then the scum and the dross will come to the top, and you can skim them off.—*Maclaren.*

"*One mightier.*"

I. Mightier than John, because "mighty to save."

II. Mightier than John, who could impart no spiritual gift. Jesus has sent "the Comforter."

III. Mightier than John, who could only warn of judgment. "*Thou* shalt come to be our Judge."—*Taylor.*

"*Fire.*"

I. The Holy Spirit is fire.

II. Christ plunges us into this Divine fire.

III. That fiery baptism quickens and cleanses.—*Maclaren.*

Wherein consists the Superiority of Jesus?—1. John calls men to repentance, Jesus remits sin. 2. John pro-

claims the kingdom of heaven, Jesus bestows it. 3. John baptizes with water, Jesus with the Spirit and with fire.

"*Not worthy to unloose.*"—"It was the token of a slave's having become his master's property, to *loose* his shoe, to *tie* the same, or to *carry* the necessary articles for him to the bath" (*Lightfoot*). The varying forms of expression used in the Gospels all illustrate this relationship between master and slave. It is to be noted that this language would indicate utter abjectness and servility of mind if Jesus had been a mere man, however exalted in character and office; it can only be explained and justified by the fact that He was God incarnate. And it gives us a vivid idea of the beauty of John's character to see that at the height of his popularity he thus effaces himself in favour of One who would only by the eye of faith be recognised to be more than a lowly Galilæan peasant.

Baptism with Water, with Fire, and with the Spirit.—Baptism with water had in view the *forgiveness of sins*, and baptism with the Spirit meant the renewal and *sanctification* of the nature: the one was negative, and the other positive. And it was baptism with the Spirit that gave efficacy to the material rite. Observe that in the original there is no preposition before "water," and that there is one before "Spirit"; the reason is that "water" is merely a means employed, and "the Spirit" more than that. Baptism of a threefold character: (1) with water; (2) with the Holy Spirit; and (3) with fire. "In the triple element of baptism there is contained or indicated a progressive gradation of the spiritual development of life, and of the element through which it occurs. Whilst the lowest degree, *i.e.* the baptism with water, refers to the external purification of sins and repentance, the baptism of the Spirit, on the contrary, refers to the internal purification by faith (the Holy Spirit being considered as the regenerating principle, John iii. 1 *sqq.*; Acts i. 5), and, finally, the baptism of fire expresses the transformation, or sanctification, of the new-born higher life in its peculiar nature" (*Olshausen*).

"*With fire.*"—No reference is made in the use of this phrase to "fire" as an emblem of Divine wrath against the impenitent, as in the following verse. The very idea of punishment is utterly incongruous with the rite of baptism, which has man's salvation always in view. It rather describes a holy influence that (1) searches the nature, (2) consumes the dross in it, (3) refines the good elements of character, and (4) elevates and ennobles the whole being. To purify, illumine, transform, inflame with holy fervour and zeal, and carry upwards, as Elijah was carried up to heaven in *a chariot of fire*. A prophecy specially fulfilled at Pentecost, when the Holy Spirit descended in tongues of fire (Acts ii. 3).

Ver. 17. "*Whose fan is in His hand.*"—The royal majesty of Christ is indicated in the use of the word "His"—"His hand," "His floor," and "His garner." Observe it is not said "His chaff"; the wheat represents those who are His, the chaff those who reject Him, and are therefore themselves rejected, and are not counted by Him as His own. In the figure of the axe reference was made solely to the fate of the impenitent: this describes the distinction being made between the sincere and the hypocritical—between those who become holy and those who remain in their sins. His work of judgment is going forward every day; but the full accomplishment of it will not be seen till the last day. The same figure is used in Amos ix. 9; Jer. xv. 7; chap. xxii. 31.

"*Wheat.*"—But how is Christ said to separate the *chaff* from the *wheat*, when He can find nothing in men but mere *chaff*? The answer is easy. The elect, who by their nature are only *chaff*, become *wheat* by the grace of God. —*Calvin.*

"*Chaff.*"—Empty, light, worthless persons, who have nothing of religion but the mere profession, who are devoid of all solidity of principle and character (cf. Ps. i. 4).

"*Fire unquenchable.*"—There seems at first sight to be a contradiction between "burning up" and "fire unquenchable." But the paradox is explained by the spiritual facts of the case: (1) there is an utter destruction of all that constitutes true life and happiness; but (2) the persons themselves are not destroyed—in that dread state they are ever conscious of an unending doom. Such seem to be the two ideas suggested by the use of the phrases "burn up" and "unquenchable." That "fire" here is not the material element, but a Divine anger of which the material fire is an emblem, is quite evident. If we are to interpret "fire" as literal flame, what can we make of "fan," "threshing-floor," "wheat," and "chaff"? "Let us lay aside the speculations by which foolish men weary themselves to no purpose, and satisfy ourselves with believing that these forms of speech denote, in a manner suited to our feeble capacity, a dreadful torment, which no man can now comprehend and no language can express" (*Calvin*).

Vers. 18-20. *John's Later Ministry.*—Why does Luke anticipate the order of events to introduce the notice of John's imprisonment at this point? Probably *to mark more distinctly the introductory character of his ministry.* Luke will finish up his summary of John, and, as it were, get him out of the way before he brings John's Lord on the scene. This Gospel has no account of John's martyrdom. The morning star fades before sunrise. The notice of his imprisonment—

I. **Completes Luke's outline of his character and work.**

II. **Shows John as a fearless rebuker of highly placed vice.**—How he got access to "kings' houses" we do not know. Whether he rebuked Herod publicly or privately we are not informed. He had only reproof for the royal profligate.

III. **Shows that the climax of a bad man's guilt is his persecution of those who would win him to goodness.**—The martyr's imprisonment seals the king's condemnation, showing his conviction that the preacher spoke the truth, and was only to be silenced by force.—*Maclaren.*

Ver. 18. "*Preached good tidings*" (*R.V.*).—Preached, lit. "proclaimed good tidings." There is something pathetic in the contrast between the good tidings which he made known to others and the tragic fate which came upon himself. From a comparison of John ii. 13 with iii. 24, it appears that John was not cast into prison until after the first Passover attended by Christ after His baptism. It would seem as if St. Luke were anxious to exhibit the history of John at one view, and to connect his bold preaching with the imprisonment in which it issued. And probably this is not without its teaching. By coupling the remote cause with its ultimate consequence—the course pursued with the results it eventually led to (dropping every intermediate fact and all irrelevant circumstances)—the inspired writers forcibly remind us how *He* must regard our lives, and actions, and characters who seeth as well as "declareth the end from the beginning."

Ver. 19. "*Herod . . . reproved by him.*"—Note that John the Baptist reproved Herod himself. He did neither (1) inflame the minds of the people against their ruler by describing and denouncing the immoral character of the life he was living, nor (2) as Christian prelates have been known to do, condone the wickedness of the king and live on good terms with his mistress. He was different from many of the "court preachers" known to history. Neither the vicious private life of the sovereign nor the evils of his public administration of affairs escaped re-

buke. Cf. the relations between Elijah and Ahab, Nathan and David.

Ver. 20. "*Added yet this above all.*" —The worst of all the evil things that Herod did was to murder the Baptist. Other sins might plead some palliation because of strong evil passions urging Herod on; but this was evidence of hatred of God and of holiness. For it is to be distinctly noted that he regarded John as a messenger and minister of God at the very time that he imprisoned him and at the later time when he beheaded him. As a Jew, Herod could not plead ignorance of God's nature and claims, and of the inviolable majesty which clothed those whom He inspired and sent to speak to men in His name. Very seldom do the sacred historians manifest any expression of personal feeling excited by the events they record; but here in the phrase "added yet this above all" the indignation of the writer is but slightly veiled. The words are equivalent to the Hebrew expression "filling up the measure of iniquity."

Vers. 19, 20. *Fidelity to duty.*— There are three periods in the life of John the Baptist. The first of these, of which we know little, lasted for thirty years, the greater part of which he spent in the desert in preparation for his life-work; the second is that of the few months of his public ministry; and the third, perhaps a still shorter period, which he spent as a prisoner in the castle of Machærus. In these different circumstances his character was subjected to severe tests. The task laid upon him of rebuking the sins of every class of the nation required rare steadfastness of soul, and fidelity to the God whose messenger he was. But his success as a prophet had its perils also. It remained to be seen whether he would come safely through them. The movement he inaugurated spread far and wide over the land, until it reached and affected even the sceptical and voluptuous Herod, who summoned him to his palace and seemed disposed to accept his teaching. Worldly wisdom might have counselled John to exercise caution in alluding to the flagrant sin in which Herod lived, or, disguising itself under the pretence of charity, might have found many excuses for it in the evil influences that had surrounded him from his earliest life, in the bad example of his father, and in the licence which is so often allowed to men in his position. John, however, spoke out against the sin of the king in as plain terms as ever he had used in rebuking the sins of Pharisees, and publicans, and soldiers. He addressed himself to the offender, and did not, as already remarked, court the popularity which a demagogue sometimes wins by inflaming the minds of the people with denunciations of the crimes of their rulers. Two things are noticeable in John's rebuke of Herod:—

I. **It was unhesitating and direct.**— "It is not lawful for thee to have thy brother's wife." It was the sinfulness of the king's conduct, and not its imprudence, or the scandal it caused, or the risks it provoked, that he laid stress upon. He spoke as one who did not dare to be silent, and not as one who was conscious of the heroism of his conduct.

II. **It was unselfish.**—John's was not one of those hard, pitiless natures that feel no compunction in administering blame. In spite of the austerity of his life, his soul was of the most exquisite sensibility. No one can read the touching words he spoke when his disciples left him to attach themselves to Jesus without perceiving this. "He that hath the bride is the bridegroom; but the friend of the bridegroom, which standeth and heareth him, rejoiceth greatly because of the bridegroom's voice: this my joy therefore is fulfilled: He must increase, but I must decrease." The firmness in rebuking sin shown by this man of such profound humility and fine sensitiveness of feeling is all the more wonderful. It must have cost him keen pain to inflict pain, and

to speak words of rebuke which he could scarcely fail to know would be fruitless, except in provoking against himself a profound and unsleeping hatred.

The third period of John's life, when he lay in the dungeon of the palace, and heard rumours of the wonderful works of Christ, who, however, showed no signs of attempting his release—when he had leisure to think of the apparent defeat of his mission and of the overthrow of the hopes and anticipations he had once cherished—was also one when his faith was subjected to new and severe tests. Nor need we wonder if in the hour of darkness he was afflicted by doubt as to the Divine mission of Him whom he had pointed out as the Messiah and the Lamb of God. His doubts, nevertheless, were not those of a poor and weak religious character. They were misgivings caused by separation from Christ, and they were solved by an appeal to Christ.

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 21—38.

The Divine Sonship of Christ and of Man.—Nowhere else in the Gospels is the fact that Jesus Christ was in a unique sense the Son of God more plainly stated than here. And yet His true humanity is no less emphatically asserted in the genealogical table which traces His descent from the founder of our race. Nor does it seem to the author of the Gospel that there is any insuperable difficulty in believing that the Son of God became Son of man—as though the Divine and the human natures were alien to each other; on the contrary, he speaks of *man* as being in a sense the son of God (ver. 38).

I. **The Divine Sonship of Christ.**—To all outward seeming Jesus was simply a young man, now about the age of thirty, who had come like others to receive baptism from John. But by supernatural signs—the opened heaven, the descent of the Spirit, and the voice of God—His unique relationship with God is declared. His absolute sinlessness is asserted in the words, "In Thee I am well pleased"; and consequently there is a difference between Him and every other member of the race with which He is now connected. He is born of woman, but not of human parentage (ver. 23); and though akin through His mother with every member of the human race—for all are descended from a common ancestor—He has not inherited a depraved nature. No sins of His own are therefore to be thought of as having been washed away by the water of baptism. Yet by His identification of Himself with His brethren He took upon Himself their shame and guilt.

II. **The Divine sonship of man.**—The great distinction between man and the other creatures is that he was made in the image of God. And therefore there is a kinship between him and his Creator which the Evangelist expresses in the words, "Adam, which was the son of God." Because of this relationship it is possible for man to know God, and love Him, and serve Him, and have communion with Him, as none of the other creatures can do. In consequence of it, also, it was possible for Christ to assume our nature and be "found in fashion as a man," without any confusion of natures in His person. Those who were sons of God, however, differed in one marked respect from Him who was the Son of God: they had lost many of the privileges of sonship because of disobedience, while the communion of Christ with God was perfect and unbroken. And the one great purpose of the Saviour's life was to restore fellowship between heaven and earth, between the Father and His human children. To Christ the heaven was opened that He might lead us into it, the Holy Spirit descended upon Him to pass from Him to us, and with us in Christ the Father is well pleased.

SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS ON VERSES 21—38.

Ver. 21. "*When all the people were baptized.*"—The peculiar phrase "when all the people were baptized" may imply that the baptism of Jesus was towards the close of John's ministry; it may, however, be St. Luke's method of explaining the reason why Jesus submitted to baptism. "All the people," the nation, by accepting John's baptism, were turning to God, and Jesus did not hold aloof from the movement. By His incarnation He had become a member of our race, by His circumcision He had become a Jew, and He fulfilled the obligations which rested upon Him of obedience to the Divine commandments. If we understand why He received the rite of circumcision, we shall understand why He received that of baptism, for the same general ideas underlie both rites. So far from separating Himself from others, as One who was of a different nature from ours, and free from the necessity of seeking forgiveness, He identified Himself with mankind so as to bear the burden of condemnation and be subject even unto death. His own explanation (Matt. iii. 15), "Thus it becometh us to fulfil all righteousness," plainly declares that He submitted to every commandment that is laid by God upon man. Hence St. Luke speaks of His baptism as a matter of course, since Israel as a nation was accepting John's ministry. It is probable that this was the only occasion when John and Jesus met together, although their careers were so closely connected and intervolved. 1. The birth of John preceded and heralded that of Jesus. 2. In his ministry also John acted as the forerunner of Jesus. 3. In his death by violence he offered a presage of the death of Jesus by cruel hands two or three years later.

A Private Celebration.—The narrative of St. Luke seems to imply that the baptism of Jesus was not at a time when there were others receiving the rite. John was evidently either alone or there were but few spectators. The mere fact of Jesus standing and praying after His baptism would lead us to infer that it was a private rather than a public celebration of the rite. Though He received baptism, He was separate from sinners; though He afterwards received burial, He was laid in a tomb "wherein was never yet man laid."

Jesus baptized.—Jesus would identify Himself with His people in their most humbling experiences. So He went down into the water (not, indeed, to be cleansed by it; rather, as an old writer says, to cleanse it), and the Divine voice declared, "This is My beloved Son!" He descended into the water, just as He submitted in His early years to the Jewish law. His being baptized was part of His unutterable humiliation. Jesus pledged Himself to the fulfilment of all righteousness on behalf of the race whom He had come to save.—*Nicoll.*

Weighty Reasons for His receiving This Rite.—There must have been weighty reasons for this water ceremony, so solemnly observed, or He never could have found place for it among His crowded days of teaching, healing, and comforting His countrymen. Though able to set all symbols and all forms aside if He chose, He went down into the water, at the beginning of His life's work, in order, we are told, to "fulfil all righteousness." He "came by water," and takes peculiar pains in His teaching that every Christian life must begin in the same way. "Born of water." "Baptize them." Why is this? Because one great part of our Saviour's work is to purify men's lives. —*Huntington.*

Fellowship with our Weakness and Sinfulness.—In the baptism Christ took upon Him the fellowship of man's weakness and sinfulness; and because His brethren needed cleansing and its symbol, He, the Sinless, took part of the same.—*Maclaren.*

Vers. 21, 22. *The first recorded Prayer of Christ and its Answer.*—It was when He was praying that the Spirit was sent down upon Him, and in all probability *it was this which at the moment He was praying for.* He was in immediate need of the Holy Spirit to equip Him for His great task. The human nature of Jesus was dependent from first to last on the Holy Ghost, being thereby made a fit organ for the Divine; and it was in the strength of this that all His work was done. If in any measure our life is to be an imitation of His—if we are to help in carrying on His work in the world, or in filling up what is lacking in His sufferings—we must be dependent on the same influence. How are we to get it? He has told us Himself. By prayer. "Your heavenly Father shall give the Holy Spirit to them that ask Him." Power, like character, comes from the fountain of prayer.—*Stalker.*

Christ's Prayerfulness.—In one sense Christ's prayers formed the truest proof of His manhood. His practice of prayer and His exhortations to it are chiefly recorded in the Gospel of Luke, which is pre-eminently a gospel of the Son of man. He prayed after His baptism.—*Nicoll.*

Prayer at the Baptism and at the Transfiguration.—In conformity with Luke's psychological purpose as an evangelist, the effect of prayer upon two of the sublimest external phenomena in the Saviour's life is mentioned by him. Prayer on His part is the psychological antecedent of the scene at the Baptism (and of the glory at the Transfiguration). To St. Luke alone we owe *both* notices. "While He was yet praying, the heaven was opened." There was not a magic cleaving of the heavens, a sudden and theatrical radiance steeping face, and form, and vesture. There was a human factor, a suitable antecedent, in the perfect Man. The inward glory grew outward, coalesced with the opening sky, and melted into the light of heaven. Among human faces few, indeed, look like the face of an angel, or are touched with heavenly radiance. The only true light on any face is sure to be a light of prayer.—*Alexander.*

The Significance of that Prayer.—Who would not penetrate, if he were permitted, into the mystery of that prayer—that prayer between the thirty years' seclusion and the three years' publicity—between the calm, peaceful home of the past, and the troubled, storm-stossed no-home of the future? It was the calling in of strength for the dread ordeal of the Temptation. It was the "putting on of the whole armour of God" for that great "withstanding in the evil day." *The prayer had its answer on the instant.* To it the heaven was opened, the Holy Ghost descended in visible form—visible to two persons, the baptizer and the Baptized; and a Voice was heard, audible to two persons—appointed sign to the one, comforting solace to the Other: "Thou art My beloved Son; in Thee I am well pleased." That prolonged and protracted prayer has its lesson for us. *Much of the blessing of sermon, sacrament, and service is lost by the want of the after-prayer of which Christ's is the example.* Too soon does the world come back upon us after the holiest communion, after the most inspiring converse with the Invisible. "Jesus also being baptized and still praying, praying still, still praying on, the heaven was opened, and the Holy Ghost descended."—*Vaughan.*

The Burden of the Prayer and the Answer of the Prayer.—The Gospel of the Son of man specially notes Christ's prayers as the tokens of His true manhood. The signs following were—

I. **The answer,** and may help us to understand—

II. **The burden** of the prayer. The connection between the petition and the opened heavens may bring us the sweet confidence that for us, too, unworthy as we are, the same blessed

gift and voice will fall on our hearts and ears if we, in His name, pray as He did.—*Maclaren.*

Our Lord's first recorded Prayer.—We are first introduced to our Lord in prayer by Luke, who relates how He came to John to be baptized. The narrative, though it does not say so in so many words, plainly implies that as soon as the Lord had come up out of the water, He set Himself to beseech His Father's blessing on the act. The answer, more, doubtless, for our sakes than His own, was forthwith visibly and audibly given by the Holy Ghost descending upon Him, and a Voice declaring, "This is My beloved Son!"—*Markby.*

Various Occasions on which Jesus Prayed.—St. Luke on eight other occasions calls attention to the prayers of Jesus—after severe labours (v. 16); before the choosing of the apostles (vi. 12); before Peter's great confession (ix. 18); at His transfiguration (ix. 28, 29); for Peter (xxii. 32); in Gethsemane (xxii. 41); for His murderers (xxiii. 34); and at the moment of death (xxiii. 46).—*Farrar.*

The Threefold Sign.

I. **The opened heavens.**—Opened not only for the descending Dove, but for the ascending aspiration and gaze, symbolising *the access thither* which that Son had who "is in heaven" even while He has come forth from heaven and remains on earth. United to Him by faith, we too may walk beneath an ever-open heaven, and look up through the lower blue to the very throne, His home and ours.

II. **The descending Dove.**—This symbol recalls the brooding Spirit hovering over chaos, and symbolises the gentle Spirit of God dwelling in Him who was "meek and lowly of heart." The whole fulness of that Spirit falls and abides on Him. It dwelt in Him that He might impart it to us, and the Dove of God might rest in our hearts.

III. **The solemn Voice.**—Thus was brought to Jesus Himself, in His manhood, the assurance of His Sonship, of the perfect love and satisfaction of the Father in Him. It was meant for Him, but not for Him alone. If we accept its witness, we too become sons; and if we find God in Him, we shall find Him well pleased even with us, and be "accepted in the Beloved."—*Maclaren.*

Consecration to Office of Redeemer.—Three outward signs were given of the consecration of Jesus to the office of Redeemer of the world. 1. The heavens were opened—henceforth He has perfect knowledge of God's plan in the work of salvation—the treasures of Divine wisdom are open to Him. 2. The descent of the Spirit, the source of life, endowing Him with all needed gifts and powers; given in fulness to Him and abiding permanently upon Him. 3. The voice from heaven giving Him in clearest form assurance of His Divine Sonship, and of the love of the Father to Him, of which He was to make His brethren partakers. The first two evangelists tell us that this series of Divine manifestations was seen by Jesus; John the Baptist tells us that he also saw it (John i. 32). As there were more than one witness it could not have been a mere figment of the imagination, and therefore St. Luke relates it as a plain objective fact. "The heaven was opened," etc.

The Triune Nature of the Godhead.—Jesus prays to God, the Spirit descends upon Him, and the voice of the Father is heard. The triune nature of the Godhead is thus declared. "When the Son is baptized, the Father testifies that He is present; present also is the Holy Spirit; never can the Trinity be broken up (*a se separari*)" (*Augustine*). By Christ's appointment the doctrine of the Trinity which was first distinctly unfolded at His baptism is set forth in the formula to be used on occasions when believers are baptized (Matt. xxviii. 19).

"*Heaven was opened.*"—Heaven, which was closed by the first Adam, is opened again over the second.

"*Like a dove.*"—On account of the mildness of Christ (cf. Isa. xlii. 2, 3), by which He kindly and gently called and every day invites sinners to the hope of salvation, the Holy Spirit descended upon Him in the appearance of a dove. And in this symbol has been held out to us an eminent token of the sweetest consolation, that we may not fear to approach to Christ, who meets us, not in the formidable power of the Spirit, but clothed with gentle and lovely grace.—*Calvin.*

The Significance of the Symbol.—The dove is used in other parts of Scripture as a symbol of (1) purity (Cant. vi. 9); (2) harmlessness (Matt. x. 16); (3) modesty and gentleness (Cant. ii. 14); and (4) of beauty (Ps. lxviii. 13). And in the history of the Deluge it is the dove with the olive leaf that tells that the peace is restored between heaven and earth (Gen. viii. 11).

The Holy Dove.—The living symbol identified with this Pentecost which inaugurated Christ's official life was seen by Jesus and John, possibly also by a number of those of the spiritually fit who were present in the crowd. This Prophet and Deliverer who had come down from heaven could not be left to His own reviving recollections of the life passed in His Father's bosom, nor to the unconscious momentum of pre-existent experiences which might come to put a high stamp on His moods and habits of thought and act. The God-man could not meet the duties and ordeals of His incarnate life in the strength of that majestic retrospect only. The dove-like form signifying an inward visitation from the presence of the Father, implied peace, tenderness, fidelity, holy and gentle fellowship. The messenger did not need to come to this obedient and undefiled Son as scorching fire, although it became fire when He in due time ministered the Spirit to sinful men. The Spirit came to bring new anointings, and discernments, and prerogatives to the humanity of Jesus Christ, to be a vehicle of fresh visions, fresh powers, fresh aptitudes, fresh vocations, which mighty things were by-and-by to pass from Christ to His disciples.—*Selby.*

The Harbinger of Peace and of the Spring.—There is rich suggestion in the form in which the Spirit descended. A great many tender thoughts cluster around the dove. The dove was the offering of the very poor. The appearance of the dove was a harbinger of spring. Remembered in connection with the Deluge, it was regarded as an emblem of peace, and a symbol of gentleness and harmlessness. All these associations made the dove a most fitting emblematic form for the Holy Ghost to assume when descending upon Jesus. Jesus came to be a peace-bringer for all, even the poorest. He came like the spring, to bring life to a dead world. He is like the dove in gentleness and harmlessness. —*Miller.*

"*Thou art My beloved Son.*"—From the time of His baptism dates the unique consciousness which Jesus had of God as His Father; it is the rising of that glorious sun which from that moment illumined His life, and which since the Day of Pentecost has risen upon humanity.—*Godet.*

Sonship implies Messiahship.—In the fact of His Divine Sonship was involved His Messiahship; the consciousness of His official rank was preceded by that of His special relationship with God.

The Voice from Heaven.—When He heard this Voice, "This is My beloved Son," those thoughts and impressions which had probably long been stirring in the human consciousness of Christ were shaped into definite conviction

and assurance, and He recognised the Divine nature in mysterious union with the Manhood which was to be made perfect through His sufferings. Long before this He must have learned the mysterious circumstances which attended His nativity. *Now* he apprehended their significance, and very naturally in the amazement, if we may not say the agitation, which was consequent on this discovery, He went under the leading of the Spirit into the wilderness.—*Drew.*

"*My beloved Son.*"—To Jesus it was the seal of Divine authentication. It was the fatherly recognition. It was the first break in the silence and loneliness of thirty years. It was, so to speak, a breath from home. If the occasion was marked by the first audible Divine intervention, it must have been one which called for it. It was a second birth to a new life; in the language of the Church of old, "His second nativity." It was the meeting-point of the private and public life Divine.—*Vallings.*

Ver. 23. "*About thirty years of age.*"—The period of life when physical and mental powers have attained their highest point of development; the age when the Levites entered upon office (Num. iv. 3, 23).

Vers. 24-38. *The Difference Between the Two Genealogies.*—While St. Matthew, in the genealogy he gives, descends from Abraham to Jesus, St. Luke ascends from Jesus to God. "St. Luke's purpose is to show that Jesus is the promised Seed of the woman (Gen. iii. 15; Gal. iv. 4), that He is that second Adam—the Father of the new race of regenerate humanity—in whom all nations of the earth are blessed" (*Wordsworth*).

The Hopes connected with the House of David.—The possibility of constructing such a table, comprising a period of thousands of years, in an uninterrupted line from father to son, of a family that dwelt for a long time in the utmost retirement, would be inexplicable, had not the members of this line possessed a *thread* by which they could extricate themselves from the many families into which every tribe and branch was again subdivided, and thus hold fast and know *the* member that was destined to continue the lineage. This thread was the hope that Messiah would be born of the race of Abraham and David. The ardent desire to behold Him and be partakers of His mercy and glory suffered not the attention to be exhausted through a period embracing thousands of years. Thus the member destined to continue the lineage, whenever doubtful, became easily distinguishable; awakening the hope of a final fulfilment, and keeping it alive until it was consummated.—*Olshausen.*

Ver. 38. "*Adam, the son of God.*"—"The last word of the pedigree is connected with its starting-point. Unless the image of God had been stamped on man, the Incarnation would have been impossible. God could not have said to a *man*, 'Thou art My beloved Son,' if humanity had not issued from Him" (*Godet*). "All things are of God through Christ; and all things are brought back through Christ to God" (*Bengel*).

The Divine Root of the Human Pedigree.—There is no bolder word in Scripture, none that strikes us with a deeper surprise and awe than this—"Adam, who was the son of God." Some may wonder why such a long and "barren list of names" is given here; but in reality the pedigree is of immense value. It connects the second Adam with the first Adam, and places a son of God at either end of the list of names; it makes us out to be the children of God both by nature and by grace. There is a Divine element in our nature as well as a

human element, a capacity for life and holiness as well as a liability to sin and death. This is the secret of that double or divided nature of which we are conscious. It is this which explains how it comes to pass that even in the worst of men we find something good, and something bad even in the best. That which is good in us we derive from God, that which is evil from all our earthly parents. It is because *every* man is a child of God, because the Divine name stands at the top of the human pedigree, that even the worst of men feels a Divine constraint laid upon him at times, yields to a Divine impulse, and so does that which is just, pure, lovely, and kind. It is because even the best of men is but a man at the best, and forgets that he is a son of God, and refuses to yield to the Divine influence, that he falls into sins, which, as he himself is the first to confess, render him guilty before God, and even move him to account himself the chief of sinners. If we keep the fact in mind that Christ is the eternal Word, by whom all things were created and made, and by whom, therefore, Adam or man was created and made, the teaching of the New Testament as to the salvation of the race is made much clearer. Because we all spring from Christ, whatever He has done or does as surely affects us as what Adam was and did affects our nature and position. The second Adam, He was nevertheless before the first Adam, and called Him into being. Hence He could die for all. Hence He lives for all, and we all live in and by Him. Hence if by the offence of one death came on all, much more did life come to all by the obedience of One. Our text makes it clear that we have not to persuade God to enter into a fatherly relation to us and to love as. He *is* our Father. The change to be wrought is a change in ourselves. We need to realise and believe the fact that we are children of God, and to be true to the responsibilities it brings with it.—*Cox.*

CHAPTER IV.

CRITICAL NOTES.

Ver. 1. **Full of the Holy Ghost.**—Which had descended upon Him in full measure at His baptism. **Led by the Spirit.**—Or, "in the Spirit" (cf. ii. 27); abiding in the Spirit as the element of His life. **Into the wilderness.**—A better reading is "in the wilderness" (R.V.), and to connect the next clause with it: the leading of the Spirit continued there during forty days. The scene of the Temptation according to a not very ancient tradition is the mountainous region near Jericho—called from this identification Quarantania. There is some probability that the legend is true.

Ver. 2. **Tempted.**—The present participle implies that the temptations lasted during the forty days, though they culminated in the three specific attempts recorded in this and in the first Gospel.

Ver. 3. **And the devil said.**—It is impossible to say whether the narrative before us, which Christ Himself must have communicated to His disciples, is literal history, or a symbolical description of an inward struggle. The phrase in the fifth verse, "in a moment of time," would seem to indicate that the prospect was presented to the spiritual sense and not to the bodily eye; and this would favour the second of the two modes of interpretation above suggested. The phrase used in the Epistle to the Hebrews, "*in all points* tempted like as we are" (iv. 15), inclines the same way. **If Thou be the Son of God.**—An allusion doubtless to the words spoken from heaven at the time of His baptism. **This stone.**—Notice the graphic touch. **Bread.**—Or, "a loaf" (R.V. margin).

Ver. 4. **It is written.**—It is somewhat remarkable that the three quotations from the Old Testament which Christ here makes are all from the Book of Deuteronomy (viii. 3, vi. 13, 16). **But by every word of God.**—Omit these words; omitted in R.V.; probably taken from Matt. iv. 4.

Ver. 5. **And the devil.**—St. Matthew describes the temptation in Jerusalem as coming before that on the mountain; he evidently follows the order of time, as he indicates in the use of the word "then" (Matt. iv. 5, 11). St. Luke may have had the idea in his mind of recording the temptations in the order of their varying degrees of intensity, as addressed respectively to natural appetite, ambition, and spiritual pride. It may be, however, that he simply narrates the two temptations, the scene of which was laid in the wilderness, before passing on to that which took place on the summit of the Temple. The words "the devil" and "into an high mountain" are possibly added from St. Matthew's Gospel; they are omitted in the R.V. See note on ver. 3.

Ver. 7. **Worship.**—*I.e.* do homage. **All shall be Thine.**—Rather, "it [the world] shall all be thine" (R.V.).

Ver. 8. **Get thee, etc.**—The first sentence in this verse is omitted in the R.V.; it was probably taken from St. Matthew's Gospel.

Ver. 9. **A pinnacle.**—Rather, "*the* pinnacle"; some well-known part of the building. Josephus tells of one called the Royal Porch which overlooked the valley of Hinnom at a dizzy height. There is nothing to indicate that Satan desired Jesus to perform a miracle in the sight of the people by casting Himself down and being preserved from injury.

Ver. 10. **For it is written, etc.**—The quotation is from Ps. xci. 11, but the words "in all Thy ways" are omitted; these words give the condition on which protection is promised—a condition which Satan would have Christ ignore.

Ver. 11. **In their hands.**—Rather, "*on* their hands" (R.V.).

Ver. 13. **All the temptation.**—Rather, "every temptation" (R.V.), *i.e.* every kind of temptation. **For a season.**—Or, "until a season" (R.V. margin); though the two renderings are virtually identical in meaning. Temptation was now abandoned, but was to be resumed again on a fitting opportunity. The reference is probably to the closing scenes of our Lord's life, when the devil would assail Jesus through the treachery of Judas (xxii. 3, 53; John xiv. 30), and through the malignant opposition of the Jews (John viii. 44).

Ver. 14. **Returned.**—*I.e.* from Judæa. **Galilee.**—The main centre of our Lord's ministry (cf. Acts x. 37; Luke xxiii. 5). **In the power of the Spirit.**—Fresh strength gained from His victory in the wilderness. **A fame.**—The ground of this is given in ver. 15.

Ver. 16. **And He came to Nazareth.**—It is almost certain that this is the visit recorded in Matt. xiii. 53-58 and Mark vi. 1-6. These latter inform us that disciples accompanied Him and that He healed a few sick persons. **As His custom was.**—*I.e.* the custom of attending the service, not necessarily of reading the lessons.

Ver. 17. **The book.**—*I.e.* the roll. **Opened.**—Lit. "unrolled." **Found the place.**—This seems to imply either that He accidentally lighted upon the passage or specially selected it, and not that it was part of the stated lesson for the day. The present order of lessons in the synagogue service is of a very much later date than this; so that we cannot discover by reference to it what particular Sabbath this was.

Vers. 18, 19.—The words are from Isa. lxi. 1, 2, freely quoted from the LXX., supplemented by a passage from Isa. lviii. 6. **To heal the brokenhearted.**—These words are not found in the best MSS. of the Gospel; omitted in R.V. **The acceptable year of the Lord.**—*I.e.* the definite time in which the Lord is gracious.

Ver. 20. **The minister.**—*I.e.* the attendant [*chazzan*], who brought the sacred volume to the reader and restored it to its place. **Sat down.**—"They read the Holy Scriptures standing [an attitude of respect], and taught sitting [an attitude of authority]" (*Speaker's Commentary*).

Ver. 21. **And He began to say, etc.**—This was the theme of His discourse: that He was the Messiah [anointed One] of whom the prophet spoke. It is evident from ver. 22 that He expatiated at some length on this topic.

Ver. 22. **Bare Him witness.**—By expressing wonder and admiration. **Gracious words.**—Reference is to the persuasive beauty and not to the ethical character of His words. **Is not this Joseph's son?**—This marks a change of feeling—contempt and envy beginning to overcome admiration.

Ver. 23. **Physician, heal Thyself.**—The best modern equivalent of this proverb is, "Charity begins at home": Do something for Thine own countrymen. It may, however, mean, "Do something for Yourself, work a miracle here, and save Yourself from being rejected by us." **Whatsoever we have heard done in Capernaum.**—There is no record in the Gospels of the miracles wrought at Capernaum to which reference is here made. They must belong to the period indicated in John ii. 12.

Ver. 24.—"No prophet is received in his own country, as he is elsewhere; and it is God's way to send His messengers to strangers, as in the case of Elijah and Elisha, who were sent to be the ministers of God's mercy to Gentiles" (*Speaker's Commentary*).

Ver. 25. **Three years and six months.**—So in Jas. v. 17; in 1 King xviii. 1 three years are spoken of, but we do not know the *terminus a quo* from which they are reckoned; if from the flight of Elijah to Zarephath, the time would correspond with that here specified.

Ver. 26. **Sarepta.**—*I.e.* Zarephath (1 Kings xvii. 9): a village half-way between Tyre and Sidon.

Ver. 29.—*Dean Stanley* points out the accuracy of the description given of Nazareth in this place, though at first sight there seems to be inaccuracy. "Most readers probably from these words imagine a town built on the summit of a mountain, from which summit the intended precipitation was to take place. This is not the situation of Nazareth. Yet its position is still in accordance with the narrative. It is built 'upon,' that is, on the side of, 'a mountain'; but the 'brow' is not beneath but over the town, and such a cliff as is here implied is to be found in the abrupt face of the limestone rock, about thirty or forty feet high, at the south-west corner of the town, and another at a little farther distance" (*Sinai and Palestine*, x.).

Ver. 30.—A miraculous occurrence is evidently implied. The Nazarenes had Him in their grasp; so that the awe with which a dignified demeanour might impress a furious crowd and keep them within bounds would not account for His deliverance on this occasion.

Ver. 31. **Came down.**—Capernaum being situated on the shore of the Sea of Tiberias, Nazareth being higher on the hills. **Taught them on the Sabbath days.**—Rather, "He was teaching them on the Sabbath day" (R.V.).

Ver. 32. **Doctrine.**—Rather, teaching: both the manner and substance of His words (cf. Matt. vii. 28, 29). **With power.**—Rather, "with authority" (R.V.).

Vers. 33-41 contain a narrative of the events of one particular Sabbath day, from morning to night: see also Matt. viii. 14-17; Mark i. 21-31.

Ver. 33. **Unclean devil.**—The word "unclean" is inserted, either because in Greek "demon" might be good or bad, or because in this special case the effect upon the possessed person made the epithet peculiarly appropriate.

Ver. 34. **Let us alone.**—Or, "Ah!" (R.V.), the Greek word ἔα being either the imperative of ἐάω, to "let alone," or an interjection.

Ver. 35. **Hold thy peace.**—Lit. "be muzzled."

Ver. 37. **The fame of Him.**—Rather, "a rumour concerning Him" (R.V.).

Ver. 38. **A great fever.**—This is a technical term used by contemporary Greek physicians. For other examples of minute medical or physiological details given by this Evangelist, see ver. 35 ("and hurt him not"), v. 12, vi. 6, xxii. 50, 51; Acts iii. 7, 8, iv. 22, ix. 33, xxviii. 8.

Ver. 39. **He stood over her.**—Notice the graphic description; also in ver. 40, "He laid His hands on every one of them."

Ver. 40. **When the sun was setting.**—With sunset the Sabbath ended, and the friends of the sick would feel at liberty to carry them into Christ's presence.

Ver. 41.—The best MSS. omit "Christ": omitted in R.V. It is probably a gloss explanatory of "The Son of God."

Ver. 43. **Preach the kingdom of God.**—Rather, "preach the good tidings [gospel] of the kingdom of God" (R.V.).

Ver. 44. **Galilee.**—MS. evidence is very strong in favour of Judæa rather than Galilee in this passage. It may be an error of transcription; but the striking fact remains that there *was* an early Judæan ministry, which is recorded in St. John's Gospel, but is not directly referred to by the Synoptists, unless it be here.

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 1—13.

Temptation and Victory over it.—At first sight one might be inclined to think that He who was Son of God as well as Son of man could not be an example to us in the matter of resistance to evil. We find it hard to believe that He could really feel the pressure of temptation, and we take it almost for granted that He won the victory over evil in virtue of a Divine strength specially His own. Hence this episode in the life of the Saviour is usually regarded as mysterious and inexplicable, and is probably but seldom chosen by Christian preachers for purposes of exhortation. The writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews, however, speaks of the temptation of Christ in terms which bring it near to our experiences: he says, "We have an High Priest, who was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin." A reverent study, therefore, of this incident in the history of our Lord should teach us many lessons of great value, both as to the nature of temptation and as to the way in which to overcome it. From it we learn, *e.g.*—

I. **That the holiness which God approves is that which can stand the test**

which temptation applies.—It was the will of God that Jesus should be subjected to temptation. He was *led by the Spirit* into the wilderness to be tempted of the devil (cf. Matt. iv. 1). It was in accordance with what the word of God tells us of the Divine procedure that He who took upon Him our nature should be put to the test. And the process, painful as it is, is one through which all intelligent, moral beings must pass. Innocence, which is so attractive to us, may be largely ignorance of evil, and therefore be devoid of moral value; and accordingly we can see the wisdom of subjecting it to the process by which alone it can rise into holiness. The angels were put to the test, and some of them fell from their first estate. Our first parents, in like manner, were called to make the choice between obedience and disobedience to a Divine commandment; and every one of their descendants has had to suffer from the consequences of their evil choice. And in the Scriptures we read of the trial to which the faith of some of God's most eminent servants was specially subjected in the cases of Abraham, Job, David, and Peter. It is of course highly dangerous and presumptuous for us to cast ourselves in the way of temptation, and Christ has taught us to pray to be spared temptation. But that virtue or holiness is alone worthy of the name which has endured and can endure trial; and God is able and willing to impart special grace to us, when in His providence we are placed in circumstances of special danger.

II. **That we have to contend against a vigilant and wily spiritual foe.**—The doctrine of an evil spirit is unwelcome to many; but both the word of God and the facts of human life attest the existence of a personal tempter. "Assuredly," says Trench, "this doctrine of an evil spirit, tempting, seducing, deceiving, prompting to rebellion and revolt, so far from casting a deeper gloom on the mysterious destinies of our fallen humanity, is full of consolation, and lights up with a gleam and glimpse of hope regions which would seem utterly dark without it. How should one not despair of oneself, having no choice but to believe that all the strange suggestions of evil which have risen up before one's own heart had been born there! One might well despair of one's kind, having no choice but to believe that all its hideous sins and all its monstrous crimes had been self-conceived, bred within its own bosom with no suggester from without. But there is hope, if 'an enemy have done this'; if, however, the soil *in* which all these wicked thoughts and wicked works have sprung up has been the heart of man, yet the seed *from* which they sprang had been there sown by the hand of another." It lay in the necessity of things that he should come into direct and immediate collision with Him who had one mission in the world, that is to destroy the works of the devil.

III. **That temptations are manifold in form.**—Some, as this history reveals to us, spring from bodily necessities and weaknesses, others from a love of those things that are earthly and transitory, others from spiritual pride; for under these three heads may the temptations which assailed Christ be classified. They appeal to every side of the being, and no one is in circumstances which place him above the reach of some one or other of them. The poor are tempted by their poverty to distrust God, the rich and successful are tempted to use unlawful means for securing greater wealth and power or to apply what they possess to selfish ends, while those who enjoy God's favour are tempted to presume upon it. The weakness of the weak, the strength of the strong, and attainments in holiness are made by the tempter the occasion for suggesting evil counsels.

IV. **All the forms of sin suggested are found to spring from one root—self-will.**—At His incarnation Christ had merged His lot with the lot of His race. The first temptation is that He should separate Himself from them and use the power which had been intrusted to Him for providing a way of escape from the hardship in which He found Himself. The second temptation was

that He should refuse to accept the humiliation and suffering by which it was God's will that He should win His kingdom, and that He should found a kingdom like those of this world—founded on force and policy and surrounded by the pomp and display which the world loves. The third temptation was that He should put the love of His Father to the proof in a way of His own choosing and not of God's appointing. In all of them the attempt was made to excite self-will, and to urge Christ to depart from what He knew to be the course His Father would have Him follow. This was an attempt of the kind only too successfully employed against our first parents. They, too, were urged to distrust God's love, and to seize upon that which was attractive in their eyes, even although, in order to do so, they had to transgress a Divine commandment.

V. **Victory over temptation is won by steadfast trust in God and obedience to His will.**—Christ's hunger and isolation at this time did not shake His belief in God's power and willingness to sustain Him. Worldly wealth, and power, and honour which could only be secured by disloyalty to holiness and truth had no charms for Him; and He did not shrink from the toil, and pain, and suffering by which He knew it had been appointed that He should gain His throne. Nor would He abandon that life of faith which He intended to live by tempting God, or putting His loving-kindness and fidelity to the proof. All through He subordinated every feeling and desire to the will of God. In this, then, He affords us the great example of resistance to evil. No temptation can prevail against us if we calmly and fairly consider what God would have us to do, or what commandment He has given us for our guidance in the special circumstances in which we find ourselves, and if we resolutely determine to subject our wills to His will. We can never be at a loss to discover what God's will is. If we are in the habit of consulting conscience, and if we, like Christ, have our minds stored with the holy precepts of God's word, we can in an instant decide what is the path of duty, and no tempter can force us against our will to depart from that path. Our danger lies in a conspiracy between our wavering wills, our strong passions, and the counsels of the evil one.

SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS ON VERSES 1—13.

Vers. 1-13. *The Temptation in Relation to the Baptism.*—The temptation followed, and must be viewed in connection with, Christ's baptism. When God gives armour, He soon puts it to the proof, and so the strength given at the baptism was soon tested in the wilderness.—*Nicoll.*

A Strange Passage in the Life of Christ.—Jesus had been baptized of John. One would have thought that without further delay He would now have begun His public work. But we are mistaken. The thirty years must have a parallel in the forty days. The Spirit leads not to the battle-field, but to the wilderness. He leads Him out not to attack the enemy, but to sustain the enemy's attacks on Him. What mythical theory could find a motive for so strange a passage in the life of Christ? The temptations of the devil were all skilfully directed to try the question whether Jesus was so thoroughly one with the Father as He professed to be and as it was necessary He should be—whether His Father's business was really the one interest of His heart and the great business of His life—whether His delight in doing God's will was so strong that it could not be overcome by any intenser feeling—whether, under high pressure, some discord might not be revealed between Him and His father.—*Blaikie.*

The Account of the Temptation given by Christ Himself.—The account of the Temptation can only have come from

our Lord Himself. This is the only instance in which our Lord breaks through His reticence as to His personal history on earth. Here, and here only, does He give us a glimpse of what had befallen Him, or of what had passed within His breast.—*Latham.*

A Solemn Pause.—He who is ever the God, not of haste, but of order, prescribes a solemn pause, memorable in itself, monitory in its doctrine, between the Baptism and the Ministry.—*Vaughan.*

The Temptations in the Wilderness.—Of this mysterious conflict we see but little, and that dimly. The agony in the wilderness, like the final agony in the garden, is shrouded in darkness. But we see an absolute victory, and a Deliverer proved at the outset "mighty to save."

I. The preparation, the process, and the issues of our Lord's temptation exhibit it to us as a necessary element in His redeeming work.

II. In His temptation our Lord is to be regarded as a type and pattern to ourselves.—*Pope.*

The Purpose of the Temptation in Relation to Christ.

I. That He might bid defiance to Satan, and in His person conquer at the outset the power of sin.

II. That He might approve, in uttermost trial, the spotlessness and perfection of the sacrifice He carried forward to the cross.

III. That He might acquire, by a mystery of experience which we cannot fathom, a perfect sympathy with the infirmities of the nature He came to sanctify and save.—*Ibid.*

Ver. 1. "*Led by the Spirit.*"—It was necessary that Christ who had assumed our nature should be put to the proof—should be subjected to the trial of having to choose between using His gifts and faculties for gratification of self or using them in the service of God. This probation is required in the case of all free and intelligent beings; some angels passed through it successfully, man fell before it. It is noticeable that Jesus did not seek temptation, but was led towards it by a higher will than His own. The fact that temptation came immediately after the baptism in the Jordan, with all its wonderful and supernatural circumstances, is very significant. The time of spiritual exaltation is the time of spiritual danger. "Thus shalt *thou* be sure to be assaulted, when thou hast received the greatest enlargements from Heaven, either at the sacrament, or in prayer, or in any other way. *Then* look for an onset. This arch-pirate lets the empty ships pass, but lays wait for them when they return richest laden" (*Leighton*). Satan knows how to take advantage of the peculiarities of our situation.

"*Wilderness.*"—The contrast between the temptation of Adam and that of Jesus, the second Adam, both in the scenes in which they were laid and the results which followed from them, has often been drawn. 1. Adam was tempted in a garden, Jesus in the wilderness. 2. Adam fell, Jesus was victorious. 3. Adam's disobedience brought death, the obedience of Jesus brought life. "Adam fell in paradise, and made it a wilderness; Christ conquered in the wilderness, and made it a paradise, where the beasts lost their savageness (Mark i. 13) and the angels abode" (*Olshausen*).

Ver. 2. "*Did eat nothing.*"—The forty days' fast seems rather an indication of deep absorption in reverie, during which not even the stings of hunger were felt, than as a religious exercise of the kind the Jews were accustomed to observe in connection with prayer. It scarcely seems to afford ground for the custom of observing an ecclesiastical fast of like duration. For (1) Christ literally abstained from every kind of food; (2) He did not deliberately inflict the pain of hunger upon Himself—indeed, He did not feel hunger until the

forty days were past; and (3) He did not periodically observe a like abstinence—this was a unique experience in His life, and His state of ecstasy (like that of Moses and Elijah) is not one into which we can bring ourselves.

"*Hungered.*"—Christ hungered as man, and fed the hungry as God. He was hungry as man, and yet He is the Bread of Life. He was athirst as man, and yet He says, Let him that is athirst come to Me and drink (Rev. xxii. 17). He was weary, and is our rest. He pays tribute, and is a King; He is called a devil, and casts out devils; prays, and hears prayer; weeps, and dries our tears; is sold for thirty pieces of silver, and redeems the world; is led as a sheep to the slaughter, and is the Good Shepherd; is mute like a sheep, and is the everlasting Word; is the Man of sorrows, and heals our pains; is nailed to a tree and dies upon it, and by the tree restores us to life; has vinegar to drink, and changes water to wine; lays down His life, and takes it again; dies and gives life, and by dying destroys death.—*Greg. Naz.*

Vers. 3, 4. *The First Temptation.*—During the forty days Jesus had been sustained, not by the power of His Divine nature, but by the great rapture of spiritual gladness which upbore Him. When these had passed, He was torn with the pangs of hunger, and here the temptation of Satan comes in.

I. After the manner of the tempter, he **makes the truth problematical**—"*If* Thou be." The stones to the sick eyes of a hungry man had the shape of loaves, and one word from Him would have turned them to food. Why was the word not spoken? Because, if He had spoken it, He would have undone His incarnation, by drawing back from the lot of the race with which He had identified Himself. He would also have shown—

II. **A want of trust in the Divine providence** that was able to feed Him without using any miraculous energy. "*Man* shall not live," etc. He did not care to assert His Godship then. If God pleased, He might make the bare wind of the desert a banquet. Jesus has meat to eat that the tempter knows not of. This first temptation—

III. **Is presented to us by the tempter in our own lives.**—"I must live." The answer is—There is no need that a man should live, but there is need that he should be righteous. He will not die if he trusts in God. Man lives by everything that proceeds from God's mouth.—*Nicoll.*

The Danger of Starving the Soul.—Man wants no reminding that he lives by *bread.* There is no fear of his not giving care enough to the needs of his body; but there is danger lest he should think of nothing but these needs, and starve his soul, and become such that eternal life, without a body to care for, would only be a condition of aimless weariness. Jesus resolved therefore to keep His powers apart for spiritual ends. He will not use this power to provide what others win by toil, or to preserve Himself or His followers from the common ills of human life.—*Latham.*

Ver. 3. "*If Thou be the Son of God.*"—Satan contrasts the Divine greatness of Jesus as the Son of God, of which He had been assured at His baptism, with His present condition of destitution and hunger, and urges Him to depart from the condition of humiliation which He had accepted on becoming incarnate. Self-sufficiency and independence of God is the state of spirit Satan would fain excite in Christ. The temptation is a subtle one; for he does not suggest a miraculous provision of luxurious food, but of mere bread to stave off death by hunger. But Christ did not work a miracle for the sake of delivering Himself from that state of dependence upon God which all men should occupy.

"*Command this stone.*"—This gift of miracles in Christ was in many respects *a talent*; and it was necessary that He should employ this talent

wholly for the purposes for which it was intrusted to Him, viz. to confirm His mission and doctrine, to honour the Father, and to do good to men, and not at all to accommodate and relieve Himself.—*Scott.*

Ver. 4. "*Written.*"—It is not by inward illumination, but by the written word of God, that Christ as man professes to find guidance. His words are a rebuke to those who claim greater honour for what they imagine is inward illumination than they are willing to pay to God's word.

"*Not live by bread alone.*"—The passage quoted is a strikingly appropriate answer: "Jehovah suffered thee to hunger, and fed thee with manna, which thou knewest not, neither did thy fathers know; that He might make thee to know that man doth not live," etc. (Deut. viii. 3). The whole *nation* of Israel was fed for *forty years* in the wilderness: with what confidence may Christ therefore look to God for sustenance during the few days of His sojourn in the desert! God by the ordinary operation of His providence brings forth food for man out of the earth; but He is able to give sustenance in other ways, if He sees fit so to do. Manna and quails were miraculously provided for the Israelites in the wilderness; Elijah was fed by the ravens and by an angel; the multiplication of the loaves of bread and of the fishes by Christ's power (cf. also the miracle wrought by Elisha, 2 Kings iv. 42-44) illustrates this principle. It is right to look to God for extraordinary help in extraordinary circumstance. The fact that we are dependent upon God for food is also implied in the Lord's Prayer: "Give us this day our daily bread."

Christ's Use of Scripture.

I. **For defence.**—This is the very first use we find Him making of the word. He answered every suggestion of Satan with, "It is written." The word was in His hands the sword of the Spirit, and He turned with its edge the onsets of the enemy.

II. **For this use of Scripture the practice of committing it to memory is essential.**—Often, when temptation comes, there is no time to search for the word to meet it; everything depends on being armed, with sword in hand. This shows how necessary it is to fill the memory while it is plastic with stores of texts.—*Stalker.*

Christ is our Example in all Things.—Here we see how He met the tempter so as to conquer him. He used His Bible as a quiver, and He drew from it the sharp arrows which He hurled so successfully against His opponent. He drew them *from memory.* He had used the quiet days at Nazareth to store His mind with the precious words. The lesson lies for us on the surface.—*Miller.*

"*Not by bread alone.*"—It was the Saviour's purpose to give a signal proof, at the very outset of His public career, both of the weakness of His body as man and the perfect control exercised over it by the joint action of His human and Divine will. The appetite for bread was lawful; not so the abuse of His high powers to satisfy His own personal need. Therefore His answer was ready. His heart overflowing with love and confidence in His heavenly Father, and pure from all unclean desires, prompted the reply He clothed in the words of Scripture. There lay the force of His word, strong to baffle the tempter and drive him to another ground of attack. The Lord's rebuff was no mere quotation got by heart and ready; the thought rose spontaneously out of the pure springs within, and found its readiest expression in the well-studied language of Holy Writ.—*Markby.*

Our First Duty.—It is never right for us to starve our spiritual nature to get bread for our bodies. It is our *first* duty to keep God's commandments, and in obedience is the highest good that we

can attain in this world. Sometimes the best thing we can do for our life is to lose it; we had better any day starve to death than commit the smallest sin to get bread. Getting bread should not be our first object in life, and is really not our business at all.—*Miller.*

Higher Aims than Gratification of Appetite.—It is one of the grandest texts I know. Man has appetite, but appetite is not man. The gratification of appetite is not the main object of man's existence. Too many live as if they thought it was so. To make bread is the one object for which many live. Jesus Christ protests against this degradation of our nature, and says, "A man has higher aims than to gratify his appetite. He has a soul. Bread-making is not a sufficient object for a redeemed soul."—*Meyer.*

Vers. 5-8. *The Second Temptation.*

I. **The tempter tried Jesus through the mind.**—Human nature is ambitious, loves power, thirsts for greatness. To such dispositions did Satan now address himself in Christ. He offered Him universal empire; without delay and without a struggle He proposes, as it were, a short road to redemption. On one condition. He must do homage for His throne to Satan; He must hold His crown, as it were, from him. In short, it was the offer of a great good through a little evil—to save Himself and to save mankind a deluge of blood and tears, by one brief acknowledgment of an enemy's right, and by one passing homage to a usurper's crown.

II. **Christ discerned the snare and foiled the stratagem.**—The gospel so brought in would have been a curse and not a blessing. Never for one moment did His will waver. He seized upon the compromise, and crushed it to atoms in the right hand of obedience. Henceforth there must be war, war to the knife, between the Tempted and the tempter. In that decision lay ten thousand others. Christ will not have Satan lulled. He will have him bound. The lesson, the edict, the declaration of war are for all time.

III. **It has a voice for Christian men.**—Whenever we do evil that good may come we bend the knee to Satan.—*Vaughan.*

Ver. 5. "*All the kingdoms of the world.*"—Hunger had not *terrified*, neither does plenty *allure*, the Saviour from the path of duty. The scourge of poverty is followed by the vision of plenty; but the one is as powerless as the other to overcome His holy will. This teaches us the great lesson that our liability to sin does not depend upon the circumstances in which we are placed so much as upon the disposition or frame of spirit which characterises us. We are apt to think that if the cross were removed or the burden lightened we should find it easier to be holy—that the sin that besets us would lose its power to ensnare us if we were placed in happier circumstances. Yet circumstances only afford us an opportunity of manifesting what is in us. Jesus was superior to all circumstances simply because He was superior to all sin. The sinful heart will betray itself even if the outward conditions on which it lays the blame were all changed; it will be as faithless in prosperity as it was in adversity. The sinless heart is free from danger everywhere; it is not depressed by humiliation, it is not seduced from its allegiance to God by exaltation.

"*In a moment of time.*"—Perhaps in this phrase we have the clue to the solution of the question as to whether the history of the Temptation is a narrative of external facts or a parabolical description of mental and spiritual experiences. Apart from the consideration that from no mountain on earth could "all the kingdoms of the world be seen," the phrase "in a moment of time" seems to describe something presented to the mind's eye rather than to the bodily sense. And if this is the

case with one of the temptations, why may it not be so in the case of all of them? In Heb. iv. 15 we read that Christ was "tempted *in all points* like as we are." Does not this imply *manner* of temptation as well as actual *fact* of temptation? The momentary glimpse of the world's kingdoms and their glory suggests temptation of a very intense kind. For those temptations are most acute which are presented to us suddenly and unexpectedly. Another thought is suggested by an ancient writer: "It is fitting that all the kingdoms of the world, and the glory of them, should be displayed 'in a moment of time.' For here it is not so much the rapid glance of sight which is signified as the frailty of mortal power which is declared. For in a moment all this passes away; and oftentimes the glory of this world has vanished before it has arrived."

Ver. 6. *A Great Bribe offered to Christ.*—The greatness of Christ is implied in the greatness of the bribe here offered to Him. Satan is not accustomed to offer *all* to those whom he tempts, but gives by little and little. "There be some that will say—They were never tempted with kingdoms. It may well be; for it needs not, when less will serve. It was Christ only who was thus tempted; in Him lay a heroical mind that could not be allured with small matters. But with us it is nothing so, for we esteem far more basely of ourselves. We set our wares at a very easy price; he may buy us even dagger-cheap, as we say. He need never carry us so high as the mount. The pinnacle is high enough; yea, the lowest steeple in all the town would serve the turn. Or let him but carry us to the leads and gutters of our own houses, nay, let us but stand in our windows or our doors, if he will give us but so much as we can there see, he will tempt us throughly; we will accept it, and thank him too. He shall not need to come to us with kingdoms. . . . A matter of half a crown, or ten groats, a pair of shoes, or some such trifle will bring us on our knees to the devil" (*Andrewes*).

"*Delivered unto me.*"—We cannot say this statement is absolutely false. Satan has a certain limited power assigned to him; the world is under his power, not absolutely or permanently, but actually. Hence he is called "the prince of this world" by Christ Himself (John xii. 31). Worldly glory is within his power, since he may use it for tempting and ensnaring men. The description of a delegated power possessed by the evil one was calculated to correct the erroneous ideas of many of St. Luke's Gentile readers. They were accustomed to the dualistic idea of a kingdom of evil, not simply *permitted* to exist, but independent of the Divine will.

The Tempter's Promise.—High on the desert mountain, full descried, sits throned the tempter with his old promise—the kingdoms of this world and the glory of them. He still calls you to your labour, as Christ to your rest,—labour and sorrow, base desire and cruel hope. So far as you desire to possess rather than to give; so far as you look for power to command instead of to bless; so far as your own prosperity seems to you to issue out of contest or rivalry of any kind with other men, or other nations; so long as the hope before you is for supremacy instead of love, and your desire is to be greatest instead of least—first instead of last—so long you are serving the lord of all that is last and least—Death—and you shall have death's crown with the worm coiled in it, and death's wages with the worm feeding on them; kindred of the earth shall you yourself become; saying to the grave, "Thou art my father," and to the worm, "Thou art my mother and sister." I leave you to judge and to choose between this labour and the bequeathed peace; these wages and the gift of the Morning Star; this obedience and the doing of the will which shall enable you to claim another

kindred than that of earth, and to hear another voice than that of the grave, saying, "My brother, and sister, and mother."—*Ruskin.*

Ver. 7. "*If Thou therefore wilt worship me.*"—Worship of Satan means that Christ should acknowledge his delegated power, and make the Messianic kingdom like those of the kingdoms of this world, in accordance with the general expectation and desire of the Jewish people. The word "therefore" shows that this is the sense in which the passage is to be understood. Not by material means or by physical force did Christ intend to found His kingdom, but by spiritual operations. His kingdom was not to be in *continuation* of anything previously existing, but a new beginning.

Ver. 8. "*Him only shalt thou serve.*"—Satan has recourse to that passion whereof men in stricken folly are prone to be proud, and to make silly boast of their own weakness—to ambition, "the last infirmity of noble minds." But the allegiance of the Son of man was not to be so shaken. Sinless, therefore, was the soul of the Lord as well as His body.—*Markby.*

Worship due to God alone.—Christ here asserts that worship is due to God and to Him alone. Yet in Heb. i. 6 we read that worship is to be paid to Christ Himself. What way is there by which to reconcile these two assertions, except by recognition of the Divine nature of Christ? How can Arians and Socinians reconcile them?

Vers. 9-12. *The Third Temptation.*

I. Satan prompts Jesus to display His supremacy and confound His adversary by challenging the celestial powers to do Him the homage of their protection.

II. The sublime reliance of Christ's answer is in His profound submission of obedient humility.—These simple words confounded the assailant, and go to the root of the temptation. Where is the child of God upon earth who is not daily thus tempted to tempt his God? This temptation finds its best and worst comment in the sins which dishonour God in His people; in the spiritual pride which tempts the Lord to withdraw His gifts; in the presumption that trifles with danger, trusting in an unpledged protection; in the spirit, conduct, and lives of those who forget that the privileges of grace belong to the lowly in heart, and are to be maintained only by humble walking with God.—*Pope.*

Ver. 9. *How to distinguish Faith from Presumption.*—The moment trust in God presumes to break any one, even the least of the laws of God, and then expects God to save it from the consequences of its disobedience, it is not trust, but unbelief; it is not faith, but presumption; it is not honouring, it is tempting God.—*Barrett.*

"*Cast Thyself down.*"—Experiments upon the Lord our God, whether upon His forbearance, His protection, or His power, are forbidden once and for ever in the sure word of revelation. Thou shalt not put to wilful trial the preserving and protecting Hand. God will keep His servants in lawful paths; but thou shalt neither trifle with danger, and say, "God will preserve," nor with sin, and say, "God will protect!"—*Vaughan.*

Use of Supernatural Power.—Though Christ did not intend to have recourse to material means and to the methods and resources of worldly power in founding His kingdom, He yet purposed to make use of the gift of working miracles in accordance with the will of God. He is now urged to use this power *capriciously*, or in other words to infringe the relationship that existed between Him and the Father.

"*Cast Thyself down.*"—Observe, Satan may tempt us to fall, but he cannot *make* us fall. He may persuade us to cast *ourselves* down, but *he cannot cast us down.*—*Wordsworth.*

Vers. 10, 11. "*He shall give His angels charge.*"—The quotation from Scripture gives additional keenness to this temptation; and it is valuable to notice the nature of the error which underlies the use made of the sacred text. The error consists in ignoring or in keeping out of sight the fact that God's *promises* are *conditional*, while His *precepts* are *absolute*. By voluntarily creating a danger for ourselves, we deprive ourselves of the promises of help and deliverance which God will fulfil to those who are in danger while they are pursuing the path of duty. There is nothing in the narrative to imply that Christ was tempted to make an impression upon priests and worshippers in the Temple by miraculously appearing among them, and thus to induce them to accept Him as the Messiah. This idea of theatrical display and wonder-working power would be more in harmony with the second temptation of ver. 6, *i.e.* to use carnal and not spiritual means for founding His kingdom.

Ver. 12. *Temptation to Spiritual Pride.*—Finding Jesus to be a man of God, and His body proof against His weapons, Satan turns to a more formidable mode of attack. He tries Him on the quarter of spiritual pride. Doubtless he knew well that this was the most vulnerable point in the armour of the servants of God. Perhaps he had never met with one before who had escaped being wounded there; even Elijah hardly came off scatheless from that assault. Here, however, he was foiled again, and driven off by a like impulse of the pure human heart of Christ, quenching Scripture ill used with Scripture well used.—*Markly.*

"*Thou shalt not tempt.*"—In Deut. vi. 16 the words are, "*Ye* shall not tempt." Perhaps by the change to "*thou*" Christ implies His own Divine majesty, and forbids Satan to assail Him further. "*Thou* shalt not tempt Me who am the Lord thy God." To tempt God is to seek to put Him in the dilemma of either violating His own word, or of doing what we wish Him to do, even though we are conscious that our wish is not in accordance with His will. It is a kind of sin which is often prompted by religious fanaticism.

"*It is said.*"—Christ does not refute the use made by Satan of Scripture, but, as said above, sets the absolute precept over against the conditional promise. This is more emphatically indicated by St. Matthew (iv. 7).

"*It is written again.*"—The addition of a second scripture qualifies and interprets the first, but does not contradict it.—*Alford.*

Clear Guidance in Scripture.—So though thou canst not clear the sense of an obscure scripture, thou shalt always find a sufficient guard in another that is clearer.—*Leighton.*

Ver. 13. "*All the temptation.*"—*I.e.* every kind of temptation. The Christian may recognise temptations and learn the proper mode of resisting them by studying this narrative of Christ's experience in the wilderness. On every occasion of danger we may draw help from His example, for few forms of temptation will be found which may not be referred (1) to distrust of God, or (2) the desire of perishing things, or (3) vain ostentation.

"*For a season.*"—What is the force of these words? It is in accordance with the facts of His life to read them as referring to the continual battle of His life. "My temptations." That is His own description of His life. There was not a temptation at the beginning (in the wilderness) and at the end (in the garden) with a clear space between, but the battle was fought all through His life. If proof, or rather record, of it be awanting, that does not make it less terrible, for mortal struggles are often waged in grim silence.—*Nicoll.*

A Short Lull.—It is a mistake to suppose that He was only tempted during the forty days in the wilderness. Those forty days were a fierce and typical outbreak of new temptations such as He had been incapable of before His baptism; but we are significantly told that, at the close of them, the devil departed from Him "for a season." It was a short lull, and the storm was but gathering strength to burst on Him again.—*Mason.*

Enticements and Threats.—As, in the wilderness, by every allurement of pleasure, so in the garden and on the cross, by every avenue of pain, did the devil seek to shake the second Adam from His steadfastness. And this also may teach us what we have to expect; at one time the seductions, at another the threats, of an evil world. "And who is sufficient for these things?"—*Burgon.*

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 14—30.

The Acceptable Year of the Lord.—St. Luke's Gospel, which represents Christ as the Son of man, keeps up the note struck in its accounts of the birth and youth by giving as His first reported discourse this one, in the place "where He had been brought up," and in the synagogue into which it had been "His custom" from childhood to enter on the Sabbath. It was a natural feeling which drew Him thither, that He might win disciples among the companions of His boyhood. The rumour of His miracles in Capernaum heightened His reputation among His fellow-villagers. One can fancy the curious looks of the congregation, and the busy remembrances filling His heart on that Sabbath. In the discourse He delivered, Christ described the nature of the work He had to do as Messiah, and intimated that the Gentile world would welcome the blessings which the Jews valued so lightly. St. Luke gives a brief outline of both topics of discourse, and describes the effect produced upon the hearers by each.

I. **Christ's conception of His work.**—Whether the passage He read was from the usual lesson for the day or not we cannot tell. But it is significant that He stopped in the middle of a verse, and said nothing about "the day of vengeance of our God," as if He would keep the sweet and radiant side of His mission unshaded by any terror. After reading the words of the prophet He declared at length His claims to be the Messiah. Note 1. How definite and complete His conception of His work is from the first. He knew what He had come to be and do. His aims neither cleared nor grew, but were sun-clear and world-wide from the beginning. That is not the experience of God's other servants. They are led by undreamed-of ways to an end which they never foresaw. But Jesus had no mist on His future, nor any unconsciousness of His significance. Note 2. Christ's great theme was always Himself. His demand is not, Believe this or that which I tell, but, Believe in Me; and there in the synagogue, among those who had seen Him as a child, and played with Him in the streets, and known Him as the carpenter, He begins His ministry by proclaiming that the great prophecy is fulfilled in Him. If this is not the speech of incarnate Divinity, it is the boasting of arrogant egotism. He is conscious of possessing the Divine Spirit. It is the permanent effect of the sign at His baptism. Note 3. The view of men's condition implied. They are poor, captives, blind, bruised. The loving, sad eye is already looking on humanity with clear insight and yearning pity. Mark the calm consciousness of power to grapple with and overcome all these miseries. There stands a humble Galilæan peasant, and singly fronts a world full of wretchedness, blindness, bondage, and bruises, and asserts that power to remedy them all

is in Him. Was He right or wrong? If He was right, what and who is He?

II. **The effect produced on the hearers.**—They "bare Him witness." Something in their hearts was stirred by the gracious manner as well as substance of His words, and endorsed His claims and drew the hearers towards Him. That inward witness speaks still. Will the testimony within be listened to or stifled? Life and death hang on the answer. The balance wavers for a moment, and then goes the wrong way. A cold jet of criticism is turned on; and when the hearers got to saying, "Is not this Joseph's son?" (which He was not), all was over. Let us take heed how we deal with the witness of our own hearts to Jesus; for we too are in danger of drowning its voice by noisy prejudices and inclinations.

III. **Christ passes to the thought of His world-wide mission.**—The handful of Nazarenes becomes representative of the nation, and their rejection of Him the occasion of the blessings passing to the heathen. If Jesus had not long been familiar with this thought, it could not have come to Him now so quickly nor so clearly, nor been announced so decisively and calmly. Obviously He entered on His ministry with the consciousness that His kingdom was as wide as humanity, and His blessings meant for all the lonely and diseased everywhere. Note, too, how His mind is saturated with Scripture: it was His weapon in His desert conflict, and it is His unanswerable demonstration that Israel's prophets carry blessings to Gentiles. He selects His examples from the hereditary enemies of Israel, and not only hints at the inclusion of the alien, but He plainly tells of the exclusion of the Jew. In this lay the sting of the examples.

IV. **The anger of the Nazarenes.**—Their interest had quickly cooled. The carping question, and the craving for miracle, had effectually damped the incipient admiration. No doubt the words of prophecy had stirred some hopes of mere political freedom; and if He had preached revolt, He might have beat up a following. But this declaration that the outside heathen were to have a share in the healing, sight, and liberty which He proclaimed extinguished all the dreams of a political Messiah; and that helped to make the Nazarenes the angrier. They "rose up," interrupting the synagogue service, and, in the whirlwind of their fury, drag Him to some cliff high enough to kill any one thrown over it.

Let us learn how little the mere familiarity with Christ in the flesh availed to open men's eyes to His beauty, and let us beware lest a similar familiarity with the letter of the record of His life may equally blind us to our need of Him, and His Divine authority over us, and Divine power to help and heal us. Let us take heed that we yield to and follow out the stirrings of conviction in our inmost hearts; and remember, for warning against dealing lightly with these, that the same people who one half-hour bare witness to Jesus, and wondered at His gracious words, were ready to fling Him over the rock the next, and, so far as we know, lost Him for ever when He passed through their midst and went His way. That way led Him unto the wide world. It leads Him to each heart that is sad and sore, and brings Him to our doors with hands pierced and laden with blessings.—*Maclaren.*

SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS ON VERSES 14—30.

Ver. 14. "*Power of the Spirit.*"—Strengthened by His victory over temptation. "And now, the way being clear before Him, with God as His assured ally and Satan as His open foe, Jesus moves forward to the field of battle" (*Godet*).

"*Fame.*"—*I.e.* on account of (1) His teaching, and (2) of His miracles (cf. ver. 23).

The Return with Power.—The power was the power of the Spirit in which He returned to His own land. Who would not desire to be such a power in the world? Whence comes this ability? Where shall we win the subtle secret of such a power? The best gifts can neither be bought nor commanded. This power is of the very essence of a man's nature: it must radiate from his spirit.

I. **The power which Jesus wielded was drawn forth in the experience of the wilderness.**—The wilderness and the temptation preceded the gracious words. No man gets power except in conflict; conflict is the schoolroom where power and courage are learned. This principle is true in the material world and in the world of mind. Pain and isolation discipline the spirit. No man is strong who has not learned to live alone. But—

II. **Loneliness is not enough.**—It is not because Jesus spent forty days in solitude that He was strong. It was because of the power which He matured in the wilderness—the power of living not by the earthly but by the heavenly law.

III. **Our Lord shows that there is a heavenly light in ordinary human life.**—Our Lord had gone into the wilderness to bring hope to men. There was no lot in which God was not. "*This* day," He cried, "the hindering ills and the oppressive sorrows of life may disappear."—*Carpenter.*

Ver. 15. "*Synagogues.*"—In spite of the religious degeneracy of the Jewish people of this time, the word of God was still read publicly and endeavours made to elucidate its teaching and apply it to the hearts and lives of those who heard it.

Vers. 16-30. *An Epitome of the History of Jesus.*—The whole scene in the synagogue at Nazareth from beginning to end is full of typical significance. Commencing with evangelic discourse, and closing with death-perils, it may be said to be *an epitome of the history of Jesus.* And for that very reason it is introduced here by the Evangelist at so early a place in his narrative. Luke selects it for the *frontispiece* of his Gospel, showing by sample the salient features of its contents.—*Bruce.*

Christ an Example to Teachers—

I. **In His spirit of devotedness.**

II. **In His being filled with the Spirit.**

III. **In His custom of frequenting the synagogue.**

IV. **In His knowledge of and aptness to teach the word.**

V. **In His utterance of words of grace.**—*Hone.*

"*Where He had been brought up.*"—It was a trying visit, for few tasks are harder than to give God's message to one's own relatives and intimate friends, especially when they are in no mood to receive it.—*Blaikie.*

Ver. 16. *Church Attendance.* "*As His custom was.*"—There are many evidences that Jesus had fixed religious habits. Attending the weekly synagogue worship had been His custom from childhood; and although He was the Son of God, and had been manifested as the Messiah, He still continued to observe the custom. He went there to worship God, not to find an intellectual entertainment. The inconsistencies of His fellow-worshippers did not keep Him from the services. If He needed the means of grace, surely we need them far more. —*Miller.*

Jesus a Lover of the House of God.—It is strange to think of Jesus being preached to Sabbath after Sabbath during these silent years at Nazareth. What was the man like to whom Jesus listened? When He began His public work, He still regularly frequented the synagogue. This was in

fact the centre from which His work developed itself. It is thus evident that Jesus was a passionate lover of the house of God. As the Scripture was read, the great and good of former ages thronged around Him; nay, heaven itself was in that narrow place for Him.—*Stalker.*

Christ an Example as a Worshipper.—There is a strong argument to be drawn from the example of Christ for attendance upon public worship on the day of rest. If He made a point of being present at the reading and exposition of Scripture, and of joining with others in worship of God, how much more should we attend to this duty. It was "His custom"—not mere obedience to a rule imposed by ecclesiastical authority—but a way of employing the Sabbath which He found to be for edification. The narrative seems to imply that this was the first time He had addressed the people of Nazareth: we are therefore to conceive of this as an occasion of special solemnity in the life of Jesus.

"*Stood up.*"—Attitude of *respect* adopted by the Jews in reading the Scriptures: the attitude of sitting while engaged in teaching (ver. 20) implies *authority* (cf. Matt. xxiii. 2).

Ver. 18. "*The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me.*"—This, it has been often noticed, contains a statement of the doctrine of the Trinity, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, operating distinctly but harmoniously in effecting man's salvation.

"*He hath anointed Me.*"—The meaning of this prophetic citation may be better seen when we remember that it stands in the middle of the third great division of the Book of Isaiah (xlix.-lxvi.), that, viz., which comprises the prophecies of the person, office, sufferings, triumph, and Church of the Messiah; and thus by implication announces *the fulfilment of all that went before*, in Him who then addressed them.—*Alford.*

"*The poor*," *etc.*—The troubles that afflict humanity and that are to be abolished by Christ are figuratively described as (1) poverty, (2) captivity, (3) blindness, and (4) oppression.

The Sermon at Nazareth.—The opening of a ministry that has changed the world. A fourfold scheme of Christianity.

I. **A social gospel.**—"To the poor."

II. **A healing gospel.**—"To the brokenhearted."

III. **An emancipating gospel.**—"Deliverance."

IV. **An enlightening gospel.**—*Dawson.*

The New Teacher.—Three points make Him pre-eminent and unique.

I. **The relation between His person and His word.**

II. **The consciousness He had of Himself and His truth.**

III. **His knowledge of Himself and His truth were throughout perfect and self-consistent.**—*Fairbairn.*

The Text of His First Sermon.—There was nothing fortuitous in Christ's choice of His first text in Nazareth. The occasion was a marked one. None could forget it. He turned in calm self-possession to the first three verses of Isaiah's sixty-first chapter, describing what should be the work and office of the destined Redeemer and Saviour of man. It scarcely needed that He should say what the application was. The audience felt, as He read, that the text said so.—*Vaughan.*

"*Closed the book.*"—When He had read the text from the Old Testament, He closed the book and gave it back to the attendant. As soon as the book had delivered its message, He presented Himself to the congregation as the fulfilment of the prophecy. His sermon consisted in permitting the pro-

phet to pronounce the promise and then exhibiting Himself as its fulfilment. No other preacher, either false or true, ever acted thus.—*Arnot.*

The Gospel to the Poor.—The evangelisation of the poor was really the divinest thing in Christ's ministry, the most original phase thereof, and the phenomenon which most convincingly showed that a new thing, destined to make all things new, had appeared in the world—the religion of humanity, the universal religion. Such a religion is surely Divine; but when first it made its appearance, it could not but seem a very strange and startling phenomenon. —*Bruce.*

Vers. 18, 19. *Five Portraits of our Blessed Lord.*

I. Christ the **Evangelist.**
II. Christ the **Good Physician.**
III. Christ the **Liberator.**
IV. Christ the **Revealer.**
V. Christ the **Jubilee of His Church.**—*Vaughan.*

Ver. 19. "*Acceptable year.*"—The allusion is to the year of jubilee (Lev. xxv.). The benefits conferred upon Jewish society by this institution were the following: 1. The Israelite who had sold himself into slavery received his freedom. 2. Families which had alienated their patrimony received it back again. 3. A generous amnesty was granted to those who were in debt. All these are most appropriate figures of the spiritual blessings which Christ was to confer upon men.

"*The acceptable year of the Lord.*"—Our Lord laid emphasis on this last clause of His text.

I. **What was in His mind when He said He was anointed to preach "the acceptable year."**—The year of jubilee. In its remarkable position it was a type of gospel times. The jubilee year of the Lord was introduced by Christ and is in process now.

II. **The genuine jubilee year goes beyond the Old Testament picture.**—We extend both time and place. Our "year" rolls out into centuries, our "land" into the whole earth. The liberty proclaimed is soul liberty. But a man cannot live on liberty. The slave was to return to land and family. So in the gospel. The home and the birthright are waiting for us.

III. **The great delight God has in bestowing liberty.**—It is a great joy to Him. Jesus wished His first words to be all mercy. Judgment is in the background. He puts the acceptable year first, and so should it be with us. For those who despise His love and sacrifice there remains only judgment, the day of vengeance.—*Gibson.*

Vengeance left out.—If Christ left out "vengeance," well may I. It belongs neither to my province nor to this dispensation. His *first* advent had nothing to do with "vengeance." He did not come *then* to judge the world, but to save the world, and He could not, therefore, have said of this awful word, "This day is this Scripture fulfilled in your ears."—*Vaughan.*

Ver. 20. "*Eyes of all fastened on Him.*"—Many things contributed to arrest their attention: 1. The report of His teaching and mighty works which had preceded Him. 2. The fact that it was the first time He whom they knew so well was to address them. 3. The remarkable character of the words He had read. 4. His manner and bearing, which convinced them that He was about to make some important statement of His claims and purposes.

Ver. 21. "*Fulfilled in your ears.*"—The theme of Christ's discourse was that the preaching which now resounded in the synagogue of Nazareth was a fulfilment of the prophecy He had just read.

Ver. 22. "*Wondered at the gracious words.*"—This passage and John vii. 46 give us some idea of the majesty and

sweetness which characterised our Lord's utterances. It is the attractive manner of His speech rather than the substance that is here referred to; perhaps "graceful utterances" would be the best paraphrase of the expression "gracious words" (cf. Ps. xlv. 2). It is a poor result of preaching when the attention of the hearers is principally fastened upon the speaker's oratorical gifts, and what he has to say is overlooked. Frivolous curiosity gives place to contempt and indignation. The inhabitants of Nazareth could not brook the lofty claims put forth by their fellow-townsman, whom they had known from His infancy.

Gracious Words.—We can well believe that there was a peculiar charm in the Speaker's manner, but it sprang from His heart being filled with enthusiasm for the mission on which He had been sent. The grace of manner had its source in the grace that lay in the message. He had come to preach the gospel to the poor, and proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord. There can be no doubt how the Evangelist regarded the prophet's words, which Christ made His own, and in what sense He calls them "words of grace." —*Bruce.*

Ver. 23. "*Heal Thyself.*"—This was a taunt which was used again when He hung upon the cross (xxiii. 35). As great a need existed in Nazareth for the healing labours of the Saviour as in Capernaum, but the unbelief of its inhabitants hindered the exercise of His powers (cf. Matt. xiii. 58; Mark vi. 5). He was like a skilful musician or able orator whose powers are chilled and almost nullified by an unsympathetic audience.

Ver. 24. "*No prophet,*" *etc.*—Christ here gives the reason why, in His own town, He fails to make the impression He had made in Capernaum. So far from compelling His fellow-citizens to accept His claims by performing astounding prodigies, He is willing to accept the fate ordinarily encountered by Divine messengers.

Physician and Prophet.—The Saviour at Nazareth reveals at once His double character as (1) Physician, and (2) Prophet—as a Physician who is treated with scorn when He wishes to prepare help for others, and is at once bidden to heal Himself; and as a Prophet who deserves the highest honour and does not receive the least.—*Lange.*

"*In his own country.*"—Two causes may be assigned for the vulgar prejudice to which Christ here alludes. 1. In the case of one well known the charm of novelty is absent. 2. People are apt to think that circumstances of life so like their own, are wanting in that romance and mystery, which their imaginations lead them to associate with remarkable persons of whom they know but little.

Vers. 25-27. *Elijah and Elisha.*—The cases of the mercy shown to the widow of Zarephath and to Naaman find a close parallel with those of the Syrophœnician woman (Mark vii. 26) and the centurion's servant (chap. vii. 1-10). The points of resemblance are (1) the unbelief with which these prophets and Jesus were confronted at home, and (2) the faith which they encountered in persons outside the pale of Judaism. The deeds of mercy shown to the destitute and to the leper by these earlier prophets were apt figures of the benefits which Christ was able and desired to confer.

God blesses whom He will.—The general teaching of the incidents quoted from Old Testament history and of Christ's own course of procedure on this occasion may be stated as follows: 1. That God is free to confer His blessings on whom He will. 2. That it is the fault of men if they do not receive these blessings. Widows and lepers in Israel had not the faith shown by those who actually received benefits from the prophets; the mood of the

people of Nazareth was different from that of those who had been healed in Capernaum. 3. That in every nation those who fear God and work righteousness are accepted of Him.

Ver. 28. "*Filled with wrath.*"—The angry and murderous feelings manifested by the people of Nazareth justify the severity of tone which Christ had adopted in addressing them, and the ill opinion which seems at that time to have been generally formed of them (cf. John i. 46). The same anger was excited whenever the possibility of the Divine mercy being withdrawn from the Jews, because of their unbelief, and manifested to the Gentiles, was hinted at (cf. Acts xxii. 21, 22). "The word of God is a sword, is a war, is a poison, is a scandal, is a stumbling-block, is a ruin to those who resist it" (*Luther*).

Ver. 29. "*Thrust Him out of the city.*"—This was the first open insult that was offered to Jesus, and it is sad to think that it proceeded from those who had for nearly thirty years been witnesses of His innocent and holy life. "He came unto His own, and they that were His own received Him not" (John i. 11).

Ver. 30. "*Passing through the midst of them.*"—There is a tragic irony in the fact that the people of Nazareth desired to see some miracle wrought by Him to accredit His claims to be the Messiah; a miracle was granted to them, but it was in the supernatural way in which He escaped from their hands. In Christ's escape from this great danger we may see a genuine fulfilment of the promise in Ps. xci. 11, 12, which Satan had urged Him to put to the test in another way: "He shall give His angels charge concerning Thee, to guard Thee, lest haply Thou dash Thy foot against a stone."

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 31—44.

A Sabbath in Capernaum.—We here pass from the synagogue at Nazareth, among its hills, to that at Capernaum, on the lake-side, where Jesus was already known as a worker of miracles. The two Sabbaths are in sharp contrast. The issue of the one is a tumult of fury and hate; that of the other, a crowd of suppliants and an eager desire to keep Him with them. The story is in four paragraphs, each showing a new phase of Christ's power and pity.

I. **Christ as the Lord of that dark world of evil** (vers. 33-37).—The silence of the synagogue was suddenly broken by shrieks of rage and fear coming from a man who had been sitting quietly among the others. Possibly his condition had not been suspected until Christ's presence roused his dreadful tyrant. Note the rage and terror of the demon. The presence of purity is a sharp pain to impurity, and an evil spirit is stirred to its depths when in contact with Jesus. Observe, too, the unclean spirit's knowledge of the character and Divine relationship of Jesus. It gives a glimpse into a dim region, and suggests that the counsels of heaven, as effected on earth, are keenly watched and understood by eyes whose gleam is unsoftened by any touch of pity or submission. Observe Christ's tone of authority and sternness. He had pity for men who were capable of redemption; but His words and demeanour to the evil spirits are always severe. He accepts the most imperfect recognition from men, and often seems as if labouring to evoke it; but He silences the evil spirits' clear recognition. The confession which is "unto salvation" comes from a heart that loves, not merely from a head that perceives; and Jesus accepts nothing else. He will not have His name soiled by such lips. Note, still further, Christ's absolute control of the demon. His bare word is

sovereign and secures outward obedience, though from an unsubdued and disobedient will. He cannot make the foul creature love, but can make him act. Surely omnipotence speaks, if demons hear and obey. The existence of such spirits suggests the possibility of undying and responsible beings reaching, by continued alienation of heart and will from God, a stage in which they are beyond the capacity of improvement and outside the sweep of Christ's pity.

II. **The gentleness of Christ's healing power and the immediate service of gratitude to Him** (vers. 38, 39).—Now the Lord's tenderness shines unmingled with sternness. His pity, that pity which wielded omnipotence, was kindled by the beseeching of sorrowful hearts. And He who moves the forces of Deity still from His throne lets us move His heart by our cry. St. Luke is specially struck with one feature in the case—the immediate return of ordinary strength. The woman is lying, the one minute, pinned down and helpless with "a great fever," and the next is engaged in her domestic duties. When Christ heals He heals thoroughly, and gives strength as well as healing. What could a woman, who was probably a poor dependant on her son-in-law, do for her Healer? Not much. But she did what she could, and that without delay. The natural impulse of gratitude is to give its best, and the proper use of healing and new strength is to minister to Him. Such a guest made humble household cares worship; and all our poor powers and tasks, consecrated to His praise and become the offerings of grateful hearts, are lifted into greatness and dignity. He did not despise the modest fare hastily dressed for Him; and He still delights in our gifts, though the cattle on a thousand hills are His.

III. **The all-sufficiency of Christ's pity and power** (vers. 40, 41).—As soon as the sinking sun relaxed the sabbatical restrictions, a motley crowd came flocking round the house carrying all the sick that could be lifted, all eager to share in His healing. It did not argue real faith in Him, but it was genuine sense of need, and expectation of blessing from His hand; and the measure of faith was the measure of blessing. They got what they believed He could give. If their faith had been larger, its answers would have been greater. St. Luke makes prominent the inexhaustible fulness of pity and power, which met and satisfied all the petitioners. The misery spoke to Christ's heart, and He moved among the sad groups, and with gentle touch healed them all. To-day as then, the fountain of His pity and healing power is full, after thousands have drawn from it, and no crowd of suppliants bars our way to His heart or His hands. He has "enough for all, enough for each, enough for evermore."

IV. **Jesus seeking seclusion, but willingly sacrificing it at men's call** (vers. 42-44).—He withdraws in early morning, not because His store of power was exhausted, or His pity had tired, but to renew His communion with the Father. He needed solitude and silence, and we need it still more. No work worth doing will ever be done for Him unless we are familiar with some quiet place, where we and God alone together can hold converse, and new strength be poured into our hearts. Our Lord is here our pattern also, of willingly leaving the place of communion when duty calls and men implore. A great solemn "must" ruled His life, as it should do ours, and the fulfilment of that for which He "was sent" ever was His aim, rather than even the blessedness of solitary communion or the repose of the silent hour of prayer.—*Maclaren.*

SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS ON VERSES 31—44.

Vers. 31-44. *A Vivid Glimpse of Christ's Actual and Active Ministry.*—We are enabled to follow His footsteps for nearly twenty-four hours.

I. **In the earlier part of the day,** He goes to the synagogue, teaches with great impression, and deepens this still further by the *first* instance of His power over "the possessed."

II. **In the after-part of the day,**

He raises Simon's mother-in-law from her fevered bed to perfect health.

III. **Later on the same evening,** the afflicted people of the whole town are gathered round the door, and He heals them all.

IV. **The night's rest which followed** must have been of the briefest, for He rose the next morning long before day broke, and retired into a solitary place for prayer.—*Laidlaw.*

The Record of a Single Sabbath's Work.

I. **A strange scene in a church.**

II. **A wonderful transformation in a private house.**

III. **The house turned into a public hospital from which all the diseased people go away cured.**—*Hastings.*

Christ's Daily Life.

I. His work of **preaching.**

II. His work of **healing.**

III. His hours of **retirement.**—*W. Taylor.*

Ver. 31. "*Came down to Capernaum.*"—Jesus had before this visited Capernaum and wrought miracles of healing the fame of which had reached Nazareth (ver. 23); but now He makes it the headquarters of His work in Galilee. Probably the animosity towards Him manifested by His fellow-townsmen in Nazareth had something to do with His making this change. From John ii. 12 we should understand that His mother and brethren also removed to Capernaum at the same time. Perhaps the hatred He had incurred was to some extent visited upon them. So intimately was He associated henceforth with Capernaum that it is called "His own city" (Matt. ix. 1). It is strange that this city which is so much spoken of in the Gospels has completely disappeared; there are three or four theories as to which particular heap of ruins near the Sea of Galilee is to be identified with it. We can scarcely make any mistake in connecting this utter destruction with Christ's own prophecy concerning the city (Matt. xi. 23).

"*Taught them.*"—The substance of His teaching is given in Mark i. 15: "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand: repent ye, and believe the gospel."

Ver. 32. "*His word was with authority*" (*R.V.*).—The teaching of Jesus was different from that to which the people were accustomed: (1) He spoke as one sent and commissioned by God; (2) He laid stress upon His own person and claims as "the Word of God made flesh"; and (3) love for the souls of men shone out in all He said. The general characteristics of Rabbinical teaching have been described as follows: "The scribes varied greatly, like other men, in ability, character, and qualifications; but it would appear that in the time of our Lord the great bulk of them were pedantic in things that were obvious enough, and frivolous and jejune in all things that lay beyond. They were admirable guessers, and mighty in platitudes. They were ingenious in raising microscopic doubts, and perfect adepts in conjuring up conceit to do battle with conceit. They were skilful in splitting hairs to infinity, and proud of their ability to lead their hearers through the endless mazes of the imaginations of preceding rabbis—imaginations that ended in nothing, or in something that was actually worse than nothing. But they had no power, or almost none, to move the conscience toward true goodness, or to stir the heart toward God and toward man. They might speak, indeed, with positiveness enough; but it would not be with moral power. They might assert with dictatorial self-sufficiency; but it would not be with 'demonstration of the Spirit'—demonstration flashing in conviction even upon reluctant souls" (*Morison*).

Vers. 33-36. *The Demoniac in the Synagogue.*

I. **The unhappy worshipper.**—We can only conjecture the special meaning of the phrase here employed, "a spirit of an unclean devil." He had

not as yet been excluded from the synagogue worship. Or perhaps he rushed, spirit-driven, into the midst of the worshippers.

II. **The sacred Presence provokes a crisis.**—There is an unbelief which can never be silent. The demons could never confront Jesus calmly. They resent His interference. They are indignant at His saving work. They make weird, unearthly complaint.

III. **Jesus is stern and cold.**—He is gentle with sinful men. Not so here. As to a wild beast, He says, "Be muzzled. Come out of him." Whereupon the evil spirit exhibits at once his ferocity and his defeat.

IV. **The spectators draw the proper inference.**—A new power implied a new revelation. Something far-reaching and profound might be expected from Him who commanded the unclean spirits with authority and was obeyed. Yet no one was converted by this miracle. All were amazed; but wonder is not self-surrender.—*Chadwick.*

Ver. 33. "*In the synagogue.*"—It is strange to find a man possessed by an unclean spirit among the worshippers in the synagogue, but perhaps he had not before this given any open indication of the spiritual malady from which he was suffering. The excitement connected with the teaching of Christ, and the holiness of His person, may have disturbed the man's mind and stirred up the rage of the evil spirit.

Ver. 34. "*What have we to do with Thee?*"—The unclean spirit is the real speaker; but the utterance is that of the man, who, being in, *i.e.* possessed by, the evil spirit, becomes its mere instrument. In this respect a specific distinction may be observed in the mode of spiritual action in the case of true prophets: in them inspiration does not supersede personal consciousness; they either speak their own words, or they deliver a message in the name and in the words of the Lord.—*Speaker's Commentary.*

"*Art Thou come to destroy us?*"—The Saviour had not, so far as appears, been formally interfering by a specific action. But His very presence on the scene was felt to be interference. There emanated from Him, round about, an influence that went in upon men blissfully, counteracting all evil influences. The unclean spirit felt the power, and resented it as an interference—an interference not with itself in particular, but with the entire circle of kindred spirits. "Art Thou come to destroy *us*?"—*Morison.*

"*I know Thee . . . the Holy One of God.*"—Earth has not recognised her King, disguised as He is like one of her own children; but heaven has borne witness to Him (ii. 11, iii. 22), and now hell must bear its witness too—"the devils believe and tremble."—*Trench.*

The Outcry of the Evil Spirit.—Jerome speaks of the outcry of the evil spirit as being like the exclamations of a fugitive slave when he comes face to face with his master and seeks to deprecate his wrath. But it is more probable that on the part of the evil spirit there was a malignant intention to compromise Jesus by bearing testimony in favour of His high claims. The acknowledgment of the supreme power of the Saviour together with a refusal to submit to His rule is an illogical course of procedure we are only too familiar with in our own experience. To many of His professed disciples Jesus may say, "Why call ye Me Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say?"

Ver. 35. "*Thrown him in the midst.*"—The final deliverance of the sufferer from the evil spirit was accompanied by such a sharp paroxysm that evidently those in the synagogue thought that the man was dead. This is vividly indicated by the phrase "came out of him and *hurt him not.*" "Something similar to this violence of the evil spirit in the hour of its eject-

ment is evermore finding place; and Satan vexes with temptations and with buffetings none so much as those who are in the act of being delivered from his dominion for ever." In the man possessed by the evil spirit we have a living picture of our own souls under the dominion of sin; just as in the power of Christ to heal the sufferer we have a proof of His ability to control the powers of darkness and to deliver us from subjection to them.

Vers. 36, 37. "*They were all amazed.*"—"We can imagine to ourselves the emotion of those assembled in the synagogue who, while they were listening in silence to the teaching of Jesus, saw in an instant such a storm break forth in their midst—an almost visible contest between the two spiritual powers which were disputing with each other for rule over mankind" (*Godet*). In their presence the prophecy of Isaiah was fulfilled: "Even the captives of the mighty shall be taken away, and the prey of the terrible shall be delivered: for I will contend with him that contendeth with thee, and I will save thy children" (xlix. 25). The admiration manifested by those who witnessed this miracle and the fame with which the performance of such a work invested the Saviour no doubt indicate that His claim to have been sent from God was pretty widely accepted in the district. Yet after all it was but the springing up of the seed in the rocky ground where there was not sufficient deepness of earth. The words they heard and the mighty works they saw involved all the heavier punishment for their unbelief (Matt. xi. 23).

Vers. 38-41. *Healing of the Body a Pledge of the healing of the Soul.*

I. **The fever rebuked.**—1. At the request of those around. 2. Accompanied by a specific action. 3. Followed by a complete recovery.

II. **The evening's work.**—He began afresh and carried on probably late into the night His toilsome work. "Disease being the cold shadow of sin, its removal was a kind of sacrament, an outward and visible sign that the Healer of souls was nigh."—*Laidlaw.*

Ver. 38. "*Simon's house.*"—Perhaps in the statement that Jesus on leaving the synagogue went to the house of a disciple rather than to that in which His mother and brethren were, we have an indication of an estrangement between Jesus and some of His own family who believed not on Him (cf. John vii. 5). The fact that Peter was married is, one would think, calculated to disturb those who attach great importance to the doctrine of the celibacy to the clergy. We read of his wife as accompanying him in missionary journeys (1 Cor. ix. 5). Clement of Alexandria, in his *Miscellanies*, tells of her martyrdom in words that are very beautiful and free from exaggerated sentiment. "They say that the blessed Peter, when he saw his wife led away to death, rejoiced that she was graciously called, and was returning to her home, and that, calling her by name, he addressed her in words of encouragement and consolation, 'Remember thou the Lord.' Such was the marriage of the saints, and such their perfect state of mind towards their dearest."

"*A great fever.*"—*I.e.* typhoid fever.

"*They besought Him for her.*"—*I.e.* evidently Peter and his wife.

Ver. 39. "*Rebuked the fever.*"—It is not necessary to understand the word "rebuke" as implying a personification of the fever: it evidently means speaking in a firm, authoritative manner, and tolerating no resistance to His command.

"*Rose up and ministered unto them.*"—The instantaneousness and completeness of the cure is indicated in the fact that she immediately, on leaving the bed on which sickness had laid

her, ministered to the Saviour and the others, *i.e.* waited upon them at the table. We may apply this circumstance to our spiritual duties. "The first use she made of her recovered strength was to employ it in her Master's service. And does she not become a pattern therein to Christians, who on their restoration to spiritual health should employ their powers in ministering to Christ in the person of the poorest members of His mystical body?"—*Burgon.*

Consecration of Renewed Powers.—There is a whole cluster of suggestions here.

I. **Every sick person who is restored should hasten to consecrate to God the life that is given back.**—Surely it was spared for a purpose.

II. **Opportunities to minister to Christ in the persons of His people are at hand and innumerable.**—No need to wait for fine and splendid service. True ministry to Christ is doing first and well one's daily duties.—*Miller.*

Ver. 40. "*All they that had any sick.*"—Observe His Divine power and goodness shining forth in the miraculous cure of *all* diseases. And whatsoever be thy spiritual maladies, though never so many and so desperate, yet come. Never any came to Him and went away uncured.—*Leighton.*

"*Laid His hands on every one.*"—Jesus could certainly have cured by a word (vii. 6-10), or even by a simple exercise of will (John iv. 50). But there is first of all something profoundly human in this act of laying His hand on the head of each one whom He wished to benefit. It was an indication of kindly feeling. Then, too, it was morally significant. Each time that Jesus made use of material means for working a cure, whether it were by the sound of His voice or by the use of clay made with His spittle, His purpose was to establish a personal tie between the sufferer and Himself; for He wished not only to cure, but to lead to God, and to do that by presenting Himself as the organ of Divine grace among mankind. It is this moral purpose which explains the diversity in the means which He employed. If they had been in themselves curative—if, for example, they had been of the nature of magnetic passes—they would not have varied so much. But as they were directed to the heart of the sufferer, they were chosen with special reference to his character or condition. In the case of a deaf-mute, Jesus put His fingers in his ears; He anointed the eyes of a blind man with His spittle, etc. The cure, therefore, was presented to the heart of those healed as an emanation from His person, and attached them to Him by an indissoluble tie.—*Godet.*

The Miracles of Healing Prophetic.—In the healing of all manner of diseases, Jesus not only gave a proof of His power to cope with all the evils bodily and spiritual that afflict mankind, but gave a prophetic representation of the state of blessedness in the new heavens and earth, from which all that mars our happiness will be for ever excluded. In the miracles of healing we have the first-fruits of that Divine beneficence which will overcome and banish all our sorrows (cf. Rev. xxi. 3, 4).

Ver. 42. *Christ in Solitude.*—He was continually withdrawing Himself from human sight and contact in those deserts of Palestine and praying. With teaching and healing, prayer divided His life. Have we too no need of like withdrawings after Him and with Him into the wilderness? Are we so intensely spiritual that we need none of that desecularising, decarnalising process of which the desert seclusions of Jesus were the perpetual parable? It is not safe to have the world always with us. The ground "lacks moisture" which has only the glare of day upon it.—*Vaughan.*

Solitude often Dreaded.—What is it that makes solitude dreadful to some and oppressive to many? Partly (1) the sense of physical danger, born of helplessness and uncertainty. This Jesus never felt, who knew that He must walk to-day and to-morrow, and on the third day be perfected. And partly (2) the weight of unwelcome reflection, the rebukes of memory, the fears that come of guilt. Jesus was agitated by no inward discords, upbraided by no remorse. He had probably no reveries; He is never recorded to soliloquise; solitude to Him was but another name for communion with God His Father; He was never alone, for God was with Him.—*Chadwick.*

Jesus makes Time for Prayer.—Jesus would always find time for prayer, or make time for it. If His days were full of excitement and toil, He would take time out of His nights for communion with God. At least, He never allowed Himself to be robbed of His hours of devotion. Is not His example a solemn rebuke?—*Miller.*

The Order of these Events.—From St. Mark's Gospel we get several additional particulars which enable us to understand more clearly the narrative in this place. In the morning, long before the darkness of the night was past, Jesus rose up and left the house of Simon Peter and went into a desert place to pray. When His absence was discovered, Simon Peter and others went in search of Him, and entreated Him not to leave them. The early morning, the silent departure from the house, the purpose for which He sought the solitude of the desert, and the search for Him, form a very striking picture. The active labours of the preceding day caused Jesus to feel the necessity of recruiting His spiritual strength by withdrawing Himself for a time from the turmoil of the world and by holding communion with His heavenly Father. How much more do we need to seek from time to time to collect together our thoughts which are so easily dissipated by our every-day occupations, and to seek from God that spiritual refreshment that will make us strong to serve Him and our fellow-men! For we cannot give out unless we receive from Him.

The Search for Jesus.—Jesus had doubtless enjoyed some uninterrupted hours of such communings with His heavenly Father ere His friends from Capernaum arrived in search of Him. When morning came, Peter, loath to break in upon the repose of his glorious Guest, would await His appearance beyond the usual hour; but at length, wondering at the stillness, and gently coming to see where the Lord lay, he finds it—like the sepulchre afterwards—empty! Speedily a party is made up to go in search of Him, Peter naturally leading the way.—*Brown.*

Ver. 43. "*I must preach the kingdom of God.*"—No doubt those who had witnessed the miracles in Capernaum expected to see a repetition of marvels of the same kind; but in the words in which Jesus replied to their request to remain among them, He lays stress upon preaching "the good tidings of the kingdom of God" as the great work He was sent to do. As the Saviour of Israel, and not merely of Capernaum, a moral obligation lay upon Him to go from city to city. It would no doubt have been pleasanter to remain among those who showed a disposition to pay Him reverence. But "even Christ pleased not Himself." "The Saviour of the world might, indeed, by abiding in the same place, have drawn all men unto Himself; but He did not do so, because He would give *us* an example to go about, and seek those who are perishing, as the shepherd his lost sheep."

"*Other cities.*"—Jesus *went about* doing good. He did not confine His blessings to single localities. He

sought to reach as many souls as possible. He did not wait for people to come to Him, but carried the good news to their own doors. He thus taught that—

I. **His gospel is for all men,** and not for any particular place. He taught us also—

II. **To make the most of our lives and opportunities,** scattering the blessings of grace as widely as possible. He wants His Church to keep on preaching the gospel to "other cities also," till there is not one left in which it has not been heard.—*Miller.*

Ver. 44. "*The synagogues of Galilee.*"—Our Lord's procedure in this first missionary journey was therefore to visit various towns, and to preach in synagogues on successive Sabbaths. It has been calculated that the time occupied must have been some four or five months. Galilee at this period was a very populous district. Josephus says that it contained two hundred and four towns, with not less than fifteen thousand inhabitants in each, *i.e.* more than three million of a population. Even if he has exaggerated the number, it must still have been considerable.

CHAPTER V.

CRITICAL NOTES.

Ver. 1. **To hear the word of God.**—"His preaching in the synagogues had excited so much attention that the people followed Him to the shore of the lake to hear Him" (*Speaker's Commentary*). **Lake of Gennesaret.**—St. Luke alone uses the name.

Ver. 2. **Standing.**—The technical word used for vessels at anchor or fastened to the shore. **Washing their nets.**—As if their work for the day were over.

Ver. 4. **Launch out.**—The verb is in the singular; addressed to Peter, who was steersman of his boat: "let down" is in the plural; addressed to all the fishermen in the boat.

Ver. 5. **Master.**—Not "teacher": a title of respect. **All the night.**—The usual time for fishing (cf. John xxi. 3).

Ver. 6. **Their net brake.**—Rather, "was breaking" (R.V.), was on the point of breaking.

Ver. 8. **Depart from me.**—Lit. "Go forth away from me," *i.e.* "Go out of the boat and leave me." The presence of one possessed of Divine power or knowledge overawed him: he felt, too, that in Jesus there was also a Divine holiness; and he was overwhelmed with the thought of his own unworthiness. Yet he addresses Jesus as "Lord," a term of greater reverence than "Master" (ver. 5). His request that Jesus should leave him is the expression of a very different feeling from that of the sordid Gadarenes, who desired Him to depart from their coasts (viii. 37). **A sinful man.**—It is his own individual guiltiness that he confesses, and not simply the depravity of human nature: the word he uses implies this—it is *ἀνήρ*, and not *ἄνθρωπος*.

Ver. 9. **Astonished.**—Lit. "amazement possessed him."

Ver. 10. **Thou shalt catch.**—Or, "thou shalt be catching"—as a permanent occupation. "It must be remembered that this was the second call of Peter and the three apostles—the call to apostleship: they had already received a call to *faith*. They had received their first call on the banks of the Jordan, and had heard the witness of John, and had witnessed the miracle of Cana. They had only returned to their ordinary avocations until the time came for Christ's full and active ministry" (*Farrar*).

Ver. 12.—St. Matthew gives a distinct note of time and place when and where this miracle was wrought: it was after the Sermon on the Mount, and as Jesus came down from the mount, that the leper met him. **Full of leprosy.**—A term of medical accuracy describing the severity of the disease. The leprosy had spread over his whole body, but not in the manner described in Lev. xiii. 13, for he was still unclean (ver. 14). It is to be specially noticed that when the disease had attained a certain stage the man was pronounced ceremonially *clean*, and was allowed to mingle with others. **Thou canst make me clean.**—His faith was wonderfully strong, as there was only one case of a leper being cleansed by miracle—that of Naaman.

Ver. 13. **Touched him.**—A violation of the letter of the Mosaic law, but an action prompted by the higher law of compassion (Mark i. 41).

Ver. 14. **He charged him to tell no man.**—The reason of the prohibition probably was our Lord's unwillingness to allow the attention of the people to be diverted from His teaching to His miracles, and an excitement to be aroused which would interfere with His work. The mischievous effect of disobedience to His commands on this occasion is noted in Mark i. 45. **Shew thyself to the priest, etc.**—See Lev. xiv. 1-32. **For a testimony unto them.**—*I.e.* to the priests that a miracle had taken place.

Ver. 17.—The scene of this miracle was a house in Capernaum, either in a house belonging to his family (John ii. 12) or in St. Peter's house. **Pharisees and doctors of the law.**—They had probably come to see and hear the prophet whose fame was now becoming widespread. There is no reason to ascribe to them any malignant purpose at this stage of their relations with Jesus. **The power of the Lord.**—*I.e.* not of the Lord Jesus, but of the Lord God working through Jesus. **Present to heal them.**—R.V. "the power of the Lord was with Him to heal."

Ver. 18. **Men.**—Four men (Mark ii. 3).

Ver. 19.—St. Mark says that the crowd was so great that they could not get near the door. By an outside stair they reached the flat roof of the house, and by removing some of the tiles were able to lower the mat or mattress on which the sick man lay into the presence of Jesus, who was evidently in the upper room of the house.

Ver. 20.—Though Jesus repudiated the principle that suffering is in every case the proof of previous sin (John ix. 3), He did at times draw attention to the fact that suffering often follows from sin, as in John v. 14, and apparently here.

Ver. 21. **Blasphemies.**—"In classical Greek the word means abuse and injurious talk, but the Jews used it specially of curses against God, or claiming His attributes" (Matt. xxvi. 65; John x. 36)" (*Farrar*).

Ver. 22. **Their thoughts.**—Rather, "their reasonings" (R.V.).

Ver. 23. **Whether is easier, etc.**—"He does not ask, 'Which is easier, to forgive sins or to raise a sick man?' for it could not be affirmed that the act of forgiving was easier than that of healing; but, 'Which is easier, to claim this power or to claim that?'—*to say*, 'Thy sins be forgiven thee,' or to say, 'Arise and walk'? And He then proceeds, 'That is easier, and I will now prove My right to say it by saying with effect, and with an outward consequence setting its seal to My truth, the harder word, *Rise up and walk*'" (*Trench*).

Ver. 25. **Took up that whereon he lay.**—An indication of the reality of the cure. He had been carried by others to the presence of Jesus, but now is seen to depart carrying with him the mat or mattress on which he had lain.

Ver. 26. **Fear.**—A feeling akin to that described in ver. 8.

Ver. 27. **Saw.**—Rather, "observed," "beheld" (R.V.). **Levi.**—The apostle and evangelist, St. Matthew (*v.* Matt. ix. 9). Probably his original name was Levi, and the name Matthew or Matthias was given to him or assumed by him after he became an apostle. Matthew means "The gift of God." **The receipt of custom.**—"The place of toll" (R.V.). The dues or taxes were probably connected with the traffic on the Sea of Galilee.

Ver. 29. **A great feast.**—This is an indication of wealth, and implies that the act of renunciation (ver. 28) was in his case all the more remarkable. **A great company of publicans.**—As a class they would be deeply moved by the kindness of Jesus to one of their number. They were accustomed to be despised and spoken against by those of their countrymen who laid special claims to holiness. **Sat down.**—*I.e.* reclined at table according to the custom of the time.

Ver. 30. **Their scribes, etc.**—*I.e.* the scribes and Pharisees of that place. As from the character of the objection we cannot suppose that these scribes and Pharisees were themselves present at the feast, the conversation may have taken place some time after it. They may, indeed, have seen Jesus leaving the house with the other guests.

Ver. 32. **The righteous.**—There does not seem to be any satirical reflection upon the Pharisees in this reply, as persons who considered themselves righteous, but were not really so. "The argument is, the greater a man's sin, the more need he has of the call to repentance, as, if he were perfectly righteous, he would need no repentance. These words do not, of course, imply that any man is perfectly righteous, nor is such a supposition necessary to the reasoning" (*Speaker's Commentary*).

Ver. 33.—St. Luke here omits the remarkable fact, noted by St. Matthew and St. Mark, that disciples of John the Baptist joined with disciples of the Pharisees in putting this question. **Fast often, etc.**—*I.e.* follow the ascetical example of their master. **Make prayers.**—Rather, "make supplications" (R.V.).

Ver. 34. **Children of the bride-chamber.**—The groomsmen or friends of the bridegroom: they accompanied him to the house of the bride, and escorted the newly married pair to their new home. This was followed by a feast: hence fasting and mourning would be out of place. The figure is a singularly appropriate one, as the Baptist himself had spoken of Jesus as the Bridegroom (John iii. 29).

Ver. 35. **Taken away.**—A violent death is here hinted at, as in the earlier conversation with Nicodemus (John iii. 14). **Then shall they fast.**—*I.e.* have reason for fasting and

mourning: outward expressions of grief will be appropriate. Neither here nor in any other part of the New Testament is fasting prescribed.

Ver. 36.—The R.V. is much clearer: "No man rendeth a piece from a new garment and putteth it upon an old garment; else he will rend the new, and also the piece from the new will not agree with the old." In the parallel passages in St. Matthew and St. Mark the figure is slightly varied: in them stress is laid upon the idea of patching the old garment with a piece of new, unfulled cloth, which in course of time will shrink and do harm to the hitherto uninjured part of the old. Here a new garment is spoiled in order to get a patch for the old, which does not agree with it. The idea of this and of the following verses is that the new life of Christianity is not adapted to the old forms of Judaism: it will have its own fasts and festivals, but these will correspond to its own distinctive character.

Ver. 37. **Bottles.**—*I.e.* wine-skins. The old skins would be rent, if filled with new fermenting wine.

Ver. 38. **New wine . . . new bottles.**—Rather, "New wine . . . fresh wine-skins" (R.V.). **And both are preserved.**—Omitted in R.V.

Ver. 39. **Straightway.**—Omit: omitted in R.V. **The old is better.**—Rather, "the old is good" (R.V.). This is a very kindly apology, as it were, for those who had become habituated to the old religious system and could not as yet accept and enjoy the "new wine" of Christianity. The old is not better in itself, but better in their estimation.

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 1—11.

A Parable in a Miracle.—There are three stages in this incident: the sermon from the fishing-boat, the draught of fishes, and the call of Simon.

I. **The sermon from the fishing-boat.**—The narrative is vivid and picturesque. We can fancy the little crowd on the beach in the fresh morning; their unmannerly jostling; the singular inattention of Simon and the others; the wet, slimy boats drawn up, in token that fishing was done for the day; the crews busy cleaning the nets; and stretching from the strip of busy beach the glittering waters, shining in the early sun as it rose over the eastern hills. Though the fishermen had not lifted their heads from washing the nets to listen to Jesus, they were all His disciples; but they had not been summoned to forsake their callings, and Jesus had been going about preaching alone. They did not know how far He wished them to swell the crowd of listeners, and so they went on with their work. The patient doing of common duties is as true a service as any other. Who looked likest disciples—the eager listeners, or the knot of fishers? The light-minded crowd shows us that open ears and shut hearts often go together, and the true sign of discipleship was dropping the nets and pushing off just because He wished it. Let us learn to stick to our small secular duties till Jesus asks other service, and then to drop them immediately and cheerily, like these men. What a pulpit for such a preacher the rough, untidy fishing-boat was! How willingly He shared the lowly lot of His friends, and how little He cared for comfort, or what people call dignity! The gospel for all men, poor as well as rich, was fitly preached from a fishing-boat; and its power to exalt all secular work into Divine and priestly service was plain from the very place of its utterance.

II. **The draught of fishes.**—"At Thy word I will" is the very essence of obedience. Never mind though use and wont say "Folly"; never mind how vain the night's work has been, nor how weary the arms with rowing and hauling; if Jesus says, "Down with the nets," then down they should go, and he who truly calls Him Master will not stop to argue or remonstrate. Swiftness is part of obedience. The reward is as swift. The load threatens to break the nets. The miracle is remarkable, in that it was not done in answer to any cry of distress, and in that it had not for its purpose the supply of any sore need. Its value is didactic and symbolical. In the former aspect it reveals Jesus as the Lord of nature, and as fulfilling the ancient psalm (viii. 8), which ascribes to man dominion over "the fish of the sea." The incident shows how the

original and forfeited glory of humanity was restored in Jesus. "We see not yet all things put under" man, but "we see Jesus." This teaching is equally clear whether we regard the point of the miracle as being our Lord's supernatural knowledge of these passers "through the paths of the seas," or as His sovereign power bringing them to the nets. It teaches, too, His care for His followers' material needs, and prophesies the blessing which crowns obedient work in secular callings. If we are sure of what is duty, we are to stick to it, come failure or success. Then, too, we learn the need for prompt, unhesitating obedience to every command of Christ's, however it may break in on our rest or contradict our notions. If all our common duties have this motto written on them, "At Thy word," the distasteful will become pleasant and fatigue light, and success and failure will be wisely alternated by Him as may be best for us; and whatever the outward issues of our work, its effects on ourselves will be to bring us nearer to Him; and though our nets may often be empty, our hearts will be full of perfect peace.

III. **The call of Simon.**—The miracle heightened Peter's conception of the Worker, for "Lord" is a loftier form of address than "Master." It had also flashed upon him a sudden consciousness of his own sinfulness, which was altogether wholesome. It is well when great mercies reveal the Giver more clearly, and when the glimpse of the gracious Giver bows us with the sense of our own unworthiness. To know ourselves sinful and Christ as Lord is the beginning of deliverance from sin and of fitness for apostleship. But Peter was sadly wrong in his "Depart from me." The disease is a reason for the coming, not for the going, of the Healer. He would have understood himself and His Lord better if he had cried, "Never leave me, for I am sinful." He did understand matters better when, on the occasion of the second miraculous draught of fishes, he flung himself into the water to get close to his Master. A partial sense of sin and surface knowledge of Jesus drive from Him: a deeper understanding of ourselves and of Him drives to Him. Christ knows what Peter means by his foolish cry. What he wants to get rid of is, not Jesus, but the sin that separates him from Jesus. "Go away," said Peter. "Come to Me henceforth permanently, and leave all else to be with Me," replied Jesus. Christ knows our hearts better than we do, and often reads our wishes more truly than we put them into utterance. "From henceforth" indicates the change in Peter's calling and relation to Jesus. The moment was an epoch, making a revolution in his life. Our sight of our own sinfulness and of His holiness ever makes a turning-point. Well for us if "henceforth" we are nearer Him, and lifted above our old selves.

The fisherman's trade is the symbol of evangelistic activity, and the points of resemblance are very obvious. There is need for the same patient toil, the same persistent bearing up against discouragement. There will come the same apparent want of success, and there should ever sound in the servant's ears the Master's command to launch out into the deep—to push boldly into untried ground, and to ply his task, undaunted by discouragements and unwearied by the long night of toil. The conditions of success are diligence, obedience, hope. The preliminary is to leave all and follow Him. We may have little, or we may have much; but whatever it be, we have to give it up; and he who surrenders an "all" which is little is one in motive, and will be one in reward, with him who gives up an all which is much.—*Maclaren.*

SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS ON VERSES 1—11.

Vers. 1-11. *First Studies in Christ's College.*

I. **Thrust out a little from the land.**—Peter is first asked to lend his boat for the preaching of the word. For the first time the instruments of

his ordinary life are turned to the use of his new calling: his boat, his oars, his strength and skill. What a lesson is here for every disciple—to be ready to give his house, his field, his shop, his seat at the receipt of custom, not to any mere selfish purpose, but to further the preaching of the word! For thus disciples are first taught to thrust out a little, in a venture to which they are new and timid.

II. **Launch out into the deep.**—That first lesson is followed by a second, and all the more suggestive that their life-long skill now finds a Master. For themselves they have toiled all night in vain; but they learn to begin anew at His word, and now they are astonished at their success. How often would this scene and its teaching come up to memory in after-times, with other lights and other applications! How often would Peter think in other waters of his partners in the ship, of fellowship in work as well as faith, of the joy of drawing men to the shore when the Master watches and directs, and of the wonder of nets unbroken under the heavy strain!—*MacColl.*

Trust in Christ taught by the Miracle.—Peter learnt from this miracle that it was best to trust Christ. He might say to himself, "I never felt more convinced that we should take nothing by letting down the nets than I did on that morning on the lake; but I let them down, and found I was wrong." A memorable act is not done with educationally when it is over. The recollection of it is an attendant monitor, always pointing the same way; and so this miracle may have done much towards accustoming Peter to look to the Lord's prompting, and to be ready at His word to give up that about which he felt most sure.—*Latham.*

A Miracle of Instruction.—The early miracles were mostly wrought in the sight of the multitude; but this miracle of the draught of fishes was performed when few but the disciples were by. *It was a miracle of instruction:* it lent great impressiveness to great lessons, it emphasised in a way never to be forgotten the call to become "fishers of men," and it gave good augury of success. The thought of this draught must have come back to Peter at many a juncture in his life—a notable one being the morrow of the feast of Pentecost, when "there were added to them in that day about three thousand souls!"—*Ibid.*

Christ the Ruler of our Lives.—In this incident Christ unfolds Himself to His disciples as Lord of their lives and of their lives' mission. He shows that their mission will be among men whom they are to seek to win; He gives them a glimpse of a kingdom which is moral rather than material; and at the same time He shows Himself as Lord of their lives.—*Boyd Carpenter.*

I. **The scene.**—Here you have week-day ministry, open-air preaching, a quite *extempore* service, an occasional and entirely singular pulpit.

II. **The sign.**—The deed which followed when He had "left speaking" is a good illustration of the mutual influence of every-day religion and every-day work.

III. **The purpose and effects.**—A general impression of astonishment, a spiritual crisis in Peter's case, and a complete and immediate decision on his part and on that of the other fisher-apostles. The crowning purpose of the miracle was to be a sign and seal of the calling of these converts as preachers of the gospel, messengers of the kingdom, fishers of men.

IV. **The symbolic meaning.**—It was an acted parable. The analogies between the work of fishers and the work of Christ's servants are many.—*Laidlaw.*

Ver. 1. "*The people pressed upon Him.*"—The presence of a large crowd of men and women eager to hear the word of God lends additional

significance to the spiritual meaning of the miracle now wrought, and to the call now addressed to these fishermen to leave their trade and become fellow-workers with Christ in the task of saving men. The multitude gathered together upon the beach were ready and waiting to be enclosed in the gospel net.

Ver. 2. "*Were washing their nets.*"—It is interesting to notice how often in the Gospels Christ is revealed to men while they are busy in their worldly occupations, and how those very occupations are made the means of giving them truer knowledge of Him and of their relations to Him. 1. The shepherds at Bethlehem, while tending their flocks, receive tidings of the birth of Him who was to be the Good Shepherd. 2. The Magi, while engaged in watching the heavens, see the star that guides them to Christ, who was Himself the Star which was to arise out of Jacob (Num. xxiv. 17). 3. The fishermen of the Galilæan lake, Simon and Andrew, James and John, while engaged in their trade, are called to join Him and to become fishers of men. The figure of Christ as a fisherman was common in the early literature of the Church: it is based upon this passage and upon the parable in Matt. xiii. 47-50. Various refinements upon the figure were current, *e.g.* the mystical symbol of the ἰχθύς (*i.e.* an acrostic upon *Jesus Christ, Son of God, Saviour*), the idea of the soul, like the fish, being born in the water (of baptism), etc.

Ver. 3. "*Entered into one of the ships.*"—An old writer fancifully says of Christ in the boat and the people on the shore, "Behold the Fisherman upon the sea and the fish upon the land."

Vers. 4, 5. "*Launch out into the deep.*"—The faith of Simon Peter is now tested. The night-fishing had been utterly unsuccessful, and the idea of renewing the attempt that day had been abandoned: the boats had been drawn up on the shore, and the nets were being cleaned and dried. The fisherman is now told to launch out into the deep, and cast the nets again. Simon's knowledge of his craft, of the habits of fish, of the weather, etc., would have led him to refuse; but his deference to Christ and reverence for Him disposed Him to obey. To labour at the command of Christ, and to do so with alacrity and pains, is proof of a docile and implicit faith. Simon's obedience was perhaps not very severely tested by this command, but it must be remembered that his faith in Christ was as yet only in an early stage of development, and therefore more easily shaken: he now manifested deference to a Teacher, where afterwards he showed ardent obedience to a Lord and Saviour.

Ver. 5. "*Nevertheless.*"—Two feelings predominant in Peter's words: (1) weariness; (2) discouragement. "Nevertheless." Here is the correction of the two feelings. "This or that is against it, yet it shall be done."

I. **Life as a whole is one great "nevertheless."**

II. **Each act of the life is a little "nevertheless."**—A "though" and a "yet" in perpetual conflict, the "though," being the plausible thing, and the tempting thing, and the half-truth; the "yet" less apparent, but the manly thing, and the courageous and the right. There is a "though" as well as a "yet" in the simplest action. Though it is pleasant to sit still, I must be up and doing. It is irksome to perform this particular duty, but it must be done.—*Vaughan.*

Failure a Proof of Want of Faith.—Every failure is a proof of the want of faith. If faith were present, failure could not be. But there is such a thing as faith, after defeat, returning to the charge; and it is in that returning to the charge that the test of our Christianity lies.—*Ibid.*

"*At Thy bidding.*"—This is *the disciple's* "nevertheless," and finds its place in the disciple's daily duty and service. And by the faithful use of it the disciple is trained and prepared to meet other and higher demands. Humbly recognising past failure, and feeling the full weight of the disappointment, not ignoring the pressure of difficulty and the sting of pain, yet trusting in His grace, we set against the stream of indifference and unbelief the whole force of our will consecrated to Him, and say, "Nevertheless, at *Thy* bidding we will let down the net."—*Nicoll.*

Ver. 6. "*A great multitude of fishes.*"—It seems unnecessary to inquire minutely whether this miracle was due to Christ's omniscience or to His omnipotence, *i.e.* whether by supernatural knowledge He was aware of the near presence of a shoal of fish, or whether by His Divine power He brought together a multitude of the fish of the lake. Perhaps the former supposition would commend itself to most of us; but in favour of the latter we have the passage in Ps. viii. 8, in which the ideal son of man, who finds his true representative in Christ, is described as having supreme authority, not only over cattle and beasts of the earth, but over the fish and all creatures that live in the sea. In either case the miracle was equally stupendous.

Ver. 7. "*Beckoned.*"—Perhaps because of the distance they were away from the land, or because fishing operations are best carried on in silence. The noise of shouting might only drive the fish to struggle to escape, and add to the risk of losing them by their breaking through the nets.

The Miracle a Parable.—With this miracle we may compare the second of the kind wrought after the Resurrection, and also the parable in Matt. xiii. 47-50. We shall do well to keep in mind that these miracles were also parables and prophecies: everything connected with them is symbolical. The fishermen represent apostles and ministers of Christ, the ship is the Church, the net is the gospel, the sea is the world, and the shore is eternity. One part of the figure is inappropriate: the fish die when drawn out of the water, while the souls of men are taken captive to be introduced to a higher life. Perhaps this latter idea is conveyed in the words of Christ (ver. 10), "Catch men," lit. "take alive men," *i.e.* catch them for life eternal, instead of catching fish for death.

Ver. 8. "*Depart . . . for I am . . . sinful.*"

I. **An important fact.**—Peter saw himself a very sinful creature. When we stand near Jesus, we see ourselves: 1. Without moral beauty. Sin has taken away our comeliness. 2. Without moral purity. Sin has robbed us of our integrity. 3. Without moral utility. Our usefulness has gone. 4. Without moral prospect. The future is dark.

II. **A mistaken impression.**—1. "Depart from me": no, because there is something there besides sin. The Saviour beheld the man and the apostle there. 2. "Depart from me": no, because there is a great service to be rendered. Peter became a fisherman to catch men. 3. "Depart from me": no, for nearer Thee we have more light, more holiness.

The Repulsion and Attraction of Christ.—"Depart from me": "To whom shall we go?" (John vi. 68). The speaker of both texts is the same; the person addressed is the same. Yet the one utterance is the direct negation of the other. Whence comes this paradox? It is a paradox inherent in the religious life. This contrast of repulsion and attraction is the true attitude of the devout spirit towards God. Side by side they have their place in the heart—the awe which repels, the love which attracts. We

thrust God away, and yet we run after Him.—*Lightfoot.*

Peter's First Impulse.—An oppressive sense of sin had come over Peter in a moment. The eyes of God were looking from that heavenly face down into the depths of his heart. This wrung from him the cry of fear. So must it ever be when we come face to face with God. Observe Peter's first *impulse* when he realises how sinful he is. "Depart from me." The desire is to get away from God. Many do not like to think about God. But for Him to depart would be to leave the sinner helpless and hopeless. What we need is not less but more of Him. What was Peter's *final* impulse? To "forsake all, and follow Him."—*Gibson.*

Mixed Elements of Character.—This exclamation opens a window into the inner man of Peter through which we can see his spiritual state. There is in him that characteristic mixture of good and evil of which we have so many reappearances. Among the good elements are reverential awe in presence of Divine power, tenderness of conscience, and unfeigned self-humiliation—all valuable features of character, but not existing without alloy. Along with them were associated superstitious dread of the supernatural, and a slavish fear of God, showing how unfit, as yet, Peter is to be an apostle of a gospel which magnifies the grace of God even to the chief of sinners.—*Bruce.*

Self-humiliation.—With the self-humiliation of Simon Peter compare the confession of Isaiah (vi. 5) and that of St. Paul (1 Tim. i. 15). Note, also, how utterly inappropriate his words would have been, if Christ had been a mere man—even the holiest of men. They express a self-loathing which is excited only by the contemplation of infinite holiness, and by the thought of the near presence of God.

"*Depart from me.*"—The exclamation of St. Peter was wrung from a heart touched with a sense of humility, and his words did not express his thoughts. They were the cry of agonised humility, and only emphasised his own utter unworthiness. They were in reality the reverse of the deliberate and calculated request of the swine-feeding Gadarenes. The dead and profane soul tries to get rid of the presence of the Divine. The soul awakened only to conviction of sin is terrified. The soul that has found God is conscious of utter unworthiness, but fear is lost in love (1 John iv. 18). —*Farrar.*

A Strong Plea for Christ to remain. —Simon doth not greedily fall upon so unexpected and profitable a booty, but he turns his eyes from the draught to himself, from the act to the Author, acknowledging vileness in the one, in the other majesty: "Go from me, Lord, for I am a sinful man." It had been a pity the honest fisher should have been taken at his word. O Simon, thy Saviour is come into thine own ship to call thee, to call others by thee, unto blessedness; and dost thou say, "Lord, go from me"? as if the patient should say to the physician, "Depart from me, for I am sick." But it was the voice of astonishment, not of dislike—the voice of humility, not of discontentment; yea, because thou art a sinful man, therefore hath thy Saviour need to come to thee, to stay with thee; and because thou art humble in the acknowledgment of thy sinfulness, therefore Christ delights to abide with thee, and will call thee to abide with Him. No man ever fared the worse for abasing himself to his God. Christ hath left many a soul for froward and unkind usage; never any for the disparagement of itself, and entreaties of humility. Simon could not devise how to hold Christ faster than by thus suing Him to be gone, than by thus pleading his unworthiness.—*Hall.*

The Deepest Thing in Man's Heart.

—At moments like these all that is merely conventional is swept away, and the deep heart utters itself, and the deepest things that are there come forth to the light. And the deepest thing in man's heart under the law is this sense of God's holiness as something bringing death and destruction to the unholy creature. Below this is the utterly profane state, in which there is no contradiction felt between the holy and the unholy, between God and the sinner. Above it is the state of grace; in which all the contradiction is felt, God is still a consuming fire, yet not any more for the sinner, but only for the sin. It is still felt—felt far more strongly than ever—how profound a gulf separates between sinful man and a holy God; but felt no less that this gulf has been bridged over, that the two can meet, that in One who shares with both they have already met.—*Trench.*

Vers. 8-10. *A Strange Prayer and a Wonderful Answer.*

I. **The prayer is a strange one,** when we think *by whom and to whom it was offered.* This is a familiar gospel story. The prayer sounds like that of the Gadarene demoniacs; but no two cases could be more dissimilar. This prayer is wrung from a human soul by the sudden revelation of a Divine presence, of which it feels itself unworthy. Very strange must this prayer have looked to Peter in the retrospect—this prayer for separation from the Saviour, and that because he is a sinner. Here is a conversion of the converted, and that not the last or most memorable conversion. There will always be in heroic souls an experience, or many such, analogous to this of Peter. For lack of it we are ineffective, trifling, confident, wavering, unimpressive. Oh for the grace of reverence!

II. **The answer.**—Jesus does not blame the fear which He comforts. He first calms and then transfigures it. "There is a more excellent way; there is a Divine remedy for the fear that would shrink from Me: I will give thee work to do for Me." Two words are prominent in the commission. 1. "Men." Great stress is laid upon it. The object of the ministerial work is men, not "souls" merely, but "men." 2. The other word, "catch," speaks of a living capture, of a taking alive in the great net of the gospel. It might be said of some evangelists that they are satisfied to catch a piece of the man, and to catch that piece itself dead! How unlike this to the gospel of St. Peter! How is it that men, even religious men, must always dismember, never unite, the compound being to which they address themselves? There are those who despair of a gospel to the *whole* man. Not so Jesus Christ.—*Vaughan.*

Ver. 10. "*Thou shalt catch men.*"—Those that were wandering, restless and at random, through the deep, unquiet waters of the world, the smaller falling a prey to the greater, and all with the weary sense of a vast prison, he shall embrace within the safe folds and recesses of the same gospel net, which if they break not through, nor leap over, they shall at length be drawn up to shore, out of the dark, gloomy waters into the bright, clear light of day, so that they may be gathered into vessels for eternal life (Matt. xiii. 48).—*Trench.*

The Fisherman and the Shepherd.—The figure here used does not set forth the whole work of the Christian minister, but only two aspects of successful work He may accomplish, viz. that of securing within the net, and that of landing safely upon the shore. These are the first and last stages in the salvation of the soul. The intermediate stages are those in which the soul is ministered to, and fed, and encouraged, and guarded from harm; and these are represented under the figure of a shepherd caring for sheep. Hence the two figures mutually supplement one another, and show us the offices of a Christian minister as an evangelist and pastor respectively. Other thoughts

in connection with these two figures are suggested by *Jeremy Taylor*: "In the days of the patriarchs, the governors of the Lord's people were called shepherds. In the days of the gospel they are shepherds still, but with the addition of a new appellative, for now they are called fishers. Both of the callings were honest, humble, and laborious, watchful and full of trouble; but now that both the titles are conjunct, we may observe the symbol of an implicit and folded duty. There is much simplicity and care in the shepherd's trade; there is much craft and labour in the fisher's; and a prelate is to be both full of piety to his flock, careful of their welfare, and also to be discreet and wary, observant of advantages, laying such baits for the people as may entice them into the nets of Jesus' discipline."

The Significance of the Miracle.—The physical miracle was to be superseded by miracles of a higher kind, inasmuch as success in the spiritual labours of apostles is a greater proof of Divine power than mighty works that appeal to the bodily senses. The miraculous draught of men which Peter was at a later time to secure (Acts ii. 41) was more wonderful than the miracle now wrought. The purpose of the miracle seems to have been to deepen and strengthen the faith of those whom Christ now called to engage in spiritual labours, to secure obedience to that call, and to give intimation of splendid success in pursuing that higher work. Observe that Jesus calls these men to have more than faith, to give up their secular employment and to engage in work of a sacred kind. As they are not yet appointed to be apostles, their *status* is very similar to that of the Christian minister.—*Godet.*

The Training of the Apostles.—"Christ selected rough mechanics—persons not only destitute of learning, but inferior in capacity—that He might train, or rather renew, them by the power of His Spirit, so as to excel all the wise men of the world" (*Calvin*). No one need imagine that want of learning and ability are not drawbacks in the case of those who wish to become Christian ministers. Only a gross and ignorant fanaticism could foster such an idea. These fishermen were not called to teach, but to be trained to teach. What they learned from the example and teaching of Christ, from knowledge of human character and society as they went up and down the country with Him, prepared them for their great work. The various kinds of training our theological students are exercised in, are the best and most efficient substitutes which can be found for the methods employed in the case of the apostles.

Ver. 11. "*Forsook all.*"—They returned again to their occupation as fishermen after the Crucifixion, and were again called to abandon it and devote themselves to spiritual labours by a second miraculous draught of fishes and by the direct precept of Jesus. After Pentecost they never resumed their former secular calling. Probably in their going back to it we have an indication of their belief that with the death of Jesus all the hopes they had cherished were overthrown, and His call to them to become fishers of men nullified. The example of Simon Peter suggests the duties of (1) prompt obedience to Jesus, (2) self-distrust, (3) and complete devotion to Him ("leaving all to follow Him").

> "Thou hast the art on't, Peter, and canst tell
> To cast thy net on all occasions well.
> When Christ calls, and thy nets would have thee stay,
> To cast them well's to cast them quite away" (*Crashaw*).

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 12—16.

"*Be clean : be silent.*"—The Mosaic law, which banished the leper from camp and city, which compelled him to go with bare head and rent garment, as one who mourned his own death, and to cry, "Unclean, unclean!" so often as he approached the haunts of men, was not a sanitary precaution, but a dramatic religious parable setting forth God's hatred for the various forms of disease and death which spring from sin. Those afflicted by this disease were doubly burdened—they were the prey of the most loathsome of all physical maladies, and were living emblems of the disastrous effects of sin and of God's anger against it. Hence we can understand the intense longing with which this leper entreated to be cured, and the compassion of the Saviour for one in his pitiable condition. Note:—

I. **The astonishing and sublime faith of the leper.**—"Full of leprosy," he draws near to Jesus with the cry, "Lord, if Thou wilt, Thou canst make me clean." Jesus had not long begun His public ministry. He had only just delivered the Sermon on the Mount. He had not fully showed Himself unto Israel. The leper could not possibly have heard many of His words, or have seen many of His works. He may have sat on the mountain, apart from the the groups which gathered immediately round Jesus, and may have heard the divinest words which ever fell from human lips. But a great multitude had also heard them. Yet none but the leper seems to have felt that He who spake as never man spake must be more than man—the Lord from heaven. He does not hesitate to address Christ as "Lord"; nay, he worships this "Lord" as God. He kneels down, and falls on his face before Him, as though seeing in Him a divine and ineffable majesty. He has no doubt of Christ's *power* to heal a disease which was yet beyond the scope of human power. But he is humble; he refers himself solely to the pure and kindly will of Christ, leaves the decision to Him, and is prepared to accept it, whatever it may be.

II. **The compassion of Christ.**—"Moved with compassion" (Mark i. 41), "He put forth His hand and *touched* him." To touch a leper was to become a leper in the eye of the law and of the priests. So that to heal a leper Christ became a leper, just as to save sinners He who knew no sin became sin for us. What comfort was in that touch, and what promise! For how should Christ take him by the hand and not heal him? how bid him rise, and lift him from the dust, without also raising him from death to life? The touch of Christ was His response to the leper's worship: the words He speaks respond to the leper's prayer. "Lord, if Thou wilt, Thou canst make me clean." "I will: be thou clean." Word answers to word: the response of Christ is a mere echo of the leper's prayer. And so when we cry, "Make us clean," God always answers, "Be thou clean." But that is not always the answer we hear or seem to hear. We often ask God to create a clean heart within us when He can only cleanse our hearts with a torrent of affliction or with bitter tears of repentance.

III. **Our Lord's command.**—"To tell no man, and to show himself to the priests." We should have thought that the man's first duty was *not* to hold his peace, but to tell every man he met what a great Saviour he had found, and to urge them to repair to the Healer, in order that they too might be made whole. Perhaps after all, in spite of the opinion of many good men in the present day, it is *not* every convert's first and great duty to bear verbal witness to the Saviour who has redeemed him. One of the reasons for this command was, doubtless, that our Lord did not as yet wish to draw on Himself the public attention. It was perilous to the higher objects of His mission that the people of Galilee, ignorant and sensual in their thoughts, should crowd round Him, and try to make Him

by force the sort of king He would not be. And, therefore, for a time He set Himself to repress the eager zeal of his converts and disciples. Another and more special reason was, that He wished the leper to discharge a special duty, viz. to bear "a testimony to the priests." He cared for the absent priests in distant Jerusalem, no less than for the leper's immediate neighbours in Galilee. As yet the priests were prejudiced against Him. They thought of Him as a zealot, a fanatic, who in cleansing the Temple had swept away corruptions at which they connived, by which they had profited. The testimony He wished to send them could hardly have failed to make a deep and auspicious impression on their minds. Jesus would fain have brought them all to a knowledge of the truth and a better mind. And then, too, His deference to their priestly authority could hardly have failed to propitiate them, and to convince them that He was bent on establishing the law, not on making it void.

IV. **The leper's blended obedience and disobedience to the command.**—By lingering on the way and prating to every man he met, it is likely that confused and misleading rumours concerning the miracle would travel before him, and his message would lose much of its value. Till the priests have pronounced him clean, he was a leper in the eye of the law, and had no right to enter the cities and talk with men. If he assumed that he was clean before they pronounced him clean, they would infer that both he and Christ were wanting in respect both to them and to the law. All the grace, all the courtesy and deference, of our Lord's act would be cast away, and the special value and force of the testimony to the priests would be impaired, if not lost. Obviously, he thought to honour Christ by "much publishing" what He had done. Yet to what good end did he honour Christ with his tongue, while he dishonoured by disobeying Him in his life. Let us take the warning, and be "swift to hear, slow to speak." Much talk about religion—and especially about the externals of religion, about miracles and proofs, about ceremonies or the affairs of the Church—so far from strengthening the spirit of devotion, is perilously apt to weaken it. There are few who are strong enough to talk as well as to act. A great faith such as this leper's is not always a patient, submissive faith. No doubt he would have found it much easier to lay down his life for Christ's sake than to hold his tongue for Christ's sake, just as Naaman would have found it easier to "do some great thing" than simply to bathe in the Jordan. Yet we need not think too hardly of him because he could not refrain his tongue. The man who can rule that member is a perfect man, for his faith covers his whole life down to its lightest action.—*Cox.*

The Leper and the Lord.

I. **The leper's cry.**—There is a keen sense of misery. This impels him to passionate desire for healing. How this contrasts with the indifference of men as to soul-cleansing! 1. *Note his confidence.* He was sure of Christ's power to heal. 2. *Note his doubt.* He is uncertain as to Christ's willingness. He has no right to presume on it. Therefore he comes with a modest prayer, breathing entreaty quite as much as doubt. The leper's doubt is our certainty. We know the principle on which Christ's mercy flows.

II. **The Lord's answer.**—Show Him misery, and He answers with pity. Christ's touch accompanies His compassion. Those who would heal "lepers" must "touch" them. Christ's word accompanies His touch. A word of dignity and conscious power, curt, authoritative, imperative.

III. **The immediate cure.**—"Straightway." The healing of the leprosy of sin may be equally immediate. Forgiveness may be the act of a moment, though the conquering of sin be gradual and life-long. Do not suspect, but expect, immediate conversions.—*Maclaren.*

SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS ON VERSES 12—16.

Ver. 12. *Leprosy is Typical of Sin.*

I. In virtue of its **repulsiveness.**

II. As suggesting **impurity or defilement.**

III. As leading to **isolation or separation.**—*Laidlaw.*

Leprosy a Symbol of Divine Anger.—Leprosy was the most frightful of all diseases, and was regarded by the Jews with special horror, as a symbol of God's wrath against sin. In Jewish history we read of it as having been directly inflicted by God in punishment of (1) rebellion (Miriam—Num. xii.), (2) lying (Gehazi—2 Kings v. 27), and (3) presumption (Uzziah—2 Chron. xxvi. 19). The sufferings of the leper arose (1) from the physical malady, which gradually and slowly consumed the body, and could neither be cured nor alleviated by human skill, and (2) from the ceremonial defilement which it involved, and which both excluded him from the Temple and imposed upon him separation from human society. We read of these unhappy outcasts as gathering together into companies outside towns (2 Kings vii. 3; Luke xvii. 12). Leprosy is taken as a symbol of the depth of spiritual defilement and death in Ps. li. 7 and Isa. i. 6. "Leprosy was nothing short of a living death, a corrupting of all the humours, a poisoning of the very springs of life, a dissolution little by little of the whole body, so that one limb after another actually decayed and fell away (*Trench*).

Leprosy and Death.—The leper was the type of one dead in sin: the same emblems are used in his misery as those of mourning for the dead; the same means of cleansing as for uncleanness in connection with death, and which were never used except on these two occasions.—*Alford.*

Human Nature typified by this Leper.—Leprosy was to the body what sin is to the soul. Christ heals the leper by His touch. Human nature was typified by this leper. Christ healed us all by His touch. He touched us by taking our nature (Heb. ii. 16), and thus cleansed us.—*Wordsworth.*

"*Fell on his face.*"—By this act of reverence we should not necessarily be led to suppose that this sufferer knew Jesus as a Divine being; but taken in connection with his belief in our Saviour's omnipotence, and his use of the title "Lord," it indicates that genuine worship was now offered to Christ and accepted by Him.

"*If Thou wilt, Thou canst.*"—He was convinced of Christ's power, but not sure whether He would cleanse this sickness, as evidently this was the first case of leprosy which our Lord had been asked to cure.

"*Make me clean.*"

I. **The prayer of faith.**—No doubt of Christ's ability to heal him. The only question is—Is Christ willing to help him? The prayer shows acquiescence as well as humility.

II. **A prayer for physical blessing.**—In such things we never can know what is really best for us. Threatened death, or loss of property. Are we to pray to have these averted? We are never sure. We must in such temporal emergencies ever say, "If Thou wilt, Thou canst."—*Miller.*

An Exemplary Prayer.—Whether the leper consciously meant it or not, his words, "If Thou wilt, Thou canst make me clean," are quite in the spirit of prayer as Christ has taught it to us and exemplified it Himself. It was a prayer for a temporal blessing—the restoration of his health, and is made conditional upon the will of the Lord. So is it with all temporal blessings. We may desire them earnestly and ask for them from God,

but leave the bestowal or withholding of them to His gracious will. We accept this as the condition of prayer, because we feel that God in His wisdom knows better than we do what would be best for us. But no such condition attaches to prayers we offer for spiritual blessings, for we can be perfectly sure that all such *are* good for us. And we see that Christ Himself, in offering the prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane to be saved from death (Heb. v. 7), left the granting of His request to be determined by the will of God (chap. xxii. 42). The same recognition of the Divine power to fulfil the prayers of the afflicted, together with an equally calm resignation to the will of God, whatever it may be, are to be found in Dan. iii. 17, 18, and 2 Sam. xv. 25, 26.

Christ's Omnipotence.—Christ's omnipotence is the first attribute that impresses a spectator of His life and work: His calm bearing and air of authority produce a deep impression; His infinite goodness and compassion can only be fully realised as He becomes better known by us. Both *anxiety* and *faith* are manifest in this leper's words.

Ver. 13. "*Jesus touched him.*"

I. **None of the Jews would have done this.**—He was a leper. They kept lepers afar off, for fear of defilement. Jesus was not afraid of defilement. He could have healed him without a touch. But the man needed the touch of a warm hand to assure him of sympathy. Many wish to do Christian work from a distance—through agents and committees. It is much better to come close to those we wish to benefit. There is a wondrous power in a human touch. You put something of yourself into your gift.

II. **The touch left no taint of defilement on Christ.**—It left the leprous body clean without making the Healer leprous. There is no danger in touching the lowest outcasts, if you go to them with God's love in your heart, and yearning to do good. Do not slip your tract under the door and hurry away as if you were afraid or ashamed. Go inside these homes. It will not soil your hand to clasp the hands of the poor. You will both bless and be blessed in the deed.—*Miller.*

Christ's Union with our Nature.—When He took upon Him our flesh, He did not only deign to touch us with His hand, but was united to one and the same body with ourselves, that we might be flesh of His flesh.—*Calvin.*

"*Be thou clean.*"—"Such an imperative as the tongue of man had never hitherto uttered. Thus has hitherto no prophet healed. Thus He speaks in the might of God who speaks and it is done" (*Stier*). Contrast with Christ's words those used by St. Peter in Acts iii. 6, 12.

Answers to Prayer.—The leper had known that Christ was able to heal him; now he knew that Christ was willing to do so. In his case there was no delay between the offering of the prayer and the gift of the blessing asked. But in our experience there may be delay in our receiving the blessing we crave. There may lie between the majestic and merciful words "I will" and the visible result sometimes weeks and years. The prayer of faith our Lord hears at once, and He gives the soul assurance of having been heard through the Holy Spirit; but the fulfilment of the prayer He often accomplishes only after a long time, and by the delay He would prepare us for a greater benefit than that for which we asked. In the holy sacraments which appeal to our senses we have Christ stretching forth His hands to touch and cleanse the soul.

Ver. 14. "*To tell no man.*"—The soul that has received blessing from God, and is conscious of it, is apt to lose the

freshness and beauty of its spiritual life by talking too freely to others of its secret experiences, just as a rose sprinkled with dew loses something of its freshness when it is plucked and passed from hand to hand. We are instinctively slow to speak of the things that touch us deeply, and a certain hardness and coarseness are observable in the character of those who are ready to speak of their deepest spiritual experiences to those who are willing to listen to them. No one can, indeed, receive great spiritual benefits from God without revealing the fact to others, but the unconscious testimony of a humble, devout life is often far more eloquent than words that come too readily from the lips.

"*To tell no man.*"—Besides the reason suggested above in the Critical Notes, Christ may have intended that the man who had been cleansed should lose no time in proceeding to the Temple—should go on this errand "without saluting any by the way" or pausing to tell about his cure. The reasons for the journey: 1. Obedience to the Mosaic regulations concerning leprosy. 2. The expression of gratitude to God for the benefit received. 3. That the priests might learn, and by their examination of the person cleansed attest, that a mighty work had been wrought by the power of God.

"*Testimony.*"—The priests and people of Jerusalem were inclined to be hostile towards Christ: the effect of this miracle notified to them should have been to produce faith in Jesus. It was now a testimony *to* them; it might, in case of persistent unbelief, become a testimony *against* them.

The King's Touch.—This King's touch cures all sorts of diseases. It did so while He walked in a low, despised condition on earth; and it does so still by that virtual Divine power now that He is in heaven. And although His glory there is greater, His compassion is not less than when He was here; and His compassion always was, and is, directed much more to souls diseased than to bodies, as they are better and more valuable.—*Leighton.*

Superstitious Inferences from the Narrative.—The use made of this passage by Roman Catholic theologians in support of confession to priests and the observance of penance seems farfetched. It is not the priests who heal, but Christ: they merely attest the fact, and their doing so is simply because of their administration of laws partly ceremonial and partly sanitary, which are now abolished. There is no record of powers corresponding to theirs being instituted in connection with the ministers of the Christian religion.

Ver. 15. *Grateful, but disobedient.*—St. Mark informs us that the man who had been cleansed disobeyed the strict injunction of Christ and "blazed abroad the matter." His disobedience was culpable, though natural. His joy at recovering health must have been very intense, and his instinctive feelings must have led him to say, like the psalmist, "Come ye and hear, all ye who fear God, and I will declare what He hath done for my soul" (Ps. lxvi. 16). As a result, however, of his impulsive conduct, Christ was incommoded in His work by the multitudes that thronged to Him to be healed of their infirmities.

What the Miracles of Healing were.—Our Lord's miracles of healing may be regarded—

I. **As proofs of His Divine mission,** His Messiahship, and His divinity.

II. **As a means of disarming prejudice,** and thereby securing a favourable reception for His teachings.

III. **As encouragements to believing prayer** under the ordinary trials of life.

IV. **As emblems of the spiritual blessings** which He bestows.

V. **As examples to be copied by His disciples in all time.**—*Johnston.*

Vers. 15, 16. "*Great multitudes came together . . . and He withdrew Himself.*"

I. The first cleansing of a leper was a trumpet-call to all sufferers to flock to the Emmanuel presence.

II. But *He*, whose praise was on all lips, and who was Himself the holy centre of all these activities and all these mercies, "withdrew . . . and prayed." It was not one withdrawal, one wilderness, one prayer (all is plural in the original): the withdrawals were repeated, the wildernesses were more than one, the prayers were habitual. Solitary prayer was His custom. Is it ours? Does not the question humble us? Prayer divided His life with teaching and healing. We too *need* the desert. It is not safe to have the world always with us.—*Vaughan.*

The Prayers of Christ.

I. **How different from ours!**—No confession of sin. That topic was a blank to Him. No need of forgiveness.

II. **How real His prayers!**—For strength. How often is it said, "He looked up to heaven"! "Father, I thank Thee!" There was no acting, no feigning, in His devotions. He really prayed, and was really answered. Prayer was no luxury, no self-indulgence.

III. **How continual His prayers!**—He was ever withdrawing Himself from human sight and contact. Do we not need like withdrawings, and more of them?—*Ibid.*

Ver. 16. "*Withdrew Himself into the wilderness.*"—By solitary communion with God and by holy meditation even Jesus was strengthened. It is a proof of the completeness of His assimilation to us that He sought and found help by those means of grace which are at our service. Could any argument for the duty of prayer to God be stronger than this which is afforded by the example of Christ? If He found prayer a necessity of His life, how much more should we!

A Testimony to the Truthfulness of the Gospels.—The insertion of this reference to Christ's prayers is a testimony to the truthfulness of the Gospels. Had the writers invented the stories of His miraculous powers, and aimed at representing Him as altogether a supernatural being, the ideas of humility and dependence upon God, which prayer implies, would have seemed to them foreign and contradictory to their purpose.

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 17—26.

Christ's Claim to forgive, and its Attestations.—The important part of this story is not the miracle, but the forgiveness preceding it, and the teaching as to the relation between the invisible and perpetual work of Christ on men's consciences and His visible work on their outward condition.

I. The first thought suggested is—**that our deepest need is forgiveness.** Christ's answer to the faith He discerned here seems irrelevant and beside the mark. "Man, thy sins are forgiven thee," was far away from the wishes of the bearers; but it was the shortest road to their accomplishment, and goes straight to the heart of the case. Probably the sick man felt that, whatever his friends wanted for him, what he wanted most for himself was pardon. And forgiveness is our prime need. A man's relation to God is the most important thing. If that is wrong, everything is wrong. The consciousness that we have sinned is the source of all sorrow; for the most of our misery comes either from our own or others' wrong-doing, and the rest is needful because of sin, in order to discipline and purify. Hence the profound wisdom of Christ and of His gospel in not trifling with the surface, but going right to the centre. The wise physician pays little heed to secondary symptoms, but grapples with the disease. Christ makes the tree good, and trusts the good tree to make, as

it will, good fruit. The first thing to do, in order to heal men's misery, is to make them pure, and the first step towards that is to assure them of Divine forgiveness. All other attempts to deliver men will fail if this deepest wound be not dealt with first.

II. **Forgiveness is an exclusively Divine act.**—Those who now in their hearts accused Christ of blasphemy were quite right in believing that forgiveness is God's prerogative. "Sin" has to do with God only; vice has to do with morality; crime has to do with human law; and the same act may be regarded in any one of these three aspects. When regarded as sin, only He against whom it has been committed can forgive it. Forgiveness is mainly that the love of the offended shall flow to the offender, notwithstanding the offence. It is love rising above the dam which we have flung across its course, and pouring into our hearts. The essence of forgiveness is not the suspension of penalty, but the unchecked and unembittered gift of God's love to the sinner. This is what we need, and we need to have a definite Divine declaration of it. A vague trust in the possible mercy of a silent God is not enough: we need to hear with infallible certitude the assurance of forgiveness.

III. **Jesus claims and exercises the Divine prerogative of forgiveness.**—Had He been a mere man, His critics would have been justified in bringing the charge of blasphemy against Him. And he would have been bound, as a religious teacher and as a devout man, to disdain any intention of usurping the Divine prerogative. But He recognises their premises, and then asserts that He, the Son of man, has the power which they and He agree in acknowledging to belong to God only. "No man can forgive sins, but God only. I forgive sins. Whom think ye that I, the Son of man, am?" Surely we are here brought face to face with a very sharp alternative: either Jesus was an audacious blasphemer, or He was God manifest in the flesh. The whole context forbids us to take these words, "Thy sins are forgiven thee," as anything less than Divine love wiping out the man's transgressions; and if Jesus Christ said them, no hypothesis can save His character for the undiminished reverence of the world but that which sees in Him God revealed in manhood, the Son of man, who is the Son of God, the Judge of men, and their Pardoner.

IV. **Jesus Christ brings visible facts to attest His invisible power.**—The sentences, "Thy sins are forgiven thee," and "Arise, and take up thy couch," are equally easy to pronounce; the fulfilments of them are equally impossible for a man to bring about; but the difference between them is that the one can be checked, and the other cannot. He will do the visible impossibility, and leave them to judge whether He can do the invisible one or not. Of course the miracle was a witness to His right to assume the Divine prerogative, and to the efficacy of His announcement of forgiveness, only if He did it (as He assumed to give pardon) by virtue of His being in an altogether unique way the wielder of Divine power. If He did the one as a mere minister and recipient of that power, as a Moses or an Elijah, He must do the other in the same way, *i.e.* merely declare that God had forgiven the sinner. But the very stamp on all His miracles is that they are His in a fashion which is perfectly unique. True, "the Father that dwelleth in Me, He doeth the works"; but that dwelling of the Father in Him was unexampled, and presupposed His own divinity. Note, then, that our Lord here teaches us the power of His miracles as evidences of His Deity, and sets forth lucidly the relative importance of the miracle and of the inward forgiveness which it attests. The miracle is subordinate to the higher and the permanent work of bringing pardon and peace to sinners.

The subsidiary, visible effects of the gospel constitute very strong evidence of the reality of Christ's claims to exercise the invisible power of pardon. Men

reclaimed, passions tamed, homes made, instead of pandemoniums, houses of God, are proofs that the forgiveness which He gives is no mere delusion.—*Maclaren.*

SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS ON VERSES 7—26.

Vers. 17-26. *Christ forgiving Sin.*

I. **Sin and disease.**—Christ forgave the sin first, showing that He regarded it as having come first, the disease being in some measure the result of sin. There is punishment for sin in this life. If not seen in the physical frame, it is seen in the deadened conscience, the hardened heart.

II. **Faith and forgiveness.**—The man knew that he needed healing, and believed that Christ could and would heal him. If he did not yet fully admit that sin was at the root of his ailment, Christ's words settled that, and he confessed it in his heart. Sin injures not only man, but God. David said, "Against Thee only have I sinned," though he had sinned against others, and against himself. This sin entails the burden of guilt. This burden can be cleared away. Sin's worst effect can be, and at a great cost has been, removed. It is as easy to say, "Thy sins be forgiven thee," as to say, "Rise up, and walk." But the first is harder to accomplish. Nature never forgives—is merciless to those who get in her way. Man cannot forgive completely: only God can so forgive as to restore love and confidence. But it is not easy even for God to do so. Should we not value forgiveness all the more? It is a blessing greater and better than bodily healing.—*Hastings.*

Ver. 17. "*Pharisees and doctors of the law sitting by.*"—*I.e.* occupying places of honour and pre-eminence; seated as critics to judge the teaching and actions of Jesus. Their want of sympathy with Him and their prejudices soon brought them into collision with Him. We can only truly learn of Christ and understand Him by abandoning the attitude of critics, and taking up that of humble, childlike faith. The power to heal was present with Christ, yet it was only faith that could give it free scope. Such faith was manifested in the incident that follows.

Ver. 18. *Bearing one another's Burdens.*

I. **This is the kind of help we ought to render to each other.**—There are many all around us needing such aid.

II. **There are many ways of doing this neighbourly duty.**

III. **There was co-operation in this work.**—One could not have done this work. It needed four. United, they had no difficulty. So it is in helping sinners to Christ. There is strength in the union of hearts and hands, when one alone cannot take his friend to the Saviour.—*Miller.*

Intercession for Others.—It is clear that the faith of those who carried him was helpful to the sick man and specially moved our Saviour. It is true that the wise virgins cannot lend their oil to those who have it not—that no one is saved through the faith and prayers of another, if he does not himself believe. But there is a place for intercession for others. A believing heart can by prayer and supplication prevail with God to give another a new heart and faith. The words of Ambrose to Monica, grieving over the sins of her son Augustine, beautifully express this truth: "It is impossible that so many tears from a believing heart should be in vain. You will see that God will melt the heart of the son of thy tears, and bring him to repentance and faith." And it happened as the bishop had said.

Ver. 19. "*Let him down through the tiling.*"—A fine illustration of the saying, "The kingdom of heaven suf-

fereth violence, and the violent take it by force" (Matt. xi. 12).

Ver. 20. *Their Faith.*—Which persisted in spite of obstacles until the sick man was brought into His presence. The holy boldness manifested could not but please Him. It is interesting to observe that the faith of the bearers is of a kind Christ approves and rewards: this fact should encourage us in making intercession for others. So far as appears the sufferer was entirely passive, and offered no petition for himself. In answer to the question, How far do men derive benefit from the faith of others, Calvin says, "It is certain that the faith of Abraham was of advantage for his posterity when he embraced the free covenant offered to him and to his seed. We must hold a similar belief with regard to all believers, that, by their faith, the grace of God is extended to their children and their children's children, even before they are born. It is also beyond all question that earthly blessings are often, for the sake of the godly, bestowed on unbelievers."

Faith seen in Works.—The efforts of the sick man's friends told of—

I. **A very strong faith.**—The best evidence of faith is the effort we make to obtain faith's prize. There is no need of words or protestations where acts of faith attest its existence.

II. **Christ sees faith.**—He sees it in the heart where it is exercised, before there has been any expression of it in word or act; but the emphasis here lies on the fact that He sees it in act, and is pleased when it is evidenced by works. He hears wordless prayers; but where possible prayer should embody itself in act. God wants to *see* our faith.—*Miller.*

"*Thy sins are forgiven thee.*"—It is evident that while the thoughts of his friends were bent upon the cure of his physical malady, the man himself was chiefly concerned about his spiritual state. He seems, too, to have been despondent, if not despairing, since Christ's first words to him, as St. Matthew says (ix. 2), were, "Son, be of good cheer." From the word "son" (lit. "child), we understand that he was but young in years. Probably the reference to his sins before the cure is wrought is to be explained by the disease being the consequence of sinful courses.

A Declaration of Forgiveness.—The absolving words are not optative only, no mere desire that so it might be, but *declaratory* that so it was: the man's sins *were* forgiven. Nor yet were they declaratory only of something which passed in the mind and intention of God; but, even as the words were spoken, there was shed abroad in his heart the sense of forgiveness and of reconciliation with God. —*Trench.*

Forgiveness of Sin and Remission of Penalty.—An interval took place, therefore, between the forgiveness of sin and the remission of the penalty which sin had brought. In this case it was but a short interval. In many other instances men have to bear for long, and perhaps while they live, the penal consequences of their sins, even though they have obtained forgiveness. But in their case there is this compensation, that the displeasure of God being removed, their sufferings are no longer punishments.

Ver. 21. "*Speaketh blasphemies.*"—From their point of view, since they regarded Christ as a mere man, the objection raised by the scribes and Pharisees was perfectly justifiable. Their fault lay in the culpable spiritual blindness which hindered their recognition of His Divine glory.

Blasphemy.—Profane antiquity was unacquainted with the profound Biblical meaning of "blasphemy." In the sense in which they viewed it, it only signifies, first, to speak evil of

any one; and secondly, to utter words of evil foreboding. Monotheism alone leads to the true notion of blasphemy, which denotes not only imprecations, and injurious words against God, but more especially the assumption on the part of the creature of the honour belonging to the Creator (John x. 33). —*Olshausen.*

Of what this Sin consists.—Blasphemy is when (1) unworthy things are ascribed to God, (2) when the honour due to Him is withheld, and (3) when that which is specially His is conferred upon those to whom it does not belong. —*Bengel.*

All Sins are against God.—They are against God *only* (Ps. li. 4). They may be injuries and cruelties to others, but, as sins, they are relative *to God only.* And hence God only can forgive them.—*Morison.*

Absolution.—The belief in a human absolving power retains a pertinacious hold upon mankind. The savage believes that his priest can shield him from the consequences of sin. There was not a people in antiquity who had not dispensers of Divine favour. That same belief passed from Paganism into Romanism. It was exposed at the period of the Reformation: the whole idea of a human priesthood was proved baseless, human mediation was vehemently controverted, and men were referred back to God as the sole absolver. Yet still now again, three centuries after, the belief is as strong as ever. The question is not solved by merely denying the error. The heart craves human assurance of forgiveness, and can only be satisfied by positive truth.

I. **The impotency of the negation.** —"None can forgive sins, but God only." The Pharisees denied the efficacy of human absolution: but what did they effect by such denial? They conferred no peace; they produced no holiness. They were startled at hearing a man freely announcing forgiveness. It appeared to them licence given to sin. If this new Teacher were to go about the land telling sinners to be at peace, to forget the past and to work onwards, bidding men's consciences be at rest, and commanding them not to *fear* the God whom they had offended, but to *trust* in Him, what would become of morality and religion? What remained to restrain them from sin? For to dread God, and not to love and trust Him, was their conception of religion. Another class of men, the scribes, also denied human power of absolution. They were men of ponderous learning and accurate definitions. They could define the exact number of yards that might be travelled on the Sabbath day without infringement of the law; they could decide the respective importance of each duty, and tell which was the *great* commandment of the law. The scribe is the man who turns religion into etiquette; his idea of God is that of a monarch, transgression against whom is an offence against statute law; and he, the scribe, is there to explain the prescribed conditions upon which the offence may be expiated. And there are scribes in the present day, who have no idea of God but as an incensed judge, and prescribe certain methods of appeasing Him—certain prices—in consideration of which He is willing to sell forgiveness. What wonder is it that many should cry, "You have restricted God's love and narrowed the path to heaven: you have terrified me with so many snares and pitfalls, on every side, that I dare not tread at all. Give me peace; give me human guidance: I want a human arm to lean on."

II. **The power of the positive truth.** —What is forgiveness? It is God reconciled to us. What is absolution? It is the authoritative declaration that God is reconciled. Authoritative—that is, a real power of conveying a sense and feeling of forgiveness. It is the power of the Son of man *on earth* to forgive sins. It is man, God's image, representing by his forgiveness on earth God's forgiveness in heaven.

Absolution is the conveyance to the conscience of the conviction of forgive ness; to absolve is to free—to comfort by strengthening—to afford repose from fear. The Saviour emancipated from sin by the freeness of absolution. The moment the sinner's feelings changed towards God, He proclaimed that God was reconciled to him. Hence came His wondrous power with sinful, erring hearts; hence the life and fresh impulse which He imparted to the being and experience of those with whom He dealt. The absolving power is the central secret of the gospel. Salvation is unconditional: not an offer, but a *gift*; not clogged with conditions, but free as the air we breathe. And the power Christ exercised of declaring forgiveness He delegated to His Church: "Whosesoever sins ye remit, they are remitted." An example of the use of this power is given in 2 Cor. ii. 10. The apostle absolves a man because the congregation absolved him; not as a plenipotentiary supernaturally gifted to convey a mysterious benefit, but as himself an organ and representative of the Church. The power of absolution, therefore, belonged to the Church, and to the apostle through the Church. It was a power belonging to all Christians: to the apostle, because he was a Christian, not because he was an apostle. A priestly power, no doubt, because Christ has made all Christians kings and priests. By every magnanimous act, by every free forgiveness with which a pure man forgives, or pleads for mercy, or assures the penitent, he proclaims this truth, that "the Son of man hath power on earth to forgive sins"—he exhibits the priestly power of humanity—*he does* absolve: let theology say what it will of absolution, he gives peace to the conscience—he is a type and assurance of what God is—he breaks the chains and lets the captive go free.—*Robertson.*

A Delayed Cure.—It seems hard that the "doctors of the law" should be permitted to interpose.

I. But it was good for them that the cure was delayed till they had fixed on a test by which they would try Jesus, until He had reduced their doubts to a single, definite issue, and then triumphantly encountered it. And—

II. **And it was good for the paralytic himself.**—It gave him time to reflect on the gracious words, "Thy sins are forgiven thee"—to feel their power, to lay their comfort to heart. God will often delay to grant our prayers, *because* He loves us, because He wishes to assure us that we are really His.—*Cox.*

The Inward certified by the Outward.—The Saviour, in the most felicitous manner imaginable, brings the case to the simplest of issues. There was no need for any long discussion. The whole matter could be settled with a few words. The inward could be certified by the outward, without any circumlocution; the upward could be reflected by the downward, immediately; the invisible could be manifested in the visible, just at once. And if, therefore, it would be more satisfactory to them, or would carry more of the evidence of Divine authority, He could speak a few words of fiat in reference to the visible, and downward, and outward; and He would do that just as easily as He had authoritatively said, *Thy sins have been forgiven.* They might call in question His authority to say, *Thy sins have been forgiven*, inasmuch as they could not actually see the dismissal of the sins. But if when He said, *Arise, take up thy bed, and walk*, they could see with their eyes that the fiat was fulfilled, then surely they would have no just reason for calling in question the fulness of the Divine authority that was behind all that He was saying and doing.—*Morison.*

Ver. 22. "*Perceived their thoughts.*"—The supernatural insight of Christ is plainly indicated in this narrative. The secret thoughts of men lie open to Him. (1) He recognises the penitence and faith of the sufferer, though He speaks no word, and (2) He perceives

and follows out the reasonings of the unbelieving scribes and Pharisees.

Ver. 23. "*Whether is easier*," *etc.*—That is to utter words which lead to no visible consequences, or to utter words which are meant to disturb the visible course of nature? Our Lord does not compare the *acts* themselves, but the safety of claiming the power to perform them.—*Burgon.*

Ver. 24. "*But that ye may know.*"—The miracle was meant not only to reward the faith of those who had sought this benefit from Christ, but to convince the unbelieving spectators of His true power and claims. In it we may see His mercy toward even those who were hard of heart and who accused Him of blasphemy. He would give them a sign by which they might be enabled to overcome their unbelief.

Christ's Consciousness of Divine Authority.—How thoroughly conscious the Saviour must have been of His Divine authority and power! His whole influence in the country and the world at large, in the age and for all ages, lay trembling as it were in the balance, and perilled so to speak on the result of His fiat. If failure had been the result, His humiliation would have been overwhelming and final. The supposed blasphemy of His assumption in reference to the forgiveness of sins would have been demonstrated. The triumph of His censors would have been complete and legitimate. This being obviously the case, He must have known, ere He spoke, that there was really no peril; otherwise, His fiat would have faltered on His tongue, and would, indeed, have been utterly irreconcilable with the lowest degree of prudence, not to speak of the highest degrees of good sense and sincerity.—*Morison.*

"*Power on earth.*"—In the words "power on earth" there lies a tacit opposition to "power in heaven." This power is not exercised as you deem, only by God in heaven, but also by the Son of man upon earth. You rightly assert that it is only exercised by Him who dwelleth in the heavens; but He, who, in the person of the Son of man, has descended also upon earth, has brought down this power with Him here.—*Trench.*

Strength bestowed.—"I say unto thee, Arise!"

I. **A strange command.**—The man was paralysed. He was helpless as a corpse. Why did Jesus require of him such an impossibility?

II. **As the will obeys power returns.**

III. **It is the same in spiritual life.**

IV. **Strength will not come until we try to obey.**—*Miller.*

Ver. 25. "*Took up that whereon he lay.*"—A mat or couch. "The bed had borne him; now he bears the bed" (*Bengel*). There is a touch of triumph in this description of the full strength imparted to the paralytic.

Ver. 26. "*They glorified God.*"—Nothing is said as to the effect produced by this miracle upon the unbelieving scribes and Pharisees; but we are told that both the man himself and the multitude gave glory to God. This was, indeed, a fulfilment of the effect Jesus desired to accomplish.

"*Strange things.*"—*I.e.* (1) the claim to be able to forgive sins, and (2) the miracle wrought in support of this claim. The thought must have been excited in many minds that God would not have given the power to work this miracle to one who had really been guilty of blasphemy or infringed the Divine prerogative of mercy to sinners.

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 27—32.

The Call of Matthew.—The call of Matthew signally illustrates a very prominent feature in the public action of Jesus, viz. His utter disregard of the maxims of worldly wisdom. A publican disciple, much more a publican apostle, would not fail to be a stumbling-block to Jewish prejudice, and therefore to be, for the time at least, a source of weakness rather than of strength. Yet, while perfectly aware of this fact, Jesus invited to the intimate fellowship of discipleship one who had pursued the occupation of a tax-gatherer, and at a later period selected him to be one of the twelve. The eye of Jesus was single as well as omniscient: He looked on the heart, and had respect solely to spiritual fitness. He had no fear of the drawbacks arising out of the external connections or past history of true believers, but was entirely indifferent to men's antecedents.

I. **The call obeyed.**—The fact that Matthew, while a publican, resided in Capernaum, makes it absolutely certain that he knew of Jesus before he was called. It was not, however, a matter of course that he should become a follower of Jesus merely because he had heard of, or even seen, His wonderful works. Miracles of themselves could make no man a believer; otherwise all the people of Capernaum would have believed. Christ complained of the inhabitants of Capernaum in particular that they did not repent on witnessing His mighty works. It was not so with Matthew. He not merely wondered and talked, but he repented. Whether he had more to repent of than his neighbours we cannot tell. It is true that he belonged to a class of men who, seen through the coloured medium of popular prejudice, were all bad alike, and many of whom were really guilty of fraud and extortion; but he may have been an exception. His farewell feast showed that he possessed means, but we must not take for granted that they were dishonestly earned. This only we may safely say, that if the publican disciple had been covetous, the spirit of greed was now exorcised; if he had ever been guilty of oppressing the poor, he now abhorred such work. He had grown weary of collecting revenue from a reluctant population, and was glad to follow One who had come to take burdens off instead of laying them on, to remit debts instead of exacting them with rigour. And so it came to pass that the voice of Jesus acted on his heart like a spell: "He left all, rose up, and followed Him."

II. **The banquet.**—The great decision was followed by a feast in Matthew's house, at which Jesus was present. It had all the character of a great occasion, and was given in honour of Jesus. The honour, however, was such as few would value, for the other guests were peculiar. "There was a great company of publicans and of others that sat down with them." The feast was not less rich in moral significance than in the viands set on the board. For the host himself it was without doubt *a jubilee feast* commemorative of his emancipation from drudgery and uncongenial society and sin, or at all events temptation to sin, and of his entrance on the free, blessed life of fellowship with Jesus. The feast was also, as already said, *an act of homage* to Jesus. Matthew made his splendid feast in honour of his new Master, as Mary of Bethany shed her precious ointment. It is the way of those to whom much grace is shown and given to manifest their grateful love in deeds bearing the stamp of what a Greek philosopher called magnificence and churls call extravagance; and whoever might blame such acts of devotion, Jesus always accepted them with pleasure. The ex-publican's feast seems further to have had the character of *a farewell entertainment* to his fellow-publicans. He and they were to go different ways henceforth, and he would part with his old comrades in peace. Once more: we can believe that Matthew

meant his feast to be *the means of introducing his friends and neighbours to the acquaintance of Jesus*, seeking, with the characteristic zeal of a young disciple, to induce others to take the step which he had resolved on himself, or at least hoping that some sinners present might be drawn from evil ways into the paths of righteousness. Matthew's feast was thus, looked at from within, a very joyous, innocent, and even edifying one. But looked at from without, like stained windows, it wore a different aspect ; it was, indeed, nothing short of scandalous. Certain Pharisees observed the company assemble or disperse, noted their character, and made, after their wont, sinister reflections. Opportunity offering itself, they asked the disciples of Jesus the at once complimentary and censorious question, "Why eateth your Master with publicans and sinners?" On various occasions, when the same charge was made against Him, he returned different answers. The answer here may be distinguished as the professional argument, and is to this effect: "I frequent the haunts of sinners, because I am a *physician*, and they are sick and need healing. Where should a physician be but among his patients? where oftenest but among those most grievously afflicted?" Our Lord's last words to the persons who called His conduct in question at this time were not merely apologetic, but judicial. "I came not," He said, "to call the righteous, but sinners"; intimating a purpose to let the self-righteous alone, and to call to repentance and to the joys of the kingdom those who were not too self-satisfied to care for the benefits offered, and to whom the gospel feast would be a real entertainment. The word, in truth, contained a significant hint of an approaching religious revolution, in which the last should become first and the first last; Jewish outcasts, Gentile dogs, made partakers of the joys of the kingdom, and "the righteous" shut out. It was one of the pregnant sayings by which Jesus made known to those who could understand that His religion was a universal one—a religion for humanity, a gospel for mankind, because a gospel for sinners. And what this saying declared in word, the conduct it apologised for proclaimed yet more expressively by deed. It was an ominous thing that loving sympathy for "publicans and sinners"—the Pharisaic instinct discerned it to be so, and rightly took the alarm. It meant death to privileged monopolies of grace and to Jewish pride and exclusivism—all men equal in God's sight, and welcome to salvation on the same terms.—*Bruce.*

SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS ON VERSES 27—32.

Ver. 27. "*Follow Me.*"—The special call to apostleship is recorded in the case of five only of the twelve: Peter, Andrew, James, John, and Matthew. No doubt the other seven in like manner were selected individually by Jesus, and called to leave all and follow Him—a call not given to all disciples.

"*A publican.*"—Probably Matthew was one of the subordinate officers belonging to Palestine, who were in the employment of the Roman *publicanus*, who farmed the taxes. "These inferior officers were notorious for their impudent exactions everywhere; but to the Jews they were specially odious, for they were the very spot where the Roman chain galled them—the visible proof of the degraded state of the nation. As a rule none but the lowest would accept such an unpopular office, and thus the class became more worthy of the hatred with which the Jews in any case would have regarded it" (*Smith*, "*Dictionary of the Bible*," "Publican").

A Shock to Prejudice.—The shock given to the prejudices of society by Christ's choosing a publican to be an apostle must have been very great. It was an illustration of the principle of the Divine action stated by St.

Paul—the base things of the world, and things that are despised, being chosen to confound the things that are mighty (1 Cor. i. 26-28).

Matthew "the publican."—It is worthy of notice that St. Matthew, in giving the list of apostles, appends the words "the publican" to his own name, as if to mark the lowly estate he occupied when Christ called him (x. 3).

"Sitting at the place of toll" (R.V.).—There sat Matthew the publican, busy in his counting-house, reckoning up the sums of his rentals, taking up his arrearages, and wrangling for denied duties, and did so little think of a Saviour that he did not so much as look at His passage; but Jesus, as He passed by, saw him.—*Hall.*

"Went forth, and saw."—It would seem to have been an accidental passing-by—one of those chance meetings which so often turn the course of a man's life, and even that of a nation's history. Yet there was nothing accidental in the life of Christ, any more than there is in our own lives. A long train of circumstances led up to this meeting, and found in it a natural completion. It was in Capernaum that Matthew lived—the headquarters of Christ's public ministry. Matthew had, no doubt, often seen and heard Christ: he had known of His mighty deeds, and of the authority with which He spoke and acted; and perhaps the publican had been slowly making up his mind as to what his duty towards Christ was. So that when this moment came, and the Saviour paused before him and held up His finger and said "Follow Me," he was ready to obey. The vague thoughts and feelings took definite shape: the gesture and word of His Lord concluded the struggle. His choice was made—the die was cast, and he arose and followed Him. "Doubtless he immediately made, or had previously made, every requisite arrangement for leaving the affairs of his office, not in confusion, but in order. Jesus was no patron of confusion. It is the desire both of God and Jesus that all things should be done "decently and in order" (*Morison*).

Vers. 27, 28. *"Rose up, and followed Him."*—That word was enough, "Follow Me"; spoken by the same tongue that said to the corpse at Nain, "Young man, I say to thee, Arise." He that said at first, "Let there be light," says now, "Follow Me." That power sweetly inclines which could forcibly command: the force is not more irresistible than the inclination. When the sun shines upon the icicles, can they choose but melt and fall? when it looks into a dungeon, can the place choose but to be enlightened? Do we see the jet drawing up straws to it, the loadstone iron, and do we marvel if the omnipotent Saviour, by the influence of His grace, attract the heart of a publican? "He arose, and followed Him." We are all naturally averse from thee, O God; do Thou but bid us follow Thee, draw us by Thy powerful word, and we shall run after Thee. Alas! Thou speakest, and we sit still; Thou speakest by Thine outward word to our ear, and we stir not. Speak Thou by the secret and effectual word of Thy Spirit to our heart, the world cannot hold us down, Satan cannot stop our way, we shall arise and follow Thee.—*Hall.*

The Privileges and Honours conferred on Matthew.—The skill of Matthew in using his pen was afterwards to be employed in writing the first biography of His Lord and Master: his name, which had up till now borne a mark of infamy as that of a publican, was destined to be inscribed on one of the foundations of the heavenly Jerusalem (Rev. xxi. 14).

Ver. 28. *The obvious moral of the story* is that we are none of us beyond the reach of Christ, none so base but that He can redeem us, none so hateful but that He would fain save us. The one

fatal thing is to despair of ourselves, because we despair of His mercy and its power to recover us. Whatever we may be, whatever we may have done, there is in Christ a grace which can sweep away all our sins, and a saving health which can redeem us into spiritual life and vigour, into heavenly service and rest.—*Cox.*

Ver. 29. "*Levi made him a great feast.*"—The feast in the house of Matthew took place evidently a few days or weeks later, and seems to have been a farewell feast to his former friends and associates. Probably in the meantime he had been making arrangements for the new mode of life he was to follow, and for the proper transaction of the business with which he had been connected.

"*A great company of publicans.*"—The call of Matthew seems to have been accompanied by, if, indeed, it did not occasion, a great awakening in the outcast class to which he belonged. Many would be touched in heart by the mercy shown by Jesus to one of their number. There is something very beautiful in this mutual fellowship of the disciple and the Master—the one being the host and the other a guest at the same table. When we consider the relations between the two—how Jesus was to Matthew the King to whom he had sworn allegiance, the Redeemer by whom he was to be saved, the Judge by whom his eternal destiny was to be decided, and the Object of his worship—there is something very winning and beautiful in their sitting together at the same table. They were a motley company that met in the house of Matthew: men hated and despised by their neighbours for their trade or for their evil lives—persons on many of whom it was only too evident that the stamp of sin had been set deeply, who repaid scorn with scorn, and grew only more hardened and reckless as they found that they had lost the respect of others and of themselves. Yet along with them the Son of God sat down as a fellow-guest—He whose holiness was so perfect, whose hatred of sin was far more keen than that which any other mortal ever felt. The loathing and scorn of men only hardened those on whom it was spent. But these publicans and sinners were touched and melted and won by the love of Jesus, who treated them as though they were worthy of fellowship with Him, and was hopeful of even the most depraved among them. Is there not here a lesson for us? The hard, Pharisaic spirit that prides itself on its own immaculate virtue, and passes harsh judgments on the faults of others, incapacitates one for recovering the vicious or restoring the outcast and banished. Even if we were justified in cherishing such a spirit, it has no power to cope with and overcome the evils which it condemns. It is by love, by sympathy, by tenderest compassion that the wayward and erring are to be won to a love and practice of goodness. The feast in the house of Matthew is a subject which, strangely enough, has not been treated by any of the great artists. Yet it is one of the most striking and picturesque scenes in the life of Jesus. The Son of God surrounded with publicans and sinners! Imagine Him with His face and mien of holiness, and love, and majestic peace. See the change wrought even in the countenances of those who received Him as their Saviour—the John-like, the Stephen-like expression beginning to show itself in the faces of men who up to this time had been intent only on gain and vicious pleatures—the rapt, Madonna-like air already beginning to transfigure the faces of sinful women! "O happy publicans and sinners that had found out their Saviour! O merciful Saviour that disdained not publicans and sinners!"

Ver. 30. "*Murmured against His disciples.*"—The Pharisees and scribes are still restrained by awe of Jesus, and do not attack Him directly, but impeach His disciples with laxity of

conduct. The accusation the Pharisees bring is that of undue intimacy with those outside the pale of respectability and of religion. Christ's disciples need to keep in mind (1) that their conduct is watched by a censorious world, and (2) that they need to have a well-grounded reason for the things that they do. If they cannot justify their actions, they run the risk of bringing discredit upon their Master's name and cause. Association of an intimate kind with the ungodly may arise from having too weak a sense of their sinfulness, or, on the other hand, it may be deliberately engaged in with the view of effecting a change in them from sin to holiness. A complete separation between the Church and the world is not to be desired, if the leaven of holiness is to be allowed to penetrate and transform society.

Ver. 31. *The Physician and His Patients.*

I. **A complete and unanswerable defence.**—Our Saviour does not dispute the unfavourable character imputed to the publicans and sinners. It is true, therefore, the need of visiting them. He is a Physician, and must spend much of His time and ministry on those who have need of healing. To go to houses that other men shun is the honourable mark of the physician's profession. His answer could not be misunderstood. He referred to spiritual ailments, and to spiritual healing. Instead of being reproached He ought to be praised. And He will be praised for ever by those whom He has healed.

II. **A direction to His followers.**—It was a word not only to the Pharisees, but to His disciples. As He was, so should they become in His service. His Church was to be a prolonged expression and an active exponent of healing skill and mercy. 1. Christianity is remedial. 2. Christianity is hopeful. The sin and misery of the world call loudly for the enthusiasm and ingenuity of Christian hope and love; and they please the heavenly Physician best who carry the gospel of His salvation to those whom the successors of the Pharisees despair of or disdain.—*Fraser.*

A Defence of the Disciples.—Jesus takes up the defence of His disciples: probably they were unable to return a satisfactory answer to their critics. There is humour in His words: an ironical acceptance of the Pharisees, on their own estimate as whole and needing no physician, when in reality they were corrupt and self-deceived. But if there is (1) irony towards the Pharisees, there is (2) a serious allusion to the state of the publicans and sinners. Whether the Pharisees were whole or not, there could be no doubt that those, for associating with whom they blamed Him and His disciples, were indeed sick. Not only (1) sickness, but (2) admission of the fact of sickness, is required before the services of the great Physician can benefit us. This latter condition the Pharisees did not fulfil: the fact that publicans and sinners did fulfil it was the hopeful element in their case. Was it wonderful that Jesus associated with these outcasts? It was still more wonderful that these outcasts welcomed *Him.* It was the sick appealing to the Physician—a sight that should have made the Pharisees glad.

Ver. 32. "*Not . . . the righteous, but sinners.*"—Again we find irony in the Saviour's words: "to call the righteous to repentance!" In the fact that Christ thus describes the purpose for which He came as that of calling sinners to repentance, we have an indication of the part we are to play in the work of our salvation. He *calls*; it is for us to *respond, i.e.* to obey His call. The call *comes* to us, for in the work of redemption God takes the initiative. Repentance includes (1) a state of feeling—godly sorrow on account of sin; and (2) a course of action—amendment of evil ways. The feeling should not stand alone, or it will degenerate into barren regret; it should be the source from which the

action springs. Godly sorrow is not repentance, but "worketh repentance" (2 Cor. vii. 10). The Scriptures lay more stress upon the action than the feeling. Thus Isaiah says little about the latter in calling the nation to repentance, but much about the former. "Wash you, make you clean," etc. (i. 16, 17).

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 33—39.

A Lesson in Religious Liberty.—From the question here put we learn incidentally that in the matter of fasting the school of the Baptist and the sect of the Pharisees were agreed in their general practice. As Jesus told the Pharisees at a later date, John came in their own "way" of legal righteousness. But it was a case of extremes meeting; for no two religious parties could be more remote in some respects than the two just named. But the difference lay rather in the motives than in the external acts of their religious life. Both did the same things—fasted, practised ceremonial ablutions, made many prayers—only they did them with a different mind. John and his disciples performed their religious duties in simplicity, godly sincerity, and moral earnestness; the Pharisees, as a class, did all these works ostentatiously, hypocritically, and as matters of mechanical routine. Jesus made reply to the question, remarkable at once for originality, point, and pathos, setting forth in lively parabolic style the great principles by which the conduct of His disciples could be vindicated, and by which He desired the conduct of all who bore His name to be regulated. Jesus does not blame John's disciples for fasting, but contents Himself with defending His own disciples for abstaining from fasting. He takes up the position of one who virtually says, "To fast may be right for you, the followers of John: not to fast is equally right for My followers." In His reply He makes use of three beautiful and suggestive similitudes.

I. **The children of the bride-chamber.**—His reply is to this effect: "I *am* the Bridegroom, as John said; it is right that the children of the bride-chamber come to Me; and it is also right that, when they have come, they should adapt their mode of life to their altered circumstances. Therefore they do well not to fast, for fasting is the expression of sadness; and how should they be sad in My company! As well might men be sad at a marriage festival. The days *will* come when the children of the bride-chamber shall be sad, for the Bridegroom will not always be with them; and at the dark hour of His departure it will be natural and seasonable for them to fast, for then they shall be in a fasting mood—weeping, lamenting, sorrowful, and disconsolate." The principle is that men should fast when they are sad, or in a state of mind akin to sadness—absorbed, preoccupied—as at some great solemn crisis in the life of an individual or a community, such as that in the history of Peter, when he was exercised on the great question of the admission of the Gentiles to the Church, or such as that in the history of the Christian community at Antioch, when they were about to ordain the first missionaries to the heathen world. Christ's doctrine is that fasting in any other circumstances is forced, unnatural, unreal—a thing which men may be made to do as a matter of form, but which they do not with their heart and soul. "Can ye make the children of the bride-chamber fast while the bridegroom is with them?" He asked, virtually asserting that it was impossible.

II. **The new patch on the old garment, and the new wine in old skins.**—The design of these parables is much the same as that of the first part of His reply, viz. to enforce the *law of congruity* in relation to fasting and similar matters—that is, to show that in all *voluntary* religious service, where we are

free to regulate our own conduct, the outward act should be made to correspond with the inward condition of mind, and that no attempt should be made to force particular acts or habits on men without reference to that correspondence. "In natural things," He meant to say, "we observe this law of congruity. No man putteth a piece of new cloth on an old garment. Neither do men put new wine into old skins, and that not merely out of regard to propriety, but to avoid bad consequences. The good cloth would be wasted, the patchwork would be unseemly and unsatisfactory, and the old skin bottles will burst under the fermenting force of the new liquor, and the wine will be spilled and lost." The old cloth and old bottles in these metaphors represent old ascetic fashions in religion; the new cloth and the new wine represent the new joyful life in Christ, not possessed by those who tenaciously adhered to the old fashions. The parables were applied primarily to Christ's own age, but they admit of application to all transition epochs; indeed, they find new illustration in almost every generation. New wine is always in course of being produced by the eternal vine of truth, demanding in some particulars of belief and practice new bottles for its preservation, and receiving for answer an order to be content with the old ones. Without going the length of denunciation or direct attempt at suppression, those who stand by the old often oppose the new by the milder method of disparagement. They eulogise the venerable past, and contrast it with the present, to the disadvantage of the latter. "The old wine is vastly superior to the new: how mellow, mild, fragrant, wholesome, the one! how harsh and fiery the other!" Those who say so are not the worst of men: they are often the best; the men of taste and feeling, the gentle, the reverent, and the good, who are themselves excellent samples of the old vintage. Their opposition forms by far the most formidable obstacle to the public recognition and toleration of what is new in religious life; for it naturally creates a strong prejudice against any cause when the saintly disapprove of it. Observe, then, how Christ answers the honest admirers of the old wine. He concedes the point; He admits that their preference is natural. It is as if He had said, "I do not wonder that you love the old wine of Jewish piety, fruit of a very ancient vintage. But what then? Do men object to the existence of new wine, or refuse to have it in their possession, because the old is superior in flavour? No; they drink the old, but they carefully preserve the new, knowing that the old will get exhausted, and that the new will mend with age. Even so should you behave towards the new wine of My kingdom. You may not straightway desire it, because it is strange and novel; but surely you might deal more wisely with it than merely to spurn it, or spill and destroy it!" Too seldom for the Church's good have lovers of old ways understood Christ's wisdom, and lovers of new ways sympathised with His charity. When will young men and old men, liberals and conservatives, broad Christians and narrow, learn to bear with one another, yea, to recognise each in the other the necessary complement of his own one-sidedness?—*Bruce.*

SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS ON VERSES 33—39.

Ver. 33. "*Thy disciples eat and drink.*"—The second accusation is still levelled against the disciples: it is that not only do they sometimes feast with publicans, but do not observe either the Jewish fasts or those practised by the disciples of John the Baptist, and do not engage in stated actions of prayer and fasting. The form in which the objection is cast leaves the question open as to whether the disciples of Jesus were inattentive

to rules they had received from Him, or acted as they did in accordance with the spirit of His teaching.

Vers. 34, 35. *The Present and the Future.*—The reply of Jesus is virtually that these devotional actions (though He mentions fasting only) should be spontaneous — the expression of actual feeling—and not the subjects of legislation and commandment. He does not speak of fasting as an unnecessary piece of asceticism, but as a practice inappropriate for His disciples at that stage of their religious life. While He was with them their joy was complete, and fasting would be out of place: a time would come when He would be taken away from them, and they would be in the mood for fasting. [In like manner He did not *impose* forms of prayer; but when the disciples, moved by His example, requested Him to teach them to pray, He at once acceded to their desire (xi. 1-4).] The time of mourning to which Christ refers must not be limited to the short period after His death and before His disciples were assured of His resurrection. It is to be understood of the whole period of His separation from the Church—the time during which, in the absence of the heavenly Bridegroom, the Church is exposed to trials and oppression (cf. xviii. 7). The contrast between the thoughts of ver. 34 and ver. 35 is very striking: in the one Jesus speaks of the present time as joyous—the Bridegroom rejoicing in the bride; in the other the shadow of death falls upon the scene, and He depicts the grief of separation.

Jesus the Bridegroom.—It is worthy of being noted that Jesus compares Himself to a *bridegroom.* He thus takes up the representation of His relationship that was made by John himself, and not unlikely in the hearing of those very disciples who were now questioning Him (John iii. 29). He also, as it were, takes home to Himself those frequent Old Testament representations which culminate in the Forty-fifth Psalm and the Song of Solomon, and which reappear so interestingly in the Epistle to the Ephesians (v. 22-33) and the Book of Revelation (xix. 7-9, xxi. 9). The Church is the bride of Jesus. Jesus is the Bridegroom of His believing people. The love between them is ineffable; but the holy wooing and the winning have been all on His side. —*Morison.*

The Messianic Consciousness of Jesus. —These verses clearly show that from the very beginning of His ministry Jesus (1) realised the fact that He was the Messiah, (2) that He identified His coming with that of Jehovah, the husband of Israel and of humanity (Hos. ii. 19), and (3) that even then He foresaw and announced a death by violence which He was to suffer.—*Godet.*

Vers. 36-39. *Garments and Wineskins.*—By these illustrations our Lord conveyed a lesson on—

I. **The charm of naturalness, and the law of congruity in religion.**—Times of transition are critical. Jesus teaches that He had not come to patch up Pharisaism, or garnish Rabbinism, or pour His doctrines into the rigid forms of later Judaism. From Him was to date a new era.

II. **A forced junction of the old and the new would be injurious to both.**—The new force is disruptive of the old. Let the law of congruity be observed. The Christian life needed its own forms of development.—*Fraser.*

Ver. 36. "*A piece of a new garment.*"—Jesus now contrasts the spirit of the old dispensation with that of the new; and suggested as the conversation had been by the feast in the house of Matthew, the figures He employs, of robes and wine, are appropriate to the occasion. The figure as St. Luke gives it is that of tearing off a piece of a new garment with which to patch an old one. The injury done is twofold:

(1) the new garment is injured, and (2) the patch does not agree with the old garment, and gives it an odd look, so that no one would care to wear it. St. Matthew gives it under the form of the rent in the old garment which has been repaired in this way being made worse by the new "unfulled cloth" shrinking and breaking away from the material in which it has been inserted. The point of the figure is that the Jewish system was now becoming "old and ready to vanish away" (Heb. viii. 13), and Christ was about to replace it by something new. The Pharisees had multiplied fasts and ceremonies, which were like patches upon the whole system; and even John the Baptist had nothing better to suggest, but had followed the same method in his work of reformation. Christ did not purpose to repair the old garment, but to give a new one. "The whole Pauline system, what the apostle himself calls *his gospel*, the contrast between the two covenants, the mutual exclusion of the rule of the law and that of grace, the oldness of the letter and the newness of of the spirit (Rom. vii. 6), which form the substance of the Epistles to the Romans and the Galatians, are here contained under the homely image of a garment patched with a piece of cloth or of another garment that is new" (*Godet*). There is something very wonderful in the simple way in which these new and great ideas are thrown out by Jesus—in the ease with which they are suggested—without effort, without elaboration, and yet containing an infinite depth of meaning.

Vers. 37, 38. "*New wine . . . old bottles.*"—From the difference of *principle* between the old dispensation and the new Jesus passes to the *persons* representing the two. For in these consecutive figures of the robes and of the wine and wine-skins we have, as in all the double parables, fresh ideas suggested. The robes refer to differing *forms* of religious life, the new wine to an *inward life*, and the wine-skins to the persons to whom that life is imparted. Those whom He chose to receive His teaching and to become organs of it were "new men": they were not those who had grown old and stiff in religious ceremonialism, whose religious life had taken a definite set, and could not be disturbed without being shattered. But they were marked by great receptivity; and if they had much to learn, they had nothing to unlearn. They are indeed "babes," but to them that is revealed which has been hidden from "the wise and prudent." The disastrous result of putting the new wine into old bottles is illustrated in the later history of the Church, when "certain of the sect of the Pharisees who believed" (Acts xv. 5) imported into the Christian society their former prejudices and practices, and attempted to compel all to conform to the ceremonial law of Moses. The history of this controversy and of the course followed by the Judaizing party are a commentary on the words, "The new wine will burst the bottles, and be spilled, and the bottles will perish."

Ver. 39. "*No man . . . desireth new.*"—Jesus here counsels consideration to be shown toward those who are not able instantly to appreciate the worth of the new life and principle. It may be and is better than that to which they have been accustomed, but they will need time to become acquainted with its merits. Often there is something acrid and restless in the enthusiasm of the new convert which is unwelcome to those whose minds are not like his, in a ferment with fresh ideas and emotions. Let him not count those as his enemies, and enemies to the truth, who cannot appreciate his fervour. There are always those who cling to the old ways, just as there are always those who strike out new ways. Both are needed to make up the world—the conservative and the progressive parties. After a little the new wine becomes old—it grows mellow and im-

proved in tone, and will get full credit for the good qualities it possesses. There is a touch of bright humour in the picture of the connoisseur—"for he saith, The old is good.'"

CHAPTER VI.

CRITICAL NOTES.

Ver. 1. **Second Sabbath after the first.**—Or, "second-first Sabbath." This is an almost unintelligible phrase. It is omitted in some very ancient MSS., and is relegated to the margin in the R.V. The fact that it is a difficult phrase is in favour of its genuineness. It is easy to account for its omission in some MSS., but not easy to account for its insertion in others if it were not in the original text. One of the many suggestions as to the phrase is that it means "the first Sabbath of the second month": this is the month Iyar, corresponding to our May—a time when the corn in that district of Palestine is ripe. **His disciples.**—He Himself did not pluck the ears of corn. It was permissible to do this (Deut. xxiii. 25): the objection here taken was to its being done on the Sabbath.

Ver. 2. **Not lawful.**—As work of all kinds was prohibited, reaping and threshing corn was unlawful: plucking the ears was virtually reaping; rubbing them in the hands was virtually threshing.

Ver. 3. **Have ye not read, etc.**—There is a touch of irony in the question. "Are ye who study the Scriptures so devotedly, unacquainted with this?" **What David did.**—1 Sam. xxi. 1-6.

Ver. 4. **The shewbread.**—"Lit. 'loaves of setting-forth'; 'bread of the Face,' *i.e.* set before the presence of God (Lev. xxiv. 5-9). They were twelve unleavened loaves sprinkled with frankincense set on a little golden table" (*Farrar*). They might only be eaten by the priests (Lev. xxiv. 9). The plea of necessity justified the action of David and of the high priest in setting aside the ceremonial law; so too the hunger of the disciples justified their plucking and rubbing the ears of corn. Another circumstance in the incident quoted from the Old Testament made it specially appropriate to the present argument, and that was that it took place on the Sabbath. From 1 Sam. xxi. 6 it seems that David arrived on the day when the old bread was taken away and the new bread put in its place. This was done on the Sabbath (Lev. xxiv. 8).

Ver. 5. **Lord of the Sabbath.**—"The reasoning is as follows: There are laws of eternal obligation for which man was made, and whose authority can never be set aside. There are others of temporary obligation, made for man, designed for his discipline, till Christ should come and the shadow give place to the substance. Christ, as the Son of man, the Messiah, the Author and end of the law, is its Lord, not indeed to destroy, but to make perfect—to change its observance from the letter to the spirit" (*Speaker's Commentary*).

Ver. 6. **Right hand.**—Evidently a circumstance noted by an eyewitness. **Withered.**—Not only paralysed, but dried up. An apocryphal gospel, quoted by St. Jerome, says that this man was a stonemason, that his hand had been injured by an accident, and that he appealed to Jesus to heal him, in order that he might be able to work and not have to beg his bread. Though it is not distinctly stated, the narratives in the Gospels seem to imply that he had come to the synagogue expecting to be healed by Jesus.

Ver. 7. **Watched Him.**—The question as to whether it was lawful to heal or attend to the sick on the Sabbath was one on which the Jews were divided: the Pharisees held strict views of the Sabbath, and their opinions had great weight with the people, so that Jesus ran the risk of losing popularity as a religious teacher if He differed from them.

Ver. 9. **I will ask you one thing.**—This implies that a question had been put to Him. The question is given in Matt. xii. 10, "Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath days?" **To do good, or to do evil.**—"*He* was intending to work a miracle for good: *they* were secretly plotting to do harm—their object being, if possible, to put Him to death" (*Farrar*).

Ver 10. **Looking round about upon them all.**—St. Mark adds the very vivid touch, "with anger, being grieved for the hardness of their hearts" (iii. 5).

Ver. 11. **Madness.**—Lit. "senselessness, wicked folly." **One with another.**—St. Mark says and with the Herodians also (iii. 6). They were willing even to ally themselves with their enemies to attain their end of destroying Christ.

Ver. 12. **Went out.**—*I.e.* from Capernaum. **A mountain.**—Rather, "*the* mountain" (R.V.)—that is, the mountainous country, the high table-land above the Lake of Gennesaret.

Prayer to God.—The expression in the original is rather peculiar, but there is no doubt that this is its meaning. The idea that by the word translated "prayer" is meant a *proseucha* or place of prayer is far-fetched and incongruous. The narrative seems to imply that the prayer had reference to the coming selection of those who were to be set apart by Christ to do His work.

Ver. 13. **Twelve.**—There can be no doubt that the number twelve was intended to correspond to the twelve tribes of Israel. **Apostles.**—Messengers, persons *sent* on a mission.

Vers. 14-16.—In this as in all the other catalogues Peter is first, Philip fifth, James the son of Alphæus is ninth; so that the names of the apostles are given in groups of four: all give Judas Iscariot as the last of the list. **Simon.**—Also called Peter and Cephas—the one being the Greek, the other the Aramaic for "rock": the name given by anticipation (John i. 42), formally conferred when he was chosen apostle (Mark iii. 16). **Andrew.**—The name probably from a Greek word, meaning "manly." **James.**—Same name as Jacob: usually called James the Elder, to distinguish him from the other James: the first of the twelve to suffer martyrdom (Acts xii. 2). **John.**—The last survivor of the twelve: the name Boanerges—"Sons of Thunder"—conferred on him and his brother (Mark iii. 17): his father was Zebedee, mother Salome: in John xix. 25 it is probable that the sister of the mother of Jesus refers to Salome; if so, he and his brother were cousins of our Lord. **Philip.**—Greek name: the first summoned by Christ to follow Him (John i. 43). These first five apostles were all of Bethsaida. **Bartholomew.**—*I.e.* son of Tolmai: probably to be identified with Nathanael, as from John xxi. 2 Nathanael appears to have been one of the twelve, and is named in conjunction with Philip (John i. 45), as Bartholomew is in all the lists of apostles.

Ver. 15. **Matthew.**—The writer of the first Gospel: in his own list he enters his name as "Matthew the publican," in reference to his former occupation. **Thomas.**—A Hebrew name meaning "the twin," the Greek for which is Didymus (John xx. 24): frequently mentioned in St. John's Gospel. **James the son of Alphæus.**—Called James "the Less," or the Younger (Mark xv. 40). The name Alphæus appears in another form in St. John's Gospel—as Clopas (John xix. 25): of him we know nothing except that he was the husband of Mary the sister of the Virgin Mary, and that James and Jude were his sons. **Simon called Zelotes.**—*I.e.* the Zealot: the Zealots were a sect of fanatical Jews, noted for their intemperate zeal in maintaining the Jewish law. By St. Matthew he is called the Canaanite or Cananæan, another form of the name "zealot," from Hebr. *kineâh*, "zeal."

Ver. 16. **Judas the brother of James.**—This apostle has three names: Judas (brother or son) of James; Lebbæus, from Hebr. *lebh*, "heart"; and Thaddæus, from Hebr. *thad*, "bosom": either a son or a grandson of the above-mentioned Alphæus: author of Epistle of Jude. **Judas Iscariot.**—Probably *a man of Kerioth*, a city of the tribe of Judah (Josh. xv. 25): in St. John's Gospel he is described as son of Simon or (R.V.) of Simon Iscariot (John vi. 71, xiii. 26). If this Simon were the apostle, he and Judas would be father and son.

Ver. 17. **Came down.**—*I.e.* from the mountain mentioned in ver. 12. **The plain.**—The word can mean a level space on the mountain-side. **Out of all Judæa.**—"St. Matthew adds Galilee (which was to a great extent Greek), Decapolis, and Peræa: St. Mark also mentions Idumæa. Thus there were Jews, Greeks, Phœnicians, and Arabs among our Lord's hearers" (*Farrar*).

Ver. 19. **To touch Him.**—Cf. viii. 44; Matt. xiv. 36; Mark v. 30.

Vers. 20-49.—Though various opinions have been held on the subject, the balance of probabilities seems in favour of the supposition that the discourse commonly known as the Sermon on the Mount, recorded by St. Matthew, is given here in a shorter form. It is probable that St. Luke, in placing it after the choice of the twelve apostles, follows chronological order more exactly than St. Matthew, who places it before that event. A strong argument in favour of the identity of the two discourses is to be found in the fact that both evangelists mention the healing of the centurion's servant immediately after the delivery of the sermon (Matt. viii. 5; Luke vii 1). It is true that the scene seems to be differently described in the two narratives: St. Matthew speaks of Christ going up into a mountain (or rather, "*the* mountain," *i.e.* the mountainous region above the Lake of Gennesaret), and St. Luke of His coming down and standing "on a level place" (R.V.). But there is nothing to forbid us to suppose that Jesus came down from one of the higher peaks where He had been engaged in prayer, and took up His stand where He could best be seen and heard—the place He chose being still on the mountain-side.

Ver. 20. **Blessed be ye poor.**—In St. Luke the beatitudes and woes are addressed *to* the persons, and not uttered *concerning* them. St. Matthew adds "in spirit": there is every reason to suppose that St. Luke refers to literal poverty, it being among those afflicted with it that Christ found most numerous adherents. Of course spiritual qualities of humility and meekness are presupposed as springing from and promoted by poverty. The "poor" are spoken of frequently in the Psalms in the sense of humble and trustful servants of God. A great deal has been made of the supposed Ebionitism in St. Luke's Gospel as indicated

here and in such passages as i. 53, xii. 15-34, xvi. 9-25. But any such tendency is highly improbable: it is utterly inconsistent with the Pauline spirit which may be recognised in the Gospel, and is by no means necessarily implied in the passages referred to.

Ver. 22. **Separate you.**—*I.e.* excommunication or expulsion from the synagogue. Thus early is the separation between Judaism and Christianity foretold. **Your name.**—"Either your collective name as Christians (cf. 1 Pet. iv. 14-16), or your individual name" (*Alford*).

Ver. 23. **In the like manner, etc.**—"Elijah and his contemporaries (1 Kings xix. 10); Hanani imprisoned by Asa (2 Chron. xvi. 10); Micaiah imprisoned (1 Kings xxii. 27); Zechariah stoned by Joash (2 Chron. xxiv. 20, 21); Urijah slain by Jehoiakim (Jer. xxvi. 23); Jeremiah imprisoned, smitten, and put in the stocks (Jer. xxxvii., xxxviii.); Isaiah (according to tradition) sawn asunder, etc." (*Farrar*).

Vers. 24-26.—This section is peculiar to St. Luke. Notice that these four woes are in all respects the antitheses of the four preceding beatitudes.

Ver. 24. **Consolation.**—Cf. xvi. 25. This is a warning addressed to the disciples themselves.

Ver. 27.—Even in the Old Testament checks had been put upon the spirit of enmity. See Exod. xxiii. 4; Prov. xxv. 21. We find the teaching of this passage very beautifully reproduced in Rom. xii. 17, 19-21.

Ver. 28. **Pray for them, etc.**—St. Luke records two great examples of obedience to this precept—in the case of Christ (xxiii. 34), and of the proto-martyr Stephen (Acts vii. 60).

Ver. 29. **Him that smiteth thee, etc.**—That we are to act according to the spirit and not merely according to the letter of this rule is evident from our Lord's own procedure in circumstances of the kind (John xviii. 22, 23). **Cloke . . . coat.**—Cloak is the loose outer dress, the coat the inner and more indispensable article of dress. St. Luke's order is more logical than St. Matthew's.

Ver. 32. **What thank have ye?**—What claim to recompense from God?

Ver. 35. **Hoping for nothing again.**—R.V. "never despairing," and with the marginal note, "Some ancient authorities read *despairing of no man.*" The rendering of the A.V. is, however, as good as we can get. Notice that the precepts "love," "do good," "lend hoping for nothing again," correspond to vers. 32, 33, and 34 respectively.

Ver. 36.—The best MSS. omit "therefore": it is omitted in R.V.

Ver. 37. **Judge not.**—*I.e.* in a harsh, censorious spirit. Cf. with the teaching of the whole verse, Matt. xviii. 21-35.

Ver. 38. **Good measure.**—The figure is evidently taken from measuring corn. **Bosom.**—The loose folds above the girdle served as a pocket.

Ver. 39. **Ditch.**—R.V. "pit."

Ver. 40. **Every one that is perfect.**—Rather, "every one when he is perfected" (R.V.), *i.e.* no disciple on passing through the full course of training rises above the teacher from whom he has learned. The figure was evidently one frequently used by Jesus, and is employed to illustrate different aspects of truth. Cf. Matt. x. 25; John xiii. 16, xv. 20. The general idea of vers. 39, 40, is: "The blind cannot lead the blind better than he can guide himself: the scholar will not be better than his teacher: the judgment which one sinful man passes on another can never raise the standard of moral excellence in the world" (*Speaker's Commentary*).

Ver. 41.—Notice the two different words "behold" and "perceive"—R.V. "behold" and "consider." As it were, he sees at a glance the defect in another, but the most careful observation does not reveal to him his own defects. **Mote.**—A dry twig or stalk, as distinguished from *a beam* of wood.

Ver. 48. **Founded upon a rock.**—A better reading is "well builded" (R.V.). The reading followed by the A.V. may have been taken from the parallel passage in Matt. vii. 25. The point of the figure is often missed: it is not that rock is a good foundation, and earth or sand (Matt. vii. 26) a bad (for sand may be a good foundation), but that the one man took pains to get a good foundation, while the other did not, or built at haphazard.

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 1—11.

The Pharisees' Sabbath and Christ's.—We have here two Sabbath incidents, in the first of which the disciples are the transgressors of the Sabbatic tradition; in the second, Christ's own action is brought into question. The scene of the first is in the fields, that of the second is the synagogue. In the one, Sabbath observance is set aside at the call of personal needs; in the other, at the call of another's calamity. So the two correspond to the old Puritan principle that the Sabbath law allowed of "works of necessity and of mercy."

I. **The Sabbath and personal needs.**—The disciples, as they and their Master traversed some field-path through the corn, gathered a few ears, as the merciful provision of the law allowed, and began to eat the rubbed-out grains to relieve their hunger. Moses had not forbidden such gleaning, but casuistry had decided that such action was virtually reaping and winnowing, and was therefore work of a kind that violated the Sabbath. Our Lord does not question the authority of the tradition, nor ask where Moses had forbidden what His disciples were doing. Still less does He touch the sanctity of the Jewish Sabbath. He accepts His questioners' position, for the time, and gives them a perfect answer on their own ground. He quotes an incident in which ceremonial obligations give way before higher law. It is that of David and his followers eating the shewbread, which was tabooed to all but the priests, and perhaps the incident is chosen with some reference to the parallel between Himself, the true King, now unrecognised and hunted, with His humble followers, and the fugitive outlaw with his band. This shows that even a Divine prohibition which relates to mere ceremonial matter melts, like wax, before even bodily necessities. It may reasonably be doubted whether all Christian communities have learned the sweep of that principle yet, or so judge of the relative importance of keeping up their appointed forms of worship, and of feeding their hungry brother. To this Christ adds an assertion of His power over the Sabbath, as enjoined upon Israel. His is the authority which imposed it. It is plastic in His hands. The whole order of which it is a part has its highest purpose in witnessing of Him. He brings the true "rest."

II. **The Sabbath and works of beneficence.**—In His former answer Jesus had appealed to Scripture to bear out His teaching that Sabbath observance must bend to personal necessities. Here He appeals to the natural sense of compassion to confirm the principle that it must give way to the duty of relieving others. The principle is a wide one: the charitable succour of men's needs, of whatever kind, is congruous with the true design of the day of rest. Have the Churches laid that lesson to heart? On the whole, it is to be observed that our Lord here distinctly recognises the obligation of the Sabbath, that He claims power over it, that He permits the pressure of individual necessities and of others' need of help to modify the manner of its observance, and that He leaves to the spiritual insight of His followers the application of these principles. The cure which follows is done in a singular fashion. Without a request from the sufferer or any one else, He heals him by a word. His command has a promise in it, and He gives the power to do what He bids the man do. We get strength to obey in the act of obedience. But, also, the manner in which the miracle was wrought had a special reason in the very cavils of the Pharisees. Not even they could accuse Him of breaking any Sabbath law by such a cure. What had He done? Told the man to put out his hand. Surely that was not unlawful. What had the man done? Stretched it forth. Surely that broke no subtle Rabbinical precept. So they were foiled at every turn, driven off the field of argument, and baffled in their attempt to find ground for laying an information against Him. Their hearts were not touched by His gentle wisdom or healing power. All that their contact with Jesus did was to drive them to intenser hostility, and to send them away to plot His death. That is what comes of making religion a round of outward observances. The Pharisee is always blind as an owl to the light of God and true goodness, keen-sighted as a hawk for trivial breaches of his cobweb regulations, and cruel as a vulture to tear with beak and claw. The race is not extinct. We all carry one inside, and need God's help to cast him out.—*Maclaren.*

SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS ON VERSES 1—11.

Vers. 1-11.

I. **The Sabbath.**—How did our Lord spend *His* Sabbaths? In regular attendance at the synagogue services, public preaching, private ministrations of mercy to the sick and suffering. How different the Sabbaths of the Pharisees! They had added to the fourth commandment many childish and burdensome rules.

II. **A Sabbath incident in the cornfields.**—1. The charge of Sabbath-breaking. 2. Our Lord's reply.

III. **A Sabbath incident in the synagogue.**—1. A new charge. 2. A new reply. Christ gives us two simple tests. What is necessary may be done. A work of mercy may be done.—*W. Taylor.*

Ver. 1. "*Plucked the ears of corn.*"—The incidental mention of the hunger of the disciples, which they were seeking to satisfy by plucking and eating the ripe corn, is very affecting (Matt. xii. 1). It was on the plea of necessity that Jesus justified their so acting on the Sabbath day. Probably to most, if not to all of them, this degree of poverty was a new experience, since they had forsaken all to follow Jesus. Two of them at least, James and John, seem to have belonged to one of the higher strata of society—they had had servants, and were on terms of intimacy with the high priest; Matthew had followed a lucrative calling; and the other apostles had been, though perhaps poor, not in destitute circumstances. But doubtless the sacrifices they made in obeying the command of Jesus were counted but light, and the hardships they occasionally had to endure but trivial, in comparison with the blessedness of association with Him. No life can be called destitute in which there is true fellowship with Christ.

Ver. 2. "*Not lawful to do.*"—The strict observance of the Sabbath had become the marked characteristic of the Jews in the time of their exile. After their return it had become interwoven with national feeling; so that the measure of freedom which Jesus took in connection with the observance of the day gave great offence both in Judæa and in Galilee. The vast number of rules and the hair-splitting casuistry associated by the Jews with Sabbath observance are well known: they made life almost intolerable. A devout Jew was afraid to lift his finger, for fear of breaking some Rabbinical precept. "A woman must not go out with any ribbons about her, unless they were sewed to her dress. A false tooth must not be worn. A person with the toothache might not rinse his mouth with vinegar, but he might hold it in his mouth and swallow it. No one might write down two letters of the alphabet. The sick might not send for a physician. A person with lumbago might not rub or foment the affected part. A tailor must not go out with his needle on Friday night, lest he should forget it, and so break the Sabbath by carrying it about. A cock must not wear a piece of ribbon round its leg on the Sabbath, for this would be to carry something! etc., etc." (*Farrar*). The very idea of the purpose of the Sabbath had been lost. God had given it as a boon to man, and it had been made into a burden. And upon an observance of these fantastic and self-imposed rules devotees thought they could build up a holiness which would justify them in the sight of God.

Vers. 3, 4. *The Authority of the Scriptures.*—In all questions of moral and spiritual principles Christ treats the word of God as the supreme authoritative guide for man, and from it now He confutes His opponents, as in the desert He had by its aid overthrown the tempter.

"*Have ye not read?*"—There are different ways of reading: (1) that which results merely in acquaintance with the text, and (2) that which penetrates to the true significance of the record. The Pharisees *had* read the history of their great national hero, David, but they had not grasped the principle which underlay and justified his action and that of the high priest on this occasion. Jesus does not discuss the petty school question as to whether plucking the ears of corn and rubbing them out were virtually the same as reaping and threshing, but settles the dispute by laying down the great principle that the word of God which prescribed ceremonial laws laid greater stress upon moral duties than upon them, and taught that mercy was better than sacrifice. The bread consecrated to God in the holy tent was not profaned when given to relieve the hunger of His children. He implied, too, that Scripture to be of use must be interpreted by Scripture, in order that its true spirit and teaching might be learned. A single text of God's word is not therefore necessarily authoritative, but the general strain of Scripture teaches principles that are so. In accordance with the spirit of the history in 1 Sam. xxi., which Christ here quotes, was the action of Ethelwold, Bishop of Winchester. "In a time of famine he sold all the rich vessels and ornaments of the church to relieve the poor with bread, and said 'there was no reason that the dead temples of God should be sumptuously furnished, and the living temples suffer poverty.'"

Ver. 5. "*Lord also of the Sabbath.*" Jesus vindicates the conduct—of the disciples on two grounds: (1) that there were occasions when the ordinary rules of Sabbath observance might without blame be set aside; and (2) that He, as Son of man, had power to modify those very rules. His decisions were to be taken as authoritative, and the same weight attached to them as to the law concerning the Sabbath given through Moses. "Since the Sabbath was an ordinance instituted for the use and benefit of man, the Son of man, who has taken upon Him full and completed manhood, the great representative and head of humanity, has this institution under His own power" (*Alford*). This teaching is illustrated and expanded in Rom. xiv. 5, 17; Col. ii. 16, 17. Christ did not abolish the Sabbath, just as He did not abolish fasting, but He changed it from being an external ordinance observed in a rigid and servile manner, as it had become among the Jews, and made it a means of grace. Not because of a commandment binding us to certain outward conduct, but because of an inward spiritual need, do we, therefore, keep the day holy. To do good upon the Sabbath, and not merely to abstain from work, is the best way of observing the day. An indication of the lordship over the Sabbath which Christ claims is given in the change of the day of rest from the last to the first day of the week. Under the guidance of His Spirit, if not at His command, given on some occasion after His rising from the dead (cf. Acts i. 3), His followers made this change.

"*Lord of the Sabbath.*"—This title teaches us—

I. **That there is still a Sabbath day for us to observe.**

II. **That we should look to our Lord's teaching and practice for the due observance of the Sabbath.**—*W. Taylor.*

Vers. 6-11. *The Withered Hand.*—The man with the withered hand is a silent but steady example of faith. There are two things in his conduct which cast a special lustre upon it—the one more external, the other more internal and spiritual.

I. **He obeyed God rather than man.**—By his prompt obedience he takes the side of Jesus against the Pharisees, and submits himself entirely to His direction. His readiness to go with Him

in a matter of external obedience was the proof of that instinctive and deep-lying trust in Christ which made him a fit subject for His healing.

II. **He obeyed where obedience was an act of pure trust.**—The first command, "Rise up," tested the courage of his faith; the second command, "Stretch forth thine hand," tested the inner, deeper faith of the spiritual nature. Had he not been completely reliant upon Christ, he would at this point have doubted. But he implicitly obeyed, and in obeying was healed. It is an impressive illustration of the way of life. There is none that casts a clearer light on the foolish puzzles men make to themselves out of the doctrines of grace. God never bids us of our own strength to believe. It is Jehovah-Jesus who commands. Is it for any one of us to say, "I cannot"?—*Laidlaw.*

Ver. 6. *Irritation against Jesus.*—The incident here related marks the final stage in the irritation of the Pharisees against Jesus: the result of the miracle was that they "communed one with another what they might do to Jesus." The parallel passage in St. Mark (iii. 6) says "they took counsel against Him, how they might destroy Him." In the section immediately preceding this St. Luke records several stages in the growing enmity of the Pharisees: 1. The accusation of blasphemy (v. 21). 2. The murmuring at favour being shown to publicans and sinners (v. 30). 3. The fault found with the disciples for plucking the ears of corn on a Sabbath (vi. 1-6). A sign of increasing intensity of feeling is given in ver. 7. Jesus was now watched by His enemies, in order that an accusation might be brought against Him. They were prepared to take undue advantage, and if necessary to lay a trap for Him.

Ver. 7. "*Whether He would heal.*"—As mentioned in an earlier note, healing the sick, or even doing anything to alleviate suffering, on the Sabbath, was proscribed by the more rigid of the Pharisees. St. Matthew says that they asked Jesus whether it were lawful or not to heal on the Sabbath. This is not inconsistent with St. Luke's narrative, which, indeed, implies that Christ spoke in answer to some such question.

Ver. 8. "*He knew their thoughts.*"—That He was being exposed to espionage, and that they were beginning to form plans for putting Him to death.

Ver. 9. "*I will ask you one thing.*"—Jesus makes His adversaries decide the question they had themselves asked, and He so states it that they could give but one answer, and that in approval of healing on the Sabbath. He identifies omitting to do good with committing evil: not to relieve pain was to prolong or virtually to inflict pain. He states the matter in the most startling manner: "not to heal is to kill" (cf. Prov. xxiv. 11, 12). And doubtless He implied that their machinations against Himself were known to Him: while He on that Sabbath day was intent upon healing, His adversaries were thinking how best to compass His death. Who could doubt as to which of them was the better employed on that day? The Pharisees were thus caught in the snare they had laid for Him, and were unable to reply. If the question were asked, "Why not postpone the work of healing to to-morrow?" the answer would not be far to seek: "The present only is ours: to-morrow may never come" (cf. Prov. iii. 27, 28).

Ver. 10. "*Looking round about.*"—The heart of Jesus, as St. Mark tells us, was filled with grief and anger—with grief because of their unbelief, and with anger because that unbelief sprang from malice and culpable prejudice. These feelings appeared in the glance He cast upon His silenced adversaries.

"*Stretch forth.*"—With the *command* the promise of ability to obey it was

implied, if there were but faith in the heart of the hearer. In the remarkable command, to stretch forth a withered hand, we have an illustration of such seemingly unreasonable calls as these: "Prophesy upon these bones, and say unto them, O ye dry bones, hear the word of the Lord" (Ezek. xxxvii. 4); "Incline your ear, and come unto Me: hear, and your soul shall live" (Isa. lv. 3); "Awake, thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give thee light" (Eph. v. 14). It was by a sheer act of will that Christ healed the man: He *did* nothing—did not even touch the withered hand. So that His enemies could not fasten upon any outward action of His which could be construed into a breach of the Sabbath. The stretching out of the hand was a proof that the miracle had been already wrought.

Ver. 11. "*Madness.*"—The word implies *senselessness*—the frenzy of obstinate prejudice. It admirably characterises the state of ignorant hatred which is disturbed in the fixed condition of its own infallibility (2 Tim. iii. 9).—*Farrar.*

Causes of their Hatred.—Various causes contributed to inflame the Pharisees with this blind hatred: 1. Jesus had broken through their traditions. 2. He had put them to silence and shame in the presence of the people. 3. Though they were enraged at His action, He had avoided doing any overt act on which they could found a charge against Him.

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 12—19.

The Choice of the Twelve.—It is probable that the selection of a limited number to be His close and constant companions had become a necessity to Christ, in consequence of His very success in gaining disciples. It was impossible that all who believed could continue henceforth to follow Him, in the literal sense, whithersoever He might go: the greater number could now only be occasional followers. But it was His wish that certain selected men should be with Him at all times and in all places—His travelling companions in all His wanderings, witnessing all His work, and ministering to His daily needs. They were, however, to be more than travelling companions or menial servants. They were to be, in the meantime, students of Christian doctrine, and occasional fellow-labourers in the work of the kingdom, and eventually Christ's chosen trained agents for propagating the faith after He Himself had left the earth. The number of the apostolic company is significant. A larger number of eligible men could easily have been found in a circle of disciples which afterwards supplied seventy auxiliaries for evangelistic work; and a smaller number might have served all the present or prospective purposes of the apostleship. The number twelve happily expressed in figures what Jesus claimed to be, and what He had come to do, and thus furnished a support to the faith and a stimulus to the devotion of His followers. It significantly hinted that Jesus was the Divine Messianic King of Israel, come to set up the kingdom whose advent was foretold by prophets in glowing language, suggested by the palmy days of Israel's history, when the theocratic community existed in its integrity, and all the tribes of the chosen nation were united under the royal house of David. In a worldly point of view the twelve were a very insignificant company indeed—a band of poor, illiterate Galilæan provincials, utterly devoid of social consequence, not likely to be chosen by one having supreme regard to prudential considerations. Why did Jesus choose such men? Was He guided by feelings of antagonism to those possessing social advantages, or of partiality for men of His own class? No; His choice was made in true wisdom. If He chose

Galilæans mainly, it was not from provincial prejudice against those of the south; if, as some think, He chose two or even four of His own kindred, it was not from nepotism; if He chose rude, unlearned, humble men, it was not because He was animated by any petty jealousy of knowledge, culture, or good birth. If any rabbi, rich man, or ruler had been willing to yield himself unreservedly to the service of the kingdom, no objection would have been taken to him on account of his acquirements, possessions, or titles. But such men would not condescend so far, and therefore the despised One did not get an opportunity of showing His willingness to accept as disciples and choose for apostles such as they were. It mattered little, except in the eyes of contemporary prejudice, what the social position or even the previous history of the twelve had been, provided they were spiritually qualified for the work to which they were called. What tells ultimately is, not what is without a man, but what is within. If it be thought that a number of apostles were undistinguished either by high endowment or by a great career, and were in fact all but useless, the wisdom of Christ's choice of them is virtually impugned. The following considerations may serve to modify this opinion:—

I. **That some of the apostles were comparatively obscure, inferior men cannot be denied; but even the obscurest of them may have been most useful as witnesses for Him with whom they had companied from the beginning.**—It does not take a great man to make a good witness, and to be witnesses of Christian facts was the main business of the apostles. That even the humblest of them rendered important service in that capacity we need not doubt, though nothing is said of them in the apsotolic annals. It is not to be expected that a history so fragmentary and so brief as that given by St. Luke should mention any but the principal actors, especially when we reflect how few of the characters that appear on the stage at any particular crisis in human affairs are prominently noticed even in histories which go elaborately into detail. The purpose of history is served by recording the words and deeds of the representative men, and many are allowed to drop into oblivion who did nobly in their day. The less distinguished members of the apostolic band are entitled to the benefit of this reflection.

II. **Three eminent men, or even two (Peter and John), out of twelve are a good proportion**—there being few societies in which superior excellence bears such a high ratio to respectable mediocrity. Perhaps the number of "pillars" was as great as was desirable. Far from regretting that all were not Peters and Johns, it is rather a matter to be thankful for that there were diversities of gifts among the first preachers of the gospel. As a general rule it is not good when all are leaders. Little men are needed as well as great men; for human nature is one-sided, and little men have their peculiar virtues and gifts, and can do some things better than their more celebrated brethren.

III. **We must remember how little we know concerning any of the apostles.**—It is the fashion of biographers in our day, writing for a morbidly or idly curious public, to enter into the minutest particulars of outward event or personal peculiarity regarding their heroes. Of this fond, idolatrous minuteness there is no trace in the evangelic histories. The writers of the Gospels were not afflicted with the biographic mania. Moreover, the apostles were not their theme. Christ was their hero; and their sole desire was to tell what they knew of Him. They gazed steadfastly at the Sun of righteousness, and in His effulgence they lost sight of the attendant stars. Whether they were stars of the first magnitude, or of the second, or of the third made little difference.—*Bruce.*

SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS ON VERSES 12—19.

Vers. 12-49. *The Busy Christ.*

I. **A night of prayer.**

II. **A morning of work.**—Calling, choosing, healing, teaching.—*W. Taylor.*

Vers. 12-16. *The Choice of the Apostles.*—Note the difference between discipleship and apostleship. He called to Him the disciples, and of them He chose twelve to be apostles. A disciple is a learner; an apostle is an emissary. The one is still in the school; the other has left it to become a teacher and an envoy. The night between discipleship and apostleship was so critical that our Lord devoted the whole of it to prayer. These men were to be nearest to the person—to form the innermost circle—of the Saviour. From that choice sprang the little volume of the New Testament, words of eternal life; from it the real Christianity of Christendom; from it every word and work, during these eighteen centuries, of piety, of purity, of charity; from it the great multitude which no man can number. Well might that be a night of prayer upon which was to dawn the ordination, or the consecration, of the twelve apostles. Was there not matter for His night-long intercession at the throne of grace for the disciples about to become apostles, henceforth to be entrusted with this latest and largest interpretation of the mind, and the will, and the heart of God to men?—*Vaughan.*

The New Organisation.—This is all we are told of the planting of that germ of which the upgrowth is the Church of Christ. The organisation thus introduced was just enough to make of the disciples one body. Henceforth they could speak of themselves as "we"; but as yet they were only pupils, chosen to be about their Master's person, entrusted with special powers for the good of those among whom they ministered, but with no authority over the rest of the disciples.—*Latham.*

Ver. 12. "*Into a mountain to pray.*"—High mountain-peaks are in the Bible consecrated as places of communion with God. Almost all the secrets of God have been revealed on mountain-tops. Jesus prayed on this mountain for the disciples whom He was now to choose. He asked God to grant them to Him. Well has this been called the vigil before the laying of the foundation-stone of the Church—this night through which our Lord watched and prayed. We can guess the contents of this prayer from that which our Lord offered as our High Priest (John xvii.). He who prayed thus in the days of His flesh sits now on the right hand of the Majesty on high, and blesses His Church, both as High Priest and King, with gifts and offices (Eph. iv. 11).

A Crisis in the Ministry of Jesus.—St. Luke indicates in the most impressive manner that the choice of the twelve apostles marks a critical time in the ministry of Jesus. He had spoken of a new order of things, and had incurred the enmity of those who were devoted to the old order. He now regards it necessary to organise His followers, and to found a new society based upon faith in Himself and devotion to the interests of God's kingdom upon earth. The calling of the twelve marks the beginning of the spiritual Israel, in a separate and distinctive form. The choice of the twelve and the institution of the sacraments were the only definite acts of organisation which Christ judged it necessary to perform.

The Apostles divinely chosen.—Great stress is laid by St. Luke upon the night of prayer and communion with

God which preceded the choice of the twelve, and by this he would have us to understand both the importance of the occasion and also the fact that these individuals were selected under the special direction of God Himself.

The Laying of the Foundation-stone of the Church.—Thus then it would appear that our Redeemer prepared Himself by nocturnal prayer, and then in the morning installed the twelve apostles. If we consider that the election of this body of men, in whose hearts the first germs of truth were to be deposited, depended upon a careful selection of persons, we shall then be able to form an idea of that momentous act; it was the moment in which was laid the foundation-stone of the Church. Only as the discerner of all hearts was it possible for our Lord to lay the foundation of such a body of closely united minds, which might exist and represent the whole spiritual creation, that was to be called into existence. In His own person all was concentrated in one holy unity; but as the ray of light divides itself into its various colours, so in like manner went forth the *one* light which emanated from Christ into the hearts of the twelve in various modified degrees of brightness.—*Olshausen.*

Labourers sent forth by God.—As Jesus had told His disciples to pray to God to send forth labourers to gather in His harvest (Matt. ix. 38), so now does He Himself commit the matter of those to be chosen as labourers in prayer to God.

Great Importance of this Choice.—If the passage before us teaches anything, it teaches us that the sending forth of His apostles was in our Lord's judgment a matter of great importance: He does not at all treat it as though it belonged to the subordinate details of His work.—*Liddon.*

Ver. 13. "*Of them He chose twelve.*" It is a striking fact that the whole of the twelve were chosen by our Lord near the beginning of His ministry. He did not begin with a small number, to be afterwards enlarged; He completed the college of apostles at once. 1. This shows us how mature His own mind was as to His work, and as to the men best fitted to aid in it. 2. This plan had the advantage, too, of securing a united testimony and an intelligent co-operation all through.—*Blaikie.*

Little More is Heard of These Men Afterwards.—So little is saint-worship countenanced by the practice of the early Church, that we hear little more of any of these men—of some, indeed, nothing whatever. Two things are noticeable of them as a body:—

I. **Their variety in education and acquirements.**

II. **How few they seem for the task assigned to them.**—*Markby.*

"*Apostles.*"—The special title conferred upon the twelve, that of those "sent out," derives its dignity from the fact that those who bear it are in a sense representatives of Him who sends them. They are not so much messengers as ambassadors. The name is used elsewhere in the New Testament in a general sense, and applied to persons who were not of the twelve (Gal. i. 19; Acts xiv. 14; Heb. iii. 1), but it is only of the twelve that Christ, so far as we know, used it.

Not all Equally Intimate with Jesus.—It is a very striking fact that all the apostles were not on equal terms of intimacy with Jesus: Peter, James, and John were on several occasions honoured above the others in being taken into closer fellowship with the Lord (viii. 51, ix. 28; Matt. xxvi. 37). "The disciples thus surrounded our Lord in wider and still wider expanding circles; nearest to Him were the three, then came the other nine, after them the seventy, and finally the multitude of His other disciples. Undeniable, then, as is the difference which

existed between the disciples of Christ, yet this does not imply that there existed any more intimate initiation for those standing nearest to Him. The secret, or the mystery of Christ, at once the highest and the simplest truth, was to be preached from the house-tops. It is not to be doubted, however, that some penetrated infinitely deeper into this mystery than the others, and hence became far more fitted to move in more intimate proximity to our Lord" (*Olshausen*).

Characteristics of the Apostles.—None of those chosen seem to have been of high social rank. James and John were still fishermen, though, as pointed out in a preceding note (ver. 1), they were evidently "better off" than their fellow-apostles. Nor do the twelve seem to have been distinguished by intellectual gifts, or learning of the kind acquired in the schools (Acts iv. 13). Their moral and spiritual faculties and attainments seem rather to have been called into being, and cultivated by association with Jesus, than to have belonged to them when they were first chosen to be apostles. But they were men of simple, unsophisticated characters, and devoid of those inveterate prejudices which blinded the eyes of scribes and Pharisees and hardened their hearts. They loved their Master and believed in Him, and had religious aspirations which He alone could satisfy. The sense of duty was strong in them; and they conscientiously desired to do what was right. "They had also the excellent quality of persistence, or holding-out. Other men had also enrolled themselves as Jesus' disciples, and had given Him up; but the twelve had held on. No mere adventurers, or time-servers, or self-seekers would have stayed with Jesus."

The Men chosen.—1. Christ chooses simple-minded yet already measurably *prepared* men. 2. Few yet very diverse men. 3. Some prominent to go with several less noticeable men.—*Lange*

The Apostolic Office.

I. **They were sent to do a given work.**

II. **They were to be witnesses**—as to what their Master had been, and had done, and had suffered, while they were with Him. They carried out their mission (1) by their words—they preached Christ; (2) by their work—they built up the Church, the temple of redeemed souls; (3) by their sufferings—they died for Christ.—*Liddon.*

Vers. 17, 18. "*A great multitude of people.*"—Three classes of persons were now about Jesus: (1) occasional hearers (the "multitude of people" from all parts); (2) permanent disciples ("the company of His disciples"); and (3) the apostles. The first represented mankind as summoned to enter the kingdom of God; the second the Church, or the body of believers; and the third the Christian ministry.—*Godet.*

A Characteristic Scene.—The whole scene is a highly characteristic one: we have—

I. **The company of sinners**—of various nations, oppressed by various evils—ignorance, disease, and Satanic power—but desiring and seeking redemption from Christ.

II. **The Saviour**—moved with compassion, and able to heal and to deliver.

Ver. 19. "*Power came forth . . . healed them all.*"—There is something unusually grand in this touch of description, giving to the reader the impression of a more than usual exuberance of His majesty and grace in this succession of healings, which made itself felt among all the vast multitude.—*Brown.*

Miracles a Seal to the Message from God.—Miracles preceded and followed the Sermon on the Mount. The sermon was like an *epistle* sent from God: the miracles were its *seals*, impressed with the Divine image and superscription.

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 20—49.

The Sermon on the Mount as given in St. Matthew's Gospel may be taken as setting forth (1) the character of the citizens of the kingdom of heaven (v. 3-16); (2) the new law that is given to them (v. 17-48), and the new life which they live, with its duties, aims, dangers, and responsibilities (vi., vii.). A like general scheme underlies the sermon as reported by St. Luke. In the fuller report of Christ's words as given in the first Gospel, the tone is more polemical than in St. Luke—as Christ contrasts the spirituality of the righteousness which He commends to His disciples with the external and artificial righteousness of scribes and Pharisees. (For a full analysis of the Sermon on the Mount in St. Matthew's Gospel, see Westcott, *Introduction to the Study of the Gospels*, p. 386).

I. **The dispositions of those who are inclined to enter the kingdom of heaven, and of those who shut themselves out of it.**—Four beatitudes are announced to the former, four woes uttered against the latter (vers. 20-26). 1. Beatitudes. Those that are in poverty, and live hard, laborious lives, and are crushed down by affliction, if they are under the influence of the spirit of religion, are likely to abound in that humility and meekness which qualify men to be citizens of the kingdom of heaven. The rich and prosperous are apt to be proud and haughty, and harsh in temper. Doubtless the mass of those now listening to Christ belonged to the former class. The beatitudes do not belong to them in virtue of their earthly poverty and misfortunes, but in virtue of their piety. For these were not simply poor men and women, but poor men and women seeking blessings from the Saviour, and thereby confessing their own insufficiency and their reliance upon Him. (So that the gloss in St. Matthew's report of the first beatitude, "poor *in spirit*," is not in conflict with the words here.) The evil circumstances of their lives become naturally under God's blessing a discipline to prepare them for receiving an infinite reward. Their blessedness is partly in the present (ver. 20)—they possess the kingdom of heaven, they are enrolled as citizens of it, and have a right to all its privileges; and partly in the future (vers. 21, 23)—their present misery will be exchanged for happy outward conditions, their griefs will be exchanged for unending joys, the only misfortunes they will know will be persecution for a time of a kind like that endured by God's true prophets in all ages, to be followed by "a great reward in heaven." In view of what is in store for them they may well be pronounced "blessed," in spite of all in their present lot that seems sordid and unhappy. 2. Woes. These correspond exactly to the foregoing beatitudes: over against the "poor" are set "the rich," over against "the hungry" are "the full," over against "those that weep" are "those that laugh," over against those that are hated by the world are those that are loved by the world. The words "for ye have received your consolation" show us what we are to understand by "the rich": they are those who find all their satisfaction in the present life. It is not mere riches that are cursed—just as in the preceding section it was not mere poverty that was blessed. Men like Joseph of Arimathæa and Nicodemus, who were rich, were not disqualified for being disciples of Jesus. But as a matter of fact the wealthy and those of high rank, as a class, set themselves against Jesus, and therefore shut themselves out of the kingdom of heaven. The woes now uttered were amply fulfilled in the sufferings that accompanied the overthrow of Jerusalem and the fall of the Jewish state a generation later, and have no doubt reference also to a reversal of lot in a future state (cf. xvi. 25). A similar passage is found in Jas. v. 1 *ff.*

II. **A proclamation of the new law by which the society Christ founds is to**

be governed, and of the spirit by which it is animated (vers. 27-45).—The new law or principle by which Christ would have the society He founds to be directed and animated is that of charity or love, and He sets it forth in concrete form (vers. 27-30), and then as an abstract rule. 1. Practical manifestations of charity (vers. 27-30). It is to be more than merely not rendering evil for evil: it is to be a rendering good for evil (cf. Rom. xii. 21), or an overcoming evil by good. To every fresh exhibition of malice, a stronger and more intense exhibition of love is to be opposed. "Do good," "bless," "pray for," are ascending degrees of love in its outward manifestations—just as the words "hate you," "curse you," "despitefully use you," mark increasing degrees of maliciousness. It is to be the source of beneficent *actions*, and under its influence the Christian ceases, if need be, to insist upon his rights (vers. 29, 30). Both to do good unceasingly and to bear wrong unmurmuringly are commended to him. 2. The golden rule (ver. 31). "As ye would that men," etc. In its negative form, "Do not to others what you would have others abstain from doing to you," the rule has been found in more than one system of morality outside the Christian; but in none does it have the prominent place that Christ gives it—in none is it commended to men by an example comparable with His. Further, 3. Christ lays stress upon the disinterestedness of this virtue as compared with ordinary affection (vers. 32-35 *a*). Ordinary love is quenched by want of sympathy, and naturally seeks a return of kindred feeling. But there is no stain of selfishness or alloy of worldly-wise calculation in the love which Christ commanded and exemplified. 4. He describes the great example of this disinterested love in the Divine love which is shown even to the unthankful and the evil (vers. 35 *b*, 36). The reward won by manifesting this love is not some external recompense, but it consists in the love becoming purer and more intense, and in the possessor of it sharing the blessedness of Him who is love itself. 5. The effects of this love as manifested towards men: it leads to the formation of merciful judgments concerning the sinful (ver. 37); to generosity and helpfulness towards all, which God will bountifully reward (ver. 38); to ability to guide the erring and correct the faulty,—actions which the proud, unloving Pharisees were incapable of performing (vers. 39-42). It is only from a nature that is itself good that these good results can proceed. A proud man cannot teach humility, a selfish man cannot teach charity, any more than a thorn can yield figs or a bramble bush grapes (vers. 43, 44). If we are to teach others holiness, we must be holy ourselves: it was the holiness of Jesus that gave Him pre-eminence as a teacher, and His disciples must be like Him if they would continue His work (ver. 45).

III. **The necessity for sincerity and thoroughness in discipleship, and the disasters incurred by the opposite faults** (vers. 46-49).—To hear and not to do the sayings of Christ is to give them intellectual acceptance, but not to allow them to penetrate and govern the whole being—conscience, will, feelings, and conduct—in short, all that constitutes one's true personality. Our spiritual life is an erection we set up; and if it be not well built, it will fall before the assault of temptation or trial, and will not stand the final test by which the Divine Judge will bring to light the value of our work (cf. 1 Cor. iii. 12-15).

SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS ON VERSES 20—49.

Ver. 20. *The Qualifications for the Kingdom of Heaven*—poverty, hunger, etc.,—we do not possess of ourselves, but Christ imparts them to us by awakening in our hearts, which have grown weary under the pressure of worldly things, the longing for spiritual food. This longing shall in very truth

be satisfied. One of the traditional sayings of Christ preserved by *Clement* is, "Will, and thou shalt be able."

Spiritual Poverty.—Spiritual poverty, a heart that feels its need, is the first thing that makes us fit for the kingdom of God. He who does not have this first qualification cannot have those that follow. "There are many," *Augustine* says, "who would rather give all their goods to the poor than themselves become poor in the sight of God." The source of true humility is found only in Him "who, though He was rich, yet for our sakes became poor."

"*Blessed be ye poor.*"—This is indeed an admirably sweet, friendly beginning of His doctrine and preaching. For He does not proceed like Moses . . . with command, threatening and terrifying, but in the friendliest possible way with pure, enticing, alluring, and amiable promises.—*Luther.*

The Poor inherit the Kingdom.—St. James seems to give a paraphrase of this beatitude when he speaks of "*the poor of this world*, rich in faith, and heirs of the kingdom which God hath promised to them that love Him" (ii. 5). As a simple matter of fact, the poor seem to have been the class that was most forward to receive the Saviour, and in which He found the most devoted of His disciples (cf. also 1 Cor. i. 26-29).

Ver. 21. "*Ye that hunger now.*"—An anticipation of this beatitude is to be found in the song of Mary: "He hath filled the hungry with good things" (i. 53). Cf. also Ps. cvii. 9: "For He satisfieth the longing soul, and filleth the hungry soul with goodness."

"*Ye that weep now.*"—In the eye of Heaven blessedness begins at the point which, in human estimation, is reckoned the extreme of misery.

Ver. 22. "*Shall hate you.*"—In the manifestation of hatred towards the followers of Jesus a climax is observable. 1. The feeling of dislike. 2. A breaking off of intercourse. 3. Malicious slanders. 4. Excommunication. Cf. John ix. 22, 34, xii. 42, xvi. 2.

"*Your name.*"—*I.e.* the name of Christian. St. Peter alludes to these words in 1 Pet. iv. 14, 16, and St. James in ii. 7, as in ver. 5 of the same chapter he has alluded to ver. 20 of this. "'Malefic' or 'execrable superstition' was the favourite description of Christianity among the Pagans, and Christians were charged with incendiarism, cannibalism, and every infamy" (*Farrar*).

Ver. 23. "*Rejoice ye in that day.*"—A very striking fulfilment of this command, and a statement of the ground on which the joy of the apostles was based, are given in Acts v. 41: "Rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for His name." In several other passages in the New Testament "glorying in tribulation" is commended as a Christian duty, and various beneficial results are described as flowing from patient submission to suffering for the sake of Christ. See Heb. xi. 26; Rom. v. 3; Jas. i. 2, 3; Col. i. 24.

"*Reward in heaven.*"—An indirect hint that they were not to expect too great a reward for their faithfulness in the present life.

"*Did their fathers,*" *etc.*—"If the empress," said *Chrysostom*, "causes me to be sawn asunder, then let me be sawn asunder, for that was the fate of the prophet Isaiah; if she casts me into the sea, I will think of Jonah; if she casts me into the furnace of fire, I think of the three holy children; if she throws me to the wild beasts, I will think of Daniel in the lions' den; if she cuts off my head, I have still St. John as my companion; if she causes me to be stoned, what else happened to Stephen?"

"*The prophets.*"—It is especially no-

ticeable how the Saviour at once places His newly chosen apostles in the same rank with the prophets of the Old Testament, and in the demand that they should be ready for His name's sake to suffer shame shows the sublimest self-consciousness. It scarcely needs pointing out how completely the idea that they were to suffer in such society, surrounded by such "a cloud of witnesses," was adapted to strengthen the courage and the spiritual might of the apostles.—*Lange.*

Ver. 24. "*Woe unto you.*"—In this passage, as in Matt. xxiv. 19, the words perhaps imply commiseration rather than anger: "Alas! for you." In Matt. xxiii. 13-16 the same phrase is used in denunciation of evil-doers.

"*Rich.*"—Not all the rich, but those who "receive their consolation" in the world—that is, who are so completely occupied with their worldly possessions that they forget the life to come. The meaning is—riches are so far from making a man happy that they often become the means of his destruction. In any other point of view the rich are not excluded from the kingdom of heaven, provided they do not become snares for themselves, or fix their hope on the earth, so as to shut against them the kingdom of heaven. This is finely illustrated by Augustine, who, in order to show that riches are not in themselves a hindrance to the children of God, reminds his readers that poor Lazarus was received into the bosom of rich Abraham.—*Calvin.*

"*Received your consolation.*"—"For ye, who trust in your riches, and accounting them sufficient for your happiness, neglect the spiritual treasures which I offer you, may be assured that you have received all your enjoyment in this world, and have no ground for expecting any in the world to come." Cf. chap. xvi. 25.

Ver. 25. "*Full.*"—Those who possess all that the heart can desire, and do not hunger and thirst after righteousness. The danger in which they stand is that of losing all that they possess at present, and thus of being destitute at once of both earthly and heavenly goods. See again an illustration in the fate of the rich man in the parable, who had been accustomed to "fare sumptuously every day," and who found himself both excluded from the heavenly banquet and stripped of those luxuries in which he had placed all his delight.

"*Laugh.*"—Senseless, frivolous, ungodly mirth is rebuked here as in Eccles. ii. 2, vii. 6; Prov. xiv. 13. Yet, on the other hand, the Christian is described as "sorrowful, *yet always rejoicing*" (2 Cor. vi. 10), and receives exhortations to maintain this spirit of holy gladness (cf. Phil. iv. 4).

Ver. 26. "*Speak well of you.*"—Cf. Jas. iv. 4: "Know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God?" John xv. 19: "If ye were of the world, the world would love his own."

"*False prophets.*"—"Universal praise from the world is a stigma for the Saviour's disciples, since it brings them into the suspicion (1) of unfaithfulness; (2) of characterlessness; (3) of the lust of pleasing. False prophets can ever reckon upon loud applause" (*Van Oosterzee*). Cf. Mic. ii. 11: "If a man walking in wind and falsehood do lie, saying, I will prophesy unto thee of wine and of strong drink: he shall even be the prophet of this people" (R.V.).

Ver. 27. "*Love your enemies.*"—The word here used generally denotes "complacency in the character" of the one loved, as distinguished from personal affection; but the sense in which it is here employed is that of maintaining kindly feelings and conduct towards another in spite of his enmity. The connection between this

precept and the foregoing words is well brought out by *Meyer*: "Yet although I utter against *those* these woes, yet I enjoin on you not hatred but love towards your enemies. It is therefore no accidental antithesis."

"*Do good*," *etc.*—A climax is noticeable in the precepts which describe the manner in which love to enemies is to be displayed. 1. In deeds—"do good." 2. In words—"bless." 3. In prayers for their welfare—"pray for them."

A New Departure.—Although it cannot be denied that love to enemies is in a certain sense required even by Jewish and heathen moralists, it must yet be remembered that the thought of requiting acts of enmity with devout intercession could only arise in the heart of Him who has Himself prayed for the evil-doers.—*Lange.*

Vers. 27-38. *Christ's Law of Love.*—A seemingly easy but profoundly difficult section. We must keep in mind—

I. **That the address is given to Christ's own followers.**—It can neither be understood nor practised by any others. The contrast is between true disciples and *sinners* who will do nothing but what will bring an immediate reward from men.

II. **It is to be obeyed in the spirit, and not in the letter.**—Christ gives us here some examples of how the true *spirit* of Christianity is seen. Had He intended these examples to be practised by His followers in literal obedience on all occasions, He would not have been content with merely giving instances. He would have gone over the whole range of possible circumstances, and shown us how to act in every case. But this is impossible, and contrary to the very spirit and essence of Christianity.—*Hastings.*

The Law of Love proclaimed.

I. **The extent of love** (vers. 27-30).

II. **The golden rule of love** (ver. 31).

III. **The Christian's standard of love** (vers. 32-36).

IV. **Love's reward** (vers. 37, 38).—*W. Taylor.*

Ver. 28. "*Pray for them.*"—Many imagine what is here commanded to be impossible. But Christ never commands impossibilities; but He prescribes such kind of perfection as was attained by David in the case of Saul, and by Abraham and by Stephen the martyr in praying for his murderers, and by St. Paul in wishing to be accursed for his persecutors (Rom. ix. 3).—*Jerome.*

Ver. 29. "*Turn to him the other also.*"

I. **Do not return blow for blow.**

II. **Bear the blow in silence.**

III. **Lovingly lay thyself open to receive another blow.**

Public Rights.—This precept does not require or permit any one to surrender *public* rights, which are not his own "cloke" or "coat," much less Christian principles and Christian truth, for which we are to contend earnestly (Jude 3), and of which we are not to divest ourselves; or to allow any one to strip us, for then we should be naked indeed; nor allow any one, as far as in us lies, to strip others, and to rob Christ.—*Wordsworth.*

Ver. 30. "*Give to every man*"—The promise is made to us by Christ that He will give us whatever we ask for (John xiv. 14). Yet it is not always literally fulfilled. We do not receive what would be hurtful for us, even if we ask for it; and are often constrained to confess thankfully that our disappointment is better than our wish. "So in his humble sphere should the Christian giver act. To give everything to every one—the sword to the madman, the alms to the impostor, the criminal request to the temptress—would be to act as the enemy of

others and of ourselves. Ours should be a higher and deeper charity, flowing from those inner springs of love which are the sources of outward actions sometimes widely divergent, whence may arise both the timely concession and the timely refusal" (*Alford*).

"*Ask them not again.*"—We must remember that we ought not to quibble about words, as if a good man were not permitted to recover what is his own, when God gives him the lawful means. We are only enjoined to exercise patience, that we may not be unduly distressed by the loss of our property, but calmly wait till the Lord Himself shall call the robbers to account.—*Calvin.*

"*Asketh of thee . . . ask them not again.*"—It is to be noted that in this verse two Greek words are translated "ask": the first of them means to ask *as a favour*, the second to demand *as a right.*

Ver. 31. *The Golden Rule.*

I. **We must consider how we should like other people to treat us, were they in our circumstances and we in theirs.**

II. **It is not what others really do to us, but what we wish them to do, that should be our rule.**

III. **That which we wish others to do to us must be lawful and reasonable.**

The excellence of the rule is evident from its reasonableness, and its intelligibility, and from the fact that it is readily applicable to all persons in all circumstances. The Saviour gathers up His detailed instructions into "a little bundle which every man can put into his bosom and easily carry about with him" (*Luther*). We all love ourselves, and therefore we can all know the love our neighbour requires from us. The natural man loves himself, and that love blinds him to the wants of his neighbours: the Christian loves himself, but that love enlightens him as to what is due to his neighbour.

Vers. 32-34. "*For if ye love them,*" *etc.*—Our Lord means to say that in all these things nothing has been done for the love of God, and therefore no thanks are due. The world's view of returning love for love is well put by Hesiod: "Those who love will be loved in return, and those who visit will be visited in return; he who gives will receive gifts, and he who does not give, will receive nothing. One gives willingly to the giver; but no one to be sure gives to him who refuses to give." In the same way Socrates teaches that it is allowable to cherish a grudge at the good fortune of your enemy, but that envy only consists in grudging the good fortune of a friend. Plato speaks of it as impossible to love an enemy. Such is the wisdom of the heathen.

Vers. 35, 36. "*Children of the Highest.*"—Our Father in heaven more than any one else meets with the ingratitude of men, and it should not depress His children on earth to have to experience it also. The great reward which the Lord of love promises to the children of God consists chiefly in this, that they taste the blessedness of being able to love. "To give is more blessed than to receive." It is sweet to be loved from the heart, but it is much sweeter and inexpressibly blessed to love with the whole heart. One is more blessed in the love which one feels than in the love which one inspires.

Vers. 36, 38. *The Christian's Duty as Man to Man.*

I. **The pattern of mercy, of justice, of forbearance and forgiveness, of generosity, which we ought to take.**—This is the example of Almighty God. "Be ye *therefore* merciful," because "the Highest is kind," etc.

II. **The rule of God's government and judgment in matters between man and man.**—"With the same measure," etc. Words well known and familiar, but some of the most awful words in the Bible. For (1) we *feel* they must be true, but (2) we cannot see or guess *how* they will be carried out.—*Church.*

Ver. 37. "*Judge not.*"—1. We can only go by appearances. 2. We can never be sure of the *motive* which has prompted the action in question. 3. We cannot fully estimate the circumstances in which the man was placed whose conduct we arraign. 4. We are only too liable to be influenced by our prejudices, and by considerations of self-interest, and are to a corresponding extent disqualified to act as judges.

Vers. 39, 40. *Blind Leaders of Blind.* Note:—

I. The **presumption** of the leaders.

II. The **delusion** of those who trust themselves to their guidance.

III. The **inevitable fate** which befalls both.

Ver. 40 explains why the fate is inevitable: the disciple, even when perfected, when he has learned his whole lesson, can know no more than his teacher, and the very care with which he follows will ensure his falling into the mistakes his master makes.

Vers. 41, 42. *The Literal and the Figurative Beam.*—In the physical region a beam in the eye does not sharpen its sight: in morals the case is different. Those who are corrupt in mind are very quick in detecting corruption in others, even in cases where innocence would discover nothing amiss. The man with a beam in his eye has two faults: 1. He does not know the beam to be there. 2. He assumes airs of moral superiority, and carries himself as a judge instead of a brother.

Correcting the Faults of Others.

I. **It is a delicate operation to correct the faults of other men.**—It may be likened to the feat of taking a chip of wood out of an inflamed eye. A clumsy operator may easily make things worse. The case supposed is one of visible and undeniable fault. Still it is a delicate task to judge of it: it is a difficult operation to correct or remove it.

II. **Self-ignorance and self-conceit incapacitate one for performing this operation.**—Most accurate and pungent moral strictures often proceed from men who are quite aware that their own lives will not bear close inspection. Christ strongly disapproves of such conduct.

III. **An honest Christian reserves his strictest judgment for himself.**—*Fraser.*

Ver. 42. "*Let me pull out the mote.*"—A subtle form of harsh judgment of others is that which assumes the appearance of solicitude for their improvement. Our Lord teaches that all honest desire to help in the reformation of our neighbour must be preceded by earnest efforts at amending our own conduct. If we have grave faults of our own undetected and unconquered, we are incapable either of judging or helping our brethren. Such efforts will be hypocritical, for they pretend to come from genuine zeal for righteousness and care for another's good, whereas their real root is simply censorious exaggeration of a neighbour's faults; they imply that the person affected with such a tender care for another's eyes has his own in good condition. A blind guide is bad enough, but a blind oculist is a still more ridiculous anomaly. Note that the result of clearing our own vision is beautifully put, not as being ability to see the faults of our fellows, but ability to cure them. It is only the experience of the pain of casting out a darling evil, and the consciousness of God's pitying mercy as given to us, that make the eye keen enough, and the hand steady and gentle enough, to pull out the mote.—*Maclaren.*

Vers. 43-45. *Good and Bad Fruit.*—Christ here speaks of the inner nature—the heart—of man and of its outward manifestations, and asserts that in all cases the inner is the maker of the outward. A good heart will infallibly reveal itself in holiness of word and deed: in like manner an evil heart will disclose itself, in spite of all hypocritical attempts to conceal the true

state of matters. We have here therefore—

I. A **law** which is bound up with the nature of things, and which we cannot control; and—

II. A **test** of character of the most stringent yet most reasonable kind.

Ver. 46. "*Why call ye Me, Lord?*" *etc.*—Acknowledgment of Christ's authority is to be accompanied by obedience to His commandments.

Four Classes of Men may be described by their Relation to Christ.

I. There are those who neither call Him Lord, nor do the things which He says.

II. There are those who call Him Lord, but do not the things which He says.

III. There are those who do not call Him Lord, but do the things which He says.

IV. There are those who both call Him Lord and do the things which He says.

Vers. 47-49. *The Wise and the Foolish Hearers.*—The point of the contrast between the two men in the parable is not, as often supposed, in the selection made of a foundation on which to build. The contrast is that between two men, one of whom makes the foundation a matter of deliberate consideration, while the other never takes a moment's thought about a foundation, but proceeds to build at haphazard, on the surface, just where he happens to be. St. Luke brings this out clearly by saying that the latter built "*without a foundation.*" The one builder is characterised by considerateness and thoroughness, the other by inconsiderateness and superficiality. Two points of difference between the two builders are clearly hinted at:—

I. **The wise builder has a prudent regard to the future.**—He anticipates the coming of storms, and he aims at being well provided against them. The foolish builder, on the contrary, thinks only of the present. If all is well to-day, he recks not of to-morrow, and of the storms it may bring.

II. **The wise builder does not look merely to appearances.**—The question with him is not, What will look well? but, What will stand, being founded on the rock? The foolish builder, on the other hand, cares for appearances only. His house looks as well as another's, so far as what is above ground is concerned; and as for what is below ground, that, in his esteem, goes for nothing.

The man who has regard to appearances only never considers the future: he acts from impulse, imitation, and fashion, and the use of religion as a stay in temptation and trouble is not in all his thoughts. With the genuine disciple religion is an affair of reason and conscience—of reason looking well before and after, and of conscience realising seriously moral responsibility. The spurious, too, look only to what is seen, the outward act; the genuine look to what is not seen, the hidden foundation of inward disposition, the heart-motive, out of which flow the issues of life. The outward acts of both may be the same, but the motive of the one is love of goodness, that of the other is vanity. While we can on paper discriminate between these two classes, it is a difficult and delicate task to discern and judge between them in real life. We can only judge by appearances, and are apt to think better of the pretender than of the genuine man, for the former makes appearances his study. False disciples often gain golden opinions, when true disciples, with their faults all on the surface, are of little account.

The elements decide as to the merits of the two builders. By these are meant times of severe trial, the judgment days which overtake men even in this world occasionally, and in which many fair edifices of religious profession go down. The forms in which the trial may come are very diverse. There are trials by outward calamities, by religious doubt, by sinful desires—trials in business, by commercial crises and the

like—trials by tribulations, such as overtake professors of religion in evil times. The thing to be laid to heart is that trial, in one form or another, is to be expected. It will come, and may come suddenly.—*Bruce.*

The Wise Builder and the Foolish.—An admonition for all who read Christ's words as much as for those who originally heard them. The peroration of His sermon employs a double illustration, which must have told with graphic power on an audience accustomed to the sudden tempests and sweeping floods of the climate of Judæa.

I. **The two builders.**—To the first is likened the obedient hearer of the words of Christ. Those who follow Him are believers, as He is their Saviour—disciples, as He is their Teacher. To the second is likened the disobedient hearer of the words of Christ. He listens, and seems to honour and approve, yet does not keep or do the word. How frequent are such builders in every Church!

II. **The day of trial.**—In fair weather the two houses are equally safe. The day of storm reveals the difference. In the Day of Judgment all hollow discipleship will be exposed. How great the fall! How piteous the ruin!—*Fraser.*

The Two Houses, and their Fates.—These words apply to all the subjects of the kingdom, and not to teachers only. Obedience is the only safety. We are all builders. The houses we build are our characters. The underground work is the main thing in estimating stability. No house is stronger than its foundation. Real building on Christ is practical obedience to His commandments. Only such a life is firm whatever storm comes. There are lives which look like true Christian lives, and are not. One little "not" expresses the awful contrariety in the experience of two builders whose houses it may be stood side by side for years. So the sermon ends, burning these two pictures into our imagination. —*Maclaren.*

CHAPTER VII.

CRITICAL NOTES.

Ver. 1. **In the audience.**—Lit. "in the ears of the people" (R.V.).

Ver. 2. **Servant.**—*I.e.* slave. **Who was dear unto him.**—Or, "who was in much esteem with him." This is peculiar to St. Luke. **Sick.**—"Sick of the palsy, grievously tormented" (Matt. viii. 6). **Ready to die.**—Rather, "at the point of death" (R.V.).

Ver. 3. **He sent unto Him the elders of the Jews.**—Omit "the" (R.V.). St. Matthew represents the centurion as coming to Jesus; the discrepancy may be accounted for on the principle *qui facit per alium, facit per se.* The mission of the elders (elders, no doubt, of the synagogue built by the centurion) is peculiar to St. Luke.

Ver. 4. **Instantly.**—*I.c.* "urgently," "earnestly" (R.V.).

Ver. 5. **Built us a synagogue.**—Not necessarily the only synagogue in the town, but the synagogue to which the speakers belonged. In the ruins of Tel Hum, which is perhaps to be identified with Capernaum, the remains of two synagogues are to be seen, one of them apparently belonging to the time of Herod. Generosity of this kind is frequently mentioned by Josephus. It is almost certain from this verse and from Matt. viii. 11, 12 that this centurion, though favourably disposed towards the Jewish people and their religion, was not a proselyte. "The existence at this time of the persons who are called in Rabbinical writings Proselytes of the Gate is very doubtful" (*Speaker's Commentary*).

Ver. 7. **Say in a word.**—It is interesting to notice that Jesus had already wrought a miracle of this kind; by His word, spoken at a distance, the son of the nobleman (or "courtier") at Capernaum had been healed (John iv. 46-54). The two miracles are quite distinct events, though some critics have endeavoured to prove that they are one and the same.

Ver. 8. **For I also, etc.**—"Being myself under authority, I know what it is to obey; having soldiers under me, I know how they obey my commands. I know, then, from my own experience, that the powers of disease which are under Thy command will obey Thy word" (*Speaker's Commentary*).

Ver. 9. **Marvelled.**—The only other time when Jesus is said to have been astonished is in Mark vi. 6, when He marvelled because of *unbelief*.

Ver. 10. **That had been sick.**—Omitted from the best MSS.; omitted in R.V.

Ver. 11. **The day after.**—A better reading, followed by the R.V., is "soon afterwards." There is just the difference of a single letter between the two phrases in the original. **Nain.**—This is the only place in the Bible where the village is mentioned. It has been identified with the small village of Nein, at the foot of the Lesser Hermon. The name means "lovely." It is twenty-five miles distant from Capernaum.

Ver. 12. **Carried out.**—Places of burial were outside the towns, to avoid ceremonial defilement.

Ver. 13. **The Lord.**—This title for Jesus is much more frequently found in the third and fourth Gospels than in the first and second, and is perhaps an indication of their having been written when Christianity was somewhat widespread.

Ver. 14. **The bier.**—An open coffin.

Ver. 15. **He delivered.**—This is closely connected with what is said in ver. 13, "He had compassion on her." Cf. 1 Kings xvii. 23; 2 Kings iv. 36.

Ver. 16. **There came a fear on all.**—Rather, "fear took hold on all" (R.V.).

Ver. 17. **Judæa.**—"It is evident that the miracle of Nain, as being a greater marvel of power than any which Jesus had previously exhibited, raised His fame to the highest pitch. His name was spread abroad, not only in the immediate neighbourhood of the town in which the miracle was wrought, but throughout Judæa also. It was upon this that news of our Lord's wonder-working power reached the Baptist in his prison" (*Speaker's Commentary*). A comparison has often been drawn between the miracles of raising the dead which are recorded in the Gospels. The daughter of Jairus was *newly dead*, the widow's son was being borne to the grave, while Lazarus had been dead four days and his body was in the grave, at the time of the working of the respective miracles by which they were recalled to life.

Ver. 19.—The message sent by John the Baptist to Jesus has been the subject of much discussion. Though in form questions, his words are virtually an appeal to Christ to declare Himself and to hasten His kingdom. The fact that John was dissatisfied with the character of the work in which Jesus was engaged and wished to suggest a new departure indicates a defective faith. In view of the words in ver. 23 we can scarcely doubt that some measure of blame attached to the Baptist for failing to appreciate the work of Christ at its true value. Still, this was but a temporary lapse from faith. John's was not a fickle and wavering character, as Christ Himself here declares (ver. 24). The depression of spirits caused by his imprisonment must be taken into account in extenuation of his doubts and fears. **He that should come.**—*I.e.* the expected Messiah, a kind of title (cf. Heb. x. 37).

Ver. 21.—Omit "same," which should have been in italics, as there is no word in the original corresponding to it. **Plagues.**—Lit. scourges.

Ver. 22.—The description given of the works done by Christ is taken from Isa. lxi. 1, xxxv. 5, 6, with the exception of the detail, "the dead are raised." This last had special significance in view of the raising of the widow's son from the dead, and was perhaps suggested by that miracle. Christ's reply is virtually that He is the Messiah, and is engaged in the work which it had been foretold that the Messiah would do.

Ver. 23. **Offended.**—*I.e.* caused to stumble (see R.V.).

Ver. 24.—Depreciatory thoughts of the Baptist might have been excited in the minds of those present by the words of Christ, and therefore our Lord proceeds to set the character and work of His forerunner in their true light and to lay stress upon that in them which was great and unique. The question in this verse might be taken to mean, "It was not to see some trifling thing, such as the reeds, that you went out into the wilderness." The expression "shaken by the wind," however, seems to indicate that the words are metaphorical—that the stern, unbending character of the Baptist is suggested by contrast with the reeds.

Ver. 25. **Soft raiment.**—Contrast with this the Baptist's actual dress (Matt. iii. 4).

Ver. 26. **More than a prophet.**—Namely, an actual, personal herald and forerunner; the angel or messenger of Mal. iii. 1, and so the only prophet who had himself been announced by prophecy.

Ver. 27. **Before Thy face.**—In Mal. iii. 1 it is Jehovah who speaks, and His words are, "Behold, I will send My messenger, and he shall prepare the way before *Me*." Here, as well as in Matt. xi. 10 and Mark i. 2, we have the quotation given us, "before *Thee*, before *Thy* face." In other words, that which is said by Jehovah of Himself is applied by Christ to Himself—a very striking indication of Christ's eternal and co-equal Godhead.

Ver. 28. **A greater prophet.**—The best MSS. omit "prophet"; omitted in R.V. It is probably a gloss explaining and limiting the use of "greater," *i.e.* as a prophet. **He that is**

least.—"Rather, 'he that is less,' *i.e.* inferior to John, in gifts and power, yet being 'in the kingdom' is in a higher state. He that holds but a small place in the Christian Church is greater as regards his office than he who prepared the way for its founding. This is said not of the personal merits but of the official position of the two" (*Speaker's Commentary*).

Vers. 29 and 30 are evidently a parenthetical description of the impression produced by our Lord's words upon those who heard them, and not a continuation of His discourse. This seems to have been understood at a very early time, as we can see from the insertion of the gloss in ver. 31, "And the Lord said," which was intended to indicate our Lord's resumption of His discourse.

Ver. 29. **Justified God.**—*I.e.* declared their belief in the wisdom of God's procedure, or acknowledged and commended the purpose of God in calling them to repentance by John.

Ver. 30. **Rejected.**—Rather, "frustrated," or "made of none effect." **Against themselves.**—Rather, "for themselves" (R.V.), or, "with reference to themselves."

Ver. 31. **And the Lord said.**—These words are absent from all the best MSS., and are rejected by modern editors. See above. It is possible that they may have got into the text from a Lectionary; but even if this were so, the historical character of vers. 29, 30 is sufficiently marked to distinguish them from Christ's own words.

Vers. 31-35.—The general meaning of this passage may be given as follows: "Those who pipe are the Jews condemning the asceticism of John, and complaining that he will not respond to their demand of a more lax mode of life. Those who mourn are the same Jews complaining of our Lord as not exhibiting the severity of life befitting a prophet. But in both cases alike wisdom is justified of her children; the foolish children are discontented with both; the children of wisdom acknowledge the Divine wisdom manifest in both, their different modes of life befitting their different missions. The simile is taken from children imitating in games a marriage or a funeral, with the accompaniments of merry or mournful music" (*Speaker's Commentary*).

Ver. 34. **Eating and drinking.**—A reference to our Lord's practice of attending entertainments and feasts, *e.g.* the marriage at Cana, the feast in the house of Levi, etc. This incident is not identical with that recorded in Matt. xxvi. 6, 7; Mark xiv. 3, and John xii. 3—the anointing at Bethany in the house of Simon the Leper. "The two occurrences have little in common but the name of the host (Simon) and the anointing. In this case the woman was 'a sinner,' showing her penitence, in the other a pious, loving disciple, preparing Him for burial; here the feet are anointed, there the head; here the objection arose from the woman's character, there from the waste; here the host objects, there Judas, while the lessons our Lord deduces are altogether different" (*Popular Commentary*).

Ver. 36. **One of the Pharisees.**—The invitation given by one of the Pharisees to Jesus would seem to belong to an early period of His ministry, before the enmity of that party against our Lord had grown intense. A certain coldness or ungraciousness seems to mark the conduct of this Pharisee in spite of his proffer of hospitality, as shown in the omission of acts of courtesy ordinarily rendered by host to guest. He may not have made up his mind about the Divine mission of Jesus, and may have given the invitation with a view of forming a definite opinion on the matter after intercourse with Him. **Sat down.**—Lit. "reclined." The guests lay on couches with their heads towards the table in the centre and their feet towards the side of the room. This gave opportunity for the anointing of the feet that took place on this occasion.

Ver. 37. **A woman, etc.**—A better reading (followed by the R.V.) is, "and, behold, a woman which was in the city, a sinner." This lays greater stress upon her notoriety as a person of abandoned character. There is no ground whatever for identifying her with Mary Magdalene, as is done in the heading of this chapter and in Christian art. Mary Magdalene was delivered by Jesus from the state of demoniacal possession; but there is no reason for believing that there was any connection between that state and a vicious life. In Eastern houses, even at the present time, it is not uncommon for strangers to enter at the hour of meals, and to take part in conversation with the guests at table. **Alabaster box.**—Rather, "alabaster cruse" (R.V.), or "flask."

Ver. 38. **His feet.**—The sandals were put off on entering the room, and so the feet were bare. Her purpose, doubtless, was to anoint His feet; but her tears began to fall ere she began her task, and so she first wiped away her tears from His feet with her hair, then kissed His feet and anointed them. **Weeping.**—No doubt at the contrast between His holiness and her sinfulness. **Kissed.**—Lit. "kissed earnestly."

Ver. 39. **If He were a prophet.**—The question as to whether Jesus was a prophet sent from God was evidently pressing upon the mind of Simon. He decides it in the negative; he was sure a prophet would in virtue of his supernatural insight have known "who and what manner of woman it was that touched him," and that he would instinctively have repelled a sinner.

Ver. 40. **I have somewhat, etc.**—A courteous mode of bespeaking attention. **Master.**—*I.e.* Teacher, or Rabbi.

Ver. 41. **Five hundred pence . . . fifty.**—About £15 12*s.* 6*d.* and £1 11*s.* 3*d.* of our money.

Ver. 42. **Frankly forgave.**—There is only one word in the original—"remitted," but it involves the idea of free grace and favour.

Ver. 44. **Turned.**—The woman was standing behind Him. **Water for My feet.**—The feet defiled on dusty roads, being only partially covered with sandals. It was customary to bring water to wash the feet of guests: see John xiii. 5.

Vers. 44-46.—Observe the contrasts between the commonplace courtesies Simon had omitted and the extraordinary acts of reverence and devotion the woman had done: water and towel contrasted with her tears and her hair, the kiss of welcome and the kisses lavished by her upon His feet, anointing-oil for the head and the precious ointment she poured upon His feet.

Ver. 47. **For she loved much.**—"Not, because she loved much, as though her love was the cause of her forgiveness. This sense is directly opposed to the parable (ver. 42), which represents the debtors as unable to pay, and the forgiveness as free; to the next clause, which plainly makes the forgiveness the ground of the love, not the reverse; and also to ver. 50, which represents *faith*, not love, as the antecedent of forgiveness, on the side of the person forgiven. The clause is to be explained: 'since she loved much,' *i.e.* her sins which are many are forgiven (as you may conclude from your own judgment, that much forgiveness produces much love), since she loved much (as these manifestations indicate)" (*Popular Commentary*).

Ver. 48. **Thy sins are forgiven.**—Her faith had virtually secured forgiveness, but her conscience still needed assurance of the fact, and this assurance Christ now gives.

Ver. 49. **Forgiveth sins also.**—Rather, "even forgiveth sins" (R.V.).

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 1—11.

The Faith of the Centurion.—That upon which the Son of God fastened as worthy of admiration was not the centurion's benevolence, nor his perseverance, but his faith. And so speaks the whole New Testament, giving a special dignity to faith. By faith we are justified. By faith man removes mountains of difficulty. As the divinest attribute in the heart of God is love, so the mightiest, because the most human, principle in the breast of man is faith: love is heaven, faith is that which appropriates heaven. Faith is that which, when probabilities are equal, ventures on God's side, and on the side of right, on the guarantee of a something within which makes the thing seem true because loved.

I. **The faith which was commended.**—1. *First evidence of its existence—his tenderness to his servant.* Of course this good act might have existed separate from religion. But we are forbidden to view it so, when we remember that he was a spiritually-minded man. Morality is not religion, but it is ennobled and made more delicate by religion. Instinct may make a man kind to his servant as to his horse or dog. But the moment faith comes, dealing as it does with things infinite, it throws something of its own infinitude on the persons loved by the man of faith; it raises them. Consequently you find the centurion "building a synagogue," "caring for our (*i.e.* the Jewish) nation," as the repository of the truth—tending his servants. And this last approximated his moral goodness to the Christian standard; for therein does Christianity differ from mere religiousness, that it is not a worship of the high, but a lifting up of the low—not hero-worship, but Divine condescension. 2. *His humility.* "Lord, I am not worthy that Thou shouldest enter under my roof." Christ calls this faith. How is humility the result of, or rather identical with, faith? Faith is trust. Trust is dependence on another; the spirit which is opposite to independence or trust in self. Hence where the spirit of proud independence is, faith is not. There was no servility in this, but true freedom. The centurion *chose* his master. He was not fawning on the emperor at Rome, nor courting the immoral ruler at Cæsarea, who had titles and places to give away; but he bent in lowliest homage of heart before the Holy One. His freedom was the freedom of

uncoerced and voluntary dependence, the freedom and humility of faith. 3. *His belief in an invisible living will.* "Say in a word." He asked not the presence of Christ, but simply an exertion of His will. He looked not like a physician to the operation of unerring laws, or the result of the contact of matter with matter. He believed in Him who is the Life indeed. He felt that the Cause of causes is a person. Hence he could trust the living Will out of sight. This is the highest form of faith. Through his own profession he had reached this truth. Trained in obedience to military law, accustomed to render prompt submission to those above him, and to exact it from those below him, he read law everywhere; and law to him meant nothing unless it meant the expression of a personal will.

II. **The causes of Christ's astonishment.**—1. The centurion was a *Gentile*; therefore unlikely to know revealed truth. 2. A *soldier*, and therefore exposed to a recklessness, idleness, and sensuality which are the temptations of that profession. But he turned his loss to glorious gain. There are spirits which are crushed by difficulties: others would gain strength from them. The greatest men have been those who have cut their way to success through difficulties. And such have been the greatest triumphs of art and science; such, too, of religion. Moses, Elijah, Abraham, the Baptist, the giants of both Testaments, were not men nurtured in the hothouse of religious advantages. Many a man would have done good if he had not had a superabundance of the means of doing it. Religious privileges are necessary especially for the feeble, as crutches are necessary; but, like crutches, they often enfeeble the strong. For every advantage which facilitates performance, and supersedes toil, a corresponding price is paid in loss. The place of religious might is not the place of religious privileges. But where amid manifold disadvantages the soul is thrown upon itself, a few kindred spirits, and God, there grow up those heroes of faith like the centurion, whose firm conviction wins admiration even from the Son of God Himself.

III. **This incident testifies to the perfect humanity of Christ.**—The Saviour "marvelled": that wonder was no fictitious semblance of admiration. It was genuine wonder. He had not expected to find such faith. The Son of God increased in wisdom as in stature. He knew more at thirty than at twenty. In all matters of eternal truth His knowledge was absolute. But it would seem that in matters of earthly fact, which are modified by time and space, His knowledge was like ours, more or less dependent on experience. Now we forget this—we are shocked at the thought of the partial ignorance of Christ, as if it were irreverence to think it: we shrink from believing that He really felt the force of temptation; or that the forsakenness on the cross and the momentary doubt have parallels in our human life. In other words, we make that Divine life a mere mimic representation of griefs that were not real, and surprises that were feigned, and sorrows that were theatrical. But thus we lose the Saviour. For if we lose Him as a brother, we cannot feel Him as a Saviour.—*Robertson.*

SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS ON VERSES 1—16.

Vers. 1-10. *The Centurion of Great Faith.*—The character of the man comes out in his affection for his slave, his reverence for such religious light as he had already attained, his modesty and reticence. Jesus marvelled at his faith. It delighted the heart of the Son of man with a rare joy. He gave it the palm over all such faith as He had already met with, and responded to it even beyond the soldier's expectation. Wherein consisted the *greatness* of the faith so signally praised?

I. **It was great when we consider the man in whom it was found.**—How favourably he contrasts with those who saw many miracles, and yet did not believe. This stranger's faith was based on the report of others. He had not been present at any of the healings done in the city.

II. **It was great in its view of Christ's power.**—His argument is one from less to more. Though it be not *all* the truth, it goes to the heart of the truth about the power of Christ. It puts the crown of the universe on His head, and the sceptre of universal dominion into His hand. In so thinking and speaking faith acts just as it ought.

III. **It was great in its sole dependence upon Christ and His will.**—It needed no help from sight or sense. It made nothing of difficulty or distance. In this it was unparalleled in the experience of Jesus.

IV. **It was great in its self-forgetting humbleness.**—There was not a vestige of desire for honour to himself. Indeed, there was the fullest expression of the opposite. Most striking humility! Men said, "He is worthy." He says, "I am unworthy." He would have the Lord get all the honour, and the thing be so done as to keep himself out of sight altogether. How hard it is to be simple, unconscious, and humble in our faith! But this is faith's true mark: None but Christ! —*Laidlaw.*

Strong Faith rewarded.

I. **The centurion of Capernaum.**—*a.* A good man. *b.* A good master.

II. **The centurion's humility.**

III. **The centurion's faith.**

IV. **The centurion's reward.**—*Watson.*

Vers. 1-16. *Power and Compassion.*—Why are these two incidents recorded? The first, because of the centurion's *faith*; the second, because of the Saviour's *pity.*

I. **Where was the faith?**—It was in the obedience. Obedience *is* faith. The centurion knew—felt that Jesus was a captain who had but to issue the word, and be obeyed. There is no faith that is not surrender, no faith that does not say, "Bid me do this, Lord, and I will do it."

II. **The meeting of the Prince of life and of the victim of death.**—Jesus and His followers stood aside to let the procession pass. But when He saw the twice-bereaved woman, "He had compassion on her." He said, "Weep not." He restored the young man to life, and to his mother. It is a little anecdote. It has its "moral." "I am the resurrection and the life." Natural death is not the worst calamity. To be "dead in sins" is worse. And Christ has power over spiritual death as well. His power over physical death is only an illustration of His greater power.—*Hastings.*

Healing the Sick: Raising the Dead.

I. **The dying slave healed.**—1. The good soldier. 2. The soldier's slave. 3. The soldier's friends. 4. The soldier's faith. 5. The soldier's reward.

II. **The dead son raised.**—1. The dead son. 2. The weeping mother. 3. The loving Saviour.—*W. Taylor.*

Ver. 1. "*Entered into Capernaum.*"—The miracle recorded in this section was one of those "mighty works done in Capernaum" (Matt. xi. 23) which failed to produce repentance. The unbelief of the inhabitants of that city, as Christ solemnly declared, rendered them more guilty than the people of Sodom. Three lessons may be drawn from this: 1. That it is foolishness to think that faith would necessarily have been excited in us, or would be stronger than it is, if we had been witnesses of Christ's life and miracles. 2. That we may shudder at the sins of others and at the punishment they may have incurred, and yet be far more guilty ourselves. (3) According to the measure of light against which we have sinned will be our punishment.

Ver. 2. "*Servant who was dear unto him.*"—Luke thus anticipates a doubt which might have arisen in the mind of the reader; for we know that slaves were not held in such estimation as to make their masters so solicitous about their life, unless by extraordinary industry, or fidelity, or some other virtue, they had secured their favour. By this statement Luke means that this was not a low or ordinary slave, but a faithful servant, distinguished by many excellencies, and very highly esteemed by his master; and that this was the reason why he was so anxious about his life, and recommended him so earnestly.—*Calvin.*

Master and Slave.—This mutual affection of master and slave is very touching, especially when we consider the brutality that so often marked the slavery of the ancients. We may safely conclude that the piety, love, faith, and humility that were so prominent in the character of the centurion had been a good influence upon one who had been for long in daily intercourse with him, and had called forth all the better qualities of the slave. Surely the same holy influence should produce like effects in our own society more frequently than it appears to do.

Master and Man.—The whole mass of men may be classed in two divisions: (1) we are employers of others, or (2) we are employed by others. The first may learn—

I. **To exercise considerateness and kindliness to those who work for them.**

II. **The employed may learn to earn respect and attachment** by faithful service—no eye-service, no slipshod work—to be loyal, faithful, and true. The employer is not to regard his workman as a mere machine, to be used up and tossed aside; the employed is not to regard his master as a blood-sucker, to be watched and guarded against, lest he should suck blood too freely. Let us adorn our stations, remembering our common origin, our common salvation, our common responsibility.—*Hiley.*

Ver. 3. "*Sent . . . the elders of the Jews.*"—The respect manifested by the centurion towards Jesus is emphatically marked. 1. He chose the most honourable persons, and those whom he was accustomed to reverence, to convey his message to the Lord. 2. He sent a second deputation composed of his own personal friends (ver. 6). A false humility often leads a man to be guilty of real disrespect: true humility is punctilious in the matter of doing honour to the superior.

Ver. 4. "*Besought Him instantly*" (*i.e.* earnestly).—The duty of making intercession for others is commended to us by what is here told of the earnestness with which these elders besought Christ to grant the boon desired by the centurion.

Imperfect Faith effectual.—These elders, although they were not without faith, had, nevertheless, less faith than he who sent them (ver. 9). Yet do they not entreat in vain for him.—*Gerlach.*

Ver. 5. "*He loveth our nation.*"—Before Christ healed his servant the centurion had been healed by the Lord. This was itself a miracle. One who belonged to the military profession, and who had crossed the sea with a band of soldiers, for the purpose of accustoming the Jews to endure the yoke of Roman tyranny, submits willingly, and yields obedience to the God of Israel.—*Calvin.*

Blessings won by the Centurion.—The centurion was attracted by the Jewish religion. The religion of heathen Rome had failed (as well it might!) to supply the wants of such a spirit as his. He had been guided to embrace the purest system of all which existed in his day; and "the Father of mercies and God of all com-

fort" left him not without further light, but first guided him to the knowledge, and now brought him into the very presence of Him who is the Light itself.—*Burgon.*

Ver. 6. "*Then Jesus went with them.*"—It is noticeable that on another occasion Jesus had a similar request offered to him. A certain nobleman besought him to come and heal his son who was at the point of death (John iv. 46, 47). Jesus did not go, but spoke the word by which the child was healed. His action in abstaining to go to the bedside of the nobleman's son, and in acceding to the request to come to heal the centurion's slave, may have some special significance in it. The greater faith of the centurion may explain our Lord's procedure. In the case of the nobleman His course of action was calculated to strengthen weak faith.

"*Trouble not Thyself.*"—See note on viii. 49. The phrase here used might be translated, "Don't worry yourself," and is closely akin to that kind of colloquial expressions which we describe as "slang." In the two cases where we find it in this Gospel, it is used by plain, ordinary people, by the servants of Jairus, and by the centurion, a man who possibly had risen from the ranks. To say that such a slang use of the word is unworthy of the New Testament is only to say that the evangelists were bound to polish up the diction of servants and soldiers, instead of reporting it in the most lifelike way possible. —*R. Winterbotham.*

"*Not worthy.*"—As one who not only contrasted his own sinfulness with the perfect holiness of Jesus, and who regarded Jesus as a superior being, but who remembered that he was himself somewhat of an alien to the race to which Jesus belonged, and to whom He so largely confined Himself.

Yet counted worthy.—Counting himself unworthy that Christ should enter into his doors, he was counted worthy that Christ should enter into his heart. —*Augustine.*

Ver. 7. "*Say in a word.*"—If the Lord Jesus had been a mere creature, could He have suffered such views of Himself to pass uncorrected? But instead of this—as on every other occasion—the more exalted were men's views of Him, ever the more grateful it was to His spirit.—*Brown.*

Two Reasons why Christ need not Come.—The centurion gave two reasons why Christ need not take the trouble of entering his house: the first was based upon his own *unworthiness* to receive so great a guest; the second was based upon the power which he believed that Christ possessed—it was *needless* for Him to come in person, He had but to speak the word and the servant would be healed.

Ver. 8. "*I also am a man set under authority.*"—The faith of the centurion was childlike in its character, but essentially true in the spiritual insight it manifested. He argues from the less to the greater. "Though I am only a subordinate officer, with limited powers" ("set under authority"), "I can yet give commands to servants and be obeyed. Much more art Thou able to send an angel to heal my servant, or to bid the disease depart." He had learned from his own life as a soldier a true idea of the Divine government of the world, and saw in the power entrusted to him as an officer an emblem of the power which God exercises over the world. As truly as he could execute *his* will, did God, as he believed, who is the source of all power, carry into effect beneficent purposes towards mankind.

"*Do this,*" *etc.*—Oh that I could be but such a servant to mine heavenly Master! Alas! every one of His commands says, "Do this," and I do it not: every one of His inhibitions says, "Do it not," and I do it. He says, "Go from the world," and I run to it: He says, "Come to Me," and I run

from Him. Woe to me! this is not service, but enmity. How can I look for favour while I return rebellion? —*Hall.*

Ver 9. *The Nature of Faith.*—This is the first time that faith is mentioned in this Gospel; and it is in accordance with the purpose of St. Luke to lay special emphasis upon the manifestation of this virtue by one who was outside the circle of the chosen people—it was an earnest of the acceptance of the Saviour by the nations of the world. Faith is to be distinguished from "sight" or knowledge: it is a moral quality rather than an intellectual faculty—a laying hold of that which is unseen—a venturing to believe upon evidence which satisfies the heart rather than convinces the reason. It is produced by love, and not by argument.

Spontaneous and Intense Faith.—This was the greatest exhibition of faith which had as yet come under the observation of Christ. Two things distinguish it and give it special value.

I. **Its spontaneousness.**—It had sprung up without special cultivation: God's dealings with the Jewish people had been of such a marked character that it was comparatively easy for one of that nation to have faith in Him, but the centurion had been born and brought up in heathen society.

II. **Its intensity.**—The centurion did not, as the Jews so often did, demand a sign to convince him of Christ's power: he was fully persuaded that Jesus could with a word perform this mighty deed, whether He chose to exercise His power or not.

"*In Israel.*"—The name is a significant one ("He who striveth with God"): it was given to the patriarch Jacob in memorial of the faith which gave him power over the angel and enabled him to prevail. With the prevailing unbelief of the Jewish people the strong faith of their great ancestor is, therefore, tacitly contrasted. By a heathen, and not by a son of Abraham, is faith shown in all its strength and beauty. "Christ found in the oleaster what He had not found in the olive" (*Augustine*).

Humility pleasing to God.—As haughtiness is an abomination unto the Lord, so humility is pleasing to Him. "Though the Lord be high, yet hath He respect unto the lowly: but the proud He knoweth afar off" (Ps. cxxxviii. 6).

Roman Soldiers mentioned in the New Testament.—Everything connected with the centurion is remarkable—for a master to have such love to his slave, for a Roman to show such humility, for a heathen to show such reverence to the religion of an alien and subject people. It is interesting to notice that in the New Testament we have various other instances of piety and goodness in the cases of Roman soldiers. There was the centurion at the cross, who confessed that Jesus was the Son of God (Mark xv. 39); Cornelius, distinguished by his prayers and almsgiving (Acts x. 1, 2); and Julius, who treated Paul courteously and interfered to preserve his life (*ibid.* xxvii. 3, 42, 43). Probably, it has been remarked, these cases prove that, in the general decay of morals at this time, the Roman army, by its order and discipline, tended to foster some of the primitive virtues which had distinguished the nation at an earlier period.

Ver. 10. "*They that were sent.*"—From a comparison of the various narratives of this miracle, it would appear that, after sending two deputations, one of Jewish elders and one of his own friends, the centurion himself came and deprecated any further trouble being taken by Jesus than His merely speaking the word. If this be the case, this verse would

imply that he remained with Jesus: "they that were sent returned to the house, and found the servant whole." This perhaps gives us another indication of the centurion's faith.

Intercession.—If the prayers of an earthly master prevailed so much with the Son of God for the recovery of a servant, how shall the intercession of the Son of God prevail with His Father in heaven for us that are His impotent children and servants upon earth!—*Hall.*

The Power of Christ.—The power of Christ to heal bodily sickness by a word may well be taken as a pledge of His power to heal the soul. "So also He rebukes the diseases of the soul, and they are gone. Oh, if we did but believe this, and put Him to it! For faith doth, in a manner, command Him—as He doth all other things" (*Leighton*).

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 11—18.

The Compassionate Lord of Life.—Observe—

I. **The meeting of the two processions.**—Jesus is coming up to the city, with a considerable crowd following, and meets the funeral coming out of the gate. Face to face stand the Prince of life with His attendants and the waiters on death. The dead man, dead in his youth, and when most needed, the lonely mother, the sympathising or gossiping crowd—these show the ravages of death, the sorrow that shadows all human love and every home, and the unavailing, though well-meant, consolation which men can give. That procession is going one way, and He and His the other. They come in contact, and His power arrests the march, sends the dead back living, and the mourner glad. That meeting may stand for a symbol of His whole coming and work. Why this widow should have been chosen out of all the mourners that laid their dead to rest that day we do not know. The reasons for the distribution of His gifts are generally beyond us.

II. **Christ's unasked pity.**—The sight of the extreme grief of the poor mother, whom He knew to be reduced to utter loneliness, and probably to poverty, by the death of her only bread-winner and object of love, went straight to Christ's heart. Misery appealed to Him even if it was dumb. His perfect manhood was perfectly compassionate, and was hindered from the freest flow of pity by no selfishness. One great glory of this miracle is spontaneousness. Neither request nor faith precedes it. How should they? Death was a final and inexorable evil, and none of the three recorded raisings from the dead was in answer to prayers or belief in His power. The last thing that could have occurred to that weeping mother was that this Stranger, whom she was too much absorbed to notice, could give her back her son. But if there was no prayer, there was sorrow and there was need; and sorrow which He could soothe, and need which He could supply, never made their moan in His hearing in vain. Most of His miracles had some measure of faith in some persons concerned as a precedent condition. But that was a condition established for our sakes, not for His. His love and power were tied to no one manner of working, and unasked, untrusted, probably unobserved, He feels the impulse of pity, which is love turned towards misery, and the impulse moves His all-powerful will. While ordinarily He is still wont to be found of those that seek Him, He still finds and blesses some who seek Him not.

III. **Christ the compassionate immediately becomes the consoler.**—Very beautiful is it that the soothing words "Weep not" are said before the miracle, as if He would not wait even for a moment before seeking to calm the sorrow. But words which are impotent on other lips, and only make tears run faster,

are of sovereign power when He speaks them. Nothing is emptier than the usual well-meant attempts to comfort. What is the use of telling not to weep when all the cause of weeping remains? But if we know that He is with us in trouble, and can hear His whisper of comfort, the sharpness of pain is lulled, though the wound remain. He comforted the widowed heart by the utterance of His sympathy before He gave her back her dead, and therein He reveals Himself to all as the compassionate, and therefore the Consoler even of sorrows that will last as long as life. His "Weep not" is not rebuke nor a vain attempt to stop the expression without touching the source of grief, but is a specimen of His continual work, and a prophecy of the time when "there shall be no more sorrow, nor crying."

IV. **To compassion and comforting succeeds the stupendous act of life-giving.**—Christ's look and word to the mother showed His heart, if not His purpose, and so the bearers halt in silent obedience and expectation. Jesus spake two words—"Young man, arise"—as if waking him from sleep, and the young man "sat up." How bewildered he would be, finding himself there on the bier, in the blazing light, and with this crowd around him! He "began to speak"—some confused exclamations, probably, like those of a suddenly awakened man, not knowing where he was or how he came there. Like the other cases of resurrection, this one suggests many questions—Was return to life a kindness to the young man? how did the experience during death fit in with that of earth? and others which might be raised but not answered. As to the first of these, no doubt, this and all the cases are presented as done out of compassion for the mourners; but we cannot suppose that that motive is irreconcilable with regard for the persons raised, and we may be assured that the gain to the mother was not attained by loss to the son. Probably the restoration of his bodily life was the beginning of his spiritual life.

The whole incident may be regarded as a revelation of Christ's power, or as a revelation of death's impotence. Christ stands forth as the Prince and Giver of life. His word is enough. Wherever that dead man was, he heard and obeyed. The ease with which the miracle is done contrasts with the effort of Elijah and Elisha in their analogous acts. The assumption of authority by Christ is of a piece with all His tone. The whole is His proclamation that He is "Lord both of the dead and living." It is prophetic too, for it foreshadows the day when they that are in the graves shall hear the voice of the Son of God. The miracle also teaches the impotence of death, which is but His servant, and vanishes at His bidding. It demonstrates the partial operation of death, as affecting not the person, but only the body. It shows that when a man dies he is not ended, but that personality, consciousness, and all that make the man are wholly unaffected thereby. "He gave him to his mother." Who can paint that reunion? May we not venture to see in Christ's action here some dim forecast of the future, when, amid the joy of heaven, we too may hope to be reunited to our dear ones, lost awhile. Surely He who brought this young man back from the dead to soothe a widow's sorrow, and found joy in giving him back to a mother's arms, will do the like with us, and let lonely and yearning hearts clasp again their beloved.—*Maclaren.*

SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS ON VERSES 11—17.

Vers. 11-17. *At the Gate of Nain.*—In this most touching story we see Jesus as a true friend. From a true friend we expect compassion, comfort, help.

I. **A friend needed.**

II. **A friend found.**—He offers to the widow pity, comfort, help.

III. **A friend still needed and still near.**—Jesus is the same. Heaven

has made no change in His friendship. He by His spirit still raises the spiritually dead, and by His mighty word will yet raise the physically dead. —*Spence.*

Vers. 11-15.

I. **The compassion of Jesus.**

II. **The pains taken by Jesus in all that He did.**

III. **The power shown by Jesus.**—*Brown.*

The Lord of Life.

I. **Two crowds** (vers. 11, 12).—In the midst of the one a dead man. In the midst of the other the Life of the world. In the first death in its hardest, cruelest form; for the dead man was just entering on man's life, and his only real mourner was his widowed mother.

II. **The meeting.**—The *pity* of Jesus —pity of sight, of speech, of touch, a whole body of pity. The *power* of Jesus—power brought forth by pity. A true picture this of the Saviour.—*Lindsay.*

I. **The Saviour's tender sympathy.**

II. **The Saviour's words of power.**

III. **The Saviour's spreading fame.** —*W. Taylor.*

The Divine Consoler.

I. **The widow mourning.**

II. **The widow comforted.**—By (1) a word of compassion; (2) a word of power.—*Watson.*

Ver. 11. *The Beauty of the Narrative.*—The exquisite literary skill of St. Luke is nowhere more clearly manifested than in telling of this incident; it and the walk to Emmaus will stand comparison with the masterpieces of literary style in any language. Abundant particulars are given which serve to call up a very vivid picture: the city, the gate, the multitude that followed Jesus, the long funeral procession that met them, the open bier, the man's age and circumstances, his mother's condition, the feeling manifested by Christ, His actions and words, His gestures, the eager attention of the bystanders, the astonishment at the miracle, and the excited comments passed upon it, are all touched upon. Yet there is no wearisome elaboration of details and no height of colouring. The story is told without using adjectives—the great resource to which modern word-painters betake themselves. So far from St. Luke's work being of the word-painting order, it is simply a clear conception of the whole scene with all its details, expressed in a perfectly simple, natural manner.

Ver. 12. "*The only son.*"—The special circumstances of this bereavement are carefully noted: 1. The man was young. 2. He was an only son. 3. His mother was a widow. In several places in Scripture grief for an only son is taken as the very type of grief—as an expression of the keenest distress the soul can feel. "O daughter of My people, gird thee with sackcloth, and wallow thyself in ashes: make thee mourning, as for an only son, most bitter lamentation" (Jer. vi. 26). Cf. also Zech. xii. 10; Amos viii. 10. Indeed, to a Jewish mind this form of bereavement was specially grievous, since it was regarded as often a direct punishment for sin.

"*And she was a widow.*"—St. Luke has told us the sum of her misery in a few words. The mother was a widow, with no further hope of having children; nor with any upon whom she might look in the place of him that was dead. To him alone she had given suck. He alone made her home cheerful. All that is sweet and precious to a mother, was he alone to her! A young man (ver. 14)—that is in the flower of his age; just ripening into manhood; just entering upon the time of marriage; the scion of his race; the branch of succession; the sight of his mother's eyes; the staff of her declining years.—*Gregory of Nyssa.*

Ver. 13. "*Had compassion.*"—In

some cases Christ wrought a miracle when asked by a sufferer, in some cases when asked by their friends, and in some cases, as here, of His own accord. No request was presented to Him—the only appeal was that of the sorrow which filled the mother's heart, and touched the spectators with sympathy. What comfort there is in this thought—that our needs, our helplessness, our grief, speak louder than our prayers and fill the heart of Christ with compassion. Some sought blessings from the Saviour; but this was a case in which He sought out the sufferer, with the purpose of stanching her sorrow. The purpose for which Christ wrought miracles is often unwisely said to have been to attest His mission by displaying the Divine power which He possessed. But clearly this was not His motive on the present occasion: His one idea was to do good—to comfort the sorrowful.

"*Weep not.*"—He felt authorised to administer consolation; in the unexpected, almost accidental, meeting with the funeral procession, He recognised a signal given Him by the Father to put forth His power to comfort human sorrow and to overcome death.

This Case a Special Appeal to Christ's Pity.—It is not wonderful that Christ had compassion in sorrow like this. Could He forget, as He looked at this weeping mother, that He was Himself the son of a widow, and the stay of her widowhood? or fail to foresee the day, only some months distant, the noon of which would see His own mother's heart pierced with the sword as she stood by His dolorous cross, of which the eve should weep over her as she followed His body to its rocky grave? But forasmuch as He Himself must die that dead men may live, and forasmuch as His mother was soon to weep over His grave that all mourning mothers might thenceforth weep less bitterly, therefore He went forward to this widow, and with a voice in which there must have trembled a strange tenderness said unto her, "Weep not!"—*Dykes.*

An Authoritative Summons.—Here is something quite unusual. A man at once compassionate and wise does not try to check natural grief. He rather endeavours to find some consideration that will abate and moderate it. But here is no argument, no consolatory words; only a simple, weighty, authoritative summons, "Weep not!" This arouses attention, stirs expectation of something to come.—*Laidlaw.*

Ver. 14. "*Touched the bier.*"—The gesture of touching the bier was a very significant one: it was symbolical of His power to arrest with His finger the triumph of death, and revealed almost unconsciously the majesty with which He was clothed. "Life had met death, wherefore the bier stopped."

"*Young man, I say to thee.*"—By this word Christ proved the truth of the saying of Paul, that "God calleth those things which are not as though they were" (Rom. iv. 17). He addresses the dead man, and makes Himself be heard, so that death is changed into life. We have here: (1) a striking emblem of the future resurrection, as Ezekiel is commanded to say, "O ye dry bones, hear the word of the Lord" (xxxvii. 4); and (2) we are taught in what manner Christ quickens us spiritually by faith. It is when He infuses into His word a secret power, so that it enters into dead souls, as He Himself declares, "The hour cometh, when the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God, and they who hear shall live" (John v. 25).—*Calvin.*

Sleep and Death.—In sleep as in death there is a sundering of the connection between soul and body, though in the one case it is but temporary, while in the other it is permanent. Yet just as the sound of the human voice is sufficient to restore the connection in the case of one buried in sleep, so the

Saviour's word avails to restore connection, even in the case of the dead. —*Godet.*

The Lord of Life and Death.—There is incomparable majesty in the phrase, "*I say unto thee.*" He to whom it was addressed seemed to have passed away beyond the reach of the human voice; no lamentations of his mother and friends could reach his ear. Yet the Saviour spoke as one whose words resounded through the world of the grave and could give commands which even the dead must hear and obey. "The Lord of life and death speaks with command. No finite power could have said so without presumption or with success. That is the voice that shall one day call up our vanished bodies from those elements in which they are resolved, and raise them out of their dust. Neither sea, nor death, nor hell can offer to detain their dead when He charges them to be delivered" (*Hall*).

The Compassionate Heart, Mouth, Feet, and Hand.—Here was a conspiration of all parts to mercy: the heart had compassion, the mouth said "Weep not," the feet went to the bier, the hand touched it, the power of the Deity raised the dead.—*Ibid.*

Ver. 15. "*Sat up and began to speak.*"—The return of life is marked by movement and speech: the rigid corpse resumed its vital functions, the mute tongue was loosened. The young man thus restored by the creative power of Christ became as it were His possession—he belonged by the gift of life for a second time to the Saviour. But Christ gives him over to his mother.

A Spiritual Resurrection also.—The feeling of sympathy expressed by our Saviour for the mother is put forth as the motive which created the resolution in Jesus to raise up the person reposing on the bier. But this does not exclude the idea of this action having a reference also to the resuscitated person. Man as a sentient being can *never* be only a *means*, as would here be the case were we to regard the joy of the mother as the only object of the raising of the youth from the dead. Her joy, on the contrary, is only the immediate but more unessential *result* of this action, recognisable by those who were present; the secret result of this resuscitation was the *spiritual raising up* of the youth to a more exalted state of existence, through which only the joy of the mother assumed a true and everlasting character.—*Olshausen.*

Ver. 16. "*Fear.*"—This effect is often mentioned in connection with the miracles of Jesus. Cf. v. 26, viii. 37; Mark iv. 41. It is the natural shrinking of sinful human nature from the evident presence of the power of an all-holy God. Like feeling is recorded in the case of almost all appearances of angels recorded in Holy Scripture. Cf. also Simon Peter's words and action in v. 8.

"*Prophet.*"—The use of this name in connection with the work wrought by Jesus indicates the true idea of the prophetic office. The prophet is not a mere predictor of future events: he is the representative of God and spokesman for God; he brings benefits from God to man, and proofs of the Divine interposition in the government of the world.

"*Visited His people.*"—After a long interval of silence and apparent inactivity (cf. i. 68, 69). The miracle now wrought reminded the people of those of Elijah and Elisha. Yet there was a notable difference between the two. For though these prophets raised the dead, they did so *laboriously*; Jesus immediately and with a word: they confessedly as servants and creatures, by a power *not their own*; Jesus by that inherent "virtue which went out of Him" in every cure which He wrought. "Elijah, it is true, raises the dead; but he is obliged to stretch him-

self several times upon the body of the child whom he raises, he struggles, he feels his limited power, he is agitated; it is very evident that he invokes another power to help him, that he recalls from the kingdom of death a soul that is not altogether subject to his word, and that he is not himself the controller of death and of life. Jesus Christ raises the dead in the same way that He does the most ordinary of actions: He speaks with authority to those who are plunged in an eternal sleep; and it is very evident that He is the God of the dead as of the living, never more tranquil than when He does the greatest deeds" (*Massillon*).

The Three Miracles of raising the Dead.—The comparison of the three miracles of raising the dead (referred to above in the Critical Notes), as illustrating various degrees of spiritual deadness from which Christ can awaken the soul, has often been made by the older writers. It is strikingly expressed by *Doune*: "If I be dead within doors (If I have sinned in my heart), why *suscitavit in domo*, Christ gave a resurrection to the ruler's daughter within doors, in the house. If I be dead in the gate (If I have sinned in the gates of my soul), in my eyes, or ears, or hands in actual sins, why *suscitavit in portâ*, Christ gave a resurrection to the young man at the gate of Nain. If I be dead in the grave (in customary and habitual sins), why *suscitavit in sepulchro*, Christ gave a resurrection to Lazarus in the grave too."

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 18—35.

John's Doubt of Jesus, and Jesus' Praise of John.—In the first part of this paragraph we have an account of the faltering faith of the great witness, and of Christ's gentle treatment of the waverer; in the second, the witness of Christ to John, exuberant in recognition, notwithstanding his momentary hesitation.

I. **John's doubts.**—It is quite improbable that this message was sent for the sake of strengthening his disciples' faith in Jesus as Messiah, or as a hint to Jesus to declare Himself. The question is John's. The answer is sent to him; it is he who is to ponder the things which the messenger saw, and to answer his own question thereby. It would have been wiser if commentators, instead of trying to save John's credit at the cost of straining the narrative, had recognised the psychological truth of the plain story of his wavering conviction, and had learned its lessons of self-distrust. There is only one Man with whom it was always high-water; all others have ebbs and flows in their religious life and in their grasp of truth. John seems to have wondered if after all he had been premature in his recognition of Jesus as Messiah. Perhaps this Jesus was but a precursor, as he himself was, of the Messiah. Evidently he continues firm in the conviction of Christ's being sent from God; but he is puzzled by the contrariety between Jesus' deeds and his own expectations. He asks, "Art Thou *He that cometh*,"—a well-known name for the Messiah,—"or are we to expect another?" and it should be noted that the word for "another" means not merely a second, but a different kind of person, who should present the aspects of the Messiah as revealed in prophecy, and as embodied in John's own preaching, which Jesus had left unfulfilled. We may well take to heart the lesson of the fluctuations possible to the firmest faith, and pray to be enabled to hold fast that we have. We may learn, too, the danger to right conceptions of Christ, of separating the two elements of mercy and judgment in His character and work. John was wrong in stumbling at the gentleness, just as many to-day, who go to the opposite extreme, are wrong in stumbling at the judicial side of His work. Both halves are needed to make the full-orbed character. Our Lord does not answer Yes or No. To do so might have stilled, but would not have removed,

John's misconception. A more thorough cure is needed. So Christ attacks it in its roots by referring him back for answer to the very deeds which had excited his doubt. He points to prophetic writings which foretell the character of His work. It is as if He had said, "Have you forgotten that the very prophets whose words have fed your hopes, and now seem to minister to your doubts, have said this and this about the Messiah?" It is not Christ's work which is wanting in conformity to the Divine idea; it is John's conceptions of that idea that need enlarging. A wide principle is taught us here. The very points in Christ's work which may occasion difficulty will, when we stand at the right point of view, become evidences of His claims. What were stumbling-blocks become stepping-stones. Further, we are taught here that what Christ does is the best answer to the question who He is. Still He is doing these works among us. We look for no second Christ, but we look for that same Jesus to come the second time to be the Judge of the world of which He is the Saviour. The benediction on him who finds none occasion of stumbling in Christ is at once a beatitude and a warning. It rebukes in the gentlest fashion John's temper, which found difficulty in even the perfect personality of Jesus, and made that which should have been the "sure foundation" of his spirit a stone of stumbling. Our Lord knows that "there is none occasion of stumbling in Him," and that whoever finds any brings it or makes it. He knows and warns us that all blessedness lies for us in recognising Him for what He is—God's sure foundation of our hopes, our peace, our thoughts, our lives.

II. **The witness of Christ to John.**—Such a eulogium at such a time is a wonderful instance of loving forbearance with a true-hearted follower's weakness, and of a desire, which, in a man, we should call magnanimous, to shield John's character from depreciation on account of his message. The world praises a man to his face, and speaks of his faults behind his back. Christ does the opposite. "When the messengers were departed," He begins to speak of John. 1. He praises John's great personal character. He recalls the scenes of popular enthusiasm when all Israel streamed out to see and hear him. A small man could not have made such an upheaval. What had given him such attractive power? His heroic firmness, and his manifest indifference to material ease. John was the same man then as they had known him to be. 2. Our Lord next speaks of John's great office. He was a prophet. The dim recognition that God spoke in his fiery words had drawn the crowds, weary of teachers in whose endless jangle and jargon of casuistry was no inspiration. The voice of a man who gets his message at first hand from God has a ring in it which even dull ears detect as something genuine. 3. Jesus goes on to declare that John is more than a prophet, because He is His messenger before His face—that is, immediately preceding Himself. Nearness to Jesus makes greatness. The closer the relation to Him, the higher the honour. 4. Next we have the limitations of the forerunner and his relative inferiority to the least in the kingdom of heaven. Another standard of greatness is here from that of the world. In Christ's eyes greatness is nearness to Him and understanding of Him and His work. Neither natural faculty nor worth is in question, but simply relation to the kingdom and the King. He who had only to preach of Him who should come after him, and had but a partial apprehension of Christ and His work, stood on a lower level than the least who has to look to a Christ who has come and has opened the gates of the kingdom to the humblest believer. The truths which were hid from ages, and but visible as in morning twilight to John. are clear as day to us. What a place, then, does Christ claim! Our relation to Him determines greatness. To recognise Him is to be in the kingdom of heaven, Union with Him brings the fulfilment of the ideal of human nature; and this is life, to know and trust Him, the King.—*Maclaren.*

SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS ON VERSES 18—35.

Vers. 18-35. *The Messengers of John.*—The King's forerunner was in perplexity, because Christ did not set up an earthly kingdom.

I. **The message of the servant to the King.**—1. When, and why sent? 2. How answered..

II. **The testimony of the King to the servant.**—1. His character strong, self-denying. 2. His office. 3. His position. 4. His work. These words were a sort of funeral sermon for the Baptist.—*Spence.*

Ver. 19. *Christ the Great Counsellor.*—John was in perplexity, and sent to Christ to ask about his doubts. So should we carry our perplexities straight to Jesus. Jesus understands all, and understands us all. Tell Jesus then. Leave all in His hands, that He may manage, unravel, clear it up for us. It is not easy. The taking it to Jesus is easy. Leaving it is the hardest part. But faith not only takes to Jesus, but leaves with Him. Thus only do we find peace.—*Miller.*

John's Misconception of Christ's Work.—The Baptist had heard in his prison of the works of Christ, and was perplexed by them, since they were not of the kind he had expected them to be. He had spoken of the Coming One as having a fan in His hand with which to purge His threshing-floor, and of the axe being laid at the root of the tree. Nothing Christ had yet done corresponded with these anticipations and prophecies. His preconceived ideas hindered him from understanding Christ's procedure. This is still a most fruitful cause of spiritual ignorance and misconception. Those whose minds are under the influence of prejudice fail to understand the truth, since they seek not so much to be instructed as to justify the beliefs and opinions which they at present hold. John for the time occupied the position of those scribes and Pharisees who approached Christ as critics and not as learners. The question revealed a measure of *impatience.* "It seemed, no doubt, hard to him that his Master should let him lie so long in prison for his fidelity—useless to his Master's cause, and a comparative stranger to His proceedings—after having been honoured to announce and introduce Him to His work to the people. And since the wonders He wrought seemed only to increase in glory as He advanced, and it could not but be easy for Him who preached deliverance to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that were bound, to put it into the heart of Herod to set him at liberty, or to effect his liberty in spite of Herod, he at length determines to see if, through a message from the prison by his disciples, he cannot get Jesus to speak out His mind, and at least set his own at rest" (*Brown*).

"*He that should come,*" *etc.*—The Jews expected more than one Divine messenger—Elijah, "that prophet" (Deut. xviii. 15), and the Messiah.

Alternations of Mood.—These alternations of moods of wonderful elevation and of sudden and deep depression are to be traced in all the men of the Old Testament—raised for a moment above themselves, but not being transformed in spirit, they quickly fall back to their natural level.—*Godet.*

Loss of Faith.—The temporary loss of a bright faith. It was natural, but unnecessary. Do not many Christian people get more despairing over the loss of a few pounds, or over a little pain, than John did in his great trials? And yet how unnecessary was John's doubt. Jesus *was* indeed the Messiah. John's active work was now done. So needless, too, is all anxiety of Christian people in their times of darkness. The true way is never to doubt Jesus.

Though there are clouds, the sun shines behind them undimmed.—*Miller.*

Ver. 21. "*He cured many of their infirmities.*"—The mistake into which John had fallen was in not seeing that the beneficent works done by Christ were precisely those ascribed to Him by the prophets who foresaw His coming. Cf. Isa. xxxv. 4-6, lxi. 1 *ff.*

Ver. 22. "*Tell John what things ye have seen.*"—The reply to John was a significant narrative of what Jesus had been heard and seen to say and do, and not a bare "Yes" or "No." The legend of Tarquinius Superbus and the messenger from Sextus supplies us with a similar mode of reply. "Sextus sent a messenger to his father for further instructions. On his arrival it happened that the king was walking in his garden. To the inquiries of the envoy the king made no reply, but continued striking off the heads of the tallest poppies with his stick, and then bade the messenger relate to his son what he had seen him do. Sextus comprehended his father's meaning. On false charges he either banished or put to death all the principal men of the city," etc.

Christ's Miracles Emblematical.—The works of bodily healing, beneficent as they were in themselves, were also emblematical of Christ's power to heal the souls of men—to give spiritual sight, vigour, cleansing, etc., to those blinded, weakened, and defiled by error and sin. It is therefore appropriate for the spiritual side of His work to be mentioned in connection with these miracles: "to the poor the gospel [or good tidings] is preached." There can scarcely be said to be a climax in the works enumerated; but the last of them is that which is specially characteristic of the Messiah (according to Isa. lxi. 1). "That which made this feature in our Lord's ministry so remarkable was the contemptuous manner in which the Jewish doctors had been wont to treat the humbler sort of people (cf. John vii. 49, ix. 34). By 'poverty,' however, doubtless the same thing is intended in this as in other places in the Gospel—namely, that condition of heart which is usually found to belong to persons endued with a very slender portion of this world's goods" (*Burgon*).

Ver. 23. "*Blessed is he,*" *etc.*—Rara felicitas.—*Bengel.*

Christ an Occasion of Stumbling—The same prophet to whose predictions Christ had just referred had foretold that some would find occasion of stumbling in Him. "And He shall be for a sanctuary; but for a stone of stumbling and for a rock of offence to both the houses of Israel, for a gin and for a snare to the inhabitants of Jerusalem" (Isa. viii. 14). Jesus warns both John and those who now hear Him of this danger.

The Difference between the Spirit of the Old Testament and of the New.—It is a striking argument for the great difference between the Old and the New Testament that even the greatest of the prophets can, at the beginning, accommodate himself only with difficulty to the Saviour's way of working. Among all those lofty and brilliant expectations which had been excited by the prophetic word, the meek, still spirit of the gospel could only gradually break a way for itself. John must continually take secret offence against Jesus before he had become in spirit a disciple of the best Master.—*Lange.*

Vers. 24-27. "*Began to speak unto the people.*"—Jesus replies to the thoughts of the crowd. They *might imagine* from St. John's message and the words in which it was delivered that the Baptist wavered in his faith, and that his imprisonment had shaken his constancy. Our Lord, therefore, reminds them of what John was, how he had acted, and how they themselves had behaved to him. "What went ye out for to see? Not an inconstant

and vacillating man; not a reed shaken by the wind; but a man of inflexible resolution and invincible courage. What went ye out into the wilderness to see? Not a man of effeminate temper; not a sycophant who would flatter any for hope of gain. No; his rigorous fare, his simple garb, the very place in which you found him, refute this notion. If he had been such, he would have been in the court, and not in the desert. But what went ye out for to see? A prophet; yea, I say unto you, and more than a prophet: and He then refers to their own Scripture for the true character and office of John.—*Wordsworth.*

"*What went ye out . . . to see?*"—There is a climax in the words (1) a reed, (2) a man, (3) a prophet. It was something great and wonderful in the person and mission of John the Baptist that drew the multitudes to him; but it was a spiritual and not a worldly greatness. Worldly greatness does not come into conflict with the opinions of the world, but bows before them: it seeks to dazzle the eye, and to impress the imagination of spectators.

Ver. 26. "*Much more than a prophet.*"—John's superiority consists in the facts, (1) that he was himself the subject of prophecy (Mal. iii. 1); (2) that he both saw and pointed out the fulfilment of his predictions; (3) that he was "the porter" who opened the door for the Shepherd of the sheep (John x. 3).

Ver. 27. "*I send My messenger.*"—The exceptional greatness of John arose from his connection with Christ, the true source of all spiritual greatness.

Ver. 28. "*Born of women.*"—As distinguished from those who are born of God—born again of water and of the Spirit (John i. 12, 13, iii. 5; Tit. iii. 5).

The Old Order and the New.—"The old order of things and the new are divided from each other by such a deep gulf that he who is least in the latter occupies a higher place than John himself. The most feeble disciple has a more spiritual insight into Divine things than had the forerunner. He enjoys in Jesus the privilege of sonship, while John is still only a servant. The humblest believer is one with that Son whom John announced" (*Godet*). This reflection is not given to depreciate the Baptist, but to explain and excuse his lapse from faith or his being offended in Christ.

Ver. 30. "*Rejected the counsel of God.*"—*I.e.* rejected for themselves the counsel of God. Men cannot overthrow God's purpose, but they can defeat it or make it of none effect in their own case.

Unbelief, a Thwarting God's Purpose.

I. I remark, first, **that the sole purpose which God has in view in speaking to us men is our blessing.**—I need not point out to you that "counsel" here does not mean *advice*, but *intention*. In regard of the manner immediately in hand, God's purpose or *counsel* in sending the forerunner was, first of all, to produce in the minds of the people a true consciousness of their own sinfulness and need of cleansing, and so to prepare the way for the coming of the Messiah, who should bring the inward gift which they needed, and so secure their salvation. The intention was, first, to bring to repentance, but that is a preparation for bringing to them full forgiveness and cleansing. Now, by the gospel, which, as I say, thus has one single design in the Divine mind, I mean, what I think the New Testament means, the whole body of truths which underlie and flow from the fact of Christ's death, resurrection, and ascension, which are these in brief: man's sin, man's helplessness, the incarnation of the Son of God, the death of Christ as the sacrifice for the world's sin; faith, as the hand by

which we grasp the blessing, and the gift of a Divine Spirit which follows upon our faith, and bestows upon us sonship and likeness to God, purity of life and character, and heaven at last. That, as I take it, is in the barest outline what is meant by the gospel of Jesus Christ. God meant His word to save your soul. Has it done so? It is a question that any man can answer if he will be honest with himself. We shall never understand the universality of Christianity until we have appreciated the individuality of its message to each of us. God does not lose thee in the crowd: do not thou lose thyself in it, nor fail to apprehend that *thou* art personally meant by its broadest declarations. Then, further, God is verily seeking to accomplish this purpose even now, by my lips, in so far as I am true to my Master and my message.

II. Secondly, **this single Divine purpose, or "counsel," may be thwarted.**—"They frustrated the counsel of God." Of all the mysteries of this inexplicable world, the deepest of all is, that, given an infinite will and a creature, the creature can thwart the Infinite. Now I said that there was only one thought in the Divine heart when God sent His Son, and that was to save you and me and all of us. But that thought cannot but be frustrated, and made of none effect, as far as the individual is concerned, by unbelief. For there is no way by which any human being can become participant of the spiritual blessings which are included in that great word "salvation," except by simple trust in Jesus Christ. How can any man get any good out of a medicine if he locks his teeth and will not take it? How can any truth that I refuse to believe produce any effect upon me? And so I remind you that the thwarting of God's counsel is the awful prerogative of unbelief. Then note that, in accordance with the context, you do not need to put yourselves to much effort in order to bring to naught God's gracious intention about you. "They thwarted the counsel of God, being *not* baptized of him." They did not *do* anything. They simply did nothing. And that was enough. There is no need for violent antagonism to the counsel. Fold your hands in your lap, and the gift will not come into them. Further, the people that are in most danger of frustrating God's gracious purpose are not men and women steeped to the eyebrows in the stagnant pool of sensuous sin, but the clean, respectable, church-and-chapel-going, sermon-hearing, doctrine-criticising Pharisees.

III. Lastly, **this thwarting brings self-inflicted harm.**—A little skiff of a boat comes athwart the bows of a powerful steamer. What will become of the skiff, do you think? You can thwart God's purpose about yourself, but the great purpose goes on and on. And "who hath hardened himself against Him and prospered"? You can thwart the purpose, but it is kicking against the pricks. Consider what you lose when you will have nothing to do with that Divine counsel of salvation! Consider not only what you lose, but what you bring upon yourself, how you bind your sin upon your hearts.—*Maclaren.*

Vers. 31-34. *Children at Play.*—The bearing of their contemporaries towards the Baptist and Christ had been childish and petulant. The ascetic life of the first had offended them; the gracious social deportment of Jesus was equally unwelcome. The illustration employed gives point to Christ's comparison. The generation which surrounded our Saviour were like ill-humoured children who would neither play at marriage nor funeral. Nothing pleased them. Though a pleasant comparison, it was a sharp rebuke. To be childlike is good: it is evil to be childish. This childish unreason often repeats itself. Put the matter as you will, many will find fault with Christ and Christianity. The gospel is too hard or too easy. Prejudice can always find some objection. Christians also are complained of. They are too un-

social or too social, too gloomy or too happy, too cautious or too bold. Be not disconcerted or discouraged by such criticisms. Bear yourselves as becomes disciples of the criticised Christ.—*Fraser.*

The Humour of the Illustration.—As we scrutinise these words the *humour* of our Lord breaks out like rippling light over the page. Broadly regarded, how delicious is the taking down of the Rabbis and other dignitaries of the synagogue by the likening them to a parcel of little children! It could not fail to be *infra dig.* to these super-exalted representatives of official Judaism to have their conduct illustrated and reprimanded by the capricious changeableness of children.—*Grosart.*

Ver. 31. "*Whereunto then shall I liken?*"—The double question seems to imply a difficulty in finding an appropriate figure to represent the unbelief and waywardness which found excuses for rejecting two messengers from God whose modes of procedure differed so widely from each other as did those of Jesus and John the Baptist. Conduct so unreasonable and perverse can scarcely find any parallel in the ordinary actions of men: only the folly and peevishness of children can supply an adequate simile for it. "You were angry with John because he would not dance to your piping, and with me because I will not weep to your dirge. Yet the children of wisdom, the truly wise, approve all the various methods of Divine wisdom, and profit by them, and press into the kingdom of heaven."

Severity and Graciousness.—John the Baptist is regarded as a type of the law, which brought men to Christ, and prepared His way accordingly. There were natures which neither the severity of the law nor the graciousness of the gospel could win over. Yet had Christ (Wisdom) His faithful children—His true disciples—under either dispensation.—*Burgon.*

Remarkable Circumstances in connection with John.—A number of very remarkable facts concerning John the Baptist are given in the Gospels, which no inventor of legendary matter would have thought of fabricating. 1. One would have expected the ministry of the Baptist to come to an end when Christ began His; but as a matter of fact both continued for some time the same work of preaching and baptizing. 2. After the declaration of John (John iii. 25-36) one would have thought that all his disciples would have immediately attached themselves to Christ; but they kept separate for some time, and only after the death of John seem, as a body, to have joined Christ. 3. It is remarkable that Jesus sent no message to John during His imprisonment, and that this reply to the question put by the Baptist should have contained no personal matter. 4. And even when tidings are brought to Jesus of John's violent death He utters not a word upon the subject.—*Brown.*

Ver. 35. "*Wisdom is justified of all her children.*"—Our Lord's saying grows naturally out of the comparison which He has just made. The children sitting in the world's market-place suggest to Him another sort of children, the children of Wisdom. Wisdom is represented as a parent; a certain number of human beings are children of Wisdom; and children, as a rule, may be expected to understand their parents, and to do them justice, when the world at large finds fault with them. A child, it may be presumed, is more or less like his parent. He has a sympathy with him, arising out of common character and mental constitution, which enables him to understand what his parent means. He is familiar, from long association and habit, with his parent's ways of looking at things. He is in the secret of his parent's mind. He can anticipate with confidence where to others all is dark or meaningless. Then, our Lord says, if Wisdom is misunderstood by men at

large, there is no such misunderstanding in Wisdom's family circle; there, at least, the dull and ill-natured world is shut out, while bright and loving faces gaze upon the parent's countenance with a certainty that all is well. The true children of the eternal Wisdom were not even in those days shocked because John the Baptist came as an ascetic, or because the Son of man came "eating and drinking."—*Liddon.*

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 36—50.

The Pharisee's Mistake.—The picture of this sinful woman, with Christ and the Pharisee on either hand, is another of those instances which show the Gospel to be a book for all time. The two ways of dealing with sin are still to be met with—the hard repulsion of formal righteousness, and the sympathy of Divine love. Sympathy has wonderful eyes, but nothing is so blind as spiritual pride. Let us look at the mistake this Pharisee made—

I. **As it regarded Christ.**—*He could not read Christ's nature, and undervalued it.* He imagined that Christ's accessibility to this woman arose from want of knowledge, when it came from the greatness of His compassion. The forbearance of Christ had its source, not in ignorance, but in the deep, far-reaching vision of infinite Love, which wills not the death of any sinner, but that he should turn and live, and which made Him ready not only to rescue the lost and wipe away their tears, but to pour out His own soul unto the death to save them. But every man reads another by the heart in his own bosom; and the hard, self-righteous Pharisee is utterly unable to comprehend Him who does not break the bruised reed, and who has a joy greater than all the angels of heaven over one sinner that repenteth. "As the heavens are high above the earth, so are God's thoughts higher than man's thoughts." *He mistook also Christ's way of rescuing from sin.* If it entered into the Pharisee's thought at all to rescue from sin, it would be by keeping the sinner back from him, thanking God, and even feeling a selfish kind of thankfulness, that he was not like him. The sinner must be made fully sensible of his exclusion from the sympathy of all good men, and no door of access can be opened till purity is restored. Any other way would seem encouragement to transgression. Christ's way is the very reverse of this. His way was to come from an infinite height into this world, that He might be near sinners, able to touch them and ready to be touched. It was to take their nature upon Him in the very likeness of sinful flesh, that they might feel Him closer still, and that "He might not be ashamed to call them brethren." It was "to become sin for them, though He knew no sin"—that He might bear it, first by pity, then by sacrifice, and at last by pardon. And now He carries out His plan in one of its applications when He draws the sinner near Him, and suffers her to clasp His feet that she may feel she is in contact with God's infinite and saving mercy.

II. **As it regarded the woman.**—*The Pharisee thought that as a sinner she was to be despised.* He saw only what was repulsive in her, and had he confined his view to the sin his feeling had right with it. But he included the sinner. It was a look of pride without any pity; and pride, above all spiritual pride, without pity is as cold and blind as the polar ice. Such pride could not see a human soul with infinite destinies, though degraded, a precious gem incrusted with miry clay, yet capable of reflecting the brightest rays of the Divine glory. Surely we ought to feel that in every fellow-man, however degraded, there is a kindred and immortal nature which can never be cut off in this world from the possibility of the highest rise. Should not the thought of this community of nature melt our hearts when we look upon poor outcast humanity? and shall we ever think ourselves more pure than the Son of God, and seek to shake

ourselves free from its touch? *The Pharisee did not see that a new life had entered into the woman's heart.* A man who is so blind as not to perceive the deep capacity of the old nature will not discover the dawning tokens of the new. Was it nothing to find her pressing close to Christ, clinging to His feet, bathing them with weeping? The outward signs were before him, if he had known how to read them, of the greatest change that can befall a human soul. These sobs and tears, and this irrepressible emotion, are the cries of the new creature in Christ Jesus, which must find its way to Him who is its life and joy. Penitence was there, too deep for words, the broken and contrite heart which God will not despise, a loathing of sin which this Pharisee cannot understand, and a glowing love that made his frown forgotten in the irresistible attraction to a Saviour's feet.

III. **As it regarded himself.**—*The Pharisee showed that he did not know his own heart.* Had he been better acquainted with it, he would have found sufficient there for dissatisfaction. If not committing the sins which he condemned, he might have known that he had the seeds of them in his nature. If he was keeping them down by inward struggle, this should have made him lenient; and if cherishing the love of them, he was a publican wearing a cloak. Every unrenewed heart has the fire of corruption smouldering, though it may not show the flame. The grace of God alone can extinguish the fire of any one sin, and even then the man is a brand plucked from the burning, ready to be rekindled, and therefore bound to humility. The man who is saved from sin by love is softened by the love which saves him; but the man who is kept from sin only by pride is made more hard. He may be as near the sin in his real heart as ever, but he maintains a false outward character, and builds an unsafe barrier in his nature against open sin by being very severe upon sinners. This is the reason why a mere external reformation brings in vanity and pride and all uncharitableness, sins which, if not so disreputable in the sight of men, are as hateful in the view of God. *He did not see that in condemning this woman he was rejecting the salvation of Christ.* If he could have established his point that it was unworthy of the Saviour to hold intercourse with sinners, what hope would there have been for him? Publican and Pharisee, open transgressor and moral formalist, can only enter heaven by the same gate of free unconditional mercy. Nay, had the Pharisee seen it, he was further from the kingdom of God than she with all her sins about her, and it was not so wonderful that Christ should permit this poor woman to touch His feet as that He should sit down as a guest at the Pharisee's table. This, too, was in the way of His work, to bring in a contrite sinner with Him, and touch, if it might be, the hard, self-righteous heart. If the Pharisee had known himself and who it was that spoke to him, he would have taken his place beside her he despised. "Lord, I am not worthy that Thou shouldest come under my roof." He would have rejoiced in her reception as the ground of hope for himself, and as a proof that Christ is "able to save to the uttermost all that come unto God through Him." Let us trust that he learned this lesson.—*Ker.*

SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS ON VERSES 36—50.

Ver. 36-50. "*In the house of Simon.*"—The love in religion makes it valuable. Religion without love is valueless. In this guest-chamber of Simon's we see—

I. **A want of love.**—(1) In the host. (2) In the reception.

II. **An abundance of love.**—On the part of one who was no guest. How does she show her love? (1) Openly, (2) humbly, (3) generously.

III. **The reason of love.**—She had been forgiven. Forgiveness produces love.

IV. **The reward of love.**—The assurance of forgiveness. The remission of sins. The gift of peace.—*Spence.*

Three Portraits.

I. **The penitent sinner.**—1. Her sorrow. 2. Her faith. 3. Her love.

II. **The proud Pharisee.**

III. **The Divine Saviour.**—*Stock.*

Forgiveness and Love.—Let those who cry out that there is no originality in the Gospels find a parallel to this story in any of the religions or philosophies of the world. Pardon for a notorious sinner was an unheard-of thing, and is so still outside of the Bible. Even the Pharisees of Christ's day did not believe in it. But this was Christ's very mission. All *need* forgiveness; and if we think we have been forgiven little, it only shows our little sense of sin.—*Hastings.*

The Greater the Forgiveness, the Greater the Love.—That Jesus called the sinful because He expected converts from that class to make the best citizens, we learn from this parable viewed in connection with its historical setting. On this occasion also He was on His defence for His sympathetic relations with social reprobates, and the gist of His apology was—the greater the forgiveness, the greater the love, and therefore the better the citizen, the test of good citizenship being devotion. Christianity believes in the possibility of the last becoming first, of the greatest sinner becoming the greatest saint. Jesus hints at this, "To whom little is forgiven, the same loveth little," suggesting the correlative doctrine, that to whom much is forgiven, the same loveth much; in other words, that from among the children of passion, prone to err, may come, when their energies are properly directed, the most devoted and effective citizens and servants of the Divine kingdom. It seems a bold and hazardous assertion, but it is one, nevertheless, which the history of the Church has fully justified.—*Bruce.*

Forgiveness the Cause and Measure of Love.

I. **The outpouring of love which has grasped forgiveness.**

II. **The snarl of self-righteousness which has never been down into the depths.**

III. **The vindication, by forgiving love, of forgiven love.**—*Maclaren.*

Ver. 36. *Wisdom justified of her Children.*—The incident related in this section is an illustration of the truth of the principle laid down in ver. 35. "But wisdom is justified of all her children." It tells of one who was attracted by the graciousness of Christ, which gave offence to many of the Pharisees, and whose penitence was rewarded by the forgiveness of her sins.

"*One of the Pharisees desired Him.*"—The state of this Pharisee's feelings towards Christ is revealed in ver. 39. There was a conflict in his mind between reverence for Jesus as a possible prophet and prejudice against Him on account of some of His modes of procedure. He seems, too, to have received some benefit from Christ (ver. 42), and to have loved Him on that account, though his love was far from ardent (ver. 47). Probably his character and conduct are painted too black in popular sermons upon this incident. Jesus speaks to him in such a friendly manner that we can scarcely believe that Simon cherished any malevolent feelings towards Him.

"*He went into the Pharisee's house.*"—The action of Jesus in acceding to the request to eat with the Pharisee is an illustration of the method followed by Him, as contrasted with that followed by the Baptist (ver. 34). We often read of His receiving invitations of this kind, but never of His refusing. He showed the same genial, kindly willingness to enter into social intercourse with Pharisees, as in the case of publicans and sinners.

Ver. 37. "*A sinner.*"—The special sin of inchastity is implied in the designation. "She *was* a sinner; up to this time (in Pharisaic language) she had been so; and she was still a sinner before the eyes of the world, although before God the sanctifying change had already begun to take place, through repentance, forgiveness, and love in return for forgiveness" (*Stier*).

A Typical Case of Penitence.—Her name is not given, so she may be thought of as a typical case of penitence: each one who reads the story may think of himself or herself as standing in her place. She came to anoint Jesus in token of her gratitude to Him as her Saviour. Love does not need to be instructed how to express itself; it is skilful in finding out appropriate methods. Cf. xvii. 15, xix. 35-37.

Ver. 38. "*Stood at His feet . . . weeping.*"—As she stood behind Jesus her tears began to flow, perhaps involuntarily; they bedewed His feet; with her hair dishevelled in token of grief she wiped His feet, and finding she was not repulsed, she kissed them over and over again (ver. 45), and anointed them with the ointment she had brought. "Her eyes, which once longed after earthly joys, now shed forth penitential tears; her hair, which she once displayed for idle ornament, is now used to wipe the feet of Christ; her lips, which once uttered vain things, now kiss those holy feet; the costly ointment, with which she once perfumed her body, is now offered to God" (*Wordsworth*). See Rom. vi. 19, "As ye have yielded your members servants to uncleanness, so now yield your members servants to righteousness unto holiness."

Why she came to Christ.—The purpose of her coming was (1) to show her love for Christ; (2) to testify her sorrow for sin; and (3) to obtain forgiveness. Her penitence was public, as her sin had been. Others sought bodily health from Christ; but we do not read of another who came to obtain from Him pardon of sin. Hers was a striking example of faith, love, and penitence, and she received a special reward. It would appear from a comparison of this chapter with Matt. xi. that Jesus had just issued the gracious invitation, "Come unto Me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, . . . and ye shall find rest unto your souls" (vers. 28, 29). Perhaps it was these words that gave her courage to act as she did.

Public Acknowledgment of Penitence.—A public acknowledgment of repentance and faith in Christ in some cases, as in this, is a trying ordeal: there is (1) the opposition of evil associates to be overcome—their solicitations, attempts to dissuade, and their mockery to be resisted; and (2) the contempt and distrust of those who have been upright and virtuous to be encountered, and their confidence to be won. This latter trial is the harder to be borne.

A Theme for Artists and Poets.—The scene so exquisitely described by St. Luke has inspired both painters and poets, and given them a subject excelling most others in human and religious interest. The sonnet by Hartley Coleridge is well known:

"She sat and wept beside His feet. The weight
Of sin oppressed her heart; for all the blame
And the poor malice of the worldly shame
To her were past, extinct, and out of date:
Only the sin remained—the leprous state.
She would be melted by the heat of love,
By fires far fiercer than are blown to prove
And purge the silver ore adulterate.
She sat and wept, and with her untressed hair
Still wiped the feet she was so blest to touch;
And He wiped off the soiling of despair
From her sweet soul, because she loved so much."

Dante G. Rossetti, who was both a poet and a painter, has taken the same subject and handled it with great power, though he follows the opinion

that the woman was Mary Magdalene. In the drawing by which he has illustrated the incident, Mary has left a procession of revellers, and is ascending by a sudden impulse the steps of the house where she sees Christ. Her lover has followed her, and is trying to turn her back. The poet represents her as saying:

"Oh, loose me! Seest thou not my Bridegroom's face
That draws me to Him? For His feet my kiss,
My hair, my tears He craves to-day: and oh!
What words can tell what other day and place
Shall see me clasp those blood-stained feet of His?
He needs me, calls me, loves me: let me go!"

Nature of Repentance.—Repentance as exemplified by this woman is characterised (1) by deep grief and self-loathing; (2) by wisdom in applying to the true source of forgiveness; (3) by love to the Saviour; and (4) by courage in braving the scorn of others and in overcoming false shame.

Ver. 39. "*If He were a prophet.*"—An ordinary prophet might be unacquainted with the previous character and conduct of the woman; but such a prophet as the people took Jesus to be, and as He gave Himself out to be, could not. So far Simon was right in his surmise. To Simon it appeared clear (1) that such a prophet would have known, and (2) would have repulsed, one so sinful. He made three mistakes: (1) he imagined that the holy must necessarily shun all intercourse with the sinful; (2) that this woman was still "a sinner"; and (3) that he himself was holy. The attitude he took up was that described in Isa. lxv. 5, "Stand by thyself: come not near to me; for I am holier than thou"—an attitude and language hateful to God "as smoke in the nostrils." The Pharisee, in fact, mentally put the Lord into this dilemma—either He does not know the true character of this woman, in which case He lacks that discernment of spirits which pertains to a true prophet; or, if He knows, and yet endures her touch, and is willing to accept a service at such hands, He lacks that holiness which is no less the note of a prophet of God: such, therefore, in either case He cannot be" (*Trench.*)

"*Which touched Him.*"—Touching—this is all that the Pharisee fixes on: his offence is merely technical and ceremonial.—*Alford.*

A Third Alternative.—The Pharisee omitted a third alternative—viz. that Jesus both knew what the woman was or had been, and permitted her action; and that it was possible for Him to justify His procedure.

Vers. 40-43. *Important Truths and Warnings.*—This parable and the narrative in which it is found contain truths which we are very apt to neglect, and suggest warning of which we stand in constant need.

I. For observe, first, **that flagrant sinners are much more likely to discover that they are sinners than moralists and ritualists.**

II. Observe, secondly, **that the much and the little of sin are for the most part measures of conscience, not of iniquity.**

III. Observe, thirdly, **that Christ does not teach us to run into sin, but to hate hypocrisy—the worst of sins.**

IV. Finally, **Christ specially warns us against forming those hard judgments of our brethren which of all men the "unco guid" are most apt to form.**—*Cox.*

Ver. 40. "*I have somewhat to say unto thee.*"—Christ adopts the same mode of rebuke as that made use of by Nathan to David. He tells an apologue, and asks a question which leads to Simon's pronouncing judgment against himself (cf. 2 Sam. xii. 1-7). Jesus "answers" him—*i.e.* answers his thoughts, which were revealed by his very looks.

Ver. 41. "*Five hundred pence and . . . fifty.*"—We must beware of understanding by the two debtors persons who differed from each other in positive sinfulness—the one, say, with five hundred accumulated offences, the other with but fifty. They were persons with differing consciousness of sin—the one of whom knew that his guilt was very heinous, the other having no such impression of himself. As a matter of fact it often happens that the debtor owing five hundred pence is in outward conduct more blameless than the other; for those who strive to serve God faithfully have an acuter sense of their sinfulness than others who make no such endeavour. In the present case the debtor owing the five hundred pence (the woman) *was* more guilty than the one owing fifty (Simon). Sense of guilt is a feeling we may all experience: our actual guilt or the number of our offences is known only to God.

The Aim of the Parable.—The aim of the parable was (1) to explain the strange behaviour of the woman, (2) to turn the tables on the fault-finder, (3) to defend the course of conduct which excited the Pharisee's sensoriousness.

Ver. 42. "*Frankly forgave them both.*"—Forgiveness is the free gift of God. It is not the woman's love that wins forgiveness; but that love springs from the consciousness of having been forgiven.

Ver. 43. "*I suppose.*"—There is a touch of superciliousness in Simon's reply, "I suppose." His phrase implies that he thought the question one easily answered, and did not perceive how the decision he gave condemned himself. In like manner there is a strain of sarcasm in the words of Jesus—"Thou hast *rightly* judged." It is a phrase used by Socrates when he has entangled his adversary in discussion.

Vers. 44-46. "*I entered into thine house.*"—Christ contrasts the love manifested by the penitent woman with the coldness and discourtesy of him who thought himself her superior. In the one case there was exceptional and almost extravagant manifestation of devotion, in the other an omission of the ordinary civilities shown by hosts to guests. 1. The woman washed His feet with tears ("the most priceless of waters," "the blood of the heart"), and wiped them with her hair; Simon had not offered the customary water and towel for washing and wiping the feet of guests. 2. The Pharisee had given no kiss of welcome, but she had passionately and often kissed His very feet. 3. Simon had not given even common oil for the head, but she had anointed His feet with precious ointment.

Dignity and Humility.—The Lord Jesus receives the expressions of love and honour with equal dignity and humility; He would have suffered Himself to be kissed even by the cold-hearted Simon, as He does not withdraw His feet from the tears of the woman who was a sinner. He is so humble in His majesty, and so majestic in His humility, that—shall we say like a *child* or like a *sovereign*?—He complains before a whole company of men, who were watching His words, that certain marks of respect had been culpably withheld from Him; and every one must be made to feel that He does this, not for His own sake, but for the sake of men.—*Stier.*

The Rebuke of Simon's Under-breeding.—There was something deeper than humour here, but humour there also was. Spoken in semi-public, how it must have taken down the rich and patronising Pharisee to have it flashed in upon him that the seeming-humble carpenter and peasant of Nazareth knew what a gentleman meant, and who was not a gentleman. And not only so, but it was inevitable that the "odious comparison" to her advantage with "the woman" would draw down on Simon alike the observation and laughter of all who heard.—*Grosart.*

The Explanation of Simon's Discourtesy.—If we should say that Simon thought that he was a gentleman, and that our Lord was not, we run the risk of offending our own sense of propriety; but we are probably not far from the truth. Simon treated our Lord with personal rudeness just because He was poor. And our Lord felt it, and called attention to it plainly and pointedly.—*Winterbotham.*

The Pharisee Unconscious of Sinfulness.—The Saviour might come into that house of the Pharisee—and no signs of peculiar honour shall greet or repay His presence—no water for His feet—no anointing of oil—no reverent kiss of welcome. This is natural, for Simon feels himself no sinner, nor counts it, therefore, any great thing to be privileged to entertain the sinner's Friend. —*Vaughan.*

Simon made to reprove Himself.—Jesus with tact first asks leave to speak, when He has to administer reproof, puts that reproof into a parable, and makes Simon thus administer his own reproof.—*Blaikie.*

Ver. 47. *Love and Forgiveness.*—We have here three persons who represent for us the Divine love that comes forth amongst sinners, and the twofold form in which that love is received.

I. **Christ** here stands as a manifestation of the Divine love towards mankind. 1. This love is not at all dependent upon our merits or deserts—"He *frankly* forgave them both." 2. It is not turned away by our sins: the *self-righteous* man had contempt for the sinner, the *holy* Saviour had love. 3. It manifests itself first in the form of forgiveness—only on this ground can there be union between the loving-kindness of God and the emptiness and sinfulness of our hearts. 4. It demands service: that rendered by the woman is accepted, Simon is reminded of his omissions.

II. **The woman** here stands as a representative of the penitent lovingly recognising the Divine love. 1. All true love to God is preceded in the heart by a sense of sin and an assurance of pardon. Gratitude to God as the Giver of blessings can scarcely be called love, if there be not along with it a recognition of His holiness and mercy towards the penitent. 2. Love is the gate of knowledge—it led her to truer knowledge of Christ than the Pharisee possessed, and it revealed to her her own state. 3. Love is the source of all obedience. Love prompted her expressions of devotion to Christ, love justified them, His love interpreted them and accepted them.

III. **Simon** here stands as a representative of the unloving and self-righteous man, all ignorant of the love of Christ. He is a fair specimen of his class: respectable in life, rigid in morality, unquestionable in orthodoxy; intelligent and learned, high up among the ranks of Israel. Yet the want of love made his morality and orthodoxy dead and dry encumbrances. The Pharisee was contented with himself; and so there was no sense of sin in him, therefore there was no penitent recognition of Christ as forgiving and loving him, therefore there was no love to Christ. Hence there was neither light nor heat in his soul; his knowledge was barren notions, and his laborious obedience to the law led him to a fatal self-righteousness.—*Maclaren.*

Ver. 47. "*For she loved much.*"—The difficulty in connection with the interpretation of this verse all depends upon the meaning to be given to the word "for"—"for she loved much." Does this mean "she has been forgiven *because* she loved much"? To hold that it does would violate the statement in ver. 42, that the debtor had nothing wherewith to pay his debt—*i.e.* no ground on which he could claim forgiveness. "For" here means that Jesus is arguing from the effect to the cause: her great love shows that she is conscious of having been forgiven a great debt. It is the

same kind of statement as if we were to say—"The sun must have shone, *for* the day is bright." The majesty of Jesus is displayed in the manner in which He accepts the adoration and love of the penitent, and in the exercise of the Divine prerogative of forgiving sins which He does not hesitate to employ. The great lesson is commended to all who are penitent to show their gratitude by loving much.

Ver. 48. "*Be of good comfort.*"—By simple decree given as He sat at the table He blotted out the record of this woman's sins; His knowledge of her sincere penitence being absolute, and His authority to act in God's name supreme.

Ver. 49. "*Who is this that forgiveth sins also?*"—The astonishment shown by those who were present, at the claim to forgive sin, was most natural, for the majority of those there evidently hesitated to regard Him as the penitent woman did. We need not credit them with malignant unbelief: they were amazed at a claim which doubtless many of them soon came to see was fully justified. The answer to their question would have been, "It is the Son of man" (cf. v. 24).

Ver. 50. "*Thy faith hath saved thee.*"—"Thy faith which anticipated pardon from Me, and brought thee to Me with public signs of penitence and love, *hath saved thee.*" Christ mercifully ascribes to *faith* those benefits which are due to Himself as the efficient and meritorious cause, and are apprehended by the hand of faith as the instrument on our part by which they are supplied. —*Wordsworth.*

"*Go in peace.*"—Lit. "into peace"—the state of mind to which she might now look forward. Four great blessings were therefore bestowed by Jesus upon this penitent: 1. He accepted the expressions she gave of love and devotion; 2. He approved her conduct and defended her cause; 3. He assured her of forgiveness; 4. He dismissed her with a word of benediction. The whole incident is one calculated to comfort the penitent, and to assure them of the love of Christ for them in spite of their deep unworthiness. Yet we need to keep in mind that there is a higher blessing attaching to those who are consecrated in life to Christ from the first than can be known by those who have sunk deeply in the mire of sin. None need, therefore, think lightly of the evil courses from which this woman was redeemed. "Though the love of the reclaimed profligate may be and is intense of its kind (and how touching and beautiful its manifestations are, as here!), yet *that kind* is not so high or complete as the sacrifice of the *whole life*—the bud, blossom, and fruit—to His service to whom we were in baptism dedicated" (*Alford*).

Peace with Pardon.—"Saved!" This poor, shame-soiled, sin-ruined thing that the Pharisee would have thrust out of his house into the street—*saved!* No return to the old life. An heir of heaven. Christ touched the sinful soul, and it was transformed into beauty. The woman has been in glory for eighteen centuries. This is what Christ can do, will do, for all who creep to His feet in penitence and faith. *Peace* came with the forgiveness. No peace till forgiven. No peace for uncancelled sin. But when Christ has forgiven, we should be at peace. What is there to fear now or ever? With our King's pardon we need not be afraid.—*Miller.*

"*Saved.*"—The cheering word meant much. The expression "saved" is not to be restricted to the one blessing of forgiveness of sins, though that is specially included, as it was expressly mentioned just before. Jesus meant to say that faith would do, had already done in principle, for the sinful woman, all that needed to be done in order to a complete moral rescue.—*Bruce.*

CHAPTER VIII.

CRITICAL NOTES.

Ver. 1. **Went throughout every city.**—This marks a new departure in the work of Christ: hitherto He had made Capernaum His headquarters, and had not gone very far away from it: now He began to extend the range of His activity. The time, however, is not precisely indicated. **Shewing the glad tidings.**—There is only one word in the original—"evangelising."

Ver. 2. **Certain women.**—Cf. Matt. xxvii. 55, 56; Mark xv. 40, 41. **Mary called Magdalene.**—*I.e.* of Magdala, on the Lake of Gennesaret. As stated in a previous note, there is no authority for identifying her with "the sinner" of the last chapter. She is introduced here as one whose gratitude to Jesus had been excited by His having delivered her from the direst form of Satanic possession, and as a person evidently of wealth, both of which circumstances seem incompatible with those of the woman there named. **Joanna.**—Mentioned again in xxiv. 10: nothing more known of her. As here stated, she had been cured by Jesus of some infirmity. **Chuza.**—Conjectured by some to be that "nobleman" (or courtier) whose son Jesus had healed (John iv. 46). **Herod.**—*I.e.* Herod Antipas. **Steward.**—The word is a very vague one, and may denote lieutenant of a province, treasurer, house or land steward, agent or manager. The fact of Christ having a disciple or disciples among those in the court of Herod explains what is said (in Matt. xiv. 2) about Herod's speaking "to his servants" about Jesus. **Susanna.**—Not again mentioned.

Ver. 3. **Ministered.**—Supplied the necessaries of life. **Unto Him.**—Rather, "unto them" (R.V.), *i.e.* to the apostolic company.

Ver. 4. **A parable.**—The word "parable" means a putting forth of one thing beside another for the purpose of comparison between them. Christ's adoption of this mode of teaching marks a certain change of procedure: He clothes the truth in a garb which will *veil* it from the carnally-minded, but *illustrate* it to the spiritually-minded. This parable was the first of the kind Christ spoke.

Ver. 5. **A sower.**—Rather, "the sower," also "the rock" (ver. 6), "the thorns" (ver. 7). **The wayside.**—The hard, beaten pathway. **Trodden down.**—This detail is peculiar to St. Luke.

Ver. 6. **Rock.**—That is, a rock covered with a thin coating of earth. St. Matthew and St. Mark speak of the seed's rapid growth and of the heat of the sun beating upon it. St. Luke lays stress upon its being unable to draw up the moisture it needs for growth.

Ver. 7. **Thorns.**—*I.e.* roots of thorns: ground infested with weeds which spring up along with the good seed.

Ver. 8. **An hundred-fold.**—St. Luke omits the varying degrees of fertility—"some thirty-fold, some sixty-fold, some an hundred-fold" (Matthew and Mark). **He that hath ears, etc.**—"In other words, 'this teaching is worthy the deepest attention of those who have the moral and spiritual capacity to understand it'" (*Farrar*).

Ver. 9. **Asked Him.**—When He was alone (Mark iv. 10).

Ver. 10. **Unto you it is given, etc.**—This rather an answer to a question which St. Matthew says the disciples put to Him, as to *why* He spoke to the multitude in parables. **Mysteries.**—The word is generally used in the New Testament in reference to things that have once been hidden, but are now revealed. **Seeing they might not see, etc.**—Unwillingness to obey the truth leads to incapacity to see the truth. It is not Christ's *wish* to reserve knowledge of deeper truths for initiated disciples, but deprivation of the faculty of understanding follows as a necessary consequence of neglect of that faculty. There is abundant compensation, on the other hand, in the fact that the method of teaching He adopted opens up fresh vistas of truth to those who are willing to be taught—who receive what they hear into an honest and good heart.

Ver. 12. **Those by the wayside are they, etc.**—Notice in this and following verses the seed is identified with those who hear it with varying results. In ver. 14 the identification leads to a certain confusion of metaphor in the use of the phrase "go forth." The first fault noted is hardened indifference to the word that is heard; it has no effect whatever upon them, and disappears without leaving a trace behind it.

Ver. 13. **They on the rock.**—The second fault is want of moral earnestness, which is generally accompanied by impulsiveness of feeling. **Temptation.**—Trial, in the form of "affliction or persecution" (Matthew and Mark).

Ver. 14. **Among thorns.**—The third fault is that of preoccupation with other things, which, whether morally innocent or evil, distract the attention and hinder growth in spiritual life.

Ver. 15.—Several details in this verse are peculiar to St. Luke—"an honest and good heart," "keep [the word]," and "with patience." All lay stress upon "the need of perseverance in opposition to the various temptations to fall away which have just been described" (*Speaker's Commentary*).

Vers. 16-18.—This section is connected with the foregoing parable, as is evident from the first sentence of ver. 18, and also from the fact that a similar section is found in the parallel passage in St. Mark's Gospel.

Ver. 16. **A candle.**—Rather, "a lamp" (R.V.), and so "candlestick" should be "stand" (R.V.). "The object of this saying is to impress upon the disciples their duty: they must explain to others what has become clear to themselves" (*Speaker's Commentary*).

Ver. 17.—The reference here is still to the light, or to Divine truth which was being unveiled to the disciples: the Divine purpose is that it should shine out and illuminate the world.

Ver. 18. **Seemeth to have.**—Or, "thinketh he hath" (R.V.). For whoever hears without understanding may in one sense be said to have, in another not to have, the truth.

Vers. 19-21.—St. Luke gives this incident as occurring after the parable of the sower, though without any precise note of time: St. Matthew and St. Mark relate it as occurring before that parable was spoken. It is probable that the latter evangelists follow the more correct order of time.

Ver. 19. **His mother and His brethren.**—From the fact that Joseph is not mentioned, it is reasonable to suppose that he was dead. The fact that the members of His family came thus in a body seems to indicate that they wished to control His actions. St. Mark says that "they went out to lay hold on Him: for they said, He is beside Himself." The great excitement created by His teaching and miracles, His formal choice of apostles, the unfavourable reception accorded to Him in Jerusalem, convinced them that He was bent upon a career that was bound to be a failure; and mental alienation on His part seemed to be the only explanation of His conduct. St. John says, "His brethren did not believe in Him" (vii. 5). Who these "brethren" were is an almost insoluble problem. Three hypotheses on the subject have been maintained: (1) that they were actual uterine brothers of our Lord, the sons of Joseph and Mary; (2) that they were legal half-brothers, the sons of Joseph by a former marriage; (3) that they were cousins of our Lord, the sons of Clopas (or Alphæus) and Mary his wife, sister of the Virgin, mentioned John xix. 25. For a full discussion of these various hypotheses we refer the reader to Lightfoot on Galatians, Alford in his prolegomena to the Epistle of James and his note on Matt. xiii. 55, article *James* in Smith's *Dictionary of the Bible*, and to article *Jacobus* in Herzog's *Real-Encyclopädie*. On the whole the third of these hypotheses seems to be more in accordance with the passages of Scripture bearing on the matter than are either of the other two. The allusion in Mark vi. 3 to Jesus as the son of Mary seems undoubtedly to distinguish Him as her only son from the "brethren" there named—a fact which if allowed would be fatal to the first hypothesis. While if Joseph had sons older than Jesus by a first wife, we could not understand how Jesus could be heir through him of the throne of David.

Ver. 21. **Are these.**—St. Matthew and St. Mark add vividness to the narrative by their description of Christ's gesture and look as He spoke the words: the one says, "He stretched forth His hand toward His disciples," and the other, "He looked round about on them which sat about Him." The words assert the paramount claims of spiritual over natural relationships, and show that Jesus Himself exemplified the rule which He laid down for His disciples, and allowed no ties of human affection to draw Him aside from the path of duty (cf. xiv. 26).

Vers. 22-25.—St. Luke's note of time is very vague—"on a certain day." St. Mark says that the incident happened on the evening of the day on which the parable of the sower was spoken. Hence the two evangelists are in general agreement on this point. St. Matthew introduces it without any reference to time.

Ver. 22. **The other side.**—The eastern side, which was comparatively uninhabited.

Ver. 23. **Fell asleep.**—A pathetic touch, indicating as it does how wearied He was with the labours of the day. **Came down.**—From the hillsides. Recent travellers speak of these sudden and impetuous storms as characteristic of the Lake of Gennesaret. Thus Mr. Macgregor says: "The peculiar effects of squalls among mountains are well known to all who have boated much on lakes; but on the Sea of Galilee the wind has a singular force and suddenness; and this is no doubt because that sea is so deep in the world (six hundred feet below the level of the Mediterranean) that the sun rarifies the air in it enormously, and the wind, speeding swift above a long and level plateau, gathers much force as it sweeps through flat deserts, until suddenly it meets this huge gap in the way, and it

tumbles down here irresistible." He describes his own experience of "a great storm of wind": "A brisk breeze from Bashan had freshened while we paddled along these bays. . . . The sea rose more and more, and at last heavy clouds in the east burst into a regular gale. . . . The wind whistled, and sea-gulls screamed as they were borne on the scud. Thick and ragged clouds drifted fast over the water, which became almost green in colour, as if it were on the salt sea, and the illusion was heightened by the complete obscurity of the distance, for the other side of the lake was quite invisible. . . . The storm lasted next day" (*The Rob Roy*). **Were filled with water.**—Rather, "were filling with water" (R.V.).

Ver. 24. **Master, Master.**—The repetition of the name is a mark of anxiety caused by the danger in which they were. **Rebuked the wind.**—St. Luke agrees with St. Mark in representing Christ as stilling the tempest before He rebuked the disciples for unbelief. St. Matthew reverses the order. Probably the former are more exact in the order of events they follow; the rebuke for unbelief would have greater weight after the deliverance from danger.

Ver. 25. **Where is your faith?**—"They had *some* faith, but it was not ready at hand" (*Bengel*).

Ver. 26. **Country of the Gadarenes.**—Rather, "of the Gerasenes" (R.V.). There is no doubt that the place mentioned is Kerzha or Gersa—now a ruined city near the sea opposite to Capernaum. "Directly above it is an immense mountain in which are ancient tombs. The lake is so near the base of the mountain that the swine rushing madly down could not stop, but would be hurried on into the water and be drowned" (*Thomson*, "*The Land and the Book*"). The reading "Gerasenes" was formerly rejected because the only Gerasa then known was an important town fifty miles away from the Lake of Gennesaret. t Matthew has "Gadarenes" (viii. 28, R.V.). The town of Gadara, which is three hours' journey distant from the south end of the lake, and separated from it by a deep ravine, probably gave its name to the district—"country of the Gadarenes."

Ver. 27. **Met Him out of the city.**—Rather, "there met Him a certain man out of the city" (R.V.): he was a native of Gerasa, but since his frenzy began had lived among the tombs. St. Matthew mentions *two* demoniacs. There is not necessarily any contradiction between the narratives, as St. Mark and St. Luke simply record the healing of the man in connection with whom there were many circumstances of special interest. **In the tombs.**—There were, in ancient times, no asylums in which such persons could be confined and cared for. The isolation, and neglect, and the dreary nature of his place of abode would naturally tend to aggravate his madness.

Ver. 28. **Son of God most high.**—This title is only found in i. 32, and in Acts xvi. 17, in which last case it is used by another demoniac. **Torment me not.**—The confusion of personality in consequence of the demoniacal possession is so great that sometimes it is the man who speaks, and sometimes the indwelling demon or demons.

Ver. 29. **Kept bound.**—Rather, "he was kept under guard and bound," etc. (R.V.). **Wilderness.**—Rather, "deserts" (R.V.).

Ver. 30. **What is thy name?**—The question asked perhaps to awaken the man's dormant consciousness. **Legion.**—The word is of course a Latin one, and came to be current in Palestine because of the Roman occupation. A legion consisted of six thousand soldiers. The fact of a multitude of evil spirits taking possession of one person is also alluded to in ver. 2 of this chapter and in Matt. xii. 45.

Ver. 31. **The deep.**—Rather, "the abyss" (R.V.). "The word is used in Rev. ix. 1, xx. 3, where it is translated "the bottomless pit," and where it stands for the under-world, in which evil spirits are confined" (*Speaker's Commentary*).

Ver. 33. **A steep place.**—Rather, "the steep" (R.V.), the precipice; there being from all accounts but one place where this could have happened. **Were choked.**—Many difficulties of various kinds are connected with this miracle. One of them is as to the injustice of inflicting this loss upon the owners of the swine. The common explanation is that the loss was deserved, as the animals were unclean, and can only have been kept in violation of the Mosaic law. But, on the other hand, the population seems to have been of a mixed character, and the animals may have belonged to Gentile owners. One point seems, however, to have been generally overlooked, and that is that the destruction of the herd was not apparently a necessary consequence of their becoming possessed by evil spirits. So that the permission given to the evil spirits was not a deliberate infliction of loss upon the owners of the herd. It was simply a case of panic to which all herds of animals are liable, and for which no one can have been held responsible. The evil spirits seem to have been carried against their will into the abyss they dreaded to enter. We have no right to speak of Jesus as having authority to punish breaches of the law in virtue of His Divine character, as we have His own word that He resolutely abstained from exercising any judicial powers while on earth (cf. chap. xii. 14).

Ver. 34. **What was done.**—Rather, "what had come to pass" (R.V.); so in ver. 35.

Ver. 37. **Taken with great fear.**—Rather, "holden with great fear" (R.V.), or "oppressed

with great fear." **Besought Him to depart.**—Cf. with this Peter's request (v. 8), and the different feelings which inspired the similar prayers. Christ seems to have revisited the region at a later period: see Mark vii. 31, viii. 10. Gadara was one of the ten cities in the district known as Decapolis.

Ver. 39. The reason why Christ told this man to publish the tidings of his cure is not very apparent. It may be that He wished him to be a witness of His Divine power in the midst of a degraded and godless population. Christ they had entreated to depart, but among them was one who would be a living testimony of His beneficence.

Ver. 40. **Returned.**—*I.e.* to Capernaum. **Gladly received Him.**—The word "gladly" is inserted by the translators, but it is implied in the phrase in the original: "welcomed Him" (R.V.).

Ver. 41. **Jairus.**—In Hebrew, Jair (Judg. x. 3). **Ruler of the synagogue.**—The affairs of the synagogue were ruled by a college of elders, one of whom was president or "ruler." It is interesting to see that faith in Jesus was not altogether wanting among the official class in Galilee. **Come into his house.**—"Jairus had not the faith of the Roman centurion" (*Farrar*).

Ver. 42. **Lay a dying.**—Was at the point of death. St. Matthew, who does not mention the coming of a messenger from the house of Jairus (here noted in ver. 49), describes her as "even now dead": he anticipates, that is, the mention of her actual death.

Ver. 43. **Issue of blood.**—A disease which, in addition to its painful and weakening character, exposed her to the disagreeable restrictions imposed on those who were ceremonially unclean. **Spent all her living, etc.**—St. Mark says she "had suffered many things of many physicians, and was nothing better, but rather grew worse." The somewhat trifling remark has been made that St. Luke, as a physician, is more gentle in his reference to those of his profession who had attempted to cure the woman. There seems to be little ground for the statement.

Ver. 44. **The border of His garment.**—Perhaps the fringe or tassel of blue, worn in obedience to the law in Num. xv. 38-40.

Ver. 45.—The hasty and almost impatient reply of Peter is very characteristic of him.

Ver. 46. **Virtue.**—Rather, "power" (R.V.). **I perceive that virtue, etc.**—Rather, "I perceived that power had gone forth from Me." This proves Christ's knowledge of the circumstances at the very moment of the cure.

Ver. 47. **Before all the people.**—Peculiar to St. Luke. It is a significant detail: she had sought a cure in secret, but is led to confess it openly.

Ver. 48. **Daughter.**—This is the only occasion on which Christ is recorded to have addressed a woman in this way. The kindliness it expresses is specially appropriate to the circumstances of the case. **Be of good comfort.**—Omitted by the best MSS.; omitted in R.V.

Ver. 51. **To go in.**—Rather, "to enter in with Him" (R.V.). **Peter, and James, and John.**—These same three disciples were chosen by Jesus to be witnesses of His transfiguration and to be near Him during His agony in Gethsemane.

Ver. 52. **All wept.**—Rather, "all were weeping and bewailing her" (R.V.). *I.e.* in the house, not in the chamber of death. The word translated "bewail" meant originally to beat or strike oneself: probably there is a reference to beating the breasts as a sign of grief. St. Matthew mentions "the minstrels" or flute-players, who together with other professional mourners were ordinarily employed on such occasions. **Not dead, but sleepeth.**—*I.e.* she is as one who sleeps, for she is shortly to awake. A similar word is used of Lazarus, John xi. 11.

Ver. 54. **And He put them all out.**—To be omitted: omitted in R.V., probably an interpolation from the parallel passages in the other Gospels. **Maid, arise.**—St. Mark gives the exact Aramaic words used, "*Talitha cumi.*"

Ver. 55.—The command *to give her to eat* shows that she was restored to actual life with its wants and weaknesses, and in that incipient state of convalescence which would require nourishment.

Ver. 56.—St. Matthew tells us that secrecy was not maintained; but, on the contrary, "the fame thereof went abroad into all that land." We need not suppose the parents were disobedient to the command of Jesus; an event of the kind, known to so many, could scarcely be concealed.

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 1—3.

Grateful Disciples.—In some instances those who had profited by the exercise of Christ's miraculous power, and had been healed of their diseases, rewarded Him with ingratitude, and did not even thank Him for their cure. But in many, perhaps in most cases, those whom He healed became His disciples. Yet only some of these became, or were allowed to become, His followers in the literal

sense of the word. One, at any rate, who wished to accompany Him whithersoever He went was not allowed to do so, but was told to return to his friends and tell them of the great things God had done for him (ver. 39). In this paragraph of the gospel history we read of a number of women who had been healed of evil spirits and infirmities being permitted to manifest their gratitude by following Him and by ministering to His necessities and to those of His apostles. There is something very pleasing in this eager desire to be with Christ—to listen to His teaching and to see His beneficent works, more especially those works of healing which would remind them of their own deliverance. Yet the love and gratitude thus manifested implied devotion of a heroic type, for many things conjoined to interpose obstacles in the way of carrying out the desire to accompany the Saviour in His missionary journeys. Two of these obstacles we may indicate.

I. **The life they shared was not without hardships and dangers.**—Perhaps, as we view them from this distance, the journeyings of the Saviour and His disciples seem full of excitement and interest; the varied scenes, the picturesque incidents, the remarkable persons who figure in them, the wonderful deeds of the Saviour and His gracious discourses, appear to us as clothed with an almost romantic charm. What could be more delightful than to listen to the Sermon on the Mount, to witness the raising of the widow's son from the dead, to partake of the food miraculously multiplied, or to be present on occasions when Christ showed mercy to the outcast and friendless, or overcame His adversaries by a wisdom which they would neither gainsay nor resist! But we need to remember that there must have been many days of hardship and discomfort. Sometimes the Son of man was wearied and exhausted, sad in heart at the sight of misery, distressed by the unbelief of the multitude and the hatred of the ruling classes. It was no light matter to follow Him day after day—to share His fatigues, and griefs, and humiliations, and to become subject to the danger which loyalty to Him often involved. Following Him when there was not leisure so much as to eat—when He spoke words which sifted the crowds and drove many away—when His enemies took Him up to the cliff to cast Him down, or when they were on the point of stoning Him—was possible only for those of strong love and ardent faith. We who are wedded to ease, and ruled by habit and custom, need not delude ourselves by imagining that following Christ in these circumstances was a privilege we would have been eager to secure. We are only too easily discouraged by obstacles in the religious life—by our aversion to discomfort and our regard for the world's opinion—to be sure that if we had lived in the days of Christ's earthly ministry we should have displayed a devotion like that of these disciples.

II. **The perfect holiness of Christ, too, hindered many from following Him.**—It did not hinder these. If holiness does not attract, it repels. It is a constant rebuke to all insincerity, double-mindedness, self-righteousness, and conceit, as well as to all positively vicious tendencies and practices: it assails the faulty motive as well as the sinful act. And the only way in which to live with any degree of comfort in the society of one who is truly holy is to strive to become the same. Following Christ, therefore, meant imitation of Him. In no other way could the spectacle of His piety, love, humility, and heavenly-mindedness be borne day after day. If we find ourselves incapable of a devotion to the Saviour like that of this faithful band of women, we may well ask ourselves, Have we like them known Him as a Healer and Deliverer? If we had really passed through their experience, we could scarcely fail to manifest a gratitude like theirs.

SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS ON VERSES 1—3.

Ver. 1. "*Throughout every city and village.*"—Christ now began to enlarge the sphere of His work, and, instead of making Capernaum His headquarters, to enter upon a systematic and complete visitation of the whole province of Galilee. From this time it is that He speaks of Himself as not having where to lay His head. His apostles too are called to give up their secular occupations and place themselves at His complete disposal—either to be with Him as He preached, or to go upon missions He might give them. The difference between the subject-matter of His preaching and that of John the Baptist is very plainly indicated. John spoke of preparing for the coming of the kingdom of God; Jesus announced the glad tidings that it had come. The main duty of the Christian preacher is, like Christ, to proclaim the good news of God's love to men, though he will feel bound also to speak words of warning to the indifferent and impenitent.

Vers. 2, 3. "*Ministered unto them*" (R.V.).—A subordinate but still an interesting question suggests itself as to how Christ and the twelve were sustained now that they had given themselves up to spiritual work among men. From what source was the common purse replenished? (John xiii. 29). How did they provide for bodily necessities and have wherewith to give to the poor? (John xii. 6). St. Luke here gives the answer. It was not by making use of His miraculous power that Jesus provided sustenance for Himself and for His apostles, but by consenting to receive assistance from some of those who were grateful to Him for blessings they had obtained from Him. "He who was the support of the spiritual life of His people disdained not to be supported by their gifts of things necessary for bodily life. He was not ashamed to penetrate so far into the depths of poverty as to live upon the alms of love. He only fed others miraculously; for Himself, He lived upon the love of His people. He gave all things to men His brethren, and received all things from them, enjoying thereby the pure blessing of love; which is then only perfect when it is at the same time both giving and receiving. Who could invent such things as these? It was necessary to live in this manner that it might be so recorded" (*Olshausen*).

"*All these things shall be added.*"—Jesus thus fulfilled the precepts, and found the accomplishment of the promises He gave to His disciples: "Seek ye first the kingdom of God, and His righteousness; and all these things (food, clothing, etc.) shall be added unto you" (Matt. vi. 33); "Every one that hath forsaken houses, . . . or father, or mother, . . . or lands, . . . shall receive an hundredfold" (*ibid.* xix. 29).

A Messiah living on the Bounty of Men.—What a Messiah to the eyes of the flesh was this One who lived on the bounty of men! But what a Messiah, to the eyes of the spirit, was this Son of God, living by the love of those whom His love had made to live!—*Godet.*

The Maintenance of Ministers of Religion.—The principle according to which Christ acted is that laid down in the New Testament for the guidance of the Christian Church in the matter of maintaining those who minister to the spiritual needs of the community. "The labourer is worthy of his hire," and "the Lord hath ordained that they who preach the gospel should live of the gospel" (chap. x. 7; 1 Cor. ix. 14).

"*Certain women.*"—The part played by women in ministering to the necessities of Christ and His apostles is most appropriate; for it is to Him that

they owe their emancipation from degradation, and admittance on equal terms with men to all the privileges of His kingdom. In Christ there is "neither male nor female" (Gal. iii. 28).

The Notices of Women in the Gospels.—It is interesting to notice that the Gospel history does not mention the case of any woman who was hostile to Jesus, but speaks of many who were devoted to Him. Martha served Him in Bethany, and Mary sat at His feet; Mary anointed Him, and so did the woman in the house of Simon; most signal examples of faith were afforded by the Canaanitish woman and by her who touched the hem of His garment; a woman, the wife of Pilate, bore witness to His innocence at the time the unjust sentence was passed on Him; women lamented Him on His way to crucifixion, and drew near to the cross; women went forth early to the grave of the risen Lord, and a woman was the first to see Him after His resurrection.

The Same Kind of Devotion still Possible.—May not His loving people, and particularly those of the tender, clinging sex, still accompany Him as He goes from land to land preaching, by His servants, and showing the glad tidings of the kingdom of God? and may they not minister to Him of their substance by sustaining and cheering these agents of His? Verily they may; and they do. "Inasmuch as ye have done it unto the least of these My brethren, ye have done it unto Me." Yes, as He is with them "alway, even unto the end of the world," in preaching and showing the glad tidings of the kingdom of God, even so, as many as are with the faithful workers of this work, and helpful to them in it, are accompanying Him and ministering to Him of their substance.—*Brown.*

"*Mary . . . out of whom went seven devils.*"—She had been (1) delivered from the direst form of misery, and (2) was now admitted to the highest felicity in following her Lord and in ministering to His wants.

"*Joanna . . . wife of Herod's steward.*"—Not even the corruptions of Herod's court could hinder the holy influence of Christ from penetrating to the hearts of some of those there. In like manner there were Christians in the household of Nero (Phil. iv. 22).

"*Susanna.*"—Otherwise unknown; but what more glorious record could be preserved of any life than is here indicated by the mention of her name in this connection? what purer or more lasting fame can any one win than that of having ministered to Christ?

The Needs of an Oriental comparatively Few.—It must be borne in mind that the needs of an Oriental are very small. A few dates, a little parched corn, a draught of water, a few figs or grapes plucked from the roadside trees, suffice him; and in that climate he can sleep during most of the year in the open air, wrapped up in the same outer garment which serves him for the day. Hence the maintenance of a poor man in Palestine is wholly different from the standard of maintenance required in such countries as ours with their many artificial needs. —*Farrar.*

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 4—18.

The Same Seed and Differing Soils.—As Jesus watched the crowd assembling, and perceived the various dispositions with which the people came, he could not but reflect how much of what He had to say must certainly be lost on many. He was conscious of that in His own mind which, could it only be conveyed into

the minds of those pressing around Him, would cause their lives to flourish with righteousness, beauty, love, usefulness, and joy. They came, some out of curiosity, some out of hatred, all thinking themselves entitled to hold and express an opinion concerning the importance or worthlessness of what He said. They needed to be reminded that, in order to benefit by what He had to say, they must bring certain capacities. The object of the parable is to explain the causes of the failure and success of the gospel. The seed is not in fault, the sowing is not in fault, but the soil is faulty.

I. **The first fault of soil is impenetrability.**—The hard, beaten footpath that crosses the cornfield may serve a very useful purpose, but certainly it will grow no corn. The hard surface does not admit the seed: you might as well scatter seed on a wooden table, or a pavement, or a mirror. The seed may be of the finest quality; but for all the purposes of sowing you might as well sprinkle pebbles or shot. It lies on the surface. This state of matters then represents that hearing of the word which manages to keep the word entirely outside. The word has been heard, but that is all. It has not even entered the understanding. Either from pre-occupation with other thoughts and hopes such hearers have their minds beaten hard and rendered quite impervious to thoughts of Christ's kingdom, or from a natural slowness and hard frostiness of nature: they hear the word without admitting it even to work in their understanding. They do not ponder what is heard; they do not check the statements they hear by their own thought; they do not consider the bearings of the gospel on themselves. The proposals made to the wayside hearer suggest nothing at all to him. His mind throws off Christ's offers as a slated roof throws off hail. You might as well expect seed to grow on a tightly braced drum-head, as the word to profit such a hearer; it dances on the hard surface, and the slightest motion shakes it off. The consequence is it is forgotten. When seed is scattered on a hard surface, it is not allowed to lie long. The birds devour it up. So when not even the mind has been interested in Christ's word that word is quickly forgotten; the conversation on the way home from church, the thought of to-morrow's occupations, the sight of some one in the street—anything is enough to take it clean away.

II. **The second faultiness of soil is shallowness.**—The shallow hearer our Lord distinguishes by two characteristics: (1) he *straightway* receives the word, and (2) he receives it *with joy*. The man of deeper character receives the word with deliberation, is one who has many things to take into account and to weigh. He receives it with seriousness, and reverence, and trembling, foreseeing the trials he will be subjected to, and he cannot show a light-minded joy. The superficial character responds quickly because there is no depth of inner life. Difficulties which deter men of greater depth do not stagger the superficial. These men may often be mistaken for the most earnest Christians; you cannot see the root, and what is seen is shown in greatest luxuriance by the superficial. But the test comes. The same shallowness of nature which makes them susceptible to the gospel and quickly responsive makes them susceptible to pain, suffering, hardship, and easily defeated. But how, then, can the shallow man be saved? The parable, which presents one truth regarding shallow natures, does not answer this question. But, passing beyond the parable, it may be right to say that a man's nature may be deepened by the events, and relationships, and conflicts of life. Many young persons are shallow: the old persons whom you would characterise as shallow are comparatively few.

III. **The third faultiness of soil is "dirt."**—There is seed in it already, and every living weed means a choked blade of corn. This is a picture of the pre-occupied heart of the rich, vigorous nature, capable of understanding, appreciating, and making much of the word of the kingdom, but occupied with so many

other interests that only a small part of its energy is available for giving effect to Christ's ideas. And as there is generally some one kind of weed to which the soil is congenial, and against which the farmer has to wage continual war, so our Lord specifies as specially dangerous to us "the care of this world and the deceitfulness of riches." Among rich men and poor men alike you will find some or many who would be left without any subject of thought, and any guiding principle in action, if you took from them anxiety about their position in life. The actions of a year, the annual outcome or harvest of the man, are in many cases almost exclusively the product from this seed. Our Lord warns us that if the word is to do its work in us, it must have the field to itself. It is vain to hope for the only right harvest of a human life if your heart is sown with worldly ambitions, a greedy hasting to be rich, an undue love of comfort, a true earthliness of spirit. One seed only must be sown in you, and it will produce all needed diligence in business, as well as all fervour of spirit.

In contrast to these three faults of impenetrability, shallowness, and dirt, we may be expected to do something towards bringing to the hearing of the word a soft, deep, clean soil of heart, or as said here "an honest and good heart." There are differences in the crop even among those who bring good hearts; one bears thirty-fold, one sixty, one a hundred-fold. One man has natural advantages, opportunities of position, and so forth, which make his yield greater. One man may have had a larger proportion of seed; in his early days and all through his life he may have been in contact with the word, and in favouring circumstances. But wherever the word is received, and held fast, and patiently cared for, there the life will produce all that God cares to have from it. The requisites for hearing the word so as to profit by it are (1) honesty, (2) meditation, (3) patience.—*Dods.*

SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS ON VERSES 4—18.

Vers. 4-15. *The Sower and the Seed.*—Consider this seed of the everlasting gospel—

I. **In the activities which it demands.**—Sowing, watering, reaping. Casting the seed of Divine truth into the mind and heart, vigilant looking for the germinating of the seed, the expecting of results, and the gathering in of these in greater or less abundance.

II. **In the conditions which it imposes.**—Genuineness, skilfulness, and faith. The seed must be genuine, not *bastard* wheat: skilfulness comes through self-culture and experience. The full assurance of a simple and unhesitating faith.

III. **There are risks which the seed encounters.**—The incessant malevolence of the evil spirit, the emotional or the earthly nature of those you try to win, the peril from the home environment, an imperfect sense of responsibility, a one-sided view of duty, a specious self-esteem, a morbid self-distrust.

IV. **The wages that it claims.**—Visible results, "gathered fruit," the love of those instructed, the enriching of one's own spiritual life, the discipline of one's own understanding. To share our possessions is to double them. Truth is a possession not to be covetously hoarded, but to be eagerly passed on.

V. **The joy of harvest.**—Joy noble, holy, unselfish, Divine. Joy among the angels of God, in the heart of the crowned Jesus, to the Father who sees His Son glorified, to the husbandman who gathers the sheaves into his barn. What will *your* harvest be?—*Thorold.*

The Sower and the Seed.—Having our Lord's own explanation of the parable, the application of its various points is easily made.

I. **The Sower.**—He means Himself. He came forth into the world to sow good seed.

II. **The seed.**—God's message in His gospel.

III. **The soil.**—The four kinds are pictures of four kinds of human hearts: 1. Those into whom God's message never sinks. 2. Those who are temporarily influenced. 3. Those who are preoccupied—the commonest soil of all. 4. Those who have "honest and good" hearts.—*Watson.*

The Hearts which hear.

I. **The heart which is never impressed.**—Neither melted, attracted, nor terrified. Because they listen carelessly or with dislike. Satan, too, is ever at hand to hinder.

II. **The heart which receives shallow impressions.**—Eager to learn, but shallow-souled. Feelings touched, but conscience unaffected. The hard rock of an unchanged heart under the outward show of warmth and interest.

III. **The preoccupied heart.**—Cares keep some, riches keep others, from Him at whose right hand are "pleasures for evermore."

IV. **The prepared heart.**—Earnest, simple, grateful. The word is received with the full intention of obeying it.—*W. Taylor.*

Three Obstructions to Growth.—Three distinct obstructions to growth and ripening of the seed are enumerated. The statement is exact and the order transparent. The natural sequences are strictly and beautifully maintained. The three causes of abortion—the wayside, the stony ground, and the thorns—follow each other as the spring, the summer, and the autumn. If the seed escape the wayside, the danger of the stony ground lies before it; if it escape the stony ground, the thorns at a later stage threaten its safety; and it is only when it has successively escaped all three that it becomes fruitful at length.—*Arnot.*

How the Call of God is received.—This parable is both a solemn lesson and warning, and also a description of what is actually taking place in the world. It tells how the human heart actually treats the seed which is put into it—the word of God—the impulse which it receives from God to lead a good and holy life. All these receptions and all these rejections of the word are actually going on amongst us. There are calls perpetually going on; there are either sudden rejections or gradual forgetting of these calls perpetually going on also. The parable tells us how people treat these calls.

I. There is a certain class not necessarily without religious impressions and perceptions, but they think that they shall be able to make religious convictions and their treasured aim of success in life agree. All at once some impediment—something which goes against their conscience—bars the way. By a summary act they cast out the scruple, and are satisfied. Scripture assigns this to diabolical influence. Judas overcame with high hand his reluctance to betray our Lord; and it is said the devil entered into him. Where Satan succeeds he has gained a great victory, and goes far to achieve the loss of a soul.

II. The second class are those who from levity or carelessness of mind allow the word, which they at first received with gladness, to escape from them. They can be acted upon, "receive the word," but have no energy of their own to take hold of it and extract its powers, and so they soon fall away. It is one thing to begin a thing, and a totally different thing to go on with it. The commencement is fresh; the continuance becomes stale. Perseverance to the end is the Christian triumph. Love is tried by continuance, by going on with what we have begun. This class, however, had no depth of affection for what was right in God's law: they adopted it as a fancy, and threw it away again when they had tried it. Is not this very prevalent? What change, what inconstancy, do we see in the human heart!

III. The third class is guilty of worldliness—absorbed in the business, plans, and pursuits of this present life. They do not give a place in their thoughts to another world. The stream of life carries them along, being interested in the objects of this world, until that which has thriven by practice has completely driven out the principle which has had no exercise, and the result is a simple man of the world.

IV. Opposed to these different ways of treating the word of God, which end in its decay and suppression in man's neart, is the treatment given to it by the honest and good heart, which does not sin against light, abandon what is undertaken, is not ensnared by the deceitfulness of riches, or captivated by the pomp and show of this world. It is faithful to God, knows the excellence of religion, is able to count the cost, and to make the sacrifice for the great end in view.—*Mozley.*

Different Classes of Hearers.

I. **The wayside hearers.**—Some people become familiarised with the gospel; it ceases to be *news* of any kind. Every time we hear and do not, that is a hardening of the footpath. "A smile at the end of a sermon; a silly criticism at the church door; foolish gossip on the way home." Thus the seed is lost.

II. **The rock hearers.**—The word gets easily in, and as easily out again. Shallow, emotional hearers, who would do anything when they hear, except what costs trouble. They cannot resist temptation.

III. **The thorny hearers.**—The thorns are riches and worldly cares, and the poor are troubled with both as well as the rich.

IV. **The honest hearers.**—Sincere, earnest, believing, obedient.—*Hastings.*

Diverse Reception of the Word.

I. The wayside hearer hears the word, but does not understand it: the spiritually stupid.

II. The stony-ground hearer receives the word with joy, but without thought: the inconsiderately impulsive.

III. The thorny-ground hearer receives the truth, but not as the one supremely important thing: the double-minded.

IV. The fruitful-ground hearer receives the truth with his whole heart, soul, and mind: those of open and receptive mind.—*Bruce.*

Four Classes of Men.—Jesus discerned in the crowd four distinct kinds of countenances: some unintelligent and vacant; some enthusiastic and delighted; some of grave aspect, but evidently preoccupied; and some joyous and serene, as of those who had surrendered themselves wholly to the truth He taught. The first class includes those who are characterised by utter religious insensibility; they experience no anxiety of conscience, fear of condemnation, or desire of salvation: consequently they find nothing in the gospel of Christ which is congenial to them. The second is that of those whose hearts are fickle, but easily excited, and in whom imagination and sensitiveness of feeling supply for a time the lack of a moral sense. The novelties of the gospel, the opposition to received ideas which it proclaims, charm them. In almost every revival such men form a large proportion of the new converts. The third are those of serious but of divided heart: they seek salvation, and recognise the value of the gospel; but they long also for worldly prosperity, and are not prepared to sacrifice everything for the truth. In the case of those of the fourth class, spiritual interests rule the life. Conscience is not in their case asleep, as it is in those of the first of these classes: by it the will is governed and not by imagination or sentimental feelings, as in the case of the second; and it rules over those worldly preoccupations which are so potent in the lives of the third.—*Godet.*

Ver. 4. "*He spake by a parable.*"—

The preceding verses indicate a change in the outward mode of life of our Saviour. What follows indicates a change in His mode of teaching, which arrested the attention and excited the surprise of His most intimate disciples (cf. Matt. xiii. 10). Many were now gathered together about Him, and the mode of teaching He adopted was calculated to sift the crowd, and separate genuine disciples from mere careless hearers.

Parables have a Dark and a Bright Side.—A parable is like the pillar of cloud and fire, which turned the dark side to the Egyptians, the bright side to the people of the covenant; it is like a shell which keeps the precious kernel as well *for* the diligent as *from* the indolent.—*Gerlach.*

Local Colouring of this Parable.—The parable spoken, as St. Matthew tells us, while Christ taught on the shore of the Lake of Gennesaret, may have been suggested by the scene before Him. *Dean Stanley*, describing the shores of the lake, shows us how easily this may have been the case: "A slight recess in the hillside, close upon the plain, disclosed at once in detail every feature of the great parable. There was the undulating cornfield descending to the water's edge. There was the trodden pathway running through the midst of it, with no fence or hedge to prevent the seed from falling here and there on either side of it, or upon it—itself hard with the constant tramp of horse and mule and human feet. There was the "good" rich soil, which distinguishes the whole of that plain and its neighbourhood from the bare hills elsewhere, descending into the lake, and which, where there is no interruption, produces one vast mass of corn. There was the rocky ground of the hillside protruding here and there through the cornfields, as elsewhere through the grassy slopes. There were the large bushes of thorn springing up, like the fruit trees of the more inland parts, in the very midst of the waving wheat" (*Sinai and Palestine*).

Ver. 5. "*A sower.*"—Rather, "the sower," *i.e.* the servant to whom this task is entrusted. The figure Christ here uses of Himself—as one who by simple teaching begins the task of establishing the kingdom of God on earth—is in striking contrast to the conception of the Messiah which John the Baptist had formed: "whose fan is in His hand, and He will throughly purge His floor" (chap. iii. 17).

"*Some fell.*"—Not "he sowed some by the wayside," but "some fell there." The intention of the sower is good, but it depends upon the hearer where the seed shall *fall.*

"*Trodden down . . . devoured it.*"—Two dangers: 1. Careless obliteration of the truth heard. 2. The active malice of the devil.

"*Fowls of the air.*"—These are the thoughts, talk, and business of the world, that dissipate the mind and keep it in an atmosphere of frivolity, preventing all entrance of what is heard to the heart.—*Stier.*

The Seed by the Wayside.

I. **The beaten path.**—1. The heart is trodden down by habit and custom. 2. The heart is trodden down by sin. 3. The heart is trodden down by the very feet of the sower.

II. **The lost seed.**—1. It lies on the surface for a little while and does nothing. 2. It is soon carried off.—*Maclaren.*

How are Human Hearts beaten into a Highway?—Every child's heart is sensitive to impression. But as it grows older—

I. **The thousand influences, feelings, emotions, imaginations, treading over it continuously trample it into hardness.**—Conviction of sin, not followed by turning from sin, leaves the heart harder.

II. **The same effect is produced by the common experiences of life.**—The wheels and carts of business. Too many make their hearts an open common, till they are beaten into an unimpressible callousness.

III. **Another way is by the feet of sinful habits.**—The vile feet of lust, of sensuality, of greed, of selfishness, of passion, are allowed to tread there. There is an impression that it does young people no harm to indulge in sin for a time, if they afterwards repent. It is a fatal falsehood. The heart that is trodden over by vile lusts or indulgences of any kind is never the same again.—*Miller.*

Ver. 6. "*It lacked moisture.*"—The *moisture* at the root of the seed is the same as what is called in another parable the oil, to trim the lamps of the virgins—that is, love and steadfastness in virtue.—*Bede.*

Ver. 7. *The Thorns.*

I. They suck in the sap which should go to nourish the good seed, and leave it a living skeleton.

II. They outgrow the grain both in breadth and height.

III. They spring of their own accord, while the good seed must be sown and cherished.

IV. As long as they live they grow.

V. They tear the husbandman's flesh, as well as destroy the fruit of his field.

VI. It was where the seed and the thorns grew together that the mischief was done.

VII. When pulled up too late, they leave a mere blank in the field.—*Arnot.*

Ver. 8. "*Other fell on good ground.*"—Whence, then, is the difference? Not from the seed. *That* is the same to all. Not from the sower, neither; for though these be divers, yet it depends little or nothing on *that.* Indeed, he is the fittest to preach who is himself most like his message, and comes forth not only with a handful of seed in his hand, but with store of it in his heart, the word dwelling richly in him (Col. iii. 16). Yet the seed he sows, being this word of life, depends not on his qualifications in any kind, either of common gifts or special grace. People mistake this greatly; and it is a carnal conceit to hang on the advantages of the minister, or to eye them much.—*Leighton.*

"*He cried.*"—The Lord calls the serious attention of the crowd to the unsatisfactory result of the sower's labours: "He exclaimed aloud"—He emphasised these words, which were intended to awaken in His hearers that faculty for recognising Divine things without which even the teaching of Jesus Himself would have been for them an empty sound. The parable, indeed, has that in it which might easily be heard without being understood: some might take pleasure in the picture which it presented to the imagination, without perceiving the spiritual truth that lay behind it. More than the bodily ear was needed for the perception of that truth.—*Godet.*

Ver. 10. "*Unto you it is given,*" *etc.*—Yet was there no permanent line of demarcation drawn between the disciples and the multitude. It was allowable for any hearer at any time to pass from the careless or hostile crowd into the company of those who intelligently and sincerely accepted Jesus as their Teacher and Saviour.

Ver. 11. "*The seed is the word of God.*"—The point of resemblance between the two is the powerful vitality that lies wrapped up in the unpretentious husk. The word, like the germ within the seed, has within it a force which is quite independent of human toil or effort, and which testifies to its Divine origin.

Ver. 12. "*The way side.*"—"The way is the heart beaten and dried by the passage of evil thoughts."

"*Then cometh the devil.*"—"This is the most terrible saying in the whole Bible," says *Luther*, "and yet is so little thought of! For who thinks and believes that the devil too goes always to church and sees how men listen so carelessly to the word of God and do not even pray, and how their hearts are like a hard road, which the word does not penetrate? Alas! even in us who love the word of God there is still something of the hard road in our hearts."

Ver. 13. "*With joy.*"—There are two kinds of joy which the hearer of the word may experience. There is (1) the joy which springs from a recognition of the greatness of the blessing as meeting a moral need, and which will lead the hearer to make any sacrifice to secure that blessing (cf. "for joy sold all that he had," Matt. xiii. 44); and (2) the joy which springs from an overlooking the costs, and hazards, and hardships involved in a Christian life.

"*In time of temptation fall away.*"—The heat which only *matures* a true faith *scorches up* that which is merely temporary.

Faith the Root.—Faith is to the Christian life what the root is to the plant.

I. It is hidden from sight in the depth of the soul; but—

II. It is the source of spiritual firmness, and stability, and prosperity.

Rocky Hearts.—O rocky hearts! How shallow, shallow, are the impressions of Divine things upon you! Religion goes never further than the upper surface of your hearts. You have but few deep thoughts of God, and of Jesus Christ, and of the things of the world to come. All are but slight and transient glances! The seed goes not deep. It springs up, indeed, but anything blasts and withers it. There is little room in some. If trials arise, either the heat of persecution *without*, or of temptation *within*, this sudden spring-seed can stand before neither.—*Leighton.*

Ver. 14. *Preoccupation with Worldly Things.*—The failure of the seed among thorns is due to a preoccupation with worldly things which in different cases takes a different form.

I. The **cares** which harass the poor.

II. The **distractions** inseparably connected with a life devoted to the pursuit of riches.

III. The **pleasures** to which those who are rich are tempted to addict themselves. Cf. Jer. iv. 3: "Break up your fallow ground, and sow not among thorns."

"*Go forth.*"—An indication of the *restlessness* of such characters, as contrasted with the "patience" of those of honest and good heart.

Childhood, Youth, and Age.—The first hindrance, viewed generally and as a whole, threatens the period of childhood, which lives for the outer world, and is as yet unsusceptible of the higher truth; the second, the period of youth, which is as susceptible as it is inconstant; the third, a still further advanced age, when the ripening in sanctification depends on the rooting out of indwelling sin.—*Stier.*

The Two-hearted Hearers.—The two-hearted come to no speed in anything. Friendship, it has been said, is one heart in two bodies; indecision is two hearts in one body, the one filled with earth's thorns, the other with heaven's seed. Your heart can hold many things at once, but you should never place side by side in it the seed and the thorns. Your whole soul must receive the seed as the Ark received the law, having no room for aught besides.—*Wells.*

Ver. 15. "*Honest and good heart.*"—As for captious inquiries concerning human goodness, we know indeed that "there is none good but one, that is God"; and yet Scripture, reason, and experience convince us that some natures afford a better soil for the growth of spiritual seed than others.—*Burgon.*

Types of Character not Necessarily Permanent.—The three unfruitful kinds of ground do not indicate three types of character which must necessarily remain permanent: nor is the good ground good in itself; it is made good by the operation of the word, which, though here described as seed, is elsewhere represented as the dew and rain, the hammer and the fire, which soften, crush, and purify the hearts of men.

Ver. 16. "*When he hath lighted a candle.*"—Having spoken of the effect of the word upon the *hearers*, Christ now tells His disciples what they must do as *teachers* of the word.

Christ the Bringer of Light.—Christ represents Himself as the *bringer of light*, just as He is the *sower of seed.* This light therefore *comes* to us from without, and is given to us that we may display it to others. The very purpose of a lamp is to shine and to give light to those in the house (cf. Matt. v. 14-16). The truth at present veiled from the careless and indifferent is communicated by Christ to His apostles, but not as a mystery to be possessed and enjoyed by themselves: they are illumined in order that they may communicate to the world what they have received. Hence the apostles should take care to learn the meaning of the parables, "not hiding them under a blunted understanding, nor when they did understand them, neglecting the teaching of them to others."

Ver. 17. "*Be made manifest.*"—Christ was now taking special care in teaching the apostles, imparting to them in private special instruction, and removing the veil that concealed His meaning from so many who heard His public discourses. But there was nothing like favouritism in His procedure. He had in view the benefit of all in imparting illumination to the few: the present *concealing* was for the purpose of future *revealing.* This explains the plan He took for giving light to all men. Instead of leaving the truth to its fate, and contenting Himself with a public proclamation of it, He took special care to see that a certain number were thoroughly acquainted with it, and qualified to teach it to others. Instead of leaving a vague, ill-understood impression of His teaching to pervade human society, He gave the twelve a thorough training in spiritual things.

Ver. 18. *The Pulpit and the Pew.*

I. A critical spirit is a great hindrance to profitable hearing.

II. A formal spirit hinders profitable hearing.

III. The preparation of the heart is necessary to profitable hearing.

IV. A teachable spirit is helpful to profitable hearing.

V. Attention is requisite to profitable hearing.—*Kelly.*

"*Whosoever hath.*"—This was a current proverb which Christ used to enforce one of His own parables. It is true in nature, and also in the spiritual sphere. Not that we acquiesce in any doctrine of God's arbitrary decrees. It may be true that few are chosen, but it is no less true that many are called; and if they do not respond to the call, if they are not disposed to receive the teaching of Christ, the fault lies with those who have so disposed them—at first with their parents, and also much more with themselves. The "irreducible minimum" of truth which a man must have if more is to be given him is the "honest and good" heart. It was just that honest and good heart which alone made the difference between the eleven and the multitude to whom the same call was given, "Come unto Me, and I will give you rest."—*Beeching.*

Progress in Knowledge.—The longing to know is that which the disciples "had," and on account of which it was granted to them to receive the fulness of knowledge. His word given to us raises ever deeper questions in

our hearts, and we receive ever richer answers.

The Responsibility of Hearing.—1. The reward of hearing aright—fresh knowledge communicated as the faculty for receiving it is developed and strengthened by exercise; 2. The penalty attaching to neglect—utter deprivation of knowledge, and atrophy of the very power by which it is apprehended. There is nothing arbitrary in this rule; it belongs to God's procedure in the kingdom of nature as well as in that of grace. "The fabric of the soul is affected by our indifference—the penalty of degeneration is the loss of functions, the decay of organs, the death of the spiritual nature."

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 19—21.

Natural and Spiritual Relationships.—The purpose for which Christ's mother and brethren came explains the words He uttered on this occasion. It was not merely to see Him, but to persuade Him to give up the work in which He was engaged, or even to use force to compel Him to yield to their desire. From the zeal and ardour which seemed to render Him indifferent to food and repose, they concluded that He was beside Himself (Mark iii. 20, 21), and probably also they were alarmed at the enmity towards Him which the Pharisees had begun to manifest. From their action and from the words which it evoked from Christ we may learn several important lessons.

I. **Faith is often found wanting in those who are most highly favoured in outward circumstances.**—Who could have been more highly favoured than the mother and brethren of Jesus, in being permitted for so many years to witness His pure and holy life? And yet they were at this time devoid of the faith in Him which is necessary for genuine discipleship. Others who had seen and known but little of Him had accepted Him as their Saviour and Lord, while *they* were quite out of sympathy with the work God had sent Him to do. Familiarity even with holy things is only too apt to breed indifference, and, as Christ Himself said, a prophet often finds comparative strangers more willing to listen to his message than those of his own country and kindred.

II. **There may be collision between the claims of natural affection and those of the kingdom of God.**—Christ Himself had now to choose between the two, and to subordinate the lower to the higher. And a like experience is familiar to all who have ever attempted to serve Him. This painful conflict is perhaps seen in its sharpest forms ih cases where Christianity is beginning to make its way in heathen society. New converts have often to sacrifice ties of kindred and friendship for the sake of Christ, and to seem to be cruel to those whom they love most dearly. But in no state of society is the conflict between lower and higher duties altogether unknown. Circumstances often arise in which a sensitive conscience guides the believer to take a line of action which may be disapproved of by those whose good opinion and affection he is naturally most anxious to retain. The rule he should follow is here laid down for him by the example of his Master.

III. **Obedience to God's will means intimate union with Christ.**—It was His meat and drink to do the will of His Father, and all who are imbued with the same spirit come into the closest fellowship with Him. It is quite evident that the language which Christ here uses involves claims of a unique kind—that no mere man, however holy, could thus present Himself as the bond of union between heaven and earth. The high privileges which He thus proclaims as belonging to those who become His disciples place rich and poor, high-born and lowly, on the same level. And the union which exists between Him and them death itself cannot break.

IV. **These family relationships suggest the spontaneous affection which believers should cherish towards Christ and towards each other.**—The mere fact of relationships, such as are implied in the words "mother, sister, brother," naturally calls up feelings of love, and suggests strong and indissoluble ties. We experience a kind of horror at meeting with those who seem to be wanting in this natural affection, which appears to us as rather an instinctive impulse than an emotion which we can cultivate. Christ here uses these relationships with all that they imply to represent the spiritual ties formed between Him and His true disciples. And the common tie that binds them to Him should bind them to each other. So do we find it in actual fact. Christians recognise their brethren everywhere among those who believe in Christ, though they may differ from them in race, and blood, and colour. The relation of spirit to spirit is the profoundest of all. Civil wars, love of gain, and a hundred other things have been known to break the family bond, and to extinguish natural affection. But the mutual relations of believers with each other have been least disturbed of any, when those ties have been real and not nominal.

SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS ON VERSES 19—21.

Ver. 19. "*His mother and His brethren.*"—This is one of the cases in which the parallel narratives in the other Gospels serve to supplement the history given by St. Luke, and to make its significance clearer. Had we no other information than that given here, we should not have known the reason why His mother and brethren desired to see Him; we should not have had reason for supposing that they were bent upon checking or interfering with His work; and His depreciation of natural relationships as compared with spiritual would have seemed uncalled for. We learn, however, from Mark iii. that His mother and brethren were (1) alarmed at the rupture between Him and the Pharisees, and (2) solicitous also concerning His health—for He and His disciples were so thronged by the multitude as not to have leisure "so much as to eat bread." They came to the conclusion that He was beside Himself, and wished to put Him under restraint; or they alleged this as an excuse for His procedure, in order to pacify the anger of His enemies. Their conduct was, therefore, blameworthy, as prompted by excess of natural affection, an assumption of authority over Him or worldly policy. The comment of *St. Chrysostom* on these words is interesting, even if it show us only that belief in the sinlessness of Mary was not in his time an article of the Catholic faith: "What she attempted came of overmuch love of honour; for she wished to show to the people that she had power and authority over her son, imagining not as yet anything great concerning Him; whence also she came unseasonably. Observe then her and their recklessness. For when they ought to have gone in and listened with the multitude, or, if they were not so minded, to have waited for His bringing His discourse to an end, and then to have come near, they call Him out, and do this before all, exhibiting overmuch love of honour, and wishing to show that with much authority they enjoin Him; and this, too, the Evangelist shows that he is blaming; for with this very allusion he says, 'while He yet talked to the people'; as if he should say, 'What! was there no other opportunity? What! could they not have spóken with Him in private?' . . . Whence it is evident that they did this solely out of vain-glory."

Ver. 21. *The Spiritual Relationship takes Precedence of the Natural.*—The reply of Jesus is virtually a statement of the fact that when natural and spiritual relationships come into con-

flict the former must be made to give way. "He does not despise His mother, but He gives higher honour to His Father" (*Bengel*). The principle Christ announced was one which had already been approved in the word of God, in the blessing pronounced by Moses upon the tribe of Levi: "Who said unto his father and his mother, I have not seen him; neither did he acknowledge his brethren, nor knew his own children: for they have observed Thy word, and kept Thy covenant" (Deut. xxxiii. 9). We have therefore the plain lesson taught us that we must not allow ourselves to be guided solely by natural feelings, but when earthly ties bring us into conflict with our duties towards God obey the higher call even at the risk of seeming to be cruel and hard-hearted. No friends or relatives have claims upon us superior to those which spring from our obligations to God and Christ.

"*My mother and My brethren are these.*"—Perhaps in the *first* relationship Christ referred specially to those devout women mentioned in the earlier part of the chapter, as ministering to His wants and caring for Him with all the affectionateness of their sex; in the *second* He had in view the circle of apostles and disciples immediately surrounding Him. It is to be noticed that our Lord, though in St. Matthew's narrative He introduces the additional term "sister" into His answer, does not, and indeed could not, introduce "father," inasmuch as He never speaks of an earthly father. His Father was in heaven.—*Alford.*

Son of Man.—He is Son of man as well as Son of Mary, and in one sense is more identified with the race than with her.

"*Brother, sister, and mother*"—These words define the compass and limits of the relationship of the Son of God and man with the human race. This relationship has already been thrown open to the whole race by His birth in the flesh, already involved in the grace offered to all; but it is completed only in those who do the will of God, His Father in heaven.—*Stier.*

A New Relationship.—Nor is the separation between earthly and spiritual ties necessarily final: His mother and brethren, by becoming His disciples also, will become bound to Him by a closer than natural relationship.

But One True Nobility.—There is but one true nobility—that of obedience to God. This is greater than that of the Virgin's relationship to Christ. Therefore when a woman in the crowd exclaimed, "Blessed is the womb that bare Thee, and the paps which Thou hast sucked," He did not say "She is not My mother," but "If she desires to be blessed, let her do the will of God"; He said, "Yea rather, blessed are they that hear the word of God, and keep it."—*Chrysostom.*

A Widely Extended Privilege.—With the apparent severity of the answer there is wonderful gentleness blended: the claim to relationship is denied to be the exclusive right of a few, but the privilege of making it is extended to the many who obeyed His word and accepted His teaching. All who then heard the word of God and did it, or who should hereafter hear and do, are taken into this intimate fellowship with Himself. "This was surely sent for the comfort of as many as should come after; and it is well worthy of remark how our blessed Lord in countless ways contrived that 'as many as are afar off'—even we at this distant day—should be made to feel that privileges of the highest order are ours—privileges equal to any which were enjoyed by kinsmen and disciples in the days of the Son of man" (*Burgon*).

One Family.—How glorious is the thought that there is a family even upon

earth of which the Son of God holds Himself a part; a family the loving bond and reigning principle of which is subjection to the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, and so embracing high and low, rude and refined, bond and free, of every kindred and every age that have tasted that the Lord is gracious; a family whose members can at once understand each other and take sweetest counsel together, though meeting for the first time from the ends of the earth—while with their nearest relatives, who are but the children of this world, they have no sympathy in such things; a family which death cannot break up, but only transfer to their Father's house! Did Christians but habitually realise and act upon this, as did their blessed Master, what would be the effect upon the Church and upon the world?—*Brown.*

Spiritual Affinity the Closest of All.—The deepest affinity is that of the spirit. Hence the supremacy, even in the present provisional state of things, of the wedlock relationship. Hence, too, the still higher supremacy of the relationship that will rule in the world of glory (Matt. xxii. 30).—*Morison.*

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 22—25.

Faith and Fear.—Jesus was fast asleep amid the dashing waves and drenching storm. But was the danger real? Yes, to human eyes very real. To these fishermen, who had known that water all their days, it was real, and they were afraid for themselves and Him. It was very natural, this fear, though foolish: natural that they should dread the idea of all their hopes and prospects being lost in this premature grave, yet foolish that they should fear for themselves and Him so meaningless an end. Yet nature got the upper hand of faith, and they gave way to their headlong terrors.

I. **Christ rebukes the storm.**—Though unmoved by the piercing shrieks of the wind and the hoarse menace of the waves, He wakes at the first cry of the disciples. He arose calmly, composedly. The Son of man had been sleeping. The Son of God awakes and speaks,—for Himself exhausted, for others still mighty. He looked down at the waves; He looked up into the heavens. "He rebuked the wind and the raging of the water: and they ceased, and there was a calm." What a revelation of God in man! It is not so much the mere power that impresses. We have seen Him do as great works before, and greater. But, as the wondering disciples said, "it is the manner of the man." In what condition is man by himself more thoroughly helpless than in a storm at sea—in a frail boat—the sport of the elements—a mere straw upon the waters, with death opening all her mouths upon him? In no condition, unless you add that in which Jesus was a few moments before—fast asleep. A waking man in a shipwreck may be on the watch for some means of escape. But a man asleep in a boat rapidly filling with water and on the point of going down!—such and so helpless did Jesus seem the one moment. And the next! He stands and speaks to the elements, and they hear with the facility and readiness of well-trained servants. "What manner of man is this! for He commandeth even the winds and the water, and they obey Him."

II. **Christ rebukes His disciples.**—He had His own disciples to rebuke and correct as well as the storm to still. "Where is your faith?" The question does not imply that they were absolutely faithless. This could not be. Their instinctive application to Him when things became so bad shows clearly enough their belief that He could and would deliver Himself and them from the danger. But He rebukes them for the littleness, the narrowness, of their faith, for the want of larger trust. They ought to have had such confidence in Him as to

believe that sleeping or waking made no difference to Him, that the boat which carried Him and them together would not be overwhelmed. It was not that they had no faith; but—like one who has a piece, though in sudden panic he forgets to fire—it was as bad as if they had none. They failed to apply their faith fully. It was not ready for use. They believed Jesus to be the Christ, they had left all to follow Him, and had they been consistent with their own belief they had showed no such unworthy fear. But fear for the moment ruled, and not faith. Thus they became weak, as we all are when our faith is not at hand in the time of need: thus they justly incurred the rebuke, "Where is your faith?" They had entrusted to Him their souls, their lives, their all; and yet they forgot all this in a moment of panic, out of mere natural, human fear. How exactly like us and our unbelief! For unbelief is always the same confused, feeble, sinful thing. You have received Christ as your Saviour; you have long ago known His great salvation; and yet let any sudden squall arise, and you fear and cry out as if all were lost. You grow downcast "when days are dark and friends are few." You are unstrung when some sudden trial crushes your home. Your knees fail and your hands hang down. Why is this? Where is your faith? Let not your heart be troubled. Ye believe in God; believe also in Jesus. You believe in His *almightiness*, as the Christ of God, to whom all things in providence are entrusted for His people's sake. Is there anything in your lot or life He cannot master whom the winds and waves obey? You believe in His *wisdom*. Are not your times in His hand? And your times of storm and terror you have found before to be His times of help and healing. You believe in His *love*; and His love is never more active toward you than in the tempest of trial. You believe in His *faithfulness*—that His promise stands sure, "I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee."

The distinctive teaching of the miracle may be summed up in these two items: 1. Directly, it teaches that to Him as Lord of providence belongs all power to defend His cause and people from danger, and that He is continually exercising that power which on special and signal occasions has called out not only the fervent adoration of His own, but has attracted the wonder and admiration of the world. 2. Less directly, but very significantly, the story suggests the perpetual presence of Christ in and with His Church, for its protection and deliverance.—*Laidlaw.*

SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS ON VERSES 22—25.

Vers. 22-25. *The Peace-bringer in the World of Nature.*—Note:—

I. **Christ's sleep in the storm.**
II. **The awaking cry of fear.**
III. **The word that calms the storm.**
IV. **The gentle remonstrance.**—*Maclaren.*

Ver. 22. "*He went into a ship.*"—From a comparison of the various synoptical narratives we learn that this had been a very busy day in the life of Jesus—it had been crowded with works of healing, discourses, controversies with opponents, and conversation with disciples. St. Mark distinctly says (iv. 35) that the storm upon the lake occurred on the evening of the day when He first began to speak to the multitude in parables. We need not wonder, therefore, that He was fatigued and fell asleep in the boat. "The reason why He decided to cross over to the eastern shore of the lake does not seem to have been to secure a measure of needed repose. No hint of this being His purpose is given in the Gospels. His usual course after imparting instruction in one place was to go to another, and not to rest (Mark i. 38). This district of Decapolis, on the east of the Sea of

Galilee, was a stronghold of heathenism, where there was an abundant field for religious work, and where rest would be out of the question" (*Speaker's Commentary*).

"*A ship.*"—This ship which carried Christ, and in which He taught,—sometimes near shore, where the people stood; sometimes in calm, sometimes in storm,—was a beautiful emblem of the Church sailing over the waters of this world on her voyage to the harbour of eternity.—*Wordsworth.*

Ver. 23. "*He fell asleep.*"—The scene suggests that in Jonah i. 5, where the prophet was asleep on board the Phœnician ship amidst the violence of the storm, and had to be roused from his slumbers. But with the disobedience of the prophet, and his helplessness to avert danger, are to be contrasted the untroubled conscience and serene majesty and power of Christ when He was in like circumstances.

The Wearied Saviour.—How touching that our Saviour should have been so speedily asleep! How suggestive of His great exhaustion that He should have been so sound asleep! Those delicate energies of His humanity, that needed to be statedly replenished, had been subjected to an excessive drain in consequence of the urgent demands of the people for teaching and healing.—*Morison.*

Vers. 24-32. *Lake and Shore.*

I. **A stormy lake.**—1. The weary sleeper. 2. The sudden danger. 3. The sure help.

II. **The lake shore.**—1. A sad sufferer. 2. A gracious Healer. 3. A grateful would-be follower. Jesus calms the stormy sea, and then calms a storm-tossed soul.—*W. Taylor.*

Ver. 24. "*They awoke Him.*"

I. The roar of the storm He did not hear in His sound sleep, but the moment there was a cry from His disciples for help He awoke. *What a revelation of heart we have here!* He is never asleep to His praying people. He hears the faintest cry of prayer amid the wildest tumults of the world. He is never too weary to listen to the appeal of human distress.

II. Though aroused suddenly, He awoke calm and peaceful. Such an experience reveals the grandeur and purity of His nature. No terror, no resentment, no upbraiding, for being disturbed, but perfect calmness and peace. Here we see what Christ meant when He said, "*My* peace I give unto you." In this peaceful spirit He moved amid the various turbulent scenes of His earthly life.—*Miller.*

Even Weak Faith Effectual.—The disciples were in unbelief, which cried out, "We perish!" Yet were they at the same time sufficiently believing to call upon Him, "Lord, help us!" Even weak faith is faith still; the trembling hand yet holds fast the Deliverer.—*Stier.*

"*Master, master!*"—The exclamation which reveals (1) timorous faith, reveals also (2) genuine faith, for in their distress they flee to none but Jesus.

Alarm and Perplexity.—The disciples were (1) alarmed by the violence of the tempest, and (2) perplexed by the fact that for the moment Christ seemed oblivious to their danger.

"*He arose.*"—Let any man reflect how one suddenly roused with outcries of distress and danger of death around him would in the weakness of humanity comport himself, and it will help him to perceive and estimate the unapproachable dignity of this Being. Even while one with us He is paying His tribute to the infirmity of our flesh. The Son of man slept; the Son of God in man awakes and speaks. For Himself exhausted, for others almighty.—*Stier.*

Christ's Calmness.—Cæsar's confidence that the bark which contained him and his fortunes could not sink forms the earthly counterpart to the heavenly calmness and confidence of the Lord.—*Trench.*

"*Rebuked the wind.*"—Speaking to the wind and the billows of the water as though they were living powers (Ps. cvi. 9, "He *rebuked* the Red Sea also"), or to the evil powers which may be conceived to wield them to the danger of mankind.—*Farrar.*

Union of the Divine and the Human.—What Moses performed in the might of Jehovah when he opened with his rod the way through the waters, that the Son of the Father does through the efficacy of His will alone. Here also we meet with that union of the Divine and human nature which we so often discover in the gospel. He who wearied with His day's work lays Himself awhile to sleep, because He needs bodily rest, and remains quiet in the most threatening danger, rises at once in Divine fulness of might, and commands the tempestuous wind and bridles the sea.—*Van Oosterzee.*

The Voice of Authority.—The elements which are deaf to us heard their Creator.—*Jerome.*

Ver. 25. "*Where is your faith?*"—Christ acknowledges the faith which the disciples had; answers the prayer of faith by working a perfect calm; but rebukes them for not having the stronger, firmer faith to trust Him even when He seemed insensible to their danger.—*Alford.*

A Weapon not at Hand.—Faith they had, as the weapon which a soldier has, but cannot lay hold of at the moment when he needs it the most.—*Trench.*

Faith should be a Preservative from Terror.—Wherein were the apostles to blame? It was for the state of anxiety and alarm in which Christ found them when He awoke from slumber. Faith may and should add intensity to our prayers, but it should also save us from agitation and terror.

Wait Patiently.—By these words Christ censures all irregular ways of endeavouring to extricate ourselves from difficulties. Such irregular methods argue lack of faith. They are acts of irreverence, like that of the disciples disturbing Christ in His slumber. If the times are such that we can neither row nor sail in the vessel of the Church, we must wait patiently in the ship till He arises and calms the storm. Then the words apply: "In quietness and confidence shall be your strength" (Isa. xxx. 15); and, "Their strength is to sit still" (*ibid.*, ver. 7); and "Stand still, and see the salvation of the Lord" (Exod. xiv. 13).—*Wordsworth.*

"*Being afraid.*"—Two kinds of fear agitated the minds of the disciples within the space of a very few moments: indeed, the one fear followed immediately upon the other. The *first* was sheer terror of perishing in the waters; the *second*, a reverential fear, a holy awe, at having experienced a deliverance at once so gracious and so astonishing.

The Teaching of the Miracle.—The miracle proves (1) that Christ never forgets His people, though He sometimes appears to do so; and (2) that He will certainly deliver His people at last.

The Wonder of the Disciples.—The wonder of the disciples *may* find explanation in the fact that this miracle was the first of the kind they had witnessed—the first example of Christ's power over the blind forces of nature. But we find in our own experience that each new manifestation of God's power and love in delivering us from danger excites as much astonishment in our hearts as if we were learning

for the first time the greatness of His majesty and mercy.

"*What manner of man is this!*"—A question not of doubt, but of astonishment. The disciples were amazed at (1) the unexpectedness of the miracle, and (2) at its unexampled character. For not only was the violence of the wind instantly checked, but also the raging of the water, which is usually disturbed for some time after the wind falls, ceased in a moment, and "there was a calm." This miracle, like that in v. 8, was wrought in a sphere familiar to them, and they were therefore fully able to appreciate the greatness of the power Christ displayed.

The Purpose of the Miracle.

I. It renewed and confirmed faith in Christ.

II. It gave prophetic assurance of His power and willingness to help in all subsequent times of danger. When at a later time storms threatened the bark of the Church, disciples could still believe that Christ was with them, and that in His own time He would deliver it and them from perishing in the waves.

The Miracle a Parable.—The symbolic application of this occurrence is too striking to have escaped general notice. The Saviour with His company of disciples in the ship tossed on the waves seemed a typical reproduction of the Ark bearing mankind on the flood, and a foreshadowing of the Church tossed by the tempests of the world, but having Him with her always. And the personal application is one of comfort and strengthening of faith in danger and doubt.—*Alford.*

Christ's Presence a Source of Safety.—We are sailing in this life as through a sea, and the wind rises, and storms of temptation are not wanting. Whence is this, save because Jesus is sleeping in thee? If He were not sleeping in thee, thou wouldest have calm within. But what means this, that Jesus is sleeping in thee, save that thy faith, which is from Jesus, is slumbering in thine heart? What shalt thou do to be delivered? Arouse Him and say, "Master, we perish." He will awaken—that is, thy faith will return to thee, and abide with thee always. When Christ is awakened, though the tempest beat into, yet it will not fill, thy ship; thy faith will now command the winds and the waves, and the danger will be over. —*Augustine.*

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 26—39.

The Lord of Demons.—The sufferer whom Christ healed was not merely a maniac, but a demoniac. He is not a man at war with himself, but a man at war with other beings, who have forced themselves into his house of life. The narrative of his restoration has a remarkable feature, which may help to mark off its stages. The word "besought" occurs four times in it (vers. 28, 31, 37, 38), and we may group the details round each instance.

I. **The demons beseeching Jesus through the man's voice.**—He was, in the exact sense of the word, *distracted*—drawn two ways. For it would seem to have been the self in him that ran to Jesus and fell at His feet, as if in some dim hope of rescue; but it is the demons in him that speak, though the voice be his. They force him to utter their wishes, their terrors, their loathing of Christ, though he says "I" and "me" as if these were his own. That horrible condition of a double, or, as in this case, a manifold personality speaking through human organs, and overwhelming the proper self, mysterious as it is, is the very essence of the awful misery of the demoniacs. The mere presenec of Christ lashes the demons to paroxysms; but, before the man spoke, Christ

had given His stern command to come forth. He is answered by this howl of fear and hate. Clear recognition of Christ's person is in it. They know Him who had conquered their prince long ago. The next element in the words is hatred, as fixed as the knowledge is clear. God's supremacy and loftiness, and Christ's nature, are recognised, but only the more abhorred. This, then, is a dark possibility, which has become actual for real living beings, that they should know God, and hate as heartily as they know clearly. That is the terminus towards which human spirits may be travelling. The "torment" deprecated was expulsion from the man, as if there was some grim satisfaction and dreadful alleviation in being there, rather than in "the abyss," which appears to be the alternative. How striking is Christ's unmoved calm in the face of all this fury! No doubt His tranquil presence helped to calm the man, however it excited the demons. The distinct intention of the question, "What is thy name?" is to arouse the man's self-consciousness, and make him feel his separate existence, apart from the alien tyranny which had just been using his voice and usurping his personality. But for the moment the foreign influence is still too strong, and the answer comes, "My name is Legion: for we are many" (St. Mark). There is a momentary gleam of the true self in the first word or two, but it fades away into the old confusion.

II. **The demons beseeching Jesus without disguise.**—Why should the expelled demons seek to enter the swine? It would appear that anywhere was better than "the abyss," and that unless they could find some body to enter, thither they must go. It would seem, too, that there was no other land open to them—for the prayer on the man's lips had been not to send them "out of the country," as if it were the only country on earth open to them. That makes for the opinion that demoniacal possession was the dark shadow which attended, for reasons not discoverable by us, the light of Christ's coming, and was limited in time and space by His earthly manifestation. But on such matters there is not ground enough for certainty. Another difficulty has been raised as to Christ's right to destroy property. But destruction did not necessarily follow upon possession. The drowning of the herd does not appear to have entered into the calculations of the unclean spirits. They desired houses to live in after their expulsion, and for them to plunge the swine into the lake would have defeated their purpose. The stampede was an unexpected effect of the commingling of the demoniacal with the animal nature, and outwitted the demons. There is a lower depth than the animal nature; and even swine feel uncomfortable when the demon is in them, and in their panic rush anywhere to get rid of the incubus, and, before they know, find themselves in the lake.

III. **The terrified Gadarenes beseeching Jesus to leave them.**—They had rather have their swine than their Saviour. Fear and selfishness prompted the prayer. The communities on the eastern side of the lake were largely Gentile; and, no doubt, these people knew that they did many worse things than swine-keeping, and may have been afraid that some more of their wealth would have to go the same road as the herd. They did not want instruction nor feel that they needed a healer. Were their prayers so very unlike the wishes of many of us? Is there nobody nowadays unwilling to let the thought of Christ enter into his life, because he feels an uneasy suspicion that, if Christ comes, a good deal will have to go? How many trades and schemes of life really beseech Jesus to go away and leave them in peace? And He goes away. Christ commands unclean spirits, but He can only plead with hearts. And if we bid Him depart, He is fain to leave us for the time to the indulgence of our foolish and wicked schemes. If any man open, He comes in—oh, how gladly! but if any man shut the door in His face, He can but tarry without and knock.

IV. **The restored man's beseeching to abide with Christ.**—Conscious weakness, dread of some recurrence of the inward hell, and grateful love, prompted the prayer. The prayer itself was partly right and partly wrong: right, in clinging to Jesus as the only refuge from the past misery; wrong, in clinging to His visible presence as the only way of keeping near Him. Therefore He who had permitted the wish of the demons, and complied with the entreaties of the terrified mob, did not yield to the prayer throbbing with love and conscious weakness. Strange that Jesus should put aside a hand that sought to grasp His in order to be safe; but His refusal was, as always, the gift of something better. The best defence against the return of the evil spirits was in occupation. Therefore he is sent to proclaim his deliverance among friends who had known his dreadful state, and to renew old associations which would help him to knit his new life to his old, and to treat his misery as a parenthesis. Jesus commanded silence or speech according to the need of the subjects of His miracles. For some, silence was best, to deepen the impression of blessing received; for others, speech was best, to engage and so to fortify the mind against relapse.—*Maclaren.*

SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS ON VERSES 26—39.

Ver. 26. "*Country of the Gadarenes.*—The connection is very striking in which this miracle stands with that other which went immediately before. Our Lord has just shown Himself as the Pacifier of the tumults and the discords in the outward world; He has spoken peace to the winds and to the waves, and hushed the war of elements with a word. But there is something wilder and more fearful than the winds and waves in their fiercest moods—even the spirit of man, when it has broken loose from all restraints, and yielded itself to be his organ who brings confusion and anarchy wherever his dominion reaches. And Christ will accomplish here a yet mightier work than that which He accomplished there; He will prove Himself here also the Prince of peace, the Restorer of the lost harmonies; He will speak, and at His potent word this madder strife, this blinder rage, which is in the heart of man, will allay itself, and here also there shall be a great calm.—*Trench.*

A Semi-heathen Population.—The region into which Christ had come was inhabited by a semi-heathen population, and both in the disobedience to the Jewish law manifested in the keeping of herds of animals reckoned as unclean, and in the earnest request proffered to Christ to depart from the district, we have indications of the spiritual condition of those to whom He now came to preach the gospel of the kingdom. Here where Satan was most obeyed the tyranny of his rule was manifested in its direct form.

Vers. 27, 28. "*A certain man, which had devils.*"—We have here one of the greatest dangers, no doubt, to which Jesus was exposed in the course of His life: He was face to face with uncontrolled brutal force. But the sight of His perfect calmness, and of His holy majesty, and of the profound compassion which was expressed in His countenance, affect this furious maniac; as he recognises the contrast between himself and the Saviour, there is awakened even in him a sense of his moral degradation. He feels himself at once attracted by, and repelled by, this Man who holds him under the control of His commanding eye. A crisis arises; it is declared by a loud cry; and then, like a wild beast in the presence of its tamer, the man runs forward and falls upon his knees, though at the same time he protests in the name of the spirit who possesses

him against the power which is being exercised upon him.—*Godet.*

Ver. 27. "*Met Him.*"—In the demoniac's coming to meet Christ, and yet entreating to be let alone, we have a picture of a divided consciousness: (1) an instinctive feeling that He was the Deliverer; and (2) a sense of the awful gulf between the evil nature and the Son of the most high God.

"*Abode . . . in the tombs.*"—This wretched man was kept among the tombs by an unclean spirit, that he might have an opportunity of terrifying him continually with the mournful spectacle of death, as if he were cut off from the society of men, and already dwelt among the dead.—*Calvin.*

Ver. 29. "*Bound with chains.*"—The evil spirit is strong enough to break all chains and fetters, and is overmastered only by the power of Jesus. So too on the moral and spiritual side of things an evil habit often cannot be controlled by considerations of health or propriety, or any of the restraints which reason and conscience and public opinion would impose; yet no evil habit is too strong for the power of Christ to fail to give deliverance.

Ver. 30. "*Legion.*"—The name suggests not only numbers, but organised strength and tried courage—distinction of ranks and unity of purpose.

The Christian's Armour.—Our Lord describes the enemy as "a strong man armed" (xi. 21, 22). Hence the Christian who has to contend with him or his agents is furnished with weapons of warfare also: "the whole armour of God—girdle, breastplate, shield, helmet, and sword" (Eph. vi. 13-17).

Ver. 31. "*The abyss.*"—The power of Jesus Christ extends over animals, demons, and the abyss. This the demons themselves acknowledge.—*Bengel.*

Ver. 32. "*That He would suffer them.*"—The legion of devils would have had no power over the herd of swine unless they had received it from God: how much less will they have power over the flock of the Good Shepherd!

"*And He suffered them.*"—If this granting of the request of the evil spirits helped in any way the cure of the man, caused them to resign their hold on him more easily, mitigated the paroxysm of their going forth (see Mark ix. 26), this would have been motive enough. Or still more probably it may have been necessary, for the permanent healing of the man, that he should have an outward evidence and testimony that the hellish powers which had held him in bondage had quitted him.—*Trench.*

Ver. 33. "*Ran violently down a steep place.*"—God's saints and servants appear *not* to be heard; and the very refusal of their requests is to them a blessing (2 Cor. xii. 8, 9). The wicked Satan (Job i. 11) and his ministers and servants are sometimes heard, and the very granting of their petition issues in their worst confusion and loss. These evil spirits had their prayer heard; but only to their ruin.—*Trench.*

Ver. 35. "*Sitting at the feet of Jesus.*"—Note the change: the frantic demoniac has become a meek disciple.

Ver. 37. *Tested and Found Wanting.*

I. **The Gadarenes tested**—by the presence of Christ as the Bringer of spiritual blessings and the Deliverer from evil.

II. **The Gadarenes found wanting**: they had no desire to be delivered from their sins, and felt that the presence of a holy Being would only bring further mischiefs upon them.

Impatience at Loss.—How hard it is to recognise the hand of God in anything which interrupts our present enjoyment, brings us loss, and in any

way interferes with our worldly prosperity! We overlook the actual blessings which mingle with the most afflicting dispensation. We do not consider how near we may have been brought, by chastisement, to the sacred person of our Lord. We simply are impatient and afraid. We desire nothing so much as to be as, and what, we were.—*Burgon.*

God's Power and God's Goodness.—The Gadarenes cannot endure to have Christ among them; but he who has been delivered from the unclean spirit is desirous to leave his own country and follow Him. Hence we may learn how wide is the difference between knowledge of the *goodness* and knowledge of the *power* of God. *Power* strikes men with terror, makes them fly from the presence of God, and drives them to a distance from Him; but *goodness* draws them gently, and makes them feel that nothing is more desirable than to be united to God.

"*Taken with great fear.*"—An example of *slavish* fear. Contrast the case of the Samaritans and the consequences. Fear is the beginning of wisdom (Prov. ix. 10), but perfect love casteth out fear (1 John iv. 18).

The Answered Prayer.

I. "Besought Him to depart." **This is one of the saddest sentences in the Gospels.** We can scarcely conceive of any one asking Jesus to go away. He had come to bring blessings. He had begun His work of grace. He would have gone on to other gracious acts of love and mercy had they not besought Him to depart. It was probably all because of the loss of the swine.

II. **Some feel like the Gadarenes when a work of grace begins in their community.**—They are opposed to Christianity because it interferes with their business. They are against Christianity, because Christianity is against them. All of us are apt to want Christ to depart from us when He interferes with our cherished plans.

III. **He complied with their prayer.**—He did not stay after these people asked Him to go. He would not stay where He was not wanted. He carried back the gifts He had come there to leave. Does Jesus never turn away from any heart now because He is not wanted?—*Miller.*

"*Besought Him to depart.*"—Need we wonder that to those who persist for a whole lifetime in saying to the Saviour, *Depart from us*, He should, wearied out at length, Himself say in the end, Depart from Me?—*Morison.*

Ver. 38. "*That he might be with Him.*"—Perhaps his motive was *fear* of a relapse, or it may have been *gratitude* for the deliverance he had experienced.

Ver. 39. "*Return to thine own house.*"—In the person of one man Christ has exhibited to us a proof of His grace, which is extended to all mankind. Though we are not tortured by the devil, yet he holds us as his slaves till the Son of God delivers us from his tyranny. Naked, torn, and disfigured, we wander about till He restores us to soundness of mind. It remains that, in magnifying His grace, we testify our gratitude.—*Calvin.*

Home Religion.—We should be careful to carry religion into the home (1) Because home is the place of the most sacred relationships. (2) We need religion in our homes because the commonness and the constancy of the home-relationships are apt to induce in us a semi-forgetfulness of them. (3) We need religion in the home because home is the most hopeful place for religious service. (4) Home religion is the best test of the reality of one's religion.

The Gadarene Missionary. — The saved man is sent first to his own house and friends.

I. **Let all grace from Christ begin to tell at home.**—If it cannot win its

way there, it lacks some of its vital force.

II. **The true method of the household missionary.**—"Shew how great things," etc. He has a story to tell of personal experience, of grateful love, of marvellous mercy. This—in his mouth—touches men's hearts.

III. **Success in the narrower leads to success in the wider sphere.**—The mission was successful. Doing exactly as his Lord bade him, he was soon able to do more. The letter of his commission enlarged. In time he had told his story to all Decapolis. His doctrine enlarged as well as his diocese. He could not tell his story without giving Jesus all the praise, and he found that praising Jesus was giving glory to God, and so he preached a Divine Saviour. The most terrible sufferer from infernal power becomes a preacher of salvation to ten cities. A majestic entrance of the Sun of Righteousness into this region of the Shadow of Death! For though but a momentary gloom, a ray of light was left there. Jesus went a few hours to Gadara. He found a demoniac, and left a missionary.—*Laidlaw.*

"*Jesus had done.*"—This is a very natural and beautiful trait in the story. Jesus had given all the glory to God—had told him to return home and "declare how great things God had done for him." He went his way and told how great things *Jesus* had done for him. He could not forget the Deliverer whom God had sent.

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 40—42, 49—56.

The Sleeping Child awakened.—Sorrows and need make short work of prejudices. Jairus, as a synagogue official, was probably not over-favourable to Jesus; but he must have known of the cures already done in the synagogue at Capernaum, and so he forgets his doubts and dignity, and flings himself at the feet of the new Teacher, who, whether a heretic or not, may heal his little girl. His "faith" was probably merely a belief in Christ's miraculous power; and he was far behind the heathen centurion, who did not ask Jesus to come, but only to speak. But his agony was sore, his need great, his beseeching plaintive, and Jesus does not stop to put him through a catechism before He responds to his prayer. We are taught to think more loftily of Christ's willingness and power by His swift and exuberant answers to the poorest faith. Jesus has just come from exhausting toils on the other side of the lake; but He asks for no leisure, but goes with the impatient father at once, attended by a gaping crowd of sight-seers. Take our Lord's three sayings (vers. 50, 52, 54) as guides to the narrative.

I. **He invites and encourages faith even at the moment when all seems hopeless.**—The impatience of Jairus was justified by the message of the child's death. His faith, such as it was, was ready to collapse. He could believe that Jesus could heal, but to bring to life again was too much to expect. It obviously had not occurred to him as possible. How should it? And at that moment, when the last faint spark of light in the father's darkened heart has been blown out, Christ, for the first time in the story, speaks. His words sound strange and almost meaningless, "Fear not." What more was there to fear? The last and worst had come. "Only believe." What was there to believe now? "She shall be made whole." But she is dead. But there lies hidden to be found by the believing father a comfort which was enough for faith to lay hold of, though it might not be put in plain language. He gives Jairus enough to cheer him and relight the flame of hope. He never bids us not to be afraid without bidding us believe in Him, and giving faith something to cling to. A true faith will accept His assurances even when they seem to imply impossi-

bilities; and many a mourning heart that has heard Jesus speak thus over the dear dead whom He has not raised, knows how true it is that dying they have been "made whole," and live a fuller life.

II. **He announces that the irrevocable is not irrevocable to Him and His, for He comes to awake the sleeper.**—This word was spoken in the house, at the door of the chamber. Flute-players, and hired mourners, and curious neighbours, and all the crowd that comes to buzz round sorrow, were there; and a yard off, on the other side of a wall, lay the poor child quiet and deaf to it all. It is absurd to imagine that the saying of Christ is to be taken literally, and that the child was simply in a swoon or trance. The bystanders' unfeeling laugh is proof enough that what men call death had unmistakably taken place. They had seen the last moments, and knew that she was dead. What then does the saying mean? Jesus is not dealing in sentimental fine names for the unchanged horror, as we sometimes do; but His change of names follows a change of nature. He has abolished death, and, while the physical fact remains, the whole character of it changes. Sleep is not unconsciousness. It suspends the power of affecting, or being affected by, the world of sense, but does no more. We live and think and rejoice in sleep. It has the promise of waking. It brings rest. Therefore our Lord takes the old metaphor which all nations have used to hide the ugliness of death, and breathes new hope into it.

III. **His last word is the life-giving one in the death-chamber.**—Silence and secrecy befitted it. He kept out the noisy mob, and with the parents and the three chief disciples enters the sacred presence of the dead. Why this small number of witnesses? Possibly for the sake of the child, whose tender years might be disturbed by many curious eyes; but also, apparently, because, for reasons not known to us, He desired little publicity for the miracle. How simply and easily the stupendous deed is done! One touch of His hand, two words, the very syllables of which St. Mark gives, and "her spirit returned." He is the Lord both of the dead and the living, and His word runneth very swiftly over the gulf between this world and the abode of the dead. They sleep lightly, and are easily waked by His touch. Their sleep, while it lasts, is sweet, restful, conscious, if they sleep in Jesus. As for the weary body, it slumbers; and as for the spirit, it may be said to sleep, if by that we understand the cessation of toil, the end of connection with the outer world, the tranquillity of deep repose; but, in another aspect, the sleep of the saints is their passing into a fuller and more vivid life, and they are "satisfied," when they close their eyes on earth, to open them for heaven, and sleep to "awake in His likeness."—*Maclaren.*

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 43—48.

Timid Faith rewarded and confirmed.—This incident is marked out among our Lord's healings by these two peculiarities. It was a miracle within a miracle; and it was a cure obtained without a word spoken beforehand. Jesus is called to go on an errand of mercy, and finds another merciful work to do on the way. The power of Jesus not only flows out, but overflows and dispenses blessings by the way. The crumbs that fall from His table are better than the feasts of other masters. It was also a healing granted without any previous conversation. In this it was exceptional. He usually talked with the patient, or with those interested in the case, before He wrought the cure. The faith of this woman was so fearless, prompt, and resolute that without question or explanation, before a word had been spoken, she believes, resolves, acts. She has snatched the blessing, and is only not permitted to steal it. For He would not let her go until He had obtained a confession of her faith from her own

lips. Thus, though the conversation was not held till the cure had been wrought, the exception confirmed the rule on which He acted, that, apart from faith, and the acknowledgment of faith, there would be no blessing. Two things in the narrative especially claim our attention: the woman's confidence in Christ, and Christ's action towards her.

I. **The woman's faith in the Saviour, its strength and its weakness.**—She put herself in Jesus' way on this eventful occasion, and thus proved the strength of her faith. She was filled with a belief that He was able to heal even her. She never seems to have doubted for a moment her right to take the cure if she could get it. Such a Saviour should not come within arm's length of her, but she would stretch out her hand for the blessing. Though she should have to press her way through the crowd to reach Him, she would touch Him and be healed. No doubt there were defects in this faith. Its strength and weakness lay close together. It had the defect, so to say, of its quality. Its promptness may have owed something to the mechanical or material conception of the Healer's power, as if it were some atmosphere that surrounded Him, or some magical influence that flowed even from His garments. The confidence she had in Jesus was typical in that it was strong and well-founded. That it was mixed with those other elements from which the Lord proceeds immediately to purify it may teach us a double lesson. It hints, on the one hand, how small a part of gospel truth may save the soul, if there be faith to receive and love to act upon it. The spiritual value of faith is not to be reckoned by the correctness of conception on which it rests. Yet, on the other hand, the trust which is well-founded and generous will meet with its reward in a rapid and progressive enlightenment through Christ's word and Spirit.

II. **The Saviour's action towards the woman, its wisdom and tenderness.**—The active faith of the sufferer, as it were, takes the blessing by storm, though from One who is always willing to bless. He was not, indeed, unconscious of the virtue He put forth, nor of the faith which received it. But to bring that faith into clearness and purity it was necessary to bring the subject herself into conscious and open relation to her Healer. Our Lord straightway turns round, and puts the question which amazed the disciples, and drew forth Peter's characteristic remonstrance. Searching the crowd around, and hitherto behind Him, His gaze falls upon the woman. The thin and pinched features, the pallor of habitual ill-health, helped, perhaps, to single her out. But now there mingles in it the glow of instantaneous success, and the blush of womanly sensibility. She knew instantly that she was healed. She felt in that moment how far her sanguine boldness had carried her. She perceived, indeed, that nothing was hid from her Healer, but also that His mien was as gracious as His person was mighty. What look of His met hers we can imagine. A rare delight filled His countenance—a foretaste of the joy set before Him—at the signal proof of confidence given by this poor, lone woman. This sunshine of His face, added to the joy of her own success, gave her courage to tell Him, both "for what cause she had touched Him, and how she was healed immediately." The avowal cost her not a little. She came "trembling" as she "fell down before Him," and made her confession "before all the people." But it was richly rewarded. With a kindly word of greeting, He clears her faith to her own mind, He confirms her cure as a permanent healing, and He claims to be Himself the knowing and willing author of it all. We can see why for His own sake, and for His works' sake, Jesus had to make the cure public. But we are also to note how good it was for the subject of it herself. She did not mean perhaps "to filch the blessing." Her failing leaned to virtue's side. She deemed it not worth while to have Him stop for her, when He was in such urgency, and stand and speak the healing. One quiet touch would do all she

needed. Had she been allowed to slip away without the public scene, she would have lost two things: the honour of confessing her faith, and of having her cure confirmed. Reserve was her fault, a wish to hide the cure; thus at once cheating her own self of comfort, and withholding from the Lord His due honour. He corrects that fault most gently and wisely. He does not insist upon publicity till the healing had taken place, thus making confession as easy as possible for her. The object of its publication then becomes apparent, viz. to show that the medium of the cure was faith, not physical contact, to confirm what she had already taken by His own pronounced bestowal of it, and to bring her out in grateful acknowledgment, both for His glory and her good.

There are Christians whose fault is reserve. They would be saved, as it were, by stealth. The Saviour will not have it so. True conversion is, no doubt, a secret transaction, very close and personal between the soul and Christ. But it cannot remain secret. The virtue which is gone out of Him is a savour which cannot be hid. A seen religion is not always real, but a real religion is always seen. We cannot claim Christ for ours, but He will also declare His part in the blessed bond, and have us acknowledge that we are His. "To confess with the mouth" is an essential part of the salvation which comes by believing with the heart; indeed, it is the consummation of it. "With the heart man believeth unto righteousness." This is the private justification of the man before God. "With the mouth confession is made unto salvation." This crowns the transaction. It is more than its mere publication—namely, its perfection. The salvation is neither comforting nor complete until it is openly acknowledged.—*Laidlaw.*

SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS ON VERSES 40—56.

Ver. 40. "*All waiting for Him.*"

I. **A sad father waiting.**

II. **A dead child waiting.**

III. **A sick woman waiting.**—*Watson.*

Vers. 41-44. *Two Forms of Faith.*

I. Jairus openly appeals to Jesus on his daughter's behalf, but is secretly anxious: his faith, weaker than it appears, would have ebbed away but for the Saviour's word of encouragement.

II. The woman is too timid to make her case known to Jesus, but for all that her faith is stronger than one would have judged it to be from outward appearances.

Vers. 41, 42. "*Besought Him that He would come.*"—Similarity between the raising of Jairus' daughter and the raising of Lazarus. In both cases there is (1) delay in bringing help; (2) the patient dies before Christ's arrival; (3) there is a mysterious promise of deliverance; (4) death is spoken of as a sleep.

Ver. 42. "*She lay a-dying.*"

I. **There is nothing like trouble to drive people to Christ.**—So long as things go on prosperously, many men do not ask favours of Him; but when great trial comes, He is the first to whom they turn. This is one of the most obvious *uses* of trouble.

II. The little daughter "lay a-dying." **This is a universal experience.** The paths of earth run diversely, but they all reach this point at last. No one knows when he will come to it. Sometimes it is reached in early youth. Children should think of it, not sadly, and prepare for it, not regretfully.

III. **The strongest men break down when their children are ill or in danger.**—It is a touching sight to see this father falling at Christ's feet. Stern, hard men often reveal tender-

ness in such times of trial. Behind such sternness and severity there is often a gentle, loving, affectionate heart.—*Miller.*

Ver. 43. "*Could not be healed of any.*"—In like manner—

I. **Sin is a disease of the soul.**

II. When recognised, **recourse is often had to inadequate means of cure.**

III. No sinner, however inveterate his case may be, **need despair of a cure if he will apply to Christ in faith.**

Ver. 44. *Faith's Approach to Christ.*

I. Faith comes with a deep despair of all other help but Christ's.

II. Faith has a Divine power to discover Christ.

III. Faith comes with an implicit trust in Christ.

IV. Faith seeks, for its comfort, close contact with Christ.

V. Faith, with all its imperfections, is accepted by Christ.

VI. Faith feels a change from the touch of Christ.—*Ker.*

The Power of Feeble Faith.

I. Very imperfect faith may be genuine faith.

II. Christ answers the imperfect faith.

III. Christ corrects and confirms an imperfect faith by the very act of answering it.—*Maclaren.*

Faith mingled with superstition.—This is a most encouraging miracle for us to recollect, when we are disposed to think despondingly of the ignorance or superstition of many who are nominally Christian: that He who accepted this woman for her faith, even in error and weakness, may also accept them. Superstition tinged her *thoughts*, but her *feelings* were ardent and pleasing to the Lord: the *head* may have been affected by vain imaginations, but the *heart* was sound.

Ver. 45. "*Who touched Me?*"—The fact that many thronged about Christ, and only one, by reason of her faith, was healed by touching Him, is highly significant. Many in our day are in close contact with the Saviour, in worship, in reading the word of God, and in celebrating the sacraments, who are not healed by Him for want of the faith which this sufferer manifested.

Ver. 46. "*Virtue is gone out of Me.*"—The poor woman had approached His sacred garments as men are said to touch relics, with a blind faith in their mysterious virtue and efficacy. Even *thus* she obtained a blessing, for it *was* faith. But Christ would not so be touched. He will have us know that the fountain of grace is the living God, who beholdeth all things in heaven and earth, and who claims of His rational creatures a reasonable worship.—*Burgon.*

Ver. 47. "*She came trembling.*"—This woman would have borne away a maimed blessing, hardly a blessing at all, had she been suffered to bear it away in secret and unacknowledged, and without being brought into any personal communion with her Healer. She hoped to remain in concealment out of shame, which, however natural, was untimely in this the crisis of her spiritual life. But this hope of hers is graciously defeated. Her heavenly Healer draws her from the concealment she would have chosen; but even here, so far as possible, He spares her; for not before, but after she is healed, does He require the open confession from her lips. She might have found it perhaps altogether too hard had He demanded this of her before. But waiting till the cure is accomplished, He helps her through the narrow way. Altogether spare her this painful passage He could not, for it pertained to her birth into the new life.—*Trench.*

The Necessity for Open Acknowledgment.—It was necessary that this hidden act of faith should come to light in order that (1) Christ might receive

the glory due Him; (2) the suppliant might be delivered from the false shame which would have hindered her openly acknowledging the benefit she had received; and (3) others be led to faith in Christ.

Doubts and Fears.—In this case the cure came first—a cure wrought by Christ without a word or sign. She knew that what had been done in her was a result of her own act, without permission from Jesus, and she could scarcely hope that the faith which suggested it would be accepted as genuine; hence the terror and trembling, the sudden prostration and the full confession.

Confessing associated with Believing.—The apostle Paul lays equal stress upon the necessity of *confessing with the mouth* and of *believing in the heart* (Rom. x. 9): "If thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised Him from the dead, thou shalt be saved."

Ver. 48. "*Thy faith.*"—Jesus wishes her fully to understand that it is not the contact of her hand with the border of His garment that has, as she expected, wrought the cure, but her faith. The idea of a physical and almost magical operation is dispelled, and the moral significance of the miracle is brought into view.

"*Go in peace.*"—If we keep in mind how her uncleanness separated her off as one impure, we shall have here an exact picture of the sinner drawing nigh to the throne of grace, but out of the sense of his impurity not "with boldness," rather with fear and trembling, hardly knowing what there he shall expect; but who is welcomed there, and all his carnal doubtings and questionings at once chidden and expelled, dismissed with the word of an abiding peace resting upon him.—*Trench.*

Ver. 49. "*Trouble not the Master.*"—The words are kindly, and even indicate a measure of faith. "Had He arrived while she was still in life, He might have saved her; but now she is beyond the reach even of His help."

"*Trouble not the Master.*"—The word σκύλλω is closely represented by our word "worry." Its primary application is to sheep, or other tame animals, hunted and torn by dogs or other natural enemies. It is used in this sense in Matt. ix. 36, and is translated in the R.V. by "distressed." But in ordinary colloquial use it came to mean no more than "tease" or "trouble."

The Dead Daughter.

I. **Jesus is never in a hurry.**—It seemed as if there was not a moment to lose. Why did Jesus not hasten? Why did He stop to heal the woman? Because He is never so much engrossed in one case of need that He cannot stop to give attention to another. He is never so pressed for time that we have to wait our turn. No matter what He is doing, He will instantly and always hear our cry of need.

II. **Jesus never waits too long or comes too late.**—It *seemed* as if He had tarried too long this time; but when we see how it all came out, we are sure that He made no mistake. True, the child died while He lingered; but this only gave Him opportunity for a greater miracle. He waited that He might do a more glorious work. There is always some good reason when Christ delays to answer our prayers or come to our help. He waits that He may do far more for us in the end. Even in answering our prayers it is best to let our Lord have His own way as to when and how to come to our help.—*Miller.*

Ver. 50. "*Fear not.*"—The cheering word doubtless was the more encouraging to Jairus, spoken as it was so soon after the miracle which he had witnessed.

Ver. 51. "*Peter, and James, and*

John."—Christ took with Him only those disciples who had hearts most open to receive the fulness of His grace; and it is interesting to notice that Peter long afterwards in Joppa, in performing a similar miracle, imitated exactly the method followed by Jesus in the house of Jairus (Acts ix. 40).

Ver. 52. "*She is not dead, but sleepeth.*"—She did but sleep till He who is the resurrection and the life came to waken her. In accordance with our Lord's teaching here the apostolic and later Church has instinctively substituted "sleep" for "death," in speaking of the believer's removal from this world (see Acts vii. 60; 1 Thess. iv. 14).

Ver. 54. "*Put them all forth.*"—1. Their presence was not needed—they were mourners for the dead, and Christ was about to awaken the damsel from the sleep of death. 2. Their boisterous grief was incongruous with the solemnity of the occasion. 3. Their scornful laughter at His saying rendered them unworthy to witness the deed of power.

"*Took her by the hand.*"—Our Lord adapted His manner of working miracles to the circumstances of the occasions. He called the four-days dead Lazarus from the grave with a loud voice (John xi. 43); but of this youthful maiden it is said that He took her by the hand and called her, "Damsel, arise," and woke her gently from the sleep of death.—*Wordsworth.*

"*Maid, arise.*"—One of the Fathers remarks that if Christ had not named the child all the dead would have arisen at His word.

Ver. 55. "*To give her meat.*"—An indication of an affectionate care which, even in the midst of the greatest things, forgets not the least, and which would provide for the necessity of the exhausted child on her return to life—*Stier.*

"*Give her meat.*"—Perhaps, too, partaking of food was to be a sign of actual restoration to bodily life, as when Christ Himself after His resurrection said, "Have ye here any meat?" (chap. xxiv. 41).

Ver. 56. "*Tell no man.*"—The reason for the prohibition was doubtless to avoid a notoriety, which might excite the people and give occasion for tumultuous proceedings. The disciples would, of course, obey; but the parents could scarcely conceal their feelings of gratitude.—*Speaker's Commentary.*

Silence enjoined.—Observe the different courses followed by Christ in these two cases: she who sought healing by stealth was constrained to confess openly the boon she had obtained; he who publicly appealed for the healing of his daughter is enjoined to be silent about the miracle.

CHAPTER IX.

CRITICAL NOTES.

Ver. 1. **His twelve disciples.**—A better reading is, "the twelve" (R.V.): the reading in the text is probably taken from the parallel passage in St. Matthew's Gospel. **Power and authority.**—*I.e.* ability and right: the one applies to the endowment with special gifts, the other to the right of using them on fitting occasions.

Ver. 3. **Neither staves.**—Rather, "neither staff" (R.V.). In the parallel passage in St. Mark the permission is given to take a staff. A comparison of the passages removes the apparent discrepancy. The apostles were to make no special preparation for the journey: if each had a staff for walking, let him take it, but not provide one specially. **Scrip.**—Leather wallet.

Ver. 4. **Whatsoever house, etc.**—Not to seek for comfortable quarters, or to change about unnecessarily.

Ver. 5. **Shake off the very dust.**—As a sign that all intercourse was at an end, and that the messengers of Christ left those who rejected Him to bear the full responsibility of their sinful conduct (cf. Acts xiii. 51, xviii. 6). **Against them.**—A stronger expression than in the parallel passage in St. Mark, where we read, "for a testimony unto them" (vi. 11, R.V.).

Ver. 6. **Preaching the gospel.**—Lit. "evangelising": it is a different word from that in ver. 2, also translated "preach"—which means "to proclaim as heralds" the kingdom of God. The instructions to the apostles are given at greater length in Matt. x.

Ver. 7. **Herod the tetrarch.**—Herod Antipas (a son of Herod the Great), who now ruled in Galilee: of frivolous and dissolute character, with a vein of superstition and cunning running through it. He was at Jerusalem when Christ suffered, and was one of His judges. **All that was done by Him.**—The best MSS. omit "by Him": omitted in R.V. It is probable that the mission of the twelve drew more widespread attention to the work and claims of Christ, and that this reference to Herod is an indication of the fact. **Of some.**—*I.e.* "by some."

Ver. 8.—Notice the apposite use of phrases relative to John and to Elijah: "that John was *risen from the dead*," and that Elias *had appeared*"—Elijah having been translated without tasting of death. **One of the old prophets.**—Jeremiah was expected by some to appear again (cf. Matt. xvi. 14). See 2 Esdras ii. 18; 2 Macc. ii. 4-8, xv. 13-16.

Ver. 9. **John have I beheaded.**—The "I" is emphatic both here and in the second clause of the verse: perhaps it is not too much to say that the form of the sentence indicates the growing concern and alarm excited in the mind of Herod by Christ's increasing fame. **Desired to see Him.**—Rather, "sought to see Him" (R.V.). His desire was at last gratified when Pilate sent Jesus to him as a prisoner; but his wish that Christ would perform some miracle met with no response from the Saviour (see chap. xxiii. 7-12).

Ver. 10. **Went aside privately.**—The reason of this retirement is stated by St. Matthew (xiv. 13) to have been Christ's hearing of the violent death of John the Baptist. It was a precautionary measure, rendered all the more necessary by Herod's desire to see Jesus. St. Mark says that it was for the sake of quiet (vi. 31)—as the excitement produced by the teaching of Jesus and His apostles was very great. There is no necessary discrepancy in the narratives: the retirement in question may have taken place for more reasons than one. **City called Bethsaida.**—This is not the Bethsaida near Capernaum on the west of the lake, but Bethsaida Julias on the north, in the tetrarchy of Philip, near which was "a desert place."

Ver. 11. **Followed Him.**—Jesus went by boat, and the people, seeing the direction in which He sailed, went thither on foot (Mark vi. 33). **Received them.**—*I.e.* did not dismiss them, though their following Him defeated one of the purposes for which He had sought retirement.

Ver. 13. **Five loaves.**—*I.e.* barley loaves (John vi. 9), the food of the poor. The miracle that follows is the only one narrated by all four evangelists.

Ver. 14. **Five thousand.**—Men, besides women and children (Matt. xiv. 21).

Ver. 16. **Blessed them.**—"Agreeably to the Jewish custom, by which it was usual for the head of the family, at every meal, to pronounce a blessing on the food, previously to partaking of it, commencing with the words, 'Blessed art thou, O God, who bringest bread out of the earth,' etc." (*Bloomfield*).

Ver. 17. **Baskets.**—The word used in all the narratives of this miracle is κόφινος—a wicker-basket, such as the Jews were accustomed to carry their food in when they were on a journey. The word used in the account of the other miracle of the kind (Matt. xv. 37; Mark viii. 8) is σπυρίς—a large rope-basket, capable of holding a man's body (cf. Acts ix. 25). St. Luke omits a long series of events which followed this miracle, and which are related in Matt. xiv.-xvi. 12; Mark vi. 45-viii. 30; and John vi.

Ver. 18. **It came to pass.**—This took place on the way to Cæsarea Philippi: this was a town in the valley of the upper Jordan near Paneas, which had been enlarged and fortified by the tetrarch Philip. **Praying.**—This circumstance is peculiar to St. Luke. **The people.**—Lit. "the multitudes" (R.V.).

Ver. 22. **Elders and chief priests and scribes.**—The three classes of which the Sanhedrim was composed.

Ver. 23. **To them all.**—*I.e.* to the multitude as well as to His disciples. **Will come.**—*I.e.* "desire to come." **His cross.**—A prophetic allusion to the manner of His own death: in it there is an anticipation of the part the Gentiles were to play in putting Him to death as the cross was a Roman and not a Jewish instrument of punishment.

Ver. 24. **Whosoever will save.**—*I.e.* "desire to save," as in ver. 23.

Ver. 25. **Be cast away.**—Rather, "suffer damage," as opposed to "gain": R.V. "forfeit his own self."

Ver. 27. **Till they see the kingdom of God.**—As is evident from the connection in which it stands, the first fulfilment of these words was in the Transfiguration.

Ver. 28. **About an eight days.**—*I.e.* including the day on which the words were spoken and the day on which they were fulfilled. St. Mark says "six days," reckoning the intervening time. **Took.**—"Took with Him" is a better reading (R.V.). **A mountain.**—Rather, "the mountain" (R.V.). It is probable that this was Mount Hermon, as it is the only place within the neighbourhood of Cæsarea Philippi that satisfies the requirements of the case. The summit of Tabor, which is the traditional site of the Transfiguration, seems to have been occupied by a fortress at this time. Besides, Tabor is in Galilee, while from Mark ix. 30 we would understand that Jesus and His disciples went into Galilee after this event. **To pray.**—This is peculiar to St. Luke.

Ver. 29. **White and glistering.**—The "and" is not in the original: the phrase might be rendered "sparkling white." There is perhaps a reference in the word translated "glistering" or "sparkling" to the lightning-flash.

Ver. 31. **Spake of His decease.**—Lit. "departure" out of the world—a word which probably includes His resurrection and ascension. The other evangelists say that Moses and Elijah "talked" with Jesus: St. Luke alone tells the subject of their conversation.

Ver. 32. **Heavy with sleep.**—This seems to indicate that the vision took place at night: in accordance with this, we read in ver. 37 of their descending from the mountain "next day." **And when they were awake.**—R.V. "when they were fully awake," or "having remained awake" (margin). The idea seems to be that they struggled successfully against the inclination to sleep.

Ver. 33. **As they departed from Him.**—*I.e.* Moses and Elijah. A better rendering would be, "as they were parting from Him" (R.V.); or, "as they were being separated from Him." **Good for us.**—Good, delightful, pleasant. **Tabernacles.**—Or, "booths."

Ver. 34. **A cloud.**—Matthew, "a bright cloud": probably we are to understand the Shekinah—the symbol of God's presence.

Ver. 35. **My beloved Son.**—Another reading is, "My Son, my chosen" (R.V.): this is a very probable reading, as, apart from MS. evidence in favour of it, it is more easy to imagine "beloved" (which occurs in Matthew and Mark) being substituted for "chosen," than "chosen" for "beloved."

Ver. 36. **Was past.**—R.V. "when the voice came," with "was past" in the margin. Lit. the phrase is, "when the voice had been," *i.e.* had ceased. **They kept it close.**—According to the command of Jesus (Matthew and Mark).

Ver. 37. **Much people.**—Better, "a great multitude" (R.V.).

Ver. 38. **A man of the company cried out.**—Rather, "a man [came] from the multitude [and] cried" (R.V.). **Master.**—*I.e.* teacher. **Mine only child.**—Peculiar to St. Luke: he notes the same fact in the case of the widow's son at Nain, and the daughter of Jairus.

Ver. 39. **He suddenly crieth out.**—The passage might be rendered, "it suddenly crieth out," *i.e.* the evil spirit; but the A.V. is the more natural of the two. The symptoms described are those of epilepsy.

Ver. 42. **And tare him.**—Rather, "tare him grievously" (R.V.); or, "convulsed him" (margin of R.V.). **Delivered him again to his father.**—There is a peculiar note of tenderness in St. Luke's narratives of Christ's miracles. Cf. chap. vii. 15.

Ver. 43. **Mighty power.**—Rather, "majesty" (R.V.). **But while they, etc.**—"St. Luke places in marked contrast the wonder and admiration excited by the works of Christ and the announcement of His approaching death. The words of Christ were calculated to check the disciples' hope of an earthly kingdom" (*Speaker's Commentary*).

Ver. 45. **Hid from them, that they perceived it not.**—Rather, "that they should not perceive it" (R.V.). The writer clearly refers to a Divine purpose that they should not at present be aware of the full meaning of these words.

Ver. 46. **A reasoning.**—Rather, "a dispute."

Ver. 47. **Perceiving the thought of their heart.**—The word "thought" is the same as that in ver. 46, translated "reasoning." We are naturally led to understand that the disputation was not carried on or fully spoken out in the presence of Jesus. **A child.**—Rather, "a little child" (R.V.).

Ver. 48.—*Meyer* explains the idea of the passage as follows: This child, the child whom Jesus sets before His followers, stands as a type of the humble and childlike disciple; and (the dispute having been about the comparative greatness of the disciples) such a disciple is the greatest: he is so honoured by God that he stands on earth as the representative of Christ, and of God Himself, since "he that is [willingly] least among you all, the same shall be [truly] great."

Ver. 49. **In Thy name.**—The words "in My name" (ver. 48) evidently suggested to John what he and others of the disciples had seen being done in the name of Christ. He was shocked at seeing one who was not of their company doing work which was not always possible for them to do (ver. 40).

Ver. 50. **Against us is for us.**—A better reading is, "against you is for you" (R.V.). The meaning of the two is, however, virtually the same: "us" includes both Christ and His

people. Another, and at first sight a contradictory maxim is found in Matt. xii. 30: "He who is not with Me is against Me." The whole section (ix. 51—xviii. 28) is the record of our Lord's last journey from Galilee to Jerusalem; and most of the incidents related in it are peculiar to St. Luke. It was evidently not a direct journey, but a "slow, solemn, and public progress," covering a period of some months. In John x. 22 we find our Lord in Jerusalem at the feast of the Dedication (about the end of December). After that feast He retired to Bethany beyond Jordan: from this retreat He came to Bethany near Jerusalem to raise Lazarus from the dead: then He again retired to Ephraim, and six days before the Passover He returned to Jerusalem for the last time.

Ver. 51. **When the time was come.**—Rather, "when the days were well-nigh come" (R.V.). **That He should be received up.**—The word translated "received up" means His assumption or ascension into heaven. **He stedfastly set His face.**—A Hebraism, with reference probably to Isa. l. 7. **Sent messengers.**—The action, which contrasts with His former avoidance of publicity, is to be explained by His now formally avowing Himself to be the Christ.

Ver. 52. **Village of the Samaritans.**—Samaria lay in the direct route from Galilee to Jerusalem.

Ver. 53. **Did not receive Him, etc.**—The question as to the comparative claims of the Samaritan temple at Gerizim and the Jewish Temple at Jerusalem was distinctly involved: Christ's preference of the latter led to the Samaritans' rejection of Him.

Ver. 54. **James and John.**—Whom He had surnamed "Sons of Thunder" (Boanerges, Mark iii. 17): this ebullition of fiery zeal highly characteristic of them. **Even as Elias did.**—See 2 Kings i. 10-12. This phrase is omitted from R.V., as it is not found in some of the earliest MSS. It may be a gloss, but if so it is of great antiquity, as the words are found in nearly all other MSS., versions, and writings of the Fathers. They may have been omitted accidentally, or on dogmatic grounds—to avoid apparent disparagement of the Old Testament. The recent vision on the mountain (ver. 30), when Christ received honour from Moses and Elijah and from God, may have suggested the proposal to chastise the inhospitable Samaritans.

Ver. 55. **He turned.**—Christ was evidently walking at the head of the company of disciples when the messengers returned with the tidings that the Samaritans refused to receive Him. **And said, Ye know not . . . save them** (ver. 56).—These two sentences also are omitted in the R.V., on the ground that the most important MSS. do not contain them. They do not, however, read like interpolations: they breathe too Divine a tone of thought, and are too characteristic of the Saviour, to have originated in any such way. So far as MS. evidence goes there is less authority for the doubtful sentence in ver. 56, "For the Son of man," etc., than for the other in ver. 55. **Ye know not.**—*I.e.* "Ye think ye are animated by the Spirit that moved Elijah, but ye are mistaken: it is personal irritation, and not zeal for God, that underlies your suggestion." Some prefer to take the sentence as a question, "Know ye not," etc., *i.e.* that the Spirit of Christ is different from that of Elijah? It is doubtful, however, whether this rendering is grammatically possible.

Ver. 56. **Another village.**—Probably a Galilæan and not a Samaritan village—as, if it had been the latter, we should have expected some remark upon the more noble character of its inhabitants. It would appear that when this incident occurred Christ and disciples were on the border between Galilee and Samaria.

Ver. 57. **In the way.**—Perhaps to the other village. It may be, however, that this is an indefinite form of expression, owing to the fact that St. Luke here departs from chronological order. St. Matthew distinctly states that these incidents occurred at an earlier time (viii. 19-22). It is unlikely that the same requests or proposals should have been made to Christ, and should have been answered by Him in the same way, on two separate occasions. **I will follow Thee, etc.**—His self-confidence is akin to that of St. Peter (John xiii. 37).

Ver. 58. **Nests.**—Rather, "shelters": birds do not take refuge in their nests.

Ver. 60. **Let the dead, etc.**—Any one, even one spiritually dead, could attend to this subordinate duty of burying the dead: a higher duty, which he could not delegate to another, was incumbent upon this disciple. Some have interpreted the man's request as his asking for permission to remain at home until the death of his father; but this is improbable. Had his father been lying dead at that moment, the disciple would scarcely have been among the crowd. *Farrar* suggests that his desire was to go and give a farewell funeral feast and put everything in order. Some detail which would have made the matter clear has perhaps been omitted. It may be that the father was hopelessly ill, so that the delay in all probability would not have been for long.

Ver. 61. **Bid them farewell.**—Cf. with this the circumstances of Elisha's call (1 Kings xix. 20). What was granted in one case, it might not have been safe to grant in another. This is a more reasonable explanation than to hold that Christ demands a more complete self-devotion than Elijah had any right to command. This third case is peculiar to St. Luke.

Ver. 62. **The plough.**—The kind of plough used in the East was easily overturned: a labourer who looked back regretfully, with his heart fixed on other things than his work, would be of little profit to his master.

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 1—6.

The Servants sent forth.—The very summary account of the trial mission of the twelve here given presents only the salient points of the charge to them, and in its condensation makes these the more emphatic.

I. **The gift of power.**—Miracle-working in various forms is specified. We may call that Christ's greatest miracle. That he could by His mere will endow a dozen men with such power is more, if degree come into view at all, than that He Himself should exercise it. But there is a lesson in the fact for all ages—even those in which miracles have ceased. Christ gives before He commands, and sends no man into the field without filling his basket with seed-corn. His gifts assimilate the receiver to Himself; and only in the measure in which His servants possess the power which is like His own, and drawn from Him, can they prepare His coming, or prepare hearts for it.

II. **Equipment.**—The special commands here given were repealed by Jesus when He gave His last commands. In their letter they apply only to that one journey, but in their spirit they are of universal and permanent obligation. The twelve were to travel light. Food, luggage, and money, the three requisites of a traveller, were to be "conspicuous by their absence." That was repealed afterwards, and instructions given of an opposite character, because, after His ascension, the Church was to live more and more by ordinary means; but in this journey they were to learn to trust Him without means, that afterwards they might trust Him in the means. He showed them the purpose of these restrictions in the act of abrogating them. "When I sent you forth without purse . . . lacked ye anything?" But the spirit remains unabrogated, and the minimum of outward provision is likeliest to call out the maximum of faith. We are in more danger from having too much baggage than from too little. And the one indispensable requirement is that, whatever the quantity, it should hinder neither our march nor our trust in Him who alone is wealth and food.

III. **The disposition of the messengers.**—It is not to be self-indulgent. They are not to change quarters for the sake of greater comfort. They have not gone out to make a pleasure tour, but to preach, and so are to stay where they are welcomed and to make the best of it. Delicate regard for kindly hospitality, if offered by ever so poor a house, and scrupulous abstinence from whatever might suggest interested motives, must mark the true servant. That rule is not out of date. If ever a herald of Christ falls under suspicion of caring more about life's comforts than about his work, good-bye to his usefulness. If ever he does so care, whether he be suspected of it or no, spiritual power will ebb from him.

IV. **The messenger's demeanour to the rejecters of their message.**—Shaking the dust off the sandal is an emblem of solemn renunciation of participation, and perhaps of repudiating of responsibility. It meant certainly, "We have no more to do with you," and possibly, "Your blood be on your own heads." This journey of the twelve was meant to be of short duration, and to cover much ground, and therefore no time was to be spent unnecessarily. Their message was brief, and as well told quickly as slowly. The whole conditions of work now are different. Sometimes, perhaps, a Christian is warranted in solemnly declaring to those who receive not his message that he will have no more to say to them. That may do more than all his other words. But such cases are rare; and the rule that it is safest to follow is rather that of love, which despairs of none, and, though often repelled, returns with pleading, and, if it have told often in vain, tells now with tears, the story of the love that never abandons the most obstinate.

Such were the prominent points of this first Christian mission. They who carry Christ's banner in the world must be possessed of power (His gift), must be lightly weighted, must care less for comfort than for service, must solemnly warn of the consequences of rejecting the message, and they will not fail to cast out devils and to heal many that are sick.—*Maclaren.*

SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS ON VERSES 1—6.

Vers. 1-6. *The Commission of the Twelve.*

I. **What Christ bestowed on them.**—1. Power—ability to do their work. 2. Authority—the right to do it.

II. **The instructions He imparted to them.**—1. They were to live very simply. 2. They were to be prepared for failures.—*W. Taylor.*

Vers. 1-5.—*The nature and the importance of this mission.*

I. **Christ the source of power and authority**: able to deliver sinners from Satan's bondage, and to sustain His servants.

II. **The duty of the ministers of Christ to attend to the necessities, temporal and spiritual, of men,** and to be indifferent to their own ease and comfort.

III. **Men are inexcusable when they reject and despise God's message,** and every circumstance will turn to a testimony against them.

The Miracles and the Doctrine.—Miracles of *mercy* proved the doctrine to be of God; the doctrine calling men to *repentance* proved that the miracles were wrought by the power of God.

Ver. 1. "*Power and authority.*"—Ability to act and the right to exercise it. The evil spirits will *owe* obedience because of the *authority* with which the apostles are clothed, and will *pay* it because of the *power* they possess.

Power in Proportion to Faith.—Power is given by God, but becomes ours only by faith, and is in proportion to our faith. In ver. 40 we read of this power proving ineffectual from lack of faith.

Ver. 2. *A Temporary Commission.*—They are now sent to proclaim through Judæa that the time of the promised restoration and salvation is at hand: at a future period Christ will appoint them to spread the gospel through the whole world. Here He employs them as *assistants* only, to secure attention to Him where His voice could not reach: afterwards He will commit into their hands the office of teaching which He had discharged.

"*To preach the kingdom.*"—We may suppose that the apostles would give some narrative of the life of Christ, reproduce some of His teaching, lay stress upon the importance of the message He had charged them with, and summon all to repentance and faith. The preaching was largely in anticipation of great blessings to be wrought by Jesus: after Pentecost their preaching was, 'we announce the redemption which has been fulfilled, in order that ye too may have fellowship with us, and our fellowship is with the Father, and with His Son Jesus Christ' (1 John i. 1-3).

"*He sent them.*"—Christ sent the apostles just as the sun sends out its beams, the rose the sweetness of its scent, the fire its sparks; and just as the sun appears in its beams, as the rose is felt in its scent, and the fire in its sparks, so is Christ recognised and apprehended in the virtues and powers of the apostles.—*Chrysostom.*

Ver. 3. *The Spirit of the Instructions.*—The general spirit of the instructions merely is, Go forth in the simplest, humblest manner, with no hindrances to your movements, and in

perfect faith; and this, as history shows, has always been the method of the most successful missions. At the same time we must remember that the *wants* of the twelve were very small, and were secured by the open hospitality of the East.—*Farrar.*

An Ample Equipment.—This prohibition of all provision is, if narrowly examined, itself a glorious equipment; for He who thus forbids thereby permits and commands them to expect in faith what they need, and to be fully assured beforehand of that which they afterwards (chap. xxii. 35) were constrained to confess—that they should lack nothing.—*Stier.*

Ver. 4. *Two Evils to be avoided.*—1. The apostles were to be careful not to seem to be unduly interested in matters concerning their own convenience and comfort during their stay. 2. They were not to excite jealousy by preferring one family to another, when all should be equally the objects of their solicitude. Great harm is done to the cause of Christ when His ministers come under reasonable suspicion of acting from selfish and interested motives, and when they fail to manifest the courtesy and tact which are necessary for successful work among different classes of people. Most, if not all, of the disputes that spring up in Christian congregations are due to neglect of the one or the other of these rules.

Ver. 5. "*Will not receive you.*"—The despisers are guilty of two offences:—

I. **Ingratitude** in refusing the inestimable treasure of the gospel.

II. **Rebellion** in rejecting the message sent from their King. No crime is more offensive to God than contempt of His word.

"*Shake off the dust.*"—A solemn act which might have two meanings: (1) we take nothing of yours with us—we free ourselves from all contact and communion with you; or (2) we free ourselves from all participation in your condemnation—will have nothing in common with those who have rejected God's message. It was a custom of the Pharisees, when they entered Judæa from a Gentile land, to do this act, as renouncing all communion with Gentiles. Cf. the symbolical action of Pilate (Matt. xxvii. 24).—*Alford.*

Warnings to the Impenitent still needed.—The spirit of the injunction runs through all the ages, and has come down to our day. And hence a very heavy responsibility rests on that minister of the gospel who gives no intimation of any kind to the impenitent with whom he associates, that they are impure in the sight of God, and in danger of eternal separation from the good.—*Morison.*

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 7—9.

Herod Antipas.—The three synoptical evangelists furnish us with various details of the history of Herod Antipas, which, when combined, present a striking picture of the downward progress of one who has entered on a career of crime. He appears as an Eastern despot, capricious, sensual, and superstitious; who speaks with the pride of an Ahasuerus, and yet is the slave of a Jezebel; in whose earlier history there were hopeful elements, but who in the end seems to have outlived them all, and to have been hopelessly hardened and reprobate.

I. **The hopeful period in his life.**—He is affected by the widespread movement inaugurated by John the Baptist. Righteousness, though presented in its sternest form by the preacher of the wilderness, compels his respect and

admiration. He cannot, either, be insensible to the power and authority which clothe God's servant; and so he gladly listens to John, and even goes so far as to attempt to observe some of his precepts. So far he stands on the same level with the soldiers, publicans, and harlots, who were moved to outward reformation of life in view of the coming of the kingdom of God.

II. **The turning-point in his life.**—He is reminded by the Baptist of the unlawful connection he had formed with the wife of his own brother, and is forced to decide between the claims of righteousness and the promptings of evil passions. He silences the voice of conscience, and imprisons the man who had had the courage to tell him of his sin. His vacillation between good and evil is shown by his treatment of the Baptist: he protects John for a time against the rage of Herodias, and though he keeps him a prisoner he allows his disciples to have access to him. But once he has failed to take up a decided stand against evil, he grows daily weaker and weaker, and at last he consents to give orders for the execution of God's prophet. He is indeed entrapped into the murder of the Baptist, but the snare that catches him is of the weakest, flimsiest character. Infinitely better would it have been for him to break his word than to dip his hands in the blood of one whom he knew was holy, and to do this for the gratification of a hatred which was base and cruel, and with which he did not sympathise.

III. **His final state.**—He is shaken with superstitious fears when he is told of the mighty works of Christ and of His apostles. In place of the one preacher of righteousness whom he had slain, another and even greater has arisen, and is multiplying His work twelvefold by means of those whom He has sent forth through the length and breadth of the land. "He desired to see Him." But it was the curiosity not of faith, but of unbelief—of a heart hardening, if not already hardened, against holy impressions. He doubtless heard of our Saviour's heavenly discourses, of His deeds of love, and miracles of mercy; but the report of these things wrought none of those blessed effects on Herod which they produced on guileless and innocent hearts. His curiosity, when at length he saw Jesus as a prisoner, proved to be of the most frivolous kind: "he hoped to have seen some miracle done by Him" (chap. xxiii. 8). And he who had slain the Baptist became associated with Pilate in the murder of the Prince of life.

SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS ON VERSES 7—9.

Ver. 7. *The Cowardice of Sinners.*—It is the curse of unbelief that a cowardly heart is given to sinners: "the sound of a shaken leaf shall chase them: and they shall flee as fleeing from a sword; and they shall fall when none pursueth" (Lev. xxvi. 36: cf. Job xv. 20, 21).

Ver. 8. "*That Elijah had appeared.*"—Elijah was expected to appear before the coming of Christ. Hence the inquiry in John i. 21, and in Matt. xvii. 11; hence also the suspicion expressed in ver. 19; and hence the scoff of the populace as our Saviour hung upon the cross—"Let be, let us see whether Elias will come to save Him."

Ver. 9. "*He desired to see Him.*"—The desire was fulfilled; but no sign of grace to Herod was implied by this fulfilment. For Christ did not come to Herod of His own free-will, but was brought into his presence by those who had seized and bound Him.

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 10—17.

Bread from Heaven.—The apostles needed rest after their journey. Our Lord suggested a brief retirement, and sought it at the Eastern Bethsaida, a couple of miles up the Jordan from its point of entrance to the lake. The curious crowd following on foot effectually destroyed all hope of retirement. Without a sigh or sign of impatience Jesus welcomed them. He received them patiently, because "He was moved with pity" (St. Mark), and saw in their rude crowding about Him the token of their lack of guides and teachers. They seemed to Him not merely a mob of intrusive sight-seers, but like a huddled mass of unshepherded sheep. Christ's heart felt more lovingly than ours because His eye saw deeper, and His eye saw deeper because His heart felt more lovingly. If we lived nearer Him, we should see, as He did, enough in every man to draw out pity and help, even though he should jostle us and interfere with us. Coming to the miracle itself, we may divide the narrative into three parts: the preliminaries, the miracle, and the abundant overplus.

I. **The preliminaries.**—Our Lord leads up to the miracle by forcing home on the minds of the disciples the extent of the need, and the utter inadequacy of their resources to meet it, and by calling on them and the crowd for an act of obedience, which must have seemed ludicrous to many of them. The strange suggestion that the disciples should feed the crowd must have appeared to them absurd, but it was meant to bring out the clear recognition of the smallness of their supply. Therein lie great lessons. Commands are given and apparent duties laid on us, in order that we may find out how impotent we are to do them. It can never be our duty to do what we cannot do; but it is often our duty to attempt tasks to which we are conspicuously inadequate, in the confidence that He who gives them has laid them on us to drive us to Himself, and there to find sufficiency. The best preparation of His servants for their work in the world is the discovery that their own stores are small. Those who have learned that it is their task to feed the multitude, and who have said "We have no more than such and such scanty resources," are prepared to be the distributers of His all-sufficient supply.

II. **The miracle.**—Like that of the draught of fishes, it was not called forth by the cry of suffering, nor was the need which it met one beyond the reach of ordinary means. It was certainly a miracle most plainly meant to strike the popular mind, and the enthusiasm excited by it, according to John's account, was foreseen by Christ. Why did He evoke enthusiasm which He did not mean to gratify? For the very purpose of bringing the carnal expectations of the crowd to a head, that they might be the more conclusively disappointed. The miracle and its sequel sifted and sent away many disciples, and were meant to do so. He blessed the bread. What He blesses is blessed, for His words are deeds, and communicate the blessing which they speak. The point at which the miraculous multiplication of the food came in is left undetermined. The pieces grew under His touch, and the disciples always found His hands full when they came back with their own empty. The symbolical aspect of the miracle is set forth in the great discourse which follows it in St. John's Gospel. Jesus is the bread of God which came down from heaven. That bread is broken for us. Not in His incarnation alone, but in His death, is He the food of the world; and we have not only to "eat His flesh," but to "drink His blood," if we would live. Nor can we lose sight of the symbol of His servants' task. They are the distributers of the heaven-sent bread. If they will but take their poor stores to Jesus, with the acknowledgment of their insufficiency, He will turn them into inexhaustible supplies. What Christ blesses is always enough.

III. The abundant overplus.—Twelve baskets were filled: that is to say, each apostle, who had helped to feed the hungry, had a basketful to bring off for future wants. The "broken pieces" were not crumbs that littered the grass, but the portions that came from Christ's hands. His provision is more than enough for a hungry world, and they who share it out among their fellows have their own possession of it increased. There is no surer way to receive the full sweetness and blessing of the gospel than to carry it to some hungry soul. These full baskets teach us, too, that in Christ's gift of Himself as the bread of life there is ever more than at any given moment we can appropriate. Other food cloys and does not satisfy, and leaves us starving. Christ satisfies and does not cloy, and we have always remaining, yet to be enjoyed, the boundless stores which neither eternity will age nor a universe feeding on them consume.—*Maclaren.*

"*Make them sit down.*"

I. The command to make them sit down by fifties in a company was expressive of **the authority of Christ over human multitudes whenever He comes into contact with them.** There were five thousand men besides women and children present, and, according to three evangelists out of the four, special emphasis is attached to this command, "Make them sit down." There was no doubt a growing confusion at this time: the night was at hand, and the multitude, wearied by a day of restlessness under a burning Eastern sky, and largely irritated by discussion, and carried away by the back-wave of the day's excitement, had become well-nigh unmanageable. In the presence of that confusion the disciples had readily given their rough and ready solution, "Send the multitude away, that they may go into the towns and country round about, and lodge and get victuals: for we are here in a desert place." Christ, on the contrary, said in brief, "Nay, make them sit down." He, as the master of assemblies, did not seek to rid Himself of the confusion by ridding Himself of the multitude. In this respect, as well as in a thousand other respects, He towered above all others. He was never excited, and never doubtful as to what should be done; but was always calmly confident amid the seething passions and conflicting voices of human multitudes. Thus, at the very outset, we find this distinctive attribute of Christ's ministry. He never lost command, but was ever calm and masterful as the Lord of men.

II. But this command was not only expressive of the unique authority of Jesus Christ; it was also an illustration of His **most tender consideration for those who needed it most.** John tells us that only the men sat in fifties; and Mark intimates the same. There were women and children there, but, as Matthew too asserts, the five thousand consisted of men apart from women and children. Luke tells us that they sat down "by fifties in a company." The words which Mark uses suggest that the multitude looked like a garden of flowers, well arranged in groups of living men, turning their faces as expectant to the Christ as the flowers turn theirs to the sun. But observe that women and children were not in these regular ranks of panting humanity. No one has been in a throng of five thousand men, when there has been rushing movement, discord, irritation, and weariness, without being impressed with the danger for women and children, especially when the overwhelming majority were men. Here we have one of the many beautiful touches of the Gospel narrative—the thoughtfulness of Christ concerning the weak. Order is the first law of heaven, and when Christ would perform this miracle order was the first essential. Thoughtful consideration for the weak who were in danger of being trodden underfoot was the second—"Make the men sit down"—so that in addition to the orderliness of their own ranks there may be opportunity for the women and the children to

have their share. Christ never overlooks any section of the community, ignores no small one in the greatest mass of human life.

III. This command **awakened new hopes and expectations in the hearts of the assembled multitude.** They had walked along the northern coast of the Sea of Galilee into that desert place on the eastern coast, and were wearied by the journey and the fatigue of the day. The length of the journey would make it probable that the women and children were few compared with the men. This is another subtle proof of the accuracy of Gospel records. The few, however, were not overlooked. All were weary—especially the women and children—with the events of the day. Their hopes had to a large extent been satisfied, yet weariness and hunger had taken possession of them. Now Christ awakened new hopes in their hearts. No one awakens within the heart of man such expectations as Jesus Christ. They soon came to the conclusion that the great Teacher was about to feed them. Where all was to come from they did not know, save that it would come from the same source of power and of grace as many other provisions for the need and sorrow of men had come in that unique ministry; and so every one in that vast throng was encouraged to hope for and expect some wonderful miraculous provision.

IV. By this command **Christ willingly subjected Himself to a new test of His Divine power and sympathy.** There was no necessity for His doing this save the irresistible promptings of His great love. The multitudes might have been dismissed, and yet He would have preserved His character apart from this further manifestation of His divinity. No one expected it; even His own disciples did not. It was not, therefore, done in an emergency; but this command going forth subjected Him willingly and voluntarily to a new test. That is what Christ ever does. Almost every command He gives to men subjects Him to new tests. "Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ," that is the command; "and thou shalt be saved" is the promise. He stakes His honour, and stands or falls by every command that He gives us which has a latent promise in its folds.

V. By this command Christ **subjected the disciples to a new test.** They had to exercise sufficient confidence in Him to go and tell the multitude to sit down and wait for their meal. They had just been arguing with Christ. Two hundred pennyworth of bread would not suffice, according to their calculation. There was a boy present, it was true, who had brought his five loaves and two fishes; but what were they among so many? Now that is just what is taking place every day. Every faithful messenger of Jesus Christ, who goes forth to meet the wants of men and women, knows that, apart from the power of the Christ behind him, his task is one of forlorn hope and sad humiliation. But every mission has its test, and every man of God who has gone forth at the Master's bidding has gone forth with the full assurance that he cannot be disappointed or humiliated.

VI. This command, moreover, came as **a test for the multitude.** Every one in that great multitude had to obey in anticipation of the feast. Now that was pre-eminently an act of faith. They had confidence that Jesus Christ would not have sent the message to them unless He meant to feed them. And still that is all that is required—that men should just do as He tells them, namely, look for the blessing and wait for it. How many there are unprepared to do that, and yet are surprised if they are not fed! There was not a man among the five thousand foolish enough to act in that fashion. "Make them sit down by fifties in a company. *And they did so.*"—*Davies.*

SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS ON VERSES 10—17.

Ver. 10. "*A desert place.*"—The two miracles of feeding the multitudes were performed in desert places: this circumstance (1) brought out most impressively the greatness of Christ's power, who could, apart from ordinary means, feed so large a number of people; and (2) reminded those present of the miraculous way in which God had for forty years sustained their nation in the wilderness.

The Christian Uses of Leisure.

I. **Communion with outward nature.**
II. **Intercourse with fellow-believers.**
III. **A closer converse with Christ Himself.**—*Ker.*

Ver. 11. "*The people . . . followed Him.*"—The unexpected arrival of the people defeats the plan Jesus had formed. But the Lord is deeply touched by the love towards Him manifested by this multitude, which were like sheep without a shepherd (Mark vi. 34): He "receives" them with tender loving-kindness; and while crowds arrive one after another in the course of the morning (John vi. 5), a thought springs up in His heart. What it was St. John tells us (*ibid.* 4). The Passover season was drawing near. Jesus had not been able to go up to Jerusalem with His disciples, so violent was the rage of His enemies. So then in this unexpected gathering, like that of the people in Jerusalem, He discerns a signal from heaven, and He resolves to hold a feast in the wilderness to take the place of the Passover for those who surround Him.—*Godet.*

Ver. 12. "*Go into the towns.*"—This miracle was not urgently called for by the physical necessities of the multitude, as in the other instance of miraculous feeding (Mark viii. 2, 3). The disciples themselves were of the opinion that in the neighbouring villages and country the people might get food. "It was a symbolic, didactic, *critical* miracle. It was meant to teach, and also to test: to supply a text for the subsequent sermon (recorded by St. John), and a touchstone to try the character of those who had followed Jesus with such enthusiasm. It was meant to say, 'I Jesus am the bread of life. What this bread is to your bodies, I Myself am to your souls'" (*Bruce*).

Vers. 13-16. "*Took . . . blessed . . . gave.*"—The significant points in the action of that day were (1) the provision accepted from the disciples, (2) the blessing of it by Jesus, and (3) the distribution of it among the people.—*Laidlaw.*

Ver. 13. "*Give ye.*"—The words are emphatic, for the disciples had been counselling the people to get food for themselves.

"*Give ye them to eat.*"—Christ wishes His disciples to realise their own utter inability, in order that they might by-and-by realise more intensely the fulness of His ability.

"*We have no more.*"—Here we may learn, at least, not to be too confident in our reckonings, so long as they are made for *plus* or *minus*. How many great counting-houses have forgotten in their books the column for the blessing or—the curse of God! —*Stier.*

Ver. 14. "*By fifties.*"—In which subordinate circumstance we behold His wisdom who is the Lord and Lover of order. Thus all confusion was avoided. There was no danger that the weaker, the women and children, should be passed over, while the stronger and ruder unduly put themselves forward. The apostles were thus able to pass easily up and down among the multitude, and to minister in orderly succession to the needs of every part.—*Burgon.*

"*Made them all sit down.*"—The apostles caused the people to sit down before they knew what Christ was about to do. They obeyed His command. They were weak and inexperienced, but still they were childlike, and allowed themselves to be led by His hand. "This is the true kind of obedience," says *Bernhard*, "which does not look at what is commanded, but is content to know that it is commanded by God."

Ver. 16. "*Blessed them.*"—To be thankful for little is the way to obtain more. The action of the Saviour, if we compare the various narratives of this miracle, consisted (1) of thanksgiving—acknowledgment of all the goodness of God, and an anticipation of the coming display of His power and love; and (2) of blessing the food for the use of the people. "To bless means *to speak well of.* Our Saviour on the present occasion would doubtless *speak well of His Father*; and, coincidently, He *would speak well of the provision*, His Father's gift, which He was about to distribute and increase. He might *speak well, too, in reference to the people* petitioning for their weal. He would thus coincidently *bless* the Father, *bless* the food, and invoke blessing on the people" (*Morison*).

A Like Miracle ever being wrought.—He conceals the miracle, and no one sees how the bread multiplies in His hands, any more than one sees the grass growing. "The same Divine Person, in a manner less striking, because more gradual and regular, but certainly not less wonderful, ripens all the seeds in all the gardens and orchards and in all the vineyards and meadows of this world, in successive seasons, ever since man dwelt in Paradise, to minister food to His creatures" (*Wordsworth*).

Inexhaustible Provision.—The Bible is little in bulk, like the five barley loaves and the two fishes. What thousands upon thousands has it fed, and will it feed, in every age, in every land of Christendom, to the world's end!

Ver. 17. *The Teaching of the Miracle.*—The miracle teaches us—

I. That it is our duty to do what we can to supply the bodily wants of others.

II. That those who follow Christ may trust to Him for the necessaries of life.

III. That it is becoming to thank God for His goodness before partaking of food.

IV. That nothing should be lost or wasted.

"*Fragments.*"—The food Christ gave differed from the manna; for (1) the manna was only sufficient for him who gathered it, and (2) could not be kept. The fragments are more in bulk than the original stock: in their being gathered at the command of Christ we have a beautiful picture of God's bounty in nature, which is at once lavish and careful.

"*That remained.*"—A sign that there had been abundance. *Twelve* baskets, because at Christ's command the twelve apostles gathered up the fragments. "We have thus a visible symbol of that love which exhausts not itself by loving, but after the most prodigal outgoings upon others abides itself far richer than it would else have done; of the multiplying which there ever is in a true dispensing; of the increasing which may go along with a scattering (Prov. xi. 24: cf. 2 Kings iv. 1-7)" (*Trench*).

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 18—27.

The Divine Christ confessed.

I. The first section gives us Peter's great confession in the name of the disciples (vers. 18-20).—Our Lord is entering on a new era in His work, and desires to bring clearly into His followers' consciousness the sum of His past self-revelation. The excitement which He had checked after the first miraculous feeding had died down. Amid the seclusion of Cæsarea, far away from distracting influences, He puts these two momentous questions. The first question is as to the partial and conflicting opinions among the multitudes; the second hints at the fuller unveiling of the depths of His gracious personality, which the disciples had experienced, and implies, "Surely you, who have been beside Me, and known Me so closely, have reached a deeper understanding." It has a tone of the same wistfulness and wonder as that other question of His, "Have I been so long time with you, and yet hast thou not known Me?" For their sakes He seeks to draw out their partly unconscious faith, that had been smouldering, fed by their daily experience of His beauty and tenderness. Half-recognised convictions float in many a heart, which need but a pointed question to crystallise into master-truths, to which henceforward the whole being is subject. Great is the power of putting our shadowy beliefs into plain words. "With the mouth confession is made unto salvation." Why should this great question have been preceded by the other? Probably to make the disciples feel more distinctly the chaotic contradictions of the popular judgment, and their own isolation by their possession of the clearer light. He wishes them to see the gulf opening between them and their fellows, and so to bind them more closely to Himself. It is the question the answer to which settles everything for a man. It has an intensely sharp point. We cannot take refuge from it in the general opinion. Nor does any other man's judgment about Him matter one whit to us. Christ has a strange power, after eighteen hundred years, of coming to each of us, with the same persistent interrogation on His lips. And to-day, as then, all depends on the answer we give. Many answer by exalted estimates of Him, like these varying replies, which ascribed to Him prophetic authority; but they have not drunk in the full meaning of His self-revelation unless they can reply with the full-toned confession of the apostle, which sets Him far above and apart from the highest and holiest. The confession includes both the human and the Divine sides of Christ's nature. He is the Messiah; but He is more than a Jew meant by that name—He is "the Son of the living God," by which we cannot indeed suppose that Peter meant all that he afterward learned it contained, or all that the Church has now been taught of its meaning, but which, nevertheless, is not to be watered down as if it did not declare His unique filial relation to the Father, and so His Divine nature. Christian progress in doctrine does not consist in the winning of new truths, but in the penetrating further into the meaning of old and initial truths.

II. The startling new revelation of the suffering Messiah (vers. 21, 22).—The gospel has two parts: Jesus is the Christ, and the Christ must suffer and enter into His glory. Our Lord has made sure that the disciples have learned the first before He leads to the second. The very conviction of His dignity and Divine nature made that second truth the more bewildering; but still the only road to it was through the first. The new teaching as to the sufferings was no new thought to Himself, forced on Him by the growing enmity of the nation. The cross always cast its shadow on His path. He was no enthusiast, beginning with the dream of winning a world to His side, and slowly and heroically making up His mind to die a martyr; but His purpose in being born

was to minister to and to die a ransom for the many. Note the detailed accuracy of the prevision which points to the rulers of the nation as the instruments, and to death as the climax, and to resurrection as the issue, of His sufferings; and the clear setting forth of the Divine necessity which, as it ruled all His life, ruled here also, and is expressed in that solemn "must." The necessity was no external compulsion, driving Him to an unwelcome sacrifice, but one imposed alike by filial obedience and by brotherly love. He must die because He would save.

III. **The law which ruled the Master's life is extended to the servants** (vers. 23-27).—They recoiled from the thought of His having to suffer. They had to learn that they too must suffer, if they would be His. "If any man will" gives them the option of withdrawal. A new epoch is beginning, and they will have to enlist again, and do it with open eyes. He will have no unwilling soldiers, nor any who have been beguiled into the ranks. No doubt some went away, and walked no more with Him. The terms of service are clear. Discipleship means imitation, and imitation means self-crucifixion. A martyred Master must needs have for followers men ready to be martyrs too. But the requirement goes much deeper than this. There is no discipleship without self-denial, both in the easier form of starving passions and desires, and in the harder of yielding up the will, and letting His will supplant ours. Only so can we ever come after Him, and of such sacrifice of self the cross is the eminent example. When Jesus began to teach His death, He immediately presented it as His servants' example. The ground of the law is stated in ver. 24. The wish to save life is the loss of life in the highest sense. If that desire guide us, then farewell to enthusiasm, courage, the martyr spirit, and all which makes man's life nobler than a beast's. He who is ruled mainly by the wish to keep a whole skin loses the best part of what he is so anxious to keep. Regard for self as a ruling motive is destruction, and selfishness is suicide. On the other hand, lives hazarded for Christ are thereby truly saved; and if they be not only hazarded, but actually lost, such loss is gain; and the same law by which the Master "must" die and rise again will work in the servant. Ver. 25 urges the wisdom of such apparent folly, and enforces the requirement by the plain consideration that "life" is worth more than anything beside. Therefore the dictate of the wisest prudence is that seemingly prodigal flinging away of the lower "life," which puts us in possession of the higher. Note that the appeal is here made to a reasonable regard to personal advantage, and that in the very act of urging to crucify self. So little did Christ think, as some people do, that the desire to save one's soul is selfishness. Ver. 26 confirms all the preceding by the solemn allusion to the coming of the Son of man as Judge. They surely shall then find their lives who have followed Him here. Ver. 27 adds a confirmation of this announcement of His coming to judge. The question of what event is referred to may best be answered by noting that it must be one sufficiently far off from the moment of speaking to allow of the death of the greater number of His hearers; that it must also be an event, after which these survivors would go the common road into the grave; that it is apparently distinguished from His coming "in the glory of the Father," and yet is of such a nature as to afford convincing proof of the establishment of His kingdom on earth, and to be, in some sort, a sign of that final act of judgment. All these requirements meet only in the destruction of Jerusalem, and of the national life of the chosen people. That was a crash of which we only faintly realise the tremendous significance. It swept away the last remnant of the hope that Israel was to be the kingdom of the Messiah; and from out of the dust and chaos of that fall the Christian Church emerged, manifestly destined for world-wide extension.—*Maclaren.*

SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS ON VERSES 18—27.

Ver. 18. *Opinions about Jesus Christ.*

I. **There are those who consider Him to have been the best of men that ever lived, but do not consider Him to have been perfectly sinless.**—Three objections are fatal to this opinion: 1. It is contrary to the Saviour's own claims. 2. It is founded on a prejudice against the miraculous. 3. It deprives Him of all place in connection with salvation.

II. **That He was a perfect man, but not the God-man.**—Two objections to this opinion: 1. It is opposed to the clear testimonies of Scripture. 2. The Christian Church has ever refused to rest in such a view.

III. **That He was a Divine Saviour, but not a Saviour by atoning sacrifice.**—But we have in Christ's own teaching the doctrine of the Atonement. 1. We have a doctrine of penalty following sin. 2. It is taught by what Christ says of His own substitution. 3. It follows from our Lord's connecting His death with the forgiveness of sins. 4. The fact that Christ connects His death with a covenant, and with a new covenant, brings it in His own teaching into line with the Old Testament sacrifices.—*Cairns.*

Vers. 18-20. *The Master's Prayer and the Disciple's Confession.*—The time has come for an onward step. These twelve men must be made to gather into one, and to speak out the net result of these months of silent accompanying. They must be brought to book (so to say) as to their dim, floating ideas. The time is come for confession of Christ. How shall it be done? The Divine Master takes them apart by themselves, on a journey the farthest that He ever made northward in Palestine. He had brought them thither for a sacred purpose. They were to pass from an unrealised to a realised conviction—from the spiritual stage of "believing unto righteousness" to the further spiritual stage of "confessing unto salvation." Can you wonder that St. Luke, the historian of Christ's prayers, tells us that this step, this leap, this bound, was prefaced by one of the prayers of Christ? While witnessing His absorbed, engrossed, unconscious solitude, He put to them this question, "Whom say the people that I am?"

I. **Surely there is Divine skill, and tenderness as well, in this way of putting the question.**—He asks first, What do other people say? before He goes on to propose the vital question, But what do ye, My disciples, My near ones, My own, say and think of Me? Even when the time has come for fixing their floating thoughts, for getting an answer, positive and peremptory, as to the state of their own belief—even then He will approach the subject distantly, lest haply, even then, a too sudden and abrupt interrogation might startle, perplex, or deter them.

II. **Well, they say, opinions are divided.**—John the Baptist, risen again from the death in Machærus—that is one idea. Elias, come again to fulfil the last prophecy of the Old Testament—that is another. A prophet—one of the prophets—without pledging themselves to a name or an identification—that is a third. In the midst of all these ignorant or superstitious imaginings, what say ye?

III. **The time has come for an answer from the disciples.**—The brave, sometimes too brave, Peter, as usual, is the spokesman. "The Christ of God." Was it not for this answer, this revelation, this unveiling, that the "effectual fervent prayer" had ascended? When we think what lay in that good confession—what for future generations—what for a world about to be bought with blood—what for a Church to be founded, as upon a rock, on that brief utterance, so vital, so boundless in the thing signified,—can we imagine an occasion more suitable

for the exercise, by anticipation, even of the mediatorial office, than that which required, and waited for, an unveiling, not by flesh and blood, but by a Father in heaven, to men standing here in all the backwardness, and in all the boundedness, of a fallen humanity, of a mystery kept secret hitherto from eternal times?—*Vaughan.*

Ver. 21. "*To tell no man.*"—For these, perhaps, among other reasons: 1. Because His work was not yet finished. 2. Because as yet their faith was very weak and their knowledge partial. 3. Because they had not yet received the Holy Spirit to give power to their testimony. 4. Because the public proclamation of the truth would have precipitated the workings of God's foreordained plan.—*Farrar.*

Ver. 22. "*Must suffer.*"—The gospel may be stated in two propositions. 1. Jesus is the Christ. 2. The Christ must suffer, die, and rise again; or Christ by death will enter into His glory.

A revelation of the Passion.—Christ reveals—

I. **Who are to inflict the sufferings.**

II. **The form these sufferings are to take.**

III. **The necessity for His enduring them.**

IV. **Their issue in His resurrection.**

Vers. 23-26. *Three Great Lessons*:—

I. **Not only Christ, but also His followers, must suffer and deny themselves.**

II. **That all have a life to save, more precious than all else to them.**

III. **That the great day of account should be ever before them.**

Ver. 23. *The Christian's Journey.*—1. Those things of which he takes leave. 2. The burden he carries. 3. The road he traverses.

"*Will come.*"—It is a matter of choice to follow Christ; but if the resolution be formed to do so, there is no choice but to deny oneself and take up the cross.

"*Deny himself.*"—As Peter said when he denied Christ, "I know not the man," so say thou of thyself, and act accordingly.—*Bengel.*

"*Deny himself . . . take up his cross.*"—The one is an active, the other a passive, state. Self-denial is a man's own act, and requires the strenuous exercise of the will. "Taking up the cross" implies patient submission to the will of another.

"*His cross.*"—If not (1) contempt or suffering endured for the sake of Christ, then (2) some form of affliction connected with this earthly life, or (3) temptations from without, or (4) inward conflict with sin.

Requisites for Discipleship.

I. The first requisite in a disciple is **self-denial.**

II. The second requisite is **cross-bearing.**

III. The third requisite is **spiritual service,** true and constant obedience. —*Anderson.*

"*No cross, no crown.*"

I. **The cross is to be taken up, not simply borne, when laid on the shoulder.**—This implies willing, cheerful suffering for Christ. Some people endure trials, but always with repining. The spirit of these words requires cheerfulness in suffering for Christ. Half the trial is gone if we meet it in this glad spirit.

II. **It is one's own cross, and not another's, that is to be taken up.**—The particular cross that God lays at our own feet. We are not to make crosses for ourselves, but we are always to accept those that are allotted to us. Each one's cross is the best for *him.* If we knew what other people's crosses were, we might not envy them, or wish to exchange our cross for theirs. What seems a flower-woven cross may

be full of sharp thorns. The easiest cross for each one to bear is one's own.

III. **There is a way to remove the crosses out of our life.**—Always gladly accept through love to God whatever trial, pain, or loss God sends. If my will acquiesces in His, there is no cross. —*Miller.*

Self-sacrifice.—Self-sacrifice represents more exactly than self-denial the idea intended to be conveyed by the Lord's precept here. Not that "let him *deny himself*" is other than a literal translation of the original phrase, but that in popular parlance self-denial has come to mean something much more superficial, much less thoroughgoing, than what is obviously denoted by Christ in this passage. Self-denial, in the sense in which it is an essential condition of coming *after* the Saviour, is the doing by self what St. Peter did by Christ—repudiating all connection with self, utterly disavowing it as our master.—*Goulburn.*

What is Self-denial?—The word is often and much mistaken in common use, as if it meant much the same as self-control—the control of lower elements of our being by higher; but this is not self-denial as Christ uses the word. To "deny" self means to treat it as non-existent. It means to ignore, to turn the back upon, to shut the eyes to self—something far different from mere self-control.—*Moule.*

Self-denial.

I. **There are few things in which people play more wretched farces than in their efforts at self-denial.**—Very few seem to have the remotest conception of what it means. The giving up of meat on Fridays, abstinence from social dissipation in Lent, and many other useless and uncalled-for sacrifices —these things do not constitute self-denial. There is no merit in giving up anything for its own sake.

II. **True self-denial is the yielding of the whole life to the will of Christ.** —It is self coming down from the life's throne, laying crown and sceptre at the Master's feet, and thenceforth submitting the whole life to His sway. It is living all the while not to please ourselves, but to please our Lord—not to advance our own personal interests, but to do His work. It is the glad making of any sacrifice that loyalty to Him requires. Self gives way altogether to Christ as the motive of life.

III. **Nothing is true self-denial which is done merely as self-denial.**—True self-denial, like all other forms of Christlikeness, is unconscious of self, wists not that its face shines. We deny ourselves when we follow Christ with joy and gladness, through cost and danger and suffering, just where He leads.—*Miller.*

Vers. 24-26. *Three Reasons for Cross-bearing.*

I. **We must sacrifice something**—either the lower or the higher life, animal happiness or spiritual blessedness (ver. 24).

II. **The incomparable value of the soul.**—He who gains the world at the cost of his soul is a loser by the bargain (ver. 25).

III. **At the second advent cross-bearers will receive a crown of righteousness.**—To cross-spurners will be assigned shame and everlasting contempt.—*Bruce.*

Ver. 25. *Profit and Loss.*

I. The **gain** here spoken of is nominal, imaginary.

II. The **loss** is real, and it is the greatest conceivable. 1. The soul is lost by not being exercised. 2. The soul is lost when it is perverted and corrupted.—*Service.*

Ver. 26. "*His own glory,*" *etc.*—The glory is threefold: 1. His own, which He has to and for Himself as the exalted Messiah. 2. The glory of God, which accompanies Him as coming down from God's throne. 3. The glory of the angels who surround Him with their brightness.—*Meyer.*

Ashamed of Christ.—This is what men are guilty of when Christians are in a minority, or when earnest Christianity is powerfully opposed. There is no temptation to be ashamed of Christ when all the world around you is, at any rate, professedly devoted to Him. But the temptation was a very formidable one when the Church was young, and when Christians carried their lives in their hands. Wonderful, however, it is how, in these first ages of the faith, men and women, boys and girls, in all conditions of life, joyfully accepted a painful death rather than be disloyal to their Lord and Saviour. But the wheel of time brings strange revolutions, and we no longer live in times when it could be said with entire truth that no one is ashamed of Jesus Christ. Many in all Christian countries professedly reject His name. And that this is so surely imposes on all *true* Christians the duty of explicitly confessing Christ before men.—*Liddon.*

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 28—36.

"*In the Holy Mount.*"—All the accounts of the Transfiguration carefully date it with reference to Peter's great confession and Christ's subsequent plain announcement of His sufferings. "These sayings" made an epoch in our Lord's life both as regarded Himself and His followers, marking for Him a new step towards the cross, which was henceforth perceptibly nearer and still more familiar, and for them a new pain, which might easily become apostasy. The Transfiguration seems to have a bearing both on Him and them.

I. **The change in our Lord's appearance.**—St. Luke's special contribution to this part of the narrative is the mention of Christ's praying. It connects His prayer immediately with the glory shining in His face. Prayer and communion with God will imprint a glory on a homely face yet, which, though it be nowise miraculous, does none the less show where the man has been. If we lived more habitually in the secret place of the Most High, our faces would oftener seem like those of angels, and a pure and quiet heart would make itself seen there. The glory that shone on Christ's countenance and whitened even His garments did not fall on Him from without, but rose, as it were, to the surface from within. "The veil, that is to say, His flesh," became partially transparent for a moment, and revealed not only the glory of grace and truth, but the lesser glory, which could be made visible, at least by symbol. It was a gleam of Deity, like a stray sunbeam through a rift in a clouded sky. So could He always have walked among men; and that brief flash increases our sense of the continual voluntary humiliation of His humble manhood, and tells us that "there was the hiding of His power."

II. **His converse with the mighty dead.**—They came before the apostles were awake, and that mysterious colloquy had lasted for an indefinite time before human ears caught some fragments of it. St. Luke gives the fullest account of this incident. He alone tells us that our Lord's companions were "in glory," robed in like lustre to His, and "walking with Him in white." He alone tells us the subject of their speech. They did not come as to tell Him that He must die; for His plain declaration to that effect preceded this event. Did they come to learn it from Him, and so to bear back to the dim regions whence they came the glad tidings that the long-waited-for hour was ready to strike? They stand there surely rather as learners than as teachers. The legislator and the great prophet represented all the earlier revelation, and fitly stand at His side to whom it had all pointed. The "departure which He should accomplish at Jerusalem" was the goal of law and prophecy. The loftiest organs of revelation in the past were His heralds and servants, honoured by being

allowed to attend on Him. The depths of the worlds of the dead were moved at His coming, and "the people that walked in darkness" saw "a great light." Jesus, too, needed strengthening, and the presence of these two may have been for Him what the angel from heaven was in Gethsemane. The continued conscious existence of the dead, the purpose of all "the sundry times" and "divers manners" of the past speech of God, the sovereign completeness and supremacy of the message in the Son, the central place of His death in His work—are all set forth in that wondrous interview between these three.

III. **The attesting voice from heaven.**—Peter's foolish speech was, according to this Gospel, called out by seeing the two majestic forms in the act of "parting from Him." The apostle was half-awake, stunned, and bewildered, and would fain have kept them there. There is something very naïve and childlike in the proposal to make the three tabernacles, as if these might be an inducement for the strangers to stay awhile. Inconsiderate as the speech was, it was very full of love to Jesus, and it said something for Peter's loyalty and reverence for Him, that he put the Lord first, before Moses and Elijah. His preposterous proposal was interrupted by the descent of the cloud. One reading of St. Luke's words makes all six to have entered into it, whilst another, more probably, leaves the disciples without. The remark about the voice coming "out of the cloud" seems to imply that the hearers were not within its folds. If so, then that visible symbol of the Divine Presence, which had dwelt in the first Temple between the cherubim, and had been absent for long ages, now again appeared. The disciples saw with terror Jesus and Moses and Elijah lost in its folds. They were alone, and might well wonder whether they were ever to see Jesus more. The Divine voice was meant altogether for the disciples, both in its first part, which declares Christ's dignity, and in its second, which commands their attentive acceptance of His word. In them the whole world is spoken to, and the command is for each of us. The strange light had faded from His face when He came to them, the mysterious two had vanished, the cloud had melted into the blue, the silent, bare hillside was as it had been, and "Jesus was found alone." So all other teachers, helpers, guides, are lost in His sight, or drop away as the ages roll on, and He only is left. But He *is* left, and He is enough and eternal. Happy are we if in life we hear Him, and if in our experience Jesus is found alone, the all-sufficient and unchanging companion and portion of our else lonely and restless spirits.—*Maclaren.*

SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS ON VERSES 28—36.

Vers. 28, 29. *The Transfiguration Prayer.*—This great scene left its mark for ever on the three chosen witnesses of it. The evidence of the Transfiguration must of necessity have been more impressive to the three spectators than it can be to the readers of their account of it. Marvellous, miraculous revelation! What mysteries gather round the scene! Jesus had gone up into the mountain to pray. It was as He prayed that He was transfigured. Can we at all interpret this prayer? We cannot. We know not what that prayer specially asked. But we may know some of the Divine intercessions specially needed by us in seasons of which the Transfiguration is for all time the august and solemn type.

I. **Seasons every life has of a brighter experience than the common.** Seasons of natural or spiritual exhilaration, in seclusion or in company. How natural to wish to prolong these seasons, neglecting every-day duties, heedless of other men's sorrows! Is it wrong for us to think at such moments of the gracious intercession above, which would ask for us to use

as not abusing, even if it be the Christian intercourse or the spiritual happiness? These things must come and go; duty before pleasure, even in the soul.

II. **How sorely do we all need the Transfiguration view of Christ**—were it but for once—never to fade again out of the memory, the soul's memory, of the beholder! St. Peter thought of that one night when he was drawing near to his own "exodus," and said that it assured him of the truth of his preaching, and of the truth of his Gospel, on to the very end. Which of us does not want just that something, if it might be so, to turn faith into sight and hope into knowledge? It would perhaps come to us —or something of its kind—if we watched for it as men watch for the morning—if we had the patience and the earnestness to say to the Divine Visitant, "I will not let Thee go, except Thou bless me!" Shall we use the record of the Transfiguration prayer as giving us hope that the heavenly intercession may ask that indeed beatific vision, the spiritual sight of Christ, even for us?

III. **Do we not all need that firm hold of the two revelations, the cross and the glory of Jesus Christ,** which He enforced so strongly by the teaching and the prayer of this memorable moment? May the prayer of Christ in heaven reconcile us to this twofold condition: a Divine Lord dying to save, a Divine Love humbling itself to suffer—a cross uplifted to draw all men to Him who hangs upon it, a cross to be borne now by all who would enter into the glory!—*Vaughan.*

An Answer to Prayer.—The Transfiguration was an answer to prayer. We do not say that Jesus was praying for this alteration in His countenance and raiment, or even for the privilege of talking with these wise and sympathetic spirits about the work which He was to accomplish at Jerusalem. But yet all this was in answer to the prayer He was offering when it came. To lift up the soul to God calms and ennobles it.

Vers. 28-36. *The Meaning of the Transfiguration.*

I. The Transfiguration is an illustration of **the efficacy of prayer.**

II. It demonstrates **the perfect holiness of Jesus Christ.**

III. It brings into clear view **the voluntary character of His submission to sufferings and death.**

An Aid to Faith and Patience.—The Transfiguration was an aid to faith and patience, specially vouchsafed to the meek and lowly Son of man in answer to His prayer, to cheer Him on His sorrowful path to Jerusalem and Calvary. It supplied three distinct aids to faith.

I. It gave a foretaste of the glory with which He should be rewarded after His passion for His voluntary humiliation and obedience unto death.

II. It gave assurance that the mystery of the cross was understood and appreciated by saints in heaven, if not by the darkened minds of sinful men on earth.

III. A third and chief solace to the heart of Jesus was the approving voice of His heavenly Father.—*Bruce.*

Ver. 28. "*Peter and John and James.*"—Those now chosen to witness His *glory* on the mountain of transfiguration afterwards witnessed His *agony* in the garden of Gethsemane.

Ver. 29. *A Light from Within.*—It would appear that the light shone not upon Him from without, but out of Him from within: it was one blaze of dazzling, celestial glory; it was Himself glorified. What a contrast now to that "visage more marred than any man, and His form more than the sons of men"! (Isa. lii. 14). —*Brown.*

Ver. 30. "*Moses and Elias.*"—The two who appeared to them were the representatives of the *Law* and the

Prophets: both had been removed from this world in a mysterious manner—the one without death; the other by death, indeed, but so that His body followed not the lot of the bodies of all; both, like the Greater One with whom they spoke, had endured that supernatural fast of forty days and nights: both had been on the holy mount in the visions of God. And now they came, endowed with glorified bodies before the rest of the dead, to hold converse with the Lord on that sublime event, which had been the great central subject of all their teaching, and solemnly to consign into His hands, once and for all, in a symbolical and glorious representation, their delegated and expiring power.—*Alford.*

Moses now admitted to the Land of Promise.—Moses had not been permitted when alive to enter the land of promise; but here we see him brought into it to do homage to Christ.

Preparation for Death.—When, in the desert, He was girding Himself for the work of life, angels of life came and ministered unto Him; now, in the fair world, when He is girding Himself for the work of death, the ministrants come to Him from the grave—but from the grave conquered—one from that tomb under Abarim, which His own hand had sealed long ago; the other from the rest into which he had entered without seeing corruption. There stood by Him Moses and Elias, and spake of His decease. And when the prayer is ended, the task accepted, then first since the star paused over Him at Bethlehem, the full glory falls upon Him from heaven, and the testimony is borne to His everlasting Sonship and power—"Hear ye Him."—*Ruskin.*

Witnesses to Immortality.—Here we have two thoroughly trustworthy witnesses, in Moses and Elias, that the dead are not dead, and that those who die in faith only pass out of this poor, wretched life into a better.—*Luther.*

Recognition in Another World.—St. Peter knows and recognises Moses and Elias, whose features he had never before seen. Perhaps we have here an intimation of the fact that saints in glory will know each other.

Ver. 31. "*Spake of His decease.*"—(1) The adoring gratitude of glorified men for His undertaking to accomplish such a decease; (2) their felt dependence upon it for the glory in which they appeared; (3) their profound interest in the progress of it; (4) their humble solaces and encouragements to go through with it; and (5) their sense of its peerless and overwhelming glory.—*Brown.*

"*Decease.*"—The striking word "departure" which St. Luke uses, and which is here translated by "decease," suggests ascension rather than death. It is doubly significant, as being both an appropriate term in the case of the Son of God, and as alluding to the new exodus in which He delivers all who believe in Him from worse than Egyptian bondage. There is something deeply tragic in the allusion to Jerusalem—"the city that slays the prophets" (chap. xiii. 33).

Ver. 33. "*Good for us to be here.*"—The words contain an admixture of truth and error.

I. **Truth**: a recognition of that wherein felicity consists—in a vision of the Redeemer's glory, and in hearts aflame with love and joy.

II. **Error**: a certain tinge of carnal self-love, and great ignorance of that which is needed to fit us for everlasting happiness. The vision is a means, and not an end; it is given to prepare for tribulations, and to sustain the disciples under them—to strengthen them for self-denying service.

"*Three tabernacles.*"—His desire was foolish, because—

I. He did not comprehend the design of the vision.

II. He absurdly put the servants on a level with their Lord.

III. He proposed to build fading tabernacles for men who had been already admitted to the glory of heaven and of the angels.—*Calvin.*

Vers. 33, 40, 45. *Three Incapacities.*—1. Speech without knowledge. 2. Action without power. 3. Hearing without understanding.

Ver. 34. *Fearing as they entered the Cloud.*—Men are impatient of clouds, and are slow to learn their uses, until they get a period of unbroken sunshine. Men do not see much in the clouds; they are generally unwelcome visitors. They are not ready to learn that clouds are often the bearers of blessings, and harbingers of good.

I. They are slower still to learn **the revealing power of clouds.** Job said, "Men do not see the bright light that is in the clouds." "*In* the clouds"; not fringing the clouds, but in them. We look for light by the dispersion of clouds; God's greatest sons have looked for it in the heart of clouds. When God gave the law, He did it amid clouds and thunderings. At the heart of the densest cloud was God Himself, and it was from the midst of that cloud that Moses came with his face reflecting a glory greater than the glory of the sun. These three apostles on the mount were not afraid of the glory of the Transfiguration and the brightness of that light that touched the summit upon which they stood: they were only afraid of the darkening cloud into which they were called to enter. They had no idea that there was a burden of glory, but had a very keen conception of the burden of darkness. Paul exclaimed, "Our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh out for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory."

II. In such circumstances as this **the cloud very often reveals more than the glory.** I know it is hard to believe it. You will remember that in Eden it was in the cool of the evening that our first parents heard the voice of God—just when the shadows were lengthening, and the brightness of the day was departing, and the darkening hour was drawing near, so full of solemnity, because so full of subdued light suggestive of mystery. And we may follow that a little further, and sometimes find that when the darkness is thickest round us, and we can see nothing, God often reveals Himself to us as He does not when our vision is distracted by the beauties of creation around us. We have seen Jacob ascending the hill as the night gathered and the darkness descended, and laying his head upon a stony pillow to sleep, and when asleep having a grander vision than he ever could in his waking hours. We see too much sometimes to see at all. The world with its thousands of objects, while all given to us that we may see them, very often fail to give us the truest sights; and the night must come and the darkness gather round us, so that, closed in with God, we may have some revelation we had not in the glaring and blinding day.

III. They, however, feared simply because they **did not know the capacity of the cloud to teach them the lesson they needed to learn.** It was in the cloud that they learnt to give undivided attention to what Christ had to tell them; and His first command was to keep the memory of that revelation to themselves, and meanwhile to come down, in the inspiration of it, to the foot of the hill, and there heal one of the world's sufferers. The people at the foot of the hill should be better for the Transfiguration at its summit. —*Davies.*

Ver. 35. "*My beloved Son: hear Him.*"—Two titles bestowed on Christ.

I. **Beloved Son**—as distinguished from servants like Moses and Elijah.

II. The supreme and only **Teacher** of His Church.

Ver. 36. "*Jesus was found alone.*"—Moses and Elias vanish. *Christ is left alone.* The law and the prophets were for a time, but the gospel remains for ever to the end.

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 37—45.

The Power of Faith.—The narrative of this miracle which St. Luke gives is much briefer than those in the two first Gospels, and omits a number of details which give special interest to this manifestation of Christ's power and love. The side-lights of the story are full of instruction: *e.g.*—

I. **The vicarious power of faith.**—The success of this poor father for his child is typical of a whole class of our Lord's acts of mercy. One-half of the detailed healings in the Gospel history were wrought at the prayer of friends. A considerable proportion were cures of those who could in nowise appeal to Jesus on their own behalf, and who, therefore, so far as receptive faith was concerned, were represented by their intercessors. Among the countless undetailed healings the proportion of such cures must have been great. Indeed, this was evidently a principle of the Lord's healing ministry. What a gospel, this, the Author of which plainly says by His deeds, "Not only come, but bring! Come for yourselves and find rest. Bring also the halt, the blind, the weak, the little ones, that they too may get the blessing, and My house may be filled." How far-reaching this principle is will appear when we consider the gracious teachings of Christianity as to infant salvation, its still wider teaching as to the place of representative faith for those who can own and confess nothing for themselves; also the marvellous spiritual results of patient, persevering, intercessory prayer. Nor should the reflex action of the principle be forgotten. The father stands beside the Christ of history, a monument of faith, timid yet true, because his love for his boy set him there. His "Have mercy on *us* and help *us*," like the heathen mother's "Have mercy on *me*," was highly honoured by Jesus. The parental love that identified itself with the suffering child was used by Him as a step to the faith which united child and parent both to the Healer. Thus will true spiritual affection for those committed to our care draw ourselves and them into closest bonds with Christ.

II. **The situation of the unsuccessful nine.**—Their failure had been conspicuous, and rankled in their minds. The cause of it was unbelief, want of faith, or rather of the watchfulness in prayer which keeps faith ready for action. Does not the situation recur? Are there not social evils preying on the body politic, "open sores," even of the modern world, with which Christianity—at least the Christianity of the Churches—seems unable to cope? Are there not times when their failure threatens to shame the cause of Christ, if not Christ Himself? But the Church is not Christ. His working is not to be measured by that of any human representatives, official or unofficial. We must not repeat the mistake of the multitude that day, and, because the disciples have failed, think that Jesus will fail. There are evils not to be met successfully without exceptional devotion and self-sacrifice in His followers. There are kinds of demonism—how many of them are still with us!—in face of which ordinary easy-going Christianity breaks down. To cast them out heroism is needed; and surely Christ and His cause have never wanted for heroes and heroic devotion when the need came.—*Laidlaw.*

SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS ON VERSES 37—45.

Ver. 37. *A Great Contrast.*—Very remarkable is the contrast between the scene on the Mount of Transfiguration and that which met the eyes of Christ at its foot: on the one hand the open heaven and the presence of glorified spirits, and on the other a vale of tears, with the worst forms of misery, pain, and unbelief. In his well-known picture of the Transfiguration Raffaelle has depicted this contrast in the most striking manner.

Ver. 41. "*Faithless and perverse generation.*"—The censure must have been felt (1) by those who had hastily argued from the impotence of the disciples to that of their Master; (2) by the father of the child, whose faith was so weak; (3) by the disciples who had attempted in vain to exorcise the evil spirit.

"*How long shall I be with you?*"—What a contrast for Jesus between the hours of holy peace which He had just passed in communion with heaven, and the sight of the agony of this father and of the agitated crowd!—*Godet.*

"*How long.*"—He was hastening to His Father, yet could not go till He had led His disciples to faith. Their slowness troubled Him.—*Bengel.*

Ver. 42. "*The devil threw him down.*"—That the devil should rage with more than ordinary cruelty against the child, when he is brought to Christ, ought not to excite surprise; for in proportion as the grace of Christ is seen to be nearer at hand, and acts more powerfully, the fury of Satan is the more highly excited.—*Calvin.*

Ver. 44. "*Let these sayings sink down into your ears.*"—The disciples are to bear in mind these admiring speeches on account of the contrast which His own fate would now appear with the same. They are, therefore, to build no hopes upon them, but only to recognise in them the *mobile vulgus.*—*Meyer.*

"*Delivered into the hands of men.*"—If men offer thee a wreath of honour, be careful to intertwine with it a bunch of myrrh, and thus remind thyself, as thy Saviour did, that men are changeable, and their praise fickle and destitute of power to give strength or comfort in death.—*Besser.*

Ver. 45. "*They feared to ask Him.*"—Why did they fear to ask Him? Because they had an idea what the answer would be, and did not wish to understand what was exceedingly disagreeable to them. In this we can see how the will governs the understanding. Our Lord has still, alas! too many of such disciples who know not because they will not.

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 46—50.

Humility commended; Jealousy reproved.—In very different frames of mind did Jesus and the twelve apostles return from the Mount of Transfiguration to Capernaum. His thoughts were fixed upon the cross, theirs upon places of honour in the kingdom which they believed He was about to establish on earth. This difference came out in their respective utterances. Jesus spoke for the second time about His coming sufferings, while the disciples disputed among themselves which of them should be the greatest. This dispute is a humiliating revelation of the mood in which the disciples of Jesus were, and showed how far they were from obeying the command so lately heard by three of them on the holy mount—"Hear ye Him." The cross of which He spoke they thought not of; or, rather, they banished it from their thoughts, and fixed their attention

upon the honours and rewards which could scarcely fail to be theirs when their Master had set up His kingdom. It was therefore most needful for Jesus to banish this spirit of selfish ambition from the minds of His disciples, if they were to co-operate with Him as ministers of the kingdom of God.

I. **The lesson of humility.**—He chose a little child, and presented him to the disciples as a type of the feeble, the ignorant, and the poor, whom they were in danger of slighting and driving away by assuming airs of superiority, and also as a type of the humble in spirit. It is of the very nature of ambition to render him who cherishes it harsh and contemptuous towards others, especially towards those who are too weak and insignificant to be rivals. And hence, in order to be kind and gracious and loving in their relations with those to whom they ministered, the disciples needed to cast out from their minds the selfish schemes they were forming to secure their own advancement and high places in the kingdom. It is significant that Christ does not put an end to all strife by saying that there would not be difference of rank in that kingdom—that in it all would be equal. On the contrary, He distinctly says that there are grades of distinction there as well as in the kingdoms of the world; and He enunciates the principle according to which promotion would be given. "He that is least among you all, the same shall be great." This child in its unpretentiousness, and simple trust and love, represents the type of character He would have them to imitate; and he who came nearest to it would become worthy of high rank in the kingdom of heaven.

II. **Jealousy reproved.**—The consciences of the disciples seem to have been touched by the reproof of Christ. It recalled to the memory of some of them the attitude they had recently taken up in dealing with one who was a believer in Christ, but who, for some reason or other, had kept aloof from their company. So far from "receiving" him and approving the good work he was doing in Christ's name, they had forbidden him to proceed further in it. They tell what they had done, apparently with an uneasy feeling that their action would not meet with their Master's approval. Perhaps the man whom they had interdicted was after all "a little one" whom they should have taken to their hearts, and not an enemy to be silenced. The same self-seeking spirit that had led them to dispute among themselves as to who should be greatest, had led them to resent any apparent encroachment upon their prerogatives as accredited ministers of Christ. The lesser fact that the exorcist followed not *them* overshadowed the greater fact that he was a follower of their Lord. The reply of Christ, in which He claims as allies those who in faith in Him do good work, and in which He passes no censure upon those who are unattached to the visible Church, contains a lesson which His followers in all ages have been very slow to learn. Had it been learned, there would not have been the many exhibitions of bigotry and uncharitableness which have marred the history of the Church and diminished its power for doing good in the world. All would have been approved, encouraged, and helped who in the name of Christ strove against evil, and proved the genuineness of their attachment to Him by the success of their work. As it is, it is a defect of every organised form of Christianity that those connected with it look on all who are outside it with a certain measure of suspicion and jealousy and ill-will.

SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS ON VERSES 46—62.

Vers. 46-62. *Lessons to the Twelve.*

I. **Humility** (vers. 46-48).

II. **Tolerance** (vers. 49, 50).

III. **Mercy** (vers. 51-56).

IV. **Self-sacrifice** (vers. 57-62).—*W. Taylor.*

The Disposition which Christ Approves.—The aim of this whole section is to show the mind which our Lord desires to see in His disciples.

I. **Childlike humility.**
II. **Gentle love.**
III. **Resolute self-devotion.**

Vers. 46-56. *How Christ rebuked Pride.*

I. **Pride is a common sin.**
II. **It takes various forms.**—1. Pride of place (vers. 46-48). 2. Pride of party (vers. 49, 50). 3. Offended pride (vers. 51-56).—*W. Taylor.*

Three Faults rebuked.—Three wrong dispositions rebuked: (1) ambition to be greatest; (2) intolerance, in forbidding even exorcism; (3) vindictiveness, in proposing to avenge an insult by calling down fire from heaven.

Vers. 46-50. *Exclusiveness and Bigotry.*—The same spirit of pride that led the apostles to vie with each other as to who should be greatest prompted them to manifest exclusiveness and bigotry in forbidding exorcism in the name of Christ because the exorcist did not belong to their circle.

Ver. 46. "*Which should be the greatest.*"—The disciples were guilty of a double fault: 1. They were inclined to dispute about the rewards of victory before they had accomplished their warfare. 2. They were animated by selfish ambition and jealousy.

The Crown and the Cross.—The Saviour's repeated predictions of His sufferings had not sunk into the minds of His disciples: they were thinking of the *crown*, while their Master's eye was fixed upon the *cross*.

Ver. 47. "*Set him by Him.*"—They knew that the greatest in the kingdom of heaven is he who is nearest to Christ; but they asked which of them had the best claim to the place. Probably the rest of the apostles envied those who had been with Christ upon the mount, and this was the origin of their strife.

Ver. 48. "*This child.*"—The central point of comparison is the child's *humility*. This humility (1) frees the child's understanding from vain imaginations, (2) the child's heart from rivalry, and (3) the child's will from stubbornness.—*Van Oosterzee.*

Ver. 49. "*We forbad him.*"—Cf. the jealousy of Joshua against Eldad and Medad, and the noble answer of Moses (Num. xi. 27-29).

Ver. 50. "*Forbid him not.*"—1. A reproof for the past. 2. A direction for the future.

"*He that is not,*" *etc.*—When, in applied morals, we sit in judgment on ourselves, we should in ordinary circumstances apply the law stringently, "He who is not with Christ is against Him." But when we are sitting in judgment on others, into whose hearts we cannot look directly, we should in ordinary circumstances apply the law generously, "He who is not against Christ is with Him."—*Morison.*

Two Complementary Sayings.—In Matt. xii. 30 we have a saying which is at first contradictory to this: "He who is not with Me is against Me." Yet both are true. In the contest between good and evil neutrality is as bad as enmity, so that those not for Christ are against Him; yet we can recognise all as on our side who are striving against evil, even if they are not using our methods or formally taking their place beside us. While the apostles were taught this lesson in toleration, the man receives only negative praise. There are always earnest Christian labourers who decline to be orderly in their methods. Their irregularity calls for toleration, not approval.

Inward Unity and Outward Conformity.—The saying in Matthew refers more to *inward unity* with Christ:

this one to *outward conformity* with His people. The former may exist independently of the latter, and its existence unites real Christians, whatever their name and outward differences.

Lessons taught by the incident.

I. **Beware of hasty conclusions concerning men's spiritual state based on merely external indications.**

II. "Forbid him not" reminds us of the sorrowful fact that too often **in the history of the Church it has been the spirit of the twelve rather than that of their Master which has predominated.**

III. **Outward union among Christians may be impracticable, yet the duty remains of recognising from the heart all who truly love Christ,** whatever Church they may be in; they should be dearer to us than those in our own Church who may be in spirit and life not with Christ, but against Him.

A Lesson of Mercy.—This text teaches us a lesson of mercy. It guides our estimate of others. It says: "Do not make a man an offender for a word; do not let your sympathies be narrowed to the circle of those who express the same convictions in the same phrases, or seek the same end by the same precise means, as yourself. Be prepared to believe and act upon the belief that God is not limited to one field of action or to one kind of character, but can aid and bless the work, and will eventually accept the person of all those who love the Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity, and who avail themselves of His help in combating evil within and around them."—*Vaughan.*

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 51—56.

The Spirit of the Old Testament and of the New.—We have here one of the memorable incidents of our Lord's last journey to Jerusalem. Very solemnly and very sweetly does the Evangelist introduce the reference to His passion—"when the time was come that He should be received up." It mitigates the bitterness of His Lord's sufferings and death, looking on as it thus does to the issue and the end, to the taking up of Christ into heaven, to His reception in His heavenly home and into His Father's glory.

I. **The insult.**—"He sent messengers before His face" as harbingers, to use that word in its most proper sense. "And they went, and entered into a village of the Samaritans, to make ready for Him. And they did not receive Him, because His face was as though He would go to Jerusalem." This refusal of theirs was no piece of ordinary inhospitality such as the Samaritans were wont to show to Galilæan pilgrims on their way to the feasts at Jerusalem. It was not merely as such a pilgrim that they shut their doors against Him; for this we must remember was Christ's solemn progress from Galilee to Judæa as Messiah, with these messengers everywhere announcing Him as such. But, as the Samaritans esteemed it, a Messiah going to Jerusalem to observe the feasts there did by His very act proclaim that He was no Messiah; for on Gerizim, as they believed, the old patriarchs had worshipped, consecrating it to be the holy mountain of God—which, therefore, and not Jerusalem, the Christ, when He came, would recognise and honour as the central point of all true religion.

II. **The anger of the apostles.**—The sons of Zebedee were probably with the Lord when the tidings were brought back of the village which, refusing to receive Him, had missed the opportunity of entertaining, not angels, but the Lord of angels, unawares. Upon this provocation all their suppressed and smouldering indignation against the schismatics, through whose territory they

were journeying, breaks forth. At this instance of contempt shown to their Lord and to themselves (for no doubt a feeling of personal slight mingled with their indignation, however little they may have been aware of it themselves), the "sons of thunder" would fain play Old Testament parts. They feel that a greater than Elias is here; for they are fresh from the Mount of Transfiguration, where they had seen how the glory of Moses and Elias paled before the brighter glory of Him whom they served. An outrage against Him, and a rejecting of Him, should therefore not be less terribly avenged. With all of carnal and sinful which mingled with this proposal of theirs, yet what insight into the dignity of their Lord, and the greatness of the outrage directed against Him, does it reveal—what faith in the mighty powers with which He was able to equip His servants! And yet it might almost seem as though, with all this confidence of theirs, there was a latent and lurking sense upon their part of a certain unfitness in this their proposal; and thus out of no desire to intrude into their Lord's office, but only out of a feeling that this avenging act might not exactly become *Him*, they proffer themselves as the executors of the judgment. It will become the servants, though it might not perfectly become the Lord.

III. **The disciples rebuked.**—"He turned, and rebuked them: Ye know not what manner of spirit ye are of." "You are missing," Christ would say, "your true position, which is, having been born of the spirit of forgiving love, to be ruled by that spirit, and not by the spirit of avenging righteousness. You are losing sight of the distinction between the old covenant and the new, missing the greater glory of the latter, and that it is the higher blessedness to belong to it." It behoves us to see clearly that there is no slight cast here on the spirit of Elias. Both spirits, that which breathed through and informed the prophets and saints of the old covenant, as well as that which should inform the disciples of the new, are Divine. The difference between them is not of opposition, but only of time and degree. The spirit of the old testament was a spirit of avenging righteousness; God was teaching men His holiness by terrible things in righteousness. But the spirit of the new covenant, not contrary, but brighter, is that of forgiving love; in it He is overcoming man's evil with His good. Each economy has one predominating tone from which it takes its character. The two apostles were for the moment failing to recognise this. In a confusion of old and new, and not knowing of "what manner of spirit" they were, they had fallen back on the rudiments of God's education of His people, when it was their privilege to go on unto perfection, and to teach the world the far greater might of meekness and of love. In their missing of all this there was a fault and matter of blame, yet blame by no means so severe as some are disposed to find. They were rebuked for choosing that which, perfectly good in its own time, was only not good now because a better had come in, for returning to the lower level of the old covenant when Christ had lifted them up, if only they had understood this, to the higher level of the new.—*Trench.*

SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS ON VERSES 51—56.

Vers. 51-56. *The courage and meekness of Christ.*

I. **The Divine courage and firmness of Christ in despising death.**

II. **The deadly enmities produced by differences about religion.**

III. **With what headlong ardour the nature of man is hurried on to impatience!**

IV. **How ready we are to fall into mistakes in imitating the saints!**

V. **By the example of Christ we are called to the exercise of meekness.**—*Calvin.*

Ver. 51. "*Received up.*"—Our Lord's agony, cross, and passion were at hand; but He looked through them all to His glorious ascension.

Ver. 52. "*To make ready for Him.*"—An indication of the dignity which was mingled with the humility of the Saviour. He required some preparation to be made for His coming, attended as He was by disciples, and did not choose to subject Himself to the inconveniences of haphazard arrangements made after His arrival, when a little foresight and management might prevent confusion and discomfort.

Ver. 53. "*Did not receive Him.*"—Note the disastrous effects of *religious prejudice.*

I. **It leads to a rejection of the Saviour.**

II. **It prompts a rudeness and discourtesy of which worldly people would be ashamed to be guilty.**

III. **It robs those who are blinded by it of those rich blessings which would result from communion with the Saviour and with His true disciples.**

Ver. 54. "*James and John.*"—Christ had surnamed them Boanerges, or "Sons of Thunder" (Mark iii. 17), and their present proposal strikingly harmonises with some aspects of the character that gained for them the name. We should do them wrong if we imagined that their proposal was a mere outburst of personal annoyance. It sprang from sincere jealousy for the honour of their Lord, though with it there may have mingled party passion—some remains of old-standing dislike of Jews to Samaritans.

Ver. 55. "*Ye know not.*"—James showed, when he suffered in patience death by the sword, that he had learned the meek spirit of Christ.

"*What manner of spirit.*"—1. They thought they were actuated simply by zeal for Christ, but pride and anger vitiated their zeal. 2. The spirit they manifested was not such as became the apostles of the gospel, who were sent to proclaim mercy even to the chief of sinners.

Elias' Spirit.—Elias' spirit, I hope, was no evil spirit. No; but every good spirit, as good as Elias', is not for every person, place, or time. Spirits are given by God, and men inspired with them, after several manners, upon several occasions, as the several times require. The times sometimes require one spirit, sometimes another. Elias' time, Elias' spirit. As his act good, done by his spirit, so his spirit good in his own time. The time changed; the spirit, then good, now not good. But why is it out of time? For the Son of man is come. As if He should say, Indeed, there is a time to destroy (Eccles. iii. 3); that was under the law, the fiery law, as Moses calls it; then a fiery spirit would not be amiss. The spirit of Elias was good till the Son of man came; but now He is come, the date of that spirit is expired. When the Son of man is come, the spirit of Elias must be gone; now specially, for Moses and he resigned lately in the mount. Now no lawgiver, no prophet, but Christ.—*Andrewes.*

Ver. 56. *Give People Time.*—"They went to another village."

I. **Christ's action here illustrates the importance of giving people time to accept His claims.**—This need not involve any surrender of the truth. No good is done by speaking as if the truth were less certain, less supremely important, than in our hearts we believe it to be. But who are we, that we should dare to foreclose the time of others' growth? The impenetrable reserves of truth, its distances of unapproachable light, make us incapable of judging how God may lead men on to it. Who can tell how he may help others by his own reverent and hopeful patience!

II. **This example of Christ ought to help us in the ordinary affairs of**

life.—How much unsuspected beauty might be disclosed around us if we gave people time! Remember that they who would foreclose the case for others would themselves be without light and hope if God had not borne with them. They are depending moment by moment on His long-suffering. And think how much forbearance we have received from others! So much, that we have been often unconscious that we needed any. If we considered these things, we would gladly give others time to amend.—*Paget.*

Salvation.—The love of God can pursue and convict the most lost and erring. It goes after lost sheep. But how? By our accepting the yoke of Christ we come in touch with this store of vitality. The prime aim of the new creation is to take the will of God as the motive of life. "Thy will be done" is the acceptable prayer for salvation. Salvation from what? From the crushing or subtle power of temptation—from all that harms us. Do not associate salvation merely with deliverance from a future hell: salvation is deliverance from evil habit, from disappointment, from worry. This incoming saving power of God is for daily use.—*Jones.*

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 57—62.

The Three Aspirants.—The manifold wisdom of Christ, which displayed itself in His drawing and attaching of souls to Himself by ways the most different, must often fill us with devout admiration. It can never fill us more with this than when there are brought before us in quick succession moral and spiritual conditions, with much apparent similarity, which yet are most diversely treated by Him. Such we have here. There are three who, either in their own intention or in the Lord's, are candidates for admission into the inner circle of disciples—into the circle, that is, of those who should not merely themselves receive the truth, but, as Christ's witnesses, should be actively employed in imparting the knowledge of that truth to others.

I. **The offer repelled.**—First there offers himself a scribe (Matthew), and his words sound fairly: "Master, I will follow Thee whithersoever Thou goest." They a little remind one of the great-hearted words of Ittai to David: "Surely in what place my lord the king shall be, whether in death or life, even there also will thy servant be" (2 Sam. xv. 21). Nor is there any reason to suppose that this aspirant to discipleship and to all which discipleship might involve meant at the time otherwise than he spoke. Yet there is not in him that true devotedness to Christ which shall lead him so to follow that Lord in this world that in the world to come he shall be free to follow Him whithersoever He goeth (Rev. xiv. 4). These words have more in them of Peter's confident asseveration, "Lord, I am ready to go with Thee, both into prison, and to death" (chap. xxii. 33). At all events, they inspire Him, who knowing all things knew what was in man, with no greater confidence than those other words of Peter hereafter should do; for, not welcoming this volunteer, but rather repelling, He answers, "The foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests; but the Son of man hath not where to lay His head." In other words: "Lookest thou for worldly commodities through the following of Me? In this thou must needs be disappointed. These cannot be My followers' portion, since they are not Mine. The Son of man is homeless and houseless upon earth." Nor does this answer of Christ come out to us in all its depth of meaning till we realise that hour when upon His cross He bowed His head, not having where to lay it, and having bowed it thus gave up the ghost. Whether

this scribe withdrew and went away, we are not informed. That he did withdraw is certainly the impression left upon our minds. But whatever was the issue, this reply of Christ was not meant merely and only to repel. It was intended rather to throw back this candidate for the honours of discipleship on deeper heart-searchings, that, having made these, he might either fall off altogether, or else that he might attach himself to the Lord in quite another spirit from that in which he made his present offer of service.

II. **A summons to heroism.**—The Lord, who has checked one, incites another; for He knew there was more truth in the backwardness of him to whom He addresses Himself now than in the forwardness of that other who had just addressed Him. He has for him that significant "Follow Me" which He had for a Philip, a Matthew, an Andrew, a Peter. It is in answer to such a summons that this one replies, "Lord, suffer me first to go and bury my father." This may mean, "My father now lies dead; suffer me, before I attach myself to Thee, to render the last offices of pity to him." And Christ's answer we may interpret as implying, "The spiritually dead, those who are not quickened as thou hast been with the spirit of a new life, are yet sufficient for the fulfilling of this office which would now call thee away from Me—namely, the burying of the naturally dead; they can perform it as well as thou, and, under present circumstances, thou must be contented to leave it to them." When duties come into collision, sacred duties such as that which this man pleaded must give way to those more sacred yet. Christ had said to this man, "Follow Me"; so that now that saying held good, "Whoso loveth father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me." And then Christ justifies His withdrawal of this man from attendance on the dead. He had a fitness for work which, if not directly with the living, was yet with those who were capable of being made alive: "Go thou, and preach the kingdom of God." As though He had said: "Another task is thine—namely, to spread far and wide the glad tidings of life, which as many as hear shall live. One of My royal priesthood, a Nazarite of Mine, having fellowship with Me who am the Life, thy occupation is henceforth with the living, and not with the dead."

III. **Half-heartedness blamed.**—A third offers *himself* for discipleship; yet this with conditions, and craving time for farewells which he would fain interpose. He, too, must learn that there is no dallying with a heavenly vocation; that when this has reached a man, no room is left him for conferring with flesh and blood; to him, too, as to the king's daughter of old, the word of that precept has come, "Forget also thine own people, and thy father's house" (Ps. xlv. 10); while, as it may only too easily prove, his worst foes, those who will most effectually keep him back from God, may be those of his own household (Matt. x. 36, 37). The Lord, therefore, will give no allowance to his request, shuts out at once all dangerous delays and interludes between the offer of service and the actual undertaking of it. He who holds the plough must not look behind him; if he does, he spoils the furrow, and mars the work which he has undertaken. The discipleship of Christ is such a putting of the hand to the plough, for the breaking up of the hard soil of our own hearts, for the breaking up of the hard soil of the hearts of others. The image sets forth the *laboriousness* of the work better than the more usual image of sowing; and, so to speak, carries us a step farther back in the spiritual husbandry. But he who, having put his hand to the plough, and thus begun well, shall afterwards, Christ does not say *turn* back, but even so much as *look* back, in token that his heart is otherwhere than in the task before him, he may still have his hand on the plough, but having fallen away in heart and affection from his work, he traces no straight furrows, he breaks not up aright any fallow ground; he "is not fit," or rather, is of no service and profit, "for the kingdom of God." Indeed, unless

kept to his work as an hireling, it is likely that he will presently leave his plough in the half-drawn furrow, and be found to have exchanged toil and exposure abroad for the comforts and ease of his own hearth.—*Trench.*

SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS ON VERSES 57—62.

Vers. 57-62. *Would-be Disciples.*—A slight examination of the three cases suffices to show that they practically break into two classes marked by the broad distinction that Christ warns and repels the one, but calls and insists upon the services of the other. One man is discouraged by Christ; two are pressed to enter on the instant into Christ's service. And this, even though the first seems the most ready, and the other two show a desire to shirk the call. This varying treatment must turn upon some underlying contrast in their spiritual condition; for Jesus has not two sets of terms, He is no respecter of persons who picks and chooses arbitrarily, and so His methods of treatment, though opposed, are quite consistent.

I. **See how He deals with uncalculating readiness.**—It was a striking thing for a scribe publicly to offer to become Christ's scholar. But he only took Jesus for another, a wiser scribe than himself—a very shallow qualification for Christian discipleship. His dilettante admiration and transient enthusiasm were unfit to stand the test of practical service. He knew nothing of the life of exposure and privation which this great Scribe led. The Son of man was often homeless and shelterless. His disciples were drawn to Him and kept by Him with a hold which made them indifferent to privation. It was a heart-hold. He had won them for ever to Himself. And to be a Christian now means separation for Christ's sake from the spirit of the world, and makes a man more or less of an alien and a pilgrim here. It calls him to deny himself and to toil for the salvation of others. Your easy-going scribe will not do that.

II. **See how He deals with reluctance.**—Under this term the second and third cases are to be reckoned. The first of the two is no volunteer; but he has received the call. Concealed discipleship is no longer to be maintained. Open confession, public service, consecration of himself to the work of Christ—this is what the Lord claimed from His hesitating but genuine disciple. Such a moment comes to every true disciple. It comes as a summons to decision for and open confession of Christ. It comes as a call for testimony and service, where irksome, unpleasant toil is needed. The feeling of duty is Christ's call, and it leaves you ill at ease until it is obeyed.

III. The great lesson taught by both instances is that **such clear, imperative call from Christ sounding in the heart and conscience takes precedence of everything else.**—Neither of the two of whom Luke tells us wanted to go. When called, they made excuses for not complying. They did so on the ground of something which seemed to have a prior claim. One urged a domestic duty, the other domestic affection. The first had a dead father to bury, the second had a family circle who as yet knew nothing about his new call to higher work. Yet family life, as Jesus views it, is for the present only, and not for eternity. The interests and claims of the living, spiritual world must take precedence of the dead one. In this man's case the two duties were made to conflict that there might be a lesson to you and me for all time. Summoned to the holiest of all duties, the disciple is absolved from the holiest of earthly duties. As for the second man, it is evident that the lower affections of the natural heart were straining his devotion to higher duty in a quite

perilous degree. Men who cannot steel themselves against such allurements are not fit for the work of God. Jesus is a very exigent Master. What portrait of ourselves do we recognise in these three disciples!—*Dykes.*

Enthusiasm, Reluctance, Compromise. Three Types of Character.

I. **Enthusiasm repressed.**—The prayer is not welcomed. The disciple spoke unadvisedly, and was rebuffed by Christ's answer. We must not diminish where Christ has spoken. This is His own description of the homelessness of His ministry. It is a parable. Unrest is the trial of trials to His people. To some the words come true literally, to all spiritually. Think of it ere thou speakest the "whithersoever." Jesus meets enthusiam with warning. None shall come after Him by mistake or in misunderstanding.

II. **Reluctance stimulated.**—The direct opposite. Christ takes the initiative here; summons to instantaneous decision. We know not the reasons for this special peremptoriness; but He repels the disciple's plea, and claims pre-eminence for the reign of God in man's heart and life. Christ is jealous of earthly duties, even the most sacred. His mandate is stern and imperious.

III. **Compromise rebuked.**—A wonderfully composite character! He is a volunteer, but he stipulates; an enthusiast, but he procrastinates. His prayer is denied. Christ will not allow natural affection to divert from His service. What is there in your home, your heart, your life that cannot stay there with Jesus? Count the cost. Put the hand to the plough, and look not back!—*Vaughan.*

Three Types of Character.—Each of the three sayings of Christ brought together in this place by Luke contains a distinct principle applicable to a particular type of character.

I. The word spoken to the scribe **suggested to an inconsiderate enthusiast the lesson** that one must count the cost before entering on the career of a disciple.

II. The second word is adapted to the case of a **man thoroughly in earnest, but distracted by a conflict of duties,** and virtually enunciates the principle that in all collisions between the duties we owe to the kingdom and those arising out of natural relations, the former must take precedence.

III. The third word **meets the case of a divided heart.**—The ploughman who looks back does not give his undivided attention to his task, and therefore fails to draw a straight furrow. The man who desired to bid farewell to his friends was hankering after home enjoyments, and the reply to his request taught the lesson that no one who is drawn two ways by his affections is fit for the service of the kingdom, because it demands the whole heart and mind. The very harshness and inexorableness of Christ's sayings serve to show how exacting and inexorable is the demand of the kingdom for heroic devotion.—*Bruce.*

The Three Disciples.

I. **The self-confident disciple.**—His estimate of what Christ's service required was far from complete.

II. **The diffident disciple.**—Finds himself in a dilemma which seems to warrant, if it does not necessitate, delay. Our Lord teaches that every duty, no matter how sacred or momentous, is subordinate to the primary one of following Him.

III. **Offers like the first, but in general character resembles the second.**—He is not constrained by any sense of duty. He does not appreciate the gravity of the moment, the pressing and august character of our Lord's work. This is no time for saying farewells. Love dictates the sternness of our Lord's words. He insists on wholehearted service.—*Moinet.*

Christ wants Followers—

I. **Who have counted the cost.**

II. **Who are ready to follow Him at once.**

III. **Who will follow with an undivided heart.**—*W. Taylor.*

Ver. 57. *The more eager the less prepared.*—We must bear in mind that he was a scribe, who had been accustomed to a quiet and easy life, had enjoyed honour, and was ill-fitted to endure reproaches, poverty, persecutions, and the cross. He wishes, indeed, to follow Christ, but dreams of an easy and agreeable life, and of dwellings filled with every convenience; whereas the disciples of Christ must walk among thorns, and march to the cross amidst uninterrupted afflictions. The more eager he is, the less he is prepared. He seems as if he wished to fight in the shade and at ease, neither annoyed by sweat nor by dust, and beyond the reach of the weapons of war.—*Calvin.*

Vers. 57-62. *Three Would-be Followers.*—Christ deals with three proposed followers: (1) the ambitious self-seeker; (2) the procrastinating time-server; (3) the hesitating and half-hearted compromiser.

Vers. 57, 58. An *enthusiastic* disciple checked.

Vers. 59, 60. A *laggard* disciple stimulated.

Vers. 61, 62. An *irresolute* disciple summoned to choose between the world and God.

Three Impediments.—The three impediments are: (1) earthly desire; (2) earthly sorrow; (3) earthly affection.

Ver. 60. "*Go thou and preach.*"—Jesus forbade him to go, in order to show that nothing, not even the most important work of natural duty and affection, is so momentous as care for the kingdom of heaven, and that nothing, however urgent, should cause us to be guilty of a moment's delay in providing first for that.—*Chrysostom.*

Ver. 62. *The True Follower.*—The true motive to follow Jesus must absorb every other. 1. Renunciation. 2. Concentration. 3. Expectation.

"*Plough.*"—An intimation that the ministerial life is like that of a tiller of the ground (cf. 1 Cor. iii. 9). The Christian minister is a feeder of sheep, a dresser of a vineyard, a master-builder, a watchman; all these names imply duties requiring diligence, vigilance, and toil.—*Wordsworth.*

Reluctance for the Work.—Our Lord knew quite well that if he went away he would not come back again; it was not so much love for those at home as reluctance for the work that was in his mind.

CHAPTER X.

CRITICAL NOTES.

Ver. 1. The mission of the seventy is peculiar to St. Luke. We need not be surprised at the silence of the other evangelists, as the office to which these men were called was not a permanent one. They were simply to prepare the people for Christ's approaching visit, and as it were for His last appeal to them. The instructions given to them correspond to those given to the apostles (see Matt. x.), so far as concerns present duties. In contradistinction to the temporary character of the mission of the seventy is that of the apostles, which, as the above charge given to them, indicates "an office and ministry co-extensive with the world, both in space and duration" (*Alford*).

Seventy also.—Rather, "seventy others," *i.e.* in addition to the twelve. The number seventy may have had reference to the *elders* of Israel (Exod. xxiv. 1; Num. xi. 16). Some MSS. read "seventy-two," which has been conjectured to be a traditional correction to make the number correspond to that of the members of the Sanhedrim. **Two and two.**—For mutual helpfulness, as in the case of the twelve (Mark vi. 7). **Would come.**—Rather, "was about to come" (R.V.).

Ver. 2. **Send forth.**—The word in the original may imply the ideas of urgency and haste; it is literally "drive forth," but may have lost this special force of meaning in course of time.

Ver. 4. **Neither purse, etc.**—Cf. chap. ix. 1-6. **Salute no man.**—Not to waste time upon secondary matters. Cf. 2 Kings iv. 29. Eastern salutations are, all from accounts, elaborate and ceremonious.

Ver. 6. **Son of peace.**—*I.e.* one capable of receiving their message. "The meaning here is that the disciples were to communicate their message of peace, as the prophet of old was to communicate his message of warning (Ezek. iii. 17-21), to all, whether 'worthy' or not. And it is promised to them that even if their message falls on inattentive ears or stubborn hearts, yet it shall not be fruitless, since the duty performed shall bring peace to themselves —'it shall turn to you again'" (*Speaker's Commentary*).

Ver. 8. **City.**—The previous instructions evidently had in view villages and detached houses. **Eat such things, etc.**—The reference probably is to the scruples felt by strict Jews about eating with the Samaritans. Our Lord had no such scruple: see John iv. 8. St. Paul gives the precept a wider scope by extending it to food in the houses of Gentiles: see 1 Cor. x. 27.

Ver. 12. **More tolerable.**—The principle on which judgment proceeds is given in chap. xii. 47, 48.

Ver. 13. **Woe unto thee, Chorazin, etc.**—These words were evidently spoken by Christ more than once: we find them in another connection in Matt. xi. 21-24. They derive more force here from having been spoken when Christ was at a distance away from them: the guilt they had incurred by rejecting Him was like a burden upon His mind. Chorazin has been identified with the ruined town two miles north of Capernaum (Tell Hum). There is no record in the Gospels, apart from these references, of Christ's work in Chorazin. Bethsaida—on the western side of the Lake of Gennesaret, not far from Capernaum; the birthplace of Peter, Andrew, and Philip.

Ver. 15. **Capernaum exalted to heaven.**—As being made the headquarters of Christ's ministry. **Hell.**—In the original, *Hades*, as the antithesis to heaven; the lowest as contrasted with the highest position. A better reading (followed in the R.V.) is, "Shalt thou be exalted unto heaven? Thou shalt be brought down to Hades."

Ver. 17. **Returned.**—The mission may not have occupied more than a few days: probably a time and place of rendezvous had been appointed. **Even the devils.**—Their success had exceeded the promise; for the power over evil spirits had not been formally given to them. Perhaps in their words to Christ they laid more stress upon "subject to us" than "in Thy name."

Ver. 18. **I beheld.**—It seems rather inadequate to understand by these words that Christ had witnessed with exultation the victories over evil spirits gained by the seventy during their mission. The comment of *Alford* on the passage is more in harmony with the remarkable character of this utterance of our Lord's: "The truth is that in this brief speech He sums up *proleptically*, as so often in the discourses in St. John, the whole great conflict with and defeat of the Power of evil, from the first even till accomplished by His own victory. 'I beheld Satan,' etc., refers to the original fall of Satan when he lost his place as an angel of light, not keeping his first estate; which fall, however, had been proceeding ever since step by step, and shall do so, till all things be put under the feet of Jesus, who was made lower than the angels. And this 'I beheld' belongs to the period before the foundation of the world when He abode in the bosom of the Father. He is to be (ver. 22) the great Victor over the adversary, and this victory began when Satan fell from heaven." **As lightning.**—The suddenness of the fall, and the brightness of the fallen angel.

Ver. 19. **I give.**—Rather, "I have given" (R.V.). **Power.**—Rather, "authority" (R.V.); and this forbids our taking "serpents and scorpions" in a literal sense. The words doubtless are a reminiscence of Ps. xci. 13.

Ver. 20. **Rejoice not.**—Success in doing Christ's work is less a ground of rejoicing than the consciousness of being His servants and of being saved by Him. **Written in heaven.**—Cf. Ex. xxxii. 32; Ps. lxix. 28; Phil. iv. 3; Rev. xx. 12.

Ver. 21. **Rejoiced.**—Or, "exulted": this element of joy in the Saviour's life is but little touched upon by the evangelists, and this notice of it here is therefore all the more precious. **In spirit.**—Rather, "in the Holy Spirit" (R.V.). The vast preponderance of MSS. is in favour of this very peculiar phrase, which forms a notable addition to the classical passages in which the doctrine of the Trinity is referred to. **That thou hast hid.**—The idea of the passage is, "That *though* thou didst hide from the wise, thou hast revealed unto babes." The joy is not on account of truth being hid from some, but on account of its being revealed to those of susceptible hearts. Cf. Rom. vi. 17; Isa. xii. 1, for similar expressions which demand the same kind of interpretation. In Matt. xi. 25-27 we have the same words as here in vers. 21, 22. It seems probable that Christ used these words on more than one occasion. Alford, who is not at all in favour of suggestions of the kind when used by harmonists to overcome difficulties, is emphatically of the opinion that the method in question

is to be adopted here. The Johannine character of the passage, especially of ver. 22, is well worth noticing.

Ver. 22. **All things, etc.**—As the margin indicates, some ancient MSS. preface the verse with the words, "And turning to His disciples He said." This reading is not followed by the R.V.

Ver. 24. **Many prophets and kings.**—Jacob, Gen. xlix. 18; Balaam, Num. xxiv. 17; David, 2 Sam. xxiii. 1-5.

Ver. 25. **A certain lawyer.**—One whose business it was to teach the law. It was probably in Judæa that this conversation was held; as we read (ver. 38) that Jesus was on His way to Bethany. **Tempted Him.**—The word seems to mean nothing worse than putting His skill to full proof, *i.e.* consulting Him on difficult questions. He probably wished to see if Jesus would teach him anything new; and an air of self-conceit is manifest in what little is said of him (see ver. 29). **What shall I do, etc.**—This question was put to Christ more than once: see xviii. 18; cf. with them Acts xvi. 30, 31.

Ver. 26. **How readest thou?**—"A common Rabbinical formula for eliciting a text of Scripture. What? not how? *i.e.* to what purport" (*Alford*).

Ver. 27. **Thou shalt love, etc.**—Deut. vi. 5, x. 12; Lev. xix. 18. His answer was intelligent; his summary of duty such as Christ taught; it was in knowledge of himself that he came short.

Ver. 28. **This do, and thou shalt live.**—"True in all cases: any one who can and does love God and his neighbour thus has already begun to live, has an earnest of eternal life" (*Popular Commentary*).

Ver. 29. **Willing to justify himself.**—*I.e.* to declare his obedience to this summary of the law, unless some other definition of "neighbour" than that which he held could be given—his definition excluding Samaritans and Gentiles.

Ver. 30. **Answering, said.**—Lit. "taking him up": it is perhaps not too much to say that the phrase implies that Christ did more than answer him—made the answer the basis of teaching which corrected his faulty ideas. **A certain man.**—We are to understand that he was a Jew; but no stress is laid on this. The Samaritan saw in him simply a wounded man. Perhaps this is not a fictitious story at all; it may be that the lawyer himself had been the traveller, had received kindness from a Samaritan, which he had not repaid, and which had not led him to form truer ideas as to who his neighbour was. **Down from Jerusalem.**—About twenty-one miles, Jericho lying on a much lower level than Jerusalem. The road here described was, and one might almost say is, haunted by robbers. *Jerome* says that in his time it was called "the bloody way," and that a Roman fort and garrison were needed there for the protection of travellers. **Fell among thieves.**—Rather, "robbers," "brigands": into the midst of them, they surrounded him. **Wounded him.**—Rather, "beat him" (R.V.), lit. "laying blows on him."

Ver. 31. **A certain priest.**—Probably on his way home from duties in the Temple; for Jericho was a priestly city. **That way.**—"Rather, 'on that road.' It is emphatically mentioned, because there was *another* road to Jericho, which was safer, and therefore more frequently used" (*Farrar*). **Passed by.**—Without showing the mercy inculcated by the law and the prophets (see Exod. xxiii. 4, 5; Deut. xxii. 1-4; Isa. lviii. 7).

Ver. 32. The conduct of the Levite was rather worse than that of the priest.

Ver. 33. **Had compassion.**—It was this feeling which differentiated him from the priest and the Levite; and from this feeling sprang his deeds and words of kindness to the wounded man.

Ver. 34. **Oil and wine.**—The usual remedy for wounds in the East. **His own beast.**—Thereby depriving himself of the use of it. **An inn.**—Not a caravanserai, as in ii. 7, but a house for travellers kept by a host. Two different words are used in the respective passages.

Ver. 35. **Two pence.**—The *denarius* was worth about eightpence halfpenny of our money, and was the day's wages of an ordinary labourer (see Matt. xx. 2). Probably the smallness of the sum named is intended to suggest that the Samaritan was a poor man, and thus to bring into clearer relief his generosity and kindness on this occasion,

Ver. 36. **Was neighbour.**—Rather, "proved neighbour" (R.V.), lit. "became neighbour." "The neighbour Jews (priest and Levite) became strangers, the stranger Samaritan became neighbour, to the wounded traveller. It is not place, but love, which makes neighbourhood" (*Wordsworth*).

Ver. 37. **He that shewed mercy.**—It may be that Pharisaic haughtiness led to this indirect answer, as though the lawyer disdained to use the hated name, "Samaritan." But no great stress need be laid on this. "The lawyer was taught how one really becomes the neighbour of another, namely, by active love, irrespective of nationality or religion. His question, 'Who is my neighbour?' was answered: He to whom you *ought* thus to show mercy in order to become *his* neighbour is your neighbour. The question is answered *once for all.* All are our neighbours, when we have thus learned *what we owe to man as man*"

(*Popular Commentary*). **Go, and do thou likewise.**—The question had doubtless been asked in the spirit of hair-splitting casuistry; Jesus gives the matter a practical bent.

Ver. 38. **A certain village.**—There can be no doubt that this was Bethany, and that the persons mentioned were sisters of Lazarus. The names are not only the same, but the words and actions of both are characteristic of the two sisters described in John xi., xii. Bethany was an hour's walk from Jerusalem, and was a favourite resort of our Lord, when He was in the neighbourhood of the capital. *Farrar* considers that the phrases "a certain village" and "a certain woman" are obvious traces of a tendency to reticence about the family of Bethany which he thinks are to be found in the synoptic Gospels (Matt. xxvi. 6; Mark xiv. 3). Such reticence he attributes to the danger to which more special notice of the family might have exposed them—a danger which was probably long past when St. John wrote his Gospel. This idea seems, however, to be far-fetched and baseless. The notices in St. Matthew and St. Mark are definite enough; and here the vague phrase, "a certain woman," is followed by her name and the name of her sister. Probably Bethany was not a name as familiar to Theophilus as it is to us. **Martha.**—The name is Aramaic, meaning "lady." She may have been a widow or a married woman; but we have no information on the point.

Ver. 39. The character of Mary is suggested with wonderful skill and simplicity by this description of her. **Sat at Jesus' feet.**—As a disciple; not while He was reclining at table, for the meal was being prepared.

Ver. 40. **Cumbered.**—Lit. "distracted," drawn this way and that by a multitude of things needing her personal supervision. **Came to Him.**—The word implies "suddenly appearing before Him," evidently coming from the room where the preparations were being made into that in which Jesus was. Probably the homely phrase "she flounced in" would best describe her action and mood

Ver. 41. **Martha, Martha.**—Kindliness as well as reproof is indicated in the repetition of the name. **Careful and troubled.**—The one word indicates inward anxiety, the other outward bustle.

Ver. 42. **One thing is needful.**—The food of the soul—feeding on the bread of life; this is "the good part"—the choice portion which Mary has chosen. A curious variation which is founded on good MS. authority is given in the margin of the R.V.—"but few things are needful or one." This evidently arises from a misunderstanding of Christ's words, as though by "the one thing needful" He meant one dish instead of Martha's more bountiful provision; *i.e.* "there is need for few things, indeed one would be sufficient." But apart from the evident mistake as to Christ's words, any reference of the kind to the literal food seems trivial.

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 1—16.

The Heralds of the King.—The true preparation for work for Christ is the clear sight and deep feeling of the immensity of the field, the consequent pressure of need, and the small supply of labourers. These seventy had but a few villages in a little strip of country. We have the world brought within arm's length, by steam and electricity, by commerce and rule. Seventy messengers to the people of Southern Palestine in our Lord's time was a far larger proportion than all Christian missionaries bear to the population of the world. Such a realisation of the immensity of the work will first send a man to prayer. God is the Lord of the harvest, and the fact that it is "His" is the strongest argument in the mouth of the faithful petitioner. Surely He will take means to secure His own property. The inspiration to go forth must come from Him; but, note, that the man who prays must be ready to go himself, if he is sent. To tell men that they are to be as sheep among wolves is strange encouragement to begin work with. But "I send you" is safety. He will take care of His servants going on His errands.

I. **Outfit.**—They are to travel light and to trust. This provision was expressly declared by Christ to apply only to the present case (chap. xxii. 35); but the principle underlying it is of perpetual validity. They who would do Christ's work must be unencumbered, and should be free from anxiety.

II. **Conduct on the road.**—Eastern salutations were and are long-winded affairs, and hollow to boot. Courtesy is not waste of time; but much conventionality has to be brushed aside when a man is in haste and pressed by some

great duty. We ought to be misers of time in Christ's service, and not allow social ceremonies to rob us of too much of it.

III. **Lodgings and entertainment.**—Christ's emissary is not to pick out the best-looking house in the village, but take the first he comes to. A courteous greeting is in place there, and prepares the way for the message. An obvious desire for the welfare of those to whom we carry the gospel is the indispensable condition of success. We must win confidence for ourselves before we can win a higher trust for Jesus. But the messenger is not to expect that his greeting will always be taken as he meant it. "The son of peace," of course, means one who has a nature akin to the peace invoked. Only such will receive the blessing. If the lips to which it is offered will not drink, it shall not be as water spilled on the ground, but will flow back to the source. No Christian work is lost. It produces reflex blessedness in the doer. Kindly feelings, even when spurned, warm the heart where they are kindled. Once in the house, the messenger is to stop there, whether the accommodation be good or bad. There must be a plain disregard of personal advantage, if any good is to be done. "The labourer is worthy of his hire"; but he has "no purse," so he cannot take money; and if he gets enough to eat, so that he can work, he is to stay where he is, however plain the fare. If once the suspicion is raised that selfish motives actuate the messenger of Christ, he may as well stop work. If the labourer deserves his hire, it is equally true that the hire deserves labour, and binds to toil, not to indolence.

IV. **The work to be done.**—The power of miraculous healing is given, and the rousing message is to be delivered. Both work and word apply especially to the seventy, but both point to present duties. Care for physical well-being is part of the Christian's work, and will help to get a hearing for his proper message, as medical missionaries have proved.

V. **The responsibilities incurred by those who rejected the message.**—The solemn command to leave the rejecting city with a last, repeated testimony closes this charge. Wiping off the dust of the city was meant to symbolise the rupture of all connection with it; but even after that the message was to be repeated, if, perchance, some might hear at that last moment. How the yearning of the Divine love speaks in that command! Unbelief makes no difference to the fact. The kingdom will come all the same, but the aspect of its coming changes. It no longer comes as a blessing, but as a foe. The seventy had but little time for their work; for Jesus was close behind them, and they had to leave unproductive fields more quickly than we are allowed to do. But even for us times occasionally come when we have to give up efforts, and try whether withdrawal may do more than continuance. The charge passes into the awful declarations of judgment, first on the rejecting city, and then on the seats of our Lord's ministry in Galilee, which was now closed. Note the clear recognition of degrees in criminality and retribution, measured by degrees of light. Note the selection of the Gentile cities of worst fame: Sodom with her crimes, Tyre and Sidon—the very emblems, in the Prophets, of proud enmity to God. And these sties of lust and greed are to have a lighter doom than the cities of Israel. Why? Because to reject Christ is the worst of sins, containing in its most unmingled form the essence of all sin, and auguring such alienation and aversion from the light as could only come from love of darkness. What must He have thought of Himself who said that not to accept Him was the sin deserving the deepest condemnation? Note, too, the deep pathos of this lament, drawn like a sob from the heart of Jesus. The Judge weeps over the criminals, but His tears do not make Him falter in His judgment. Though Christ would—did—give His life to avert the ruin, He cannot, when He sits on the great white throne, turn the sentence away from those who have dragged it down on themselves by turning away from Him, proclaimed in their unbelieving ears.—*Maclaren.*

SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS ON VERSES 1—16.

Vers. 1-16. *Lessons from the Seventy.*

I. **Unknown workers.**—They were the first band of that vast army of unknown Christian workers whose names, though written in heaven, have been scarcely known and never preserved on earth.

II. **Instructions for Christian workers.**—1. They were to go "two and two." A hint that Christian workers should work in sympathy and harmony. 2. "Before His face." All true Christian work is that of preparing the way for Christ. He must follow, or our work is vain. 3. Prayer for the work itself, especially for "labourers." Do we thus pray daily? Or are we merely content with working ourselves, as though we could accomplish all? 4. Courage — still needed, for some will mock, others will misrepresent our aim, and question our sincerity and zeal. 5. Simplicity of aim. Christian workers have not to study their own pleasure or convenience or profit, but to work with a single eye to God's glory in the salvation of souls.

III. **The end of Christian work.**—We cannot heal the sick, but we can discourage all which hurts the bodily health of man. The great end, however, is to bring nigh to men "the kingdom of God."

IV. **Some sources of consolation for workers.**—1. Success. Christ does not tell us not to value success, nor forbid us to rejoice at it; but He tells us not to rejoice in success as the result of our own efforts or gifts. Lest success should make us vain, He tells us that it is better to rejoice most of all in our relations to God, that by His mercy our "names are written in heaven." 2. Safety. "Nothing shall by any means hurt you." All things will work together for our good. 3. Christ as our refuge and support. He rejoices in our success. All things we need are in Him. He will make us see and hear things which many saint of old have in vain desired.—*Taylor.*

The Mission of the Seventy.—It is remarkable that the comparative abortiveness of the first evangelistic movement by the twelve did not prevent Jesus from repeating the experiment some time after on a still more extensive scale.

I. **The motive of this second mission.**—The motive was the same as in the case of the first, as were also the instructions to the missionaries. Jesus still felt deep compassion for the multitudes, and, hoping against hope, made a new attempt to save the lost sheep. He would have all men *called* at least to the *fellowship* of the kingdom, even though few should be chosen to it.

II. **The results.** — The immediate results were promising. Christ was gratified at this, albeit knowing from past experience, as well as by Divine insight, that the faith and repentance of many were only too likely to be evanescent as the early dew. When the seventy returned to report their great success, He hailed it as an omen of the downfall of Satan's kingdom, and rejoiced in spirit.

III. **Christ's warning.**—After congratulating His disciples on their success, and expressing His own satisfaction with the facts reported, Jesus spoke a warning word. He gave a timely caution against elation and vanity. It is a word in season to all who are very zealous in the work of evangelism, especially such as are crude in knowledge and grace. It hints at the possibility of their own spiritual health being injured by their very zeal in seeking the salvation of others. This may happen in many ways. Success may make the evangelists vain, and they may begin to sacrifice unto their own net. They may fall under the dominion of the devil through their very joy that he is subject unto them. They may

despise those who have been less successful, or denounce them as deficient in zeal. They may fall into carnal security respecting their own spiritual state, deeming it impossible that anything can go wrong with those who are so devoted, and whom God has so greatly owned: an obvious as well as dangerous mistake; for Judas doubtless took part in the Galilæan mission, and, for aught we know, was as successful as his fellow-disciples in casting out devils. Graceless men may be employed for a season as agents in promoting the work of grace in the hearts of others. Usefulness does not necessarily imply goodness. Christ's solemn warning is not meant to discourage or discountenance zeal, but suggest the need of watchfulness and self-examination.—*Bruce.*

The Need of the Mission.—There was need for such a mission, as the district on the east of Jordan had been little visited by Jesus hitherto. These men are sent as lambs among wolves, but two by two, for mutual support. Much is made here of the visible means they were to employ in their mission.

I. **Their message was urgent.**—"The kingdom of God is come nigh unto you."

II. **Their manner of life was the simplest.**—"Remain, eating and drinking such things as they give."

III. **Their commission was authoritative.**—"They receive you not . . . it shall be more tolerable for Sodom." This is a most impressive point. To hear the gospel preached is not only a great privilege, but a great responsibility.—*Hastings.*

The Character of the Mission.—Notice—

I. **Its place in the Gospel.**—The three "studies," as we might call them, of the varieties of would-be ministers, are set, surely not by accident, immediately before the mission of the seventy.

II. **The tenderness, the humanity, of the "two and two."**—If it were possible, we would always have it so. What strength, what comfort, is in the not solitary but sympathetic ministry! What have some of us not owed to the fellowship and the communion of a brother!

III. **The destination of the seventy.**—It is a parable for all ministers. The seventy were not Christ's substitutes—they were His forerunners. They were not sent instead of Him—they were sent whither He would come. Has this trait of ministry been prominent in our own? There is a ministry—it is no imaginary thing—which has no feature in it of the precursorship of Jesus Christ. It has no note of the voice, "There cometh One after me." There is more of parable still.

IV. **The spirit of the seventy is a spirit of intentness.**—"This one thing I do." His heart is in his work. He has no time for salutations. "The King's business requireth haste." Despatch, not loitering—and, in order to this, a thorough faith in his message, a deep conviction of its truth, its urgency, and its power—the very opposite of that uncertainty, of that suspense, which the modern evangelist too often counts the proof of intelligence and wide reading, and an open mind. Thus intent upon one thing—

V. **The messenger is not fastidious as to his quarters, his company, or his fare.**—There is a lesson in all this for the ministry of our own age. How prone it is to resent and exaggerate inconveniences—to see the dark side, which there ever must be, of the place assigned, and of the circumstances surrounding! How rash, sometimes, is the first choice—how incessant, sometimes, the restlessness afterwards!

VI. **The message.**—1. It is a message of peace. We are to bring peace into homes by bringing peace into hearts. All that vexing and harassing self-torture, which is, being interpreted, the heart at war with its God, and therefore at war with itself and with its brother—we bring the cure

of it, and it is the very reason of our coming. 2. The other word put into our mouth is "kingdom"—God's kingdom. To carry into a great lawless earth the idea of a rule and the tidings of a Ruler—to be witnesses to an order and a harmony, a will and a hand out of sight, so that we can tell not only of a rest after death, and a hope laid up in heaven, but even realise it now,—what an office, what a dignity, is this of Christ's seventy, that they should go into homes, that they should commune with human beings, in the tone not of conjecture but of certainty, and as speaking not of remote possibilities but of instant and present realities concerning a kingdom that is already ruling over all and shall one day "come"—come into sight, and come in glory! This is the office of the evangelist of the nineteenth age, as it was of the seventy in the earliest.

VII. **We are not overlooking the supernatural endowments** of the seventy for their peculiar and exceptional mission. Miraculous gifts were then and are no longer the accompaniments of the ministerial office. What then? We go on our way unencumbered by what would be to us mere impediments and hindrances, diverting the eyes of men from the spiritual to the carnal, and contributing nothing to the real enterprise, which is the turning from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God. These things are more than miracles; they are "signs" of Jesus Christ, finger-posts pointing to the invisible, coruscations of a world out of sight, of a kingdom "nigh" and "to come."—*Vaughan.*

Ver. 1. "*Seventy.*"—It may be that the number "seventy" had reference to the popular Jewish idea of there being that number of nations and languages in the world—an idea founded on the enumeration of nations in Gen. x. In that case, as the number of the apostles corresponds to that of the tribes of Israel, the choice of the seventy would prefigure the evangelisation of the world. "The seventy disciples are to be regarded as a net of love which the Lord threw out in Israel" (*Riggenbach*).

"*Two and two before His face.*"—It is remarkable how little stress has been laid on this statement. All we know, however, is—

I. **Their errand**; and—

II. **The fact that they were held worthy, through their prompt and obedient discipleship to the Master, to be made forerunners of His own ministry.**—On what they actually did or how they were received, on their after-history, there is absolute silence. But this single sentence contains two or three principles of the Christian life in man. 1. In order to the full reign of Christ anywhere there must be necessary preparation. All our approaches to religious truth, to spiritual power or holiness or peace, are gradual. The best are not best *at once*, any more than the very bad are worst at once. 2. All personal efforts for extending truth and increasing righteousness in the world are really parts of the Lord's work, and are dependent on His spiritual power.—*Huntington.*

The Significance of the Number.—As the number of the twelve apostles appears to have reference to the number of the patriarchs, so do these seventy disciples recall the number of the elders who were called up into Mount Sinai to behold the wondrous vision of God, and to eat and drink in His presence—who, moreover, assisted Moses to govern the people.—*Burgon.*

"*Two and two.*"—As they were to bear witness of Christ, they would fulfil the legal requirement, "At the mouth of two or three witnesses," etc. Where two are associated together in the name of Jesus, there is a "threefold cord which is not quickly broken" (see Eccles. iv. 9-12).

"*Whither He Himself would come.*"—

The seventy were sent to prepare the inhabitants of towns and villages throughout the land for the coming of Christ. They were (1) to give information concerning Him, and (2) to excite longing for His presence: preparation of both mind and heart.

Ver. 2. "*The harvest truly is great.*"

I. The inclination and desire of multitudes to hear Divine truth is God's harvest.

II. It is only by manifold kinds of labour that this harvest can be gathered in.

III. Those only are effective workers who have been sent forth by the Lord of the harvest.

"*Pray ye therefore.*"—This we do when we intelligently say, "Thy kingdom come." The very sending out of the seventy was of itself an answer to the prayer, which on the occasion of sending forth the twelve Jesus urged His disciples to offer.

Vers. 3-9. *Fireside Ministry.*—These verses are the pith and substance of Christ's counsels to "the seventy." They were to go forth on a perilous but fruitful errand.

I. **All really helpful human work must be rooted and grounded in loving friendship, and trust in the men it seeks to cleanse and ennoble.**—Invite trust, win love, be not in a hurry, make your mission domestic, be sociable, friendly, and human. Stay long enough to gain affection and recognise brotherhood. This was our Lord's own method.

II. **The next stage is that of compassionate healing.**—Supply physical aid to meet the acutest domestic need. Display brotherly pity in the form of restorative help to the afflicted. No one can fail to trace the luminous personality of the Master here. Christianity, like its Author, is essentially healing.

III. **But the crowning service of man to man is the interpretation of life in the light of Divine ministration.**—The missioners did not reach the climax of their work till they said, "The kingdom of God is come nigh unto you." To this sympathetic ministry of interpretation of the work of the Spirit of God every disciple of Christ has received an authoritative call, and by the earnest discharge of its various duties the demons of doubt and despair are driven off the field, and the kingdom of God is established and extended.—*Clifford.*

Vers. 3, 4. *Freedom from Anxiety.*—These messengers were (1) to have no fears concerning their own personal safety; (2) no anxieties with regard to the supply of their material necessities; (3) the ground of their confidence was to be their trust in Him who had sent them forth ("*I*" in ver. 3 is emphatic).

Ver. 4. *Three Sins to be avoided.*—Three forms of sin are to be specially avoided by the minister of Christ: avarice, luxury, and worldly anxiety.

Vers. 4, 5. *Courtesy.*

I. **Courtesy is not to interfere with duty.**

II. **Courtesy is itself to be consecrated into duty** (the salutation on entering a house).

Ver. 5. "*Peace.*"—1. The heart of the believer is filled by a peace which the world can neither give nor take away. 2. The desire of the believer is to make others partakers of this peace.

Vers. 5, 6. "*Peace be to this house.*"—The greeting of peace on the part of Christ's messenger is like a magnet which draws to itself what is of the same nature with it. Even when it is not received the blessing comes back to the giver—like the dove to the Ark. The Spirit seeks what is akin to itself, and where that is wanting finds no abode.

Ver. 6. "*Son of peace.*"—The formal benediction, like other means of grace, depends for its efficacy on the temper

of those to whom it is given. The message of peace is not defeated even if it be rejected: the duty done in proclaiming it satisfies the conscience of the messenger and fills his heart with a deeper peace.

Ver. 7. "*The labourer,*" *etc.*—What the minister of Christ receives for his sustenance is not an alms: the message he brings entitles him to it. The minister of Christ is (1) neither to seek for great temporal prosperity, (2) nor from a false shame to refuse adequate sustenance from those whom he serves in spiritual things.

Vers. 10-12. *Words of Menace.*—These menacing words concerning the towns which, without regard to the signs of the times, would reject His messengers lead Jesus to speak of those cities which have for so long enjoyed His presence without profiting by it. In leaving their neighbourhood for ever He addresses to them the warning that follows (vers. 13-16).—*Godet.*

Ver. 11. "*Is come nigh unto you.*"—The kingdom of God may come nigh to us, and yet we may be "far from the kingdom of God." In the former case we may remain passive or may offer resistance; in the latter we begin to yield to the Divine attraction and to co-operate with God's effort to save us.

Ver. 12. "*More tolerable . . . for Sodom.*"—Cf. Lam. iv. 6: "For the iniquity of the daughter of My people is greater than the sin of Sodom" (R.V.).

Vers. 12, 13. "*Sodom, Tyre, and Sidon.*"—The inhabitants of these cities had been exceedingly debased by sensual indulgences, but in two points the inhabitants of the Galilæan cities were worse than them. 1. Their consciences were seared and hardened by resistance to spiritual influences. 2. Their hearts were ossified by religious self-complacency and conceit.

Ver. 13. "*Sitting in sackcloth,*" *etc.*—After the manner of the older prophets Christ personifies Tyre and Sidon, and represents them as women clothed in sackcloth and besprinkled with ashes, and seated on the ground in sign of mourning.

Vers. 13-15. *Unrecorded labours of Christ.*

I. Note the hint here given of **the multiplicity of Christ's labours**: these were cities in which, as St. Matthew says, "most of His mighty works were done," yet the Gospels preserve no record of any one of them. "Many other things Jesus did, the which, if they should be written every one, I suppose that even the world itself would not contain the books that should be written" (John xxi. 35).

II. **The extent of Divine omniscience.**—Christ speaks as knowing not only what has happened and what will happen, but what *would have happened.*

Ver. 14. "*More tolerable.*"—Some light is here cast upon the "intermediate state" of human souls. Temporal punishment had been inflicted on these guilty inhabitants of Tyre and Sidon; their final judgment was yet to come.

Ver. 15. "*Capernaum.*"—The indignation of Jesus takes a deeper tone as He thinks of the city which had been most highly favoured, and upon which His teaching and mighty works had produced so little effect. He had been so identified with Capernaum that it was called His city (Matt. ix. 1); He had made it the headquarters of His work, and had spared no pains to win its inhabitants to become His disciples. The responsibility incurred by refusal of His grace is proportioned to the greatness of love He had manifested.

Ver. 16. *The Disciples are Ambassadors of Christ.*—As the disciples confined themselves to reproducing in their narratives the acts and teaching of

Jesus, those who heard them virtually saw and heard Jesus Himself; the attitude, therefore, that was taken up towards the messengers was an attitude taken up towards Jesus Himself. In the same way as Jesus did that which the Father had shown Him, and taught that which He had received from the Father, acceptance or rejection of Him was equivalent to acceptance or rejection of God Himself: cf. Matt. x. 40-42, and John xiii. 20, where the same thought is applied to the ministry of the twelve; and 1 Thess. iv. 8, where it is applied to the preachers of the gospel in general. —*Godet.*

"*He that heareth you,*" *etc.*—We, too, should see in the messengers who come to us in Christ's stead (2 Cor. v. 20), not the men, but the office.

The Office of the Ministry.—This is a remarkable commendation of the outward ministry.

I. Nothing ought to be a stronger encouragement to us to embrace the doctrine of the gospel than to learn that this is the highest worship of God, and a sacrifice of the sweetest odour, to hear Him speaking by human lips, and to yield subjection to His word, which is brought to us by men, in the same manner as if He were descending from heaven, or making known His will to us by angels.

II. Our confidence is established, and all doubt is removed, when we learn that the testimony of our salvation, when delivered to us by men whom God has sent, is not less worthy of credit than if His voice resounded from heaven.—*Calvin.*

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 17—24.

The Joy of the Disciples and the Joy of their Lord.—It is not easy to say whether it is for the convenience of his narrative that St. Luke omits various intermediate events and connects the return of the seventy directly with their sending forth, or whether some of them returned so speedily that the historian found nothing important to record as having happened in the interval. But, whether sooner or later, these ambassadors of Christ returned again with joy.

I. **The cause of their exultation.**—Our Lord had not given them, as He had given the twelve, a commission to cast out devils; but some tentative efforts of theirs, some ventures of faith in this direction, had been crowned with success. An acknowledgment that this surpassed at once their commission and their hopes seems to lie in their words: "Lord, even the devils are subject unto us." Such exultation was most natural; yet was there in it something of peril for those who entertained it, and for their own spiritual life. They lay, it is evident, more stress upon "are subject unto us" than upon "through Thy name." There is no more perilous moment for any man than that when he first discovers that he too can wield powers of the world to come—that these wait upon his beck; lest he should find in this a motive to self-elation, instead of giving all the glory to God. The disciples at the present moment were exposed to this temptation, as is evident from the earnest warning which the Lord presently addresses to them, suggesting to them a safer and a truer joy than that which they were now too incautiously entertaining.

II. **The exultation of Jesus.**—As Christ drew proofs of a victory over Satan, which must have been accomplished by Himself, from His own expelling of devils (Matt. xii. 28, 29), so He found proofs of the same victory in like works done by His disciples. The power of the strong man could not but indeed be broken, when not merely the Stronger Himself could spoil his goods at His pleasure, but the very weaklings among His servants could do the same. These successes of theirs were tokens, but nothing more, of the triumphant progress of the work This great triumph of the kingdom of good over the kingdom of

evil in their respective heads, which Christ evermore in the spirit saw, at certain moments of His life He realised with intenser vividness than at others. And this moment of the return of the seventy was one of these solemn and festal moments of His life. He employs the imperfect tense, to make clear that He had foreseen the glorious issue even when He sent them forth. This which they now announce to Him is even as He had surely expected: "I saw, as I sent you forth, Satan fall like lightning from heaven." Already He beheld the whole idol-worship of the heathen world, whereof Satan was the soul and informing principle, giving way, its splendour departing, its oracles dumb, and its temples forsaken.

III. **The enlarged commission.**—"Behold, I give unto you power," etc. Hitherto He had not given them this power: they, as we have seen, had in faith anticipated some portion of it; and He, finding they were the men to make the right use of it, now imparts it to them in all its fulness, according to that law of His kingdom, "To him that hath shall be given." The poisonous adder and stinging scorpion are symbols and representatives of all that has most power and most will to hurt and to harm—of all forms of deadliest malice exercised by Satan and his servants against the faithful. Amid all this deadliest malice of the enemy they should go, themselves unharmed; and, shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace, should tread it all under their feet; "and nothing shall by any means hurt you."

IV. **The word of warning.**—"Notwithstanding in this rejoice not," etc. They were not forbidden altogether to rejoice in these mighty powers as exercised by them—forbidden only to make them the chiefest matter of their joy. The reason is obvious. These a man might possess, and yet remain unsanctified still: for was there not a Judas among the twelve? These at best were the privilege only of a few; they could not therefore contain the essence of a Christian's joy. There was that wherein they might rejoice with a joy which should not separate them from any, the least of all their brethren—a joy which they had in common with all. There was that in which they might rejoice without fear—namely, in the eternal love of God, who had so loved as to ordain them unto everlasting life.

The Lord has administered, where He saw this was needed, a wholesome rebuke to that pride of which He detected the germs in His disciples; but this does not hinder Him from rejoicing in this new victory of the kingdom of light over the kingdom of darkness—a matter of the greater joy, that it was these "babes" by whose hands this victory had been won; they of the household were dividing the spoil. Christ here thanks His Father for two things: first, that He has hidden from the wise and prudent; and, secondly, that what He has hidden from them He has revealed to babes—the hiding and revealing being recognised by Him as alike His Father's work, and the judgment and the grace alike matters for which He renders thanks. For a moment, as His thoughts carry His mind up into heaven into the eternal counsels of the Father, He remains in rapt but serene meditation, and words break from His lips concerning the ineffable relations of the Father and the Son. Then turning to His disciples, He confides to them the secret that He Himself is that perfect revelation of the Father for whom all the sages and saints of the Old Testament had longed.

SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS ON VERSES 17—24.

Vers. 17-19. *The Return of the Seventy.*—A beautiful and monitory conclusion to the history, full of warning, full of encouragement, for Christ's ministers of this generation.

I. **I know not if we are in any**

danger from the particular feeling which was their snare.—Some few of us may have been privileged to see fruits of our ministry. There have been times when it was impossible to disguise the consciousness of something really done in the great war of good and evil, of Christ and Christ's foe, when the minister would have been an ungrateful rather than a humble man if he had not paused to thank God and take courage.

II. **Christ recognises the blessed achievement, and sees in it a sure token of future triumph.**—He does not correct their exultation by pointing to the small extent or the precarious nature of such successes. His word of correction takes a different turn.

III. **He corrects the joy of success by the joy of safety.**—Is there anything of selfishness here?—as though He said, "Care not for the sheep; think only of the shepherd: if his name is safe in the writing of the house of Israel, let the wolf wander at will, let the wolf come and seize and scatter"? Such a question may answer *itself*, and leave us free to read the gracious heart that spoke thus to His own. Is it not too true that these hearts and souls of ours are easily hurt and spoiled by the contemplation of even that which Christ Himself may have wrought by us? There is an enfeebling action in all standing still to erect trophies. Therefore, while his Lord recognises the work done, and goes beyond His servants in estimating its significance, He soon interposes His "notwithstanding," and with it His gracious reminder of a joy entirely wholesome—the joy of the personal safety, and of the name written in heaven. The reproof here is not for the thinking too much, but for the not thinking enough of the self's self of the man. It can never do us harm to dwell on what Christ has done *for* us. "He has written my name in heaven"—there is no self-righteousness, there is no self-complacency, in this thought. It is He who has written the name—it is He who bids me read it.

IV. **But is my name written in heaven?**—How am I to know it? These seventy were common men. But one thing they had, and it was their all. They had given themselves to Christ; they had left their all to follow Him. *Our* names were written in heaven when Christ shed for us His precious blood—when He caused us to be separately incorporated in His Church—when by the secret working of His Spirit He convinced us of sin and aroused us to flee from it. These were real acts. In all those ways the names were written. Rejoice in that writing, and it is written for you. Rejoice in it, and it is there still. Rejoice in it, and walk warily as well as thankfully in that joy.—*Vaughan.*

Ver. 17. "*Returned with joy.*"—Had they to report that their message had been everywhere favourably received? Alas! they were not thinking so much of that as of the glory they had won. Christ had given them power to heal the sick, without specially mentioning the casting out of devils. Apparently they had exceeded the letter of His instructions, and He had graciously given them success in their enterprise. The joy of the disciples, though it almost verged upon spiritual pride, is communicated to the heart of Jesus, where it takes a nobler and purer form.

Ver. 18. "*I beheld Satan . . . fall.*"—The victories of the disciples over Satanic power was a presage of the complete overthrow of the kingdom of evil. In the deliverance of the possessed Jesus beheld the beginning of the end, and spoke of the end as already in view. Not only would individual souls be delivered from oppression, but the nations sunk in bondage to the usurped authority of the evil one would be freed from the yoke.

"*As lightning.*"—Wonder not that the devils are subject to you, for their prince is fallen from heaven. Although men saw not this, I saw it, who see

what is invisible. He fell as lightning, because he was a bright archangel and Lucifer, and is plunged into darkness. If then he is fallen, what will not his servants (the inferior spirits) suffer! —*Theophylact.*

"*From heaven.*"—*I.e.* from high estate.—Cf. Isa. xiv. 12; Matt. xi. 23; Rev. xii. 4.

Ver. 19. "*Serpents and scorpions.*"—These are ever connected in Holy Scripture with what is noxious to man. Cf. Gen. iii. 1; Rev. xii. 9, xx. 2; Num. xxi. 6; Acts xxviii. 3; Ps. xci. 13; Rev. ix. 3-10, etc.

Ver. 20. *Two Kinds of Joy.*—1. That inspired by a sense of power, by attainments in the spiritual life—a joy liable to be mixed with pride and self-seeking —and therefore dangerous. 2. That inspired by a sense of God's mercy and love in Christ—a joy in which there is no danger.

"*Names written in heaven.*"—This mode of speech is often found in Scripture. It occurs in the law (Exod. xxxii. 32), in the Psalms (lxix. 28), in the prophets (Isa. iv. 3; Dan. xii. 1), and in the writings of the apostles (Phil. iv. 3; Heb. xii. 23; Rev. xiii. 8).

The Book of Life.—1. There is a book of life: an election of grace. 2. There are names written in this book: it is an election of persons. 3. We may know that our names are written in it, otherwise we could not rejoice. 4. We should give all diligence to make sure of this cause of rejoicing.

Ver. 21. "*Hid from the wise.*"—The meaning is that no man can obtain faith by his own acuteness, but only by the secret illumination of the Spirit.

"*Wise and prudent.*"—This reference suggests the thought that these evangelistic efforts were regarded with disfavour by the refined, fastidious classes of Jewish religious society. This is in itself probable. There are always men in the Church, intelligent, wise, and even good, to whom popular religious movements are distasteful. The noise, the excitement, the extravagances, the delusions, the misdirection of zeal, the rudeness of the agents, the instability of the converts—all these things offend them. The same class of minds would have taken offence at the evangelistic work of the twelve and the seventy, for undoubtedly it was accompanied with the same drawbacks. The agents were ignorant; they had few ideas in their heads; they understood little of Divine truth; their sole qualification was that they were earnest and could preach repentance well. Doubtless, also, there was plenty of noise and excitement among the multitudes who heard them preach; and we certainly know that their zeal was both ill-informed and short-lived. —*Bruce.*

"*Thou hast hid . . . hast revealed.*"—This implies—

I. That all do not obey the gospel arises from no want of power on the part of God, who could easily have brought all the creatures into subjection to His government.

II. That some arrive at faith, while others remain hardened and obstinate, is accomplished by His free election; for drawing some, and passing by others, He alone makes a distinction among men, whose condition by nature is alike.—*Calvin.*

"*Revealed . . . unto babes.*"—There is no hard-and-fast line between the two classes; some of the "wise and prudent" may by humility become as "babes," while some of those who are really poor and ignorant may, by being wise in their own conceit, shut themselves out from the revelation granted to "babes." Pride of intellect is condemned to blindness, but to the simplicity of heart which longs for the truth a revelation is given.

"*Hid . . . revealed.*"—The first clause

is a stepping-stone to the second. It is on the second that the Saviour's mind rests, as exhibiting the object which He really had in view when He praised His heavenly Father. He would have rejoiced still more if the wise and intellectual, as well as the babes, had recognised His character and accepted His claims. The sense of the passage is: "I thank Thee, that though Thou hast hidden these things from the wise and prudent, Thou hast revealed them unto babes" (*Morison*).

Ver. 22. "*No man knoweth,*" *etc.*

I. It is the gift of *the Father*, that *the Son is known*, because by His Spirit He opens the eyes of our mind to discern the glory of Christ, which otherwise would have been hidden from us.

II. *The Father*, who dwells in inaccessible light, and is in Himself incomprehensible, is revealed to us by the Son, because the Son is the lively image of Him, so that it is in vain to seek for Him elsewhere.—*Calvin.*

Knowledge of the Father and of the Son.—I. There is in His existence as Son a mystery which the Father alone comprehends.

II. The perfect knowledge of the Father is alone possessed by the Son.

III. No man can partake of this knowledge of the Father but by the Son.

"*To whom the Son will reveal Him.*"—The future conquest of the world by Jesus and His disciples rests on the relation which He sustains to God, and with which He identifies His people. The perfect knowledge of God is, in the end, the sceptre of the universe.—*Godet.*

Vers. 23, 24. "*Blessed are the eyes,*" *etc.*—Yet certain generations of Israel had seen very remarkable things: one had seen the wonders of the Exodus, and the sublimities connected with the law-giving at Sinai; another the miracles wrought by Elijah and Elisha; and successive generations had been privileged to listen to the not less wonderful oracles of God, spoken by David, Solomon, Isaiah, and the rest of the prophets. But the things witnessed by the twelve eclipsed the wonders of all bygone ages; for a greater than Moses, or Elijah, or David, or Solomon, or Isaiah, was here, and the promise to Nathanael was being fulfilled. Heaven had been opened, and the angels of God—the spirits of wisdom, and power, and love—were ascending and descending on the Son of man.—*Bruce.*

Ver. 24. "*Kings.*"—Such persons as David, Solomon, and Hezekiah, some of whom were both prophets and kings. Cf. Gen. xlix. 18, and the last words of David, a royal prophecy of Christ; 2 Sam. xxiii. 1-5, especially the close, "For this is all my salvation, and all my desire, although He make it not to grow." The blessing was not in what the disciples obtained, but in what they saw. The true knowledge of God the Father, and of Jesus Christ His Son, was the pledge of all other blessings.—*Popular Commentary.*

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 25—37.

Who is my Neighbour? versus Whose Neighbour am I?—This lawyer merely wished to test our Lord's orthodoxy. He was quite sure that he knew what to do to inherit eternal life. Christ shifts the question from intellect to conscience and practice, and that pinches. The scribe's wish to justify himself refers to his failure in conduct, which, though unaccused, he tacitly confesses. The obtuseness as well as sensitiveness of conscience is brought out by the fact that he evidently thinks that he has kept the first requirement of perfect and all-engrossing love to God, and is only sensible of defect in the second.

I. **The question, meant to excuse, but really condemning.**—"And who is my neighbour?" The lawyer pleads the vagueness of the precept, and wishes a clear definition of terms, that he may know whom he is bound to love as himself, and whom he is not. He fancies that love is only to run like a canal in a straight, artificial cutting. He will try to love all within the circle, but it must be clearly drawn; and, in the meantime, he does not feel any stirrings of love to anybody outside his own door. Is it not clear that to him love is simply a matter of obligation? and does not such a conception show that he has no notion of what it really is, nor has ever exercised it? "Tell me whom I must love" means, "Tell me whom I may escape the necessity of loving"; and he who says that has not a glimmer of what love is. In all matters of Christian living, the anxiety to have the bounds marked within which the action of the Christian spirit is to be confined, is a bad sign. It indicates latent reluctance and a total misconception of the free, spontaneous, all-embracing outgoings of the life which comes from Jesus.

II. **The details of the lovely story.**—It is not a parable which needs to be interpreted; but a story framed as an example, and needing not to be translated but copied. It gives three pictures—of the poor victim, the selfishly absorbed passers-by, and the compassionate helper. The sufferer is "a man," nothing more. The others are designated by profession or nationality, but he has no label round his neck to ticket him as "neighbour." That is the beginning of an answer to the lawyer. The picture of the man's desperate condition as he lay bleeding and insensible might well stir pity. What would the reality do? The two companion sketches of priest and Levite tell us. It does nothing. A glance, perhaps a thought of personal danger, but, at any rate, no stirrings of pity, and no pause, but, in the face of such a spectacle, they pass on. There is no sign that they were hindered by any pressure of time or duty from stopping to help. They did see, and it never struck them that they had anything to do in the matter. Is it an exaggerated picture of the conduct to which human nature is ever prone? How much less sorrow there would be in the world if we were not all guilty in this matter, and had not left misery which is forced on our notice to bleed or weep itself to death without lifting a finger to prevent it! The capacity for ignoring wretchedness and need is wonderful. Engrossment with self shuts eyes and heart to the piteous sights that fill the world. Christ might have taught His lesson without making the unsympathising pair a priest and a Levite. His boldness in thus weighing His story with unnecessary offence is striking. He sharpens it to a spear-point, and is careless about offending if He can reach the conscience. Toothless generalities offend nobody, and therefore do nobody good. "Thou art the man" needs to be pealed into the ears of culprits. But the lesson was not for the lawyer only. Formal religionists are always cold. It is possible to be so busy investigating the grounds and limits of religious duty as to forget to do it. So these heartless two teach us the terrible pitilessness of men, and its cause in self-absorption, and the special danger, in regard to it, of formal religion. The same boldness in bringing in causes of offence which might have been spared appears in making the rescuer a Samaritan. Note the details of his care. First, we have the source of all in compassion. He felt a shoot of love and pity in his heart to "the man," and that set all in motion. His conduct may be taken as a picture of what true love to the neighbour should be. It is prompt, thorough, spares no pains, acts with judgment, is generous and self-denying ("set him on his own beast," while he trudged by his side), provides for the future, and with all its liberality is not lavish, but thrifty and prudent. The lawyer had not asked, What is the love which I am bound to show? But Christ teaches him and us that it is not a mere lazy sentiment, but active, self-

sacrificing, guided by common sense, and full of resources. It moves us to all kindly offices, and makes the needy sharers in our possessions, since they share our heart. But the nationality of the helper must not be passed by. Though the lesson could have been taught without it, it makes the lesson still more emphatic. It answers the question "Who?" by brushing away all national distinctions, all prejudices of race, all differences of creed, all enmities rooted in history. It is the first dawning of that great thought which nineteen centuries have been so slow to learn, the brotherhood of man. The very word "humanity" is Christian. The idea of "philanthropy" is Christian. And the practical realisation of the idea will only be attained when the great fact on which it rests is received. "One is your Master, . . . and all ye are brethren."

III. **Note Christ's inversion of the lawyer's question.**—It makes a vast difference whether we say, "Who is my neighbour?" or "Whose neighbour am I?" for although the relation is, of course, mutual, to approach it on the one side is selfishness, and on the other is love. The one fixes attention on men's claims on me, the other on my debts to them; and while these are the same, they have a very different aspect from the two ends. The truth, therefore, which Christ would have us learn is, that to be a true neighbour is to render help, and that we are neighbours to all men in such a sense that our compassion should go out to them all, and our practical aid be given, no matter what may be the barriers of race, or creed, or colour, or distance. True love to men will cut its own channels, will not wait to be commanded, nor ask how far it is bound to go, but spontaneously and universally will own its kinship with all the needy and sad, and will seek to be as wide and as deep as the love of God, of which it is a reflection.—*Maclaren.*

SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS ON VERSES 25—37.

Ver. 25. *Questions put to Christ.*—Questions were sometimes put to Christ (1) by meek, receptive hearers, like Nicodemus, prepared to drink the sincere milk of the word that they might grow thereby; (2) by enemies, both of the Pharisaic and Sadducean parties, to ensnare and destroy Him; and (3) as in this case, to put His skill and wisdom to the test.

"*Do to inherit.*"—The question as the scribe intended was incongruous: to "do" does not fit in with "to inherit." It is as if one were to ask, What must I do to bring out sunshine? Without any bitterness, our Saviour takes up the question of the scribe in order to guide him to a knowledge of the fact that it was exactly that law of which he was so proud of keeping which condemned him. Our Lord wishes to teach him that if he only in real earnest will try to *do*, he will soon learn that he needs a Saviour who will do for him and in him what he himself cannot do.

"*To inherit eternal life.*"—In Greece men sought for truth: in Israel the object of pursuit was salvation, and righteousness as the means of attaining it.—*Godet.*

"*Inherit.*"—The phrase "inherit" alludes to possession of the land of Canaan, which the children of Israel had received as an inheritance from the hands of God, and which remained in Jewish thought as a type of Messianic happiness.

"*What shall I do,*" *etc.*—Cf. the answer given by St. Paul *after* the Ascension (Acts xvi. 30, 31).—*Farrar.*

Ver. 27. "*Thou shalt love,*" *etc.*—As

this summary of duty is given by Christ Himself on another occasion in answer to a scribe, we may perhaps conclude that it had become in the Jewish schools an approved method of declaring the essence of the law. Otherwise it would be difficult to reconcile the enlightened and spiritual reply of this lawyer with the narrow and bigoted tone of mind which he manifested.

Two Great Commandments.—The two great commandments of the law.

I. **The duty of love to God.**—1. A divinely implanted principle in the renewed hearts of believers. 2. It implies a high esteem of God. 3. It implies an earnest desire for communion with God and the enjoyment of Him. 4. It is a *judicious* principle, and not a blind enthusiastic feeling. 5. It is an *active* principle. 6. It is also a *supreme* love.

II. **The duty of love to man.**—1. It is, too, a divinely implanted principle. 2. It implies benevolent dispositions towards our neighbour. 3. Speaking well of him. 4. Doing him all the good offices in our power.—*Foote.*

The Service of God and Man.

I. **The Christian religion is one which most powerfully engages its disciples to service.**—It does so in two ways: (1) it gives them a sense of boundless obligation; (2) it exalts a life of service as the highest ideal of human life.

II. **The service to which the Christian religion engages its disciples is the service of man.**

III. **The Christian religion brings us a revelation which makes the service of man hopeful.**—*Brown.*

"*Thy heart,*" *etc.*—The "heart" in Scripture is the centre of the moral life; from it branch out the "soul" (the seat of feeling and emotion), the will (actual faculties), and the "mind" (the faculties of intelligence). Moral life proceeds from the heart, and displays itself in or by means of the other three forms of activity—emotion, energy (or "strength"), and knowledge.

Ver. 29. "*To justify himself.*"—Aware that the test of charity would prove unfavourable to him, he seeks concealment under the word "neighbour," that he may not be discovered to be a transgressor of the law. "But who accused him? Not the Lord. He had only said, 'This do, and thou shalt live.' The man's own conscience was awakened and at work; well he knew at that moment that he had not done what his lips confessed he should do; he had not loved God with all his heart and his neighbour as himself" (*Arnot*).

"*My neighbour.*"—The design of the parable of the good Samaritan is to explain the word "neighbour."

I. **The explanation is rather the converse of what might have been expected.**—We might have thought that the person who is beloved is the neighbour; in the narrative the "neighbour" is the person who loves. The fact is, the Samaritan and the traveller were "neighbours" equally, each to the other—the word being relative must be mutual; but the one who recognised the relationship is selected for the illustration, because there lay the example and the lesson. My "neighbour" then is every one who, in the providence of God, is brought into such connection with me, that I can and ought to affect him in some way for good.

II. **The course of events is always being so ordered as to bring new persons within our circle, that we may act by them a neighbour's part.**—There may be a nation on the other side of the earth with which to-day I have nothing whatever to do; but to-morrow, let a way of access be opened and presented to me, by which I could approach that nation, and let an occasion arise of doing it good which, in my conscience, I feel to be providential, and at once our neighbourhood is established

and complete, and I am constrained to perform a neighbour's, *i.e.* a near one's, part, whether it be for their souls, or whether it be for their bodies.—*Vaughan.*

Ver. 29. *The Law gave no Definition of "Neighbour."*—The scribe does not think there is danger of his not loving God, but thinks that the law is defective in giving no exact description of who is to be understood by one's neighbour.

Vers. 30-37. *The Good Samaritan.*—This parable reveals in the brightest light—

I. **The Christian's heart.**—It is like the Samaritan's. It is full of compassion. In the priest and the Levite prudence conquered humanity; in the Samaritan humanity conquered prudence, prejudice, and everything else. We are weak and slow in Christ's work because we are weak in compassion. The religion of Jesus is the religion of humanity.

II. **The Christian's hand.**—It is the ready agent of a compassionate heart. First the heart, then the hand—that is the order in the kingdom. Watch the Samaritan's hand. It is not the hand of a sluggard. How quickly it moves! He did not linger till compassion was chilled by worldly prudence. First thoughts were best. I dare say he did not think of it at all; he just did it at once. Many a noble purpose dies of cold and decay in its infancy. It is not the hand of a weakling. It is not easily tired. It carries through what it begins, and leaves nothing half done, though the doing cost much. It is not the hand of a hireling. The Samaritan was not rich. He had one ass, and no servant. But he believed that it was more blessed to give than to receive. He could not be repaid, and knew it. Payment would have spoiled all his pleasure in the deed. He had reward enough in an approving conscience reflecting the smile of God. It is not the hand of earthly ambition. The Pharisees gave alms to be seen of men. Had the Samaritan been like them, he would have passed by on the other side. But there was nothing to feed the hunger for earthly applause in this adventure. And yet if he be a real man, if this is history as well as parable, what renown! Christ has immortalised him.

III. **The Christian's sphere.**—The lawyer made it very narrow. He loved his friends, and hated his enemies, and was sure that the Samaritans were no neighbours of his. But Christ teaches that there is no limit or exception to the love of man; and that the sphere of the Christian's heart is the whole world, and that the sphere of his hand embraces every one he can help. The Samaritan never asked, "And who is my neighbour?" Nearness and need constitute "neighbourhood." In every suffering stranger there is a God-sent candidate for your pity and aid. Be neighbourly in Christ's spirit. The home mission spirit is the very genius of the gospel. Be not content with sluggard sympathies. Be a good Samaritan among the needy in our land. Heathen lands too are near us now, and every year are coming nearer. The field of Christian service is the world.—*Wells.*

Ver. 30. "*A certain man.*"—This answers the question, "Who is my neighbour?" No mention is made of nation, tribe rank, or character; but "a certain man," some one or other. It is as men that we are related and owe love to one another.

Ver. 31. "*By chance.*"—There is a certain touch of irony in the phrase; it was certainly not by "chance" that the priest and the Levite came to figure in the parable.

Chance a Nickname.—God's unseen providence, by men nicknamed Chance.—*Fuller.*

Good Opportunities.—Many good

opportunities work under things which seem fortuitous.—*Bengel.*

A Test of Character.—This is a very significant touch. The wounded man was not carried to the priest's door, or did not even call aloud for aid, or else it would have been morally impossible to refuse to help him. The chance encounter rendered it more easy to deny the claim; in other words, it served the more perfectly to test the real character of the priest—to show whether mercy was in his heart or not.

"*A certain priest.*"—Perhaps now on his way to Jerusalem, there to execute his office "in the order of his course" (chap. i. 8); or, having accomplished his turn of service, now returning home. But whether thus or not, he was one who had never learned what that meant, "I will have mercy, and not sacrifice"; who, whatever duties he might have been careful in fulfilling, had "omitted the weightier matters of the law, judgment, mercy, and faith." —*Trench.*

"*He passed by.*"

I. **All priests were not thus cold and heartless.**—Ministers are generally warm-hearted men. They ought all to be so; they ought to be like Christ. He was ever ready to help any in trouble. Many of the Jewish priests would be kind and generous. This one was not. One may occupy a very sacred place, and yet have a cold, hard heart. It is very sad when it is so.

II. **This priest did not even stop to look at the sufferer.**—Much less did he ask how he came to be injured, or to inquire what he could do for him. Perhaps he even pretended not to see the wounded man. He had doubtless excuses enough to satisfy his own mind. He was tired, or in a hurry, or it was a hopeless case, or he could not bear to look on suffering. But whatever his motives—

III. **Let us avoid repeating his fault.**—Do we never pass by human wants that we know well we ought to stop to relieve? Do we never keep out of the way of those who need our help? This verse is an ugly mirror, is it not? It shows us blemishes that we did not know we had.—*Miller.*

Excuses for Inhumanity.—Excuses for inhumanity are only too easily found. The priest might allege—

I. That he was in haste—that his business was urgent or sacred.

II. That the wounded man was past hope of recovery.

III. That the robbers were not far off, and that it was perilous to linger near the spot.

IV. That another was coming along the same road who might be able to render more efficient help.

Vers. 31-33. *Two Kinds of Holiness.* —1. The spurious holiness of priest and Levite—sanctity divorced from charity. 2. The genuine holiness of the Samaritan—holiness inspired by love.—*Bruce.*

Samaritans and Levites.—All Samaritans were not compassionate; all Levites were not hard-hearted. They were Samaritans who would not permit Jesus and His disciples, when they were weary, to pass the night in their village (ix. 53); and he was a Levite (Acts iv. 36) who was named Son of Consolation, and sold his property that he might distribute the proceeds among the poor.

Ver. 32. "*A Levite.*"—The Levite in his turn may have thought with himself that it could not be incumbent on him to undertake a perilous office, from which the priest had just shrunk; duty it could not be, else that other would never have omitted it. For him to thrust himself upon it now would be a kind of affront to his superior, an implicit charging of him with inhumanity and hardness of heart. And so, by aid of these pleas, or pleas like them, they left their fellow-countryman to perish.—*Trench.*

"*Looked on him.*"—There are very few of us who have yet learned to exert ourselves as we might do for the relief of the general misery and destitution which we cannot but see about us. The world is full of it; but it is not full of that heavenly compassion which it was meant to call forth.—*Marriott.*

Ver. 33. "*Samaritan.*"—He was one of a nation with whom the Jews had no dealings (John iv. 9), whose name was a by-word of reproach (John viii. 48), who were regarded by them as aliens and foreigners (Luke xvii. 18), and almost reckoned with the very heathen (Matt. x. 5). The wounded traveller could have no claims on him; and many reasons might have been found for passing him by.

The Law written in the Heart.—This ignorant Samaritan possessed spontaneously ("by nature," Rom. ii. 14) the light which the Rabbis had not found or had lost in their theological investigations. There is a remarkable agreement between the conduct attributed by Jesus to the Samaritan and the saying of St. Paul about the law "written in the heart" and its partial fulfilment by the heathen (Rom. ii. 14-16).—*Godet.*

Heterodoxy and Orthodoxy.—We have here heterodoxy with humanity, and orthodoxy without humanity. Our Lord has shown elsewhere, abundantly, that He has no thought of conniving at heterodoxy, or of disparaging orthodoxy. Only He teaches that humanity is better than orthodoxy, if only one may be had, and that inhumanity is worse than heterodoxy, if one must be endured.—*Schaff.*

"*Had compassion.*"—Moved with pity as to the past, help for the present, considerate care for the future.—*Stier.*

A Mark of Genuine Love.—It is the characteristic mark of genuine love that it does not ask whether the neighbour deserves love, but whether he needs love.

Love of the Brethren and of One's Neighbour.—There is a special distinction to be made between Christian love of the *brethren* (John xiii. 34) and the love of our *neighbour.*

I. **Love of the brethren** has for its object the fellow-believer, the love of Christ for its standard, and faith in Him as its condition.

II. **Love of our neighbour** embraces all men, loves them as one's self, and is grounded on the natural relation in which all sons and daughters of Adam stand to each other as members of one great family here on earth.—*Van Oosterzee.*

Vers. 33-35. *Characteristics of Love.*—True love renders help (1) with promptitude, (2) with thoroughness, (3) with self-denial, (4) with unwearying patience, (5) with tact, (6) without sentimentality.

Vers. 34, 35. "*Bound up his wounds,*" *etc.*—He leaves nothing undone to mitigate the miseries that excited his compassion.

I. **He applies healing remedies to his wounds.**

II. **He is regardless of fatigue and danger in ministering to the sufferer.**

III. **He leaves him in good keeping.**

IV. **He supplies his immediate wants,** leaves careful injunctions for his treatment in the inn, and generously promises to repay any expenses that may be incurred.

Ver. 34. *Manifestations of Love.*—The attentive look, the compassionate heart, the helpful hand, the willing foot, the open purse.—*Van Oosterzee.*

Ver. 35. "*Take care of him. . . . I will repay.*"—After having brought the wounded man to the inn, the Samaritan might have regarded himself as free from all further responsibility in the matter—he might have

left him to the kindness of his fellow-countrymen, and have said to them, "He is your neighbour rather than mine." But compassion, which has prompted him to begin, compels him to end.—*Godet.*

"*When he departed.*"—This detail gives vividness to the story: we see him as it were already on horseback and busied with giving the host injunctions as to careful treatment of the invalid.

Ver. 36. *Love like the Light.*—The Lord shows His questioner that love is like light: wherever it truly burns it shines forth in all directions, and falls on every object that lies in its way. Love that desires to limit its own exercise is not love. One of love's essential laws is expressed in those words of the Lord that the apostles fondly remembered after He had ascended, "It is more blessed to give than to receive."—*Arnot.*

"*Which . . . was neighbour?*"—The parable is a reply, not to the question, for to that it is no reply, but to the spirit out of which the question proceeded. "You inquire, Who is my neighbour? Behold a man who asked quite another question, To whom can I be a neighbour? and then be yourself the judge whether you or he have most of the mind of God—which is most truly the doer of His will, the imitator of His perfections."—*Trench.*

"*Was neighbour.*"—Rather, "proved neighbour" (R.V.); literally, "became neighbour." "The neighbour Jews became strangers, the stranger Samaritan became neighbour, to the wounded traveller. It is not place but love which makes neighbourhood" (*Wordsworth*).

Vers. 36, 37. *A Picture of Christ's Redeeming Work.*—The older commentators find in this parable a typical representation of Christ's redeeming love. The wounded traveller is man disabled by sin; the priest and Levite represent the law, which exercises no healing power; the good Samaritan is Christ; the inn the Church, etc. The suggestion is an ingenious one, though the identification of some of the details leads to grotesque results. We may, however, see in the parable a faint and unintentional reflection of the Saviour's work. The wounds of the sick (Isa. i. 6), which they who sat in Moses' seat left undressed, He whom they reviled as a Samaritan (John viii. 48) bound up with oil and wine.

Ver. 37. "*He that shewed mercy.*"—He will not name the Samaritan by name, the haughty hypocrite!—*Luther.*

"*Go, and do thou likewise.*"—The lesson derived from the parable by our Lord Himself is not that "every one who needs our mercy is to be taken for our neighbour." Nothing of the kind. Christ closes the conversation by proposing the conduct of the Samaritan—the active benevolence which he displayed even towards an enemy—as a model for imitation. Thus *the practice* of religion is revealed as the best help to *the understanding* of it. The attention is diverted from considering who is the fit *object* of love, and guided instead to the *exercise* of love itself. As in every other part of the Bible, the object proposed is to school *the heart*, not to inform *the understanding.*—*Burgon.*

A Reproof to our Shortcomings.—We should never read the story of the good Samaritan without thinking of it as a type of deeds of holy love done by many who may be grievously deficient in religious knowledge, and as a reproof to our shortcomings.

Love and its Reward.—Love of man is (1) entirely unlimited; (2) it reveals itself in unrestricted helpfulness; and (3) its reward is in an approving conscience, the praise of those who

witness it, and of the Lord Himself. It is true that mere kindness does not earn eternal life—that even if we perfectly fulfil the second table of the law, we are guilty of so many offences against the first table as to forfeit eternal life. But it is also true that he who violates the dictates of kindly feeling is not on the road that leads to faith and salvation (1 John iv. 20, 21).

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 38—42.

Jesus in the Family Circle.—This is one of the few passages in the life of the Saviour in which we are admitted to view Him in the circle of His domestic life—in which we see Him as a guest and a friend, receiving hospitality, and by gentle words allaying the angry feelings which are so apt to spring up from the most trivial causes, and mar the peace of the home. He had arrived at Bethany perhaps unexpectedly, and evidently accompanied by some of His disciples, and thus occasioned some little stir in the household there. Martha was naturally anxious to provide fitting entertainment for such an honoured Guest. For a time, apparently, Mary had assisted her in making the needful preparations for the supper, but after a little had stolen away to sit at the feet of Jesus and listen to His words. Probably she felt that there was a reasonable limit to the work of providing for material wants, and that it was making good use of the precious time of Christ's sojourn with them to allow Him to minister to them as well as to be ministered to by them.

I. **Martha's complaint.**—She is angry and put about by being left to serve alone, and in her hastiness she falls into various mistakes. 1. She attaches an undue importance to the kind of work she was engaged in. 2. She regards her sister's employment as mere waste of time. 3. She accuses the Saviour of unkindness in allowing her sister to shirk her share of the work. Specially censurable is her endeavour to get the Saviour to take her part in this difference with her sister. For it is always very embarrassing to a guest to be asked to take a side in a family dispute.

II. **The reply of Jesus.**—He reminded Martha that she was distressing and harassing herself about many trivial things, but that Mary's attention was fixed upon the one thing of supreme importance. The slight degree of blame implied in the answer, and in the repetition of her name, was no doubt robbed of its sting by the gentle tone of voice and the kindly air of the Speaker. For this was not an occasion when anything like severity was called for. Both sisters were friends and disciples of the Saviour; and He was as considerate to the weaknesses and foibles of the one, as pleased with the pure and intense devotion of the other. We have here both a warning against allowing our minds to be distracted and worried by passing trifles, and a statement of the secret of a true and lasting peace. Those that pursue various aims are drawn hither and thither by conflicting cares and duties: those that have the one true aim in view rise above all that is superficial and trifling, and enjoy a peace which the world can neither give nor take away.

SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS ON VERSES 38—42.

Vers. 38-42. *Martha, Mary, and Lazarus.*—Let us regard this incident as illustrative of a few practical considerations. Observe—

I. **The absence of all reference to Lazarus in this narrative.**—Is this because he was younger than the sisters, and of least account in the household? In John's Gospel, too, Lazarus brings up the rear. Many think that he was the young ruler who came to Christ and went away

sorrowing. Whatever be the truth on this point, Christ loved this "weak brother." He seems to have lacked force of character, decision, readiness to sacrifice for Christ's sake. Such a man may certainly be saved, but he misses much.

II. **The distinguishing character of the two sisters, and our Lord's treatment of them.**—We have the active Martha, who carries her peculiarities into her friendship with and her loyalty to Jesus Christ. This is quite right. Christ does not take from us our individuality. He does not want every one to be a Martha or every one to be a Mary. There was variety of character among the twelve. Varied services are needed. Jesus Christ needed food, and He needed willing learners. Martha was right in serving, Mary in listening. The danger is that one kind of worker thinks that the only service that should be rendered to Jesus Christ is the service he or she is rendering. Those who are active are apt to be hard upon those who are not so active as they are, or in the way which they approve. Christ taught Martha that all things are secondary to the one great thing—love to Himself. Let all learn the lesson of serving the Master in the sphere for which we are best fitted, and withal be tolerant, yea appreciative of those who serve Him in different ways.—*Davies.*

Three Faults of Martha.—Though the hospitality of Martha deserved commendation, and is commended, yet there were three faults in it which are pointed out by Christ.

I. Martha carried her activity beyond proper bounds; for Christ would rather have chosen to be entertained in a frugal manner, and at moderate expense, than that the holy woman should have submitted to so much toil.

II. Martha, by distracting her attention, and undertaking more labour than was necessary, deprived herself of the advantage of Christ's visit.

III. Martha was so delighted with her own bustling operations, as to despise her sister's pious eagerness to receive instruction. This example warns us that, in doing what is right, we must take care not to think more highly of ourselves than of others.—*Calvin.*

Vers. 38, 39. *Activity and Contemplation.*—We find in Martha the type of a life busily devoted to externals, such as is frequently exemplified in this passing world; in Mary, the type of quiet self-devotion to the Divine as the one thing needful. To a certain extent both tendencies will be combined in each believer, but it is not to be overlooked that there are different vocations, and many are better fitted for busy outward labour than an inward contemplative life, although the most active must be from the depths of his soul given up to the Lord, and the man of contemplation must consecrate his energies to the advancement of God's kingdom.—*Olshausen.*

Ver. 39. *An Answer to the Question as to inheriting Eternal Life.*—This incident gives a clear and certain answer to the question of the scribe as to inheriting eternal life: it is to listen to the words of Jesus, and to choose by faith in Him "the good part, which shall not be taken away."

"*Sat at Jesus' feet.*"—This is a living commentary on the words, "Yea, He loved the people; all His saints are in Thy hand: and they sat down at Thy feet; every one shall receive of Thy words" (Deut. xxxiii. 3).

Absence of Censoriousness.—Mary sits quiet and silent at His feet, and it never occurred to her to be discontented and to exclaim, "Master, tell my sister to come and listen too with me."

"*Heard His word.*"—As the tender flowers love to open to the rays of the sun and silently absorb its light. Jesus had not come to be served, but to serve.

Vers. 39, 40. *Characteristic Conduct of the Sisters.*—The respective characters of the two sisters again come clearly into view on the visit recorded by St. John (xii. 2, 3). There it is said that "Martha served," and that Mary "anointed the feet of Jesus, and wiped His feet with her hair."

The Judge becomes an Advocate.—Mary commits her cause to the Judge, and He becomes her Advocate. —*Augustine.*

Christ defending His Disciples.—The Gospels record various instances of Christ thus taking the part of them who trust their cause to Him. Cf. chaps. vi. 2, 3, vii. 39, 40; Matt. xxvi. 10.

Pleasure of giving and of receiving.—With Martha the pleasure of giving much to Jesus is pre-eminent: Mary feels the necessity of receiving much.

Vers. 41, 42. "*Many things . . . one thing.*"—Note the contrast between carefulness about many things and the needfulness of but one. When we possess God in Christ, we have the one thing needful to (1) *a true life*, (2) *a true growth*, (3) *a true service*, (4) *a true happiness.*

Ver. 42. "*But one thing is needful.*" —Needful for what? For rightly receiving the Saviour—the disposition which Mary was manifesting at this moment, the sitting at the feet of Jesus, the receptivity for hearing and laying up the words of eternal life.—*Van Oosterzee.*

"*That good part.*"—Why was Mary's choice better? Because "it shall not be taken away from her." From thee the burden of business shall one time be taken away; for when thou comest into the heavenly country, thou wilt find no stranger to receive with hospitality. But for thy good it shall be taken away, that what is better may be given thee. Trouble shall be taken away, that rest may be given thee. But in the meantime *thou* art yet at sea; *thy sister* is in port. —*Augustine.*

"*The good part.*"—Mary's choice is commended. The object of her choice is characterised and commended as "the one thing needful," "the good part." True religion is—

I. **Indispensably needful.**
II. **Perfectly good.**
III. **Absolutely inalienable.**

Its claims are paramount. Heaven is gained; hell is avoided. It is not only "good" in name, but in reality. It wears, lasts, satisfies. It is the only possession that is inalienable. Honour, wealth, reason, health, home, friends, all may go. This abides.—*Morris.*

I. **The essence of the Christian religion is that it is a religion of receiving.**—Martha desired to give, Mary to receive. Mary was praised; Martha was reproved. The leading trait of a Christian is that he sits at Christ's feet. Those please God most who take in most.

II. **Mary's spirit rested.**—Martha worked anxiously. The difference between them was greatest, not so much in what they did, as in the spirit in which they did it. Drink in God's peace. Be a little child.

III. **Mary had learnt to concentrate her mind.**—Martha could not do this. Mary gathered all to a single point, and that point was Christ. Martha was full of distracting and unnecessary cares. Too many of God's dear children are the same. What vain solicitudes! What is the use of it all? What is the remedy? Simplify. Throw out what is wrong, what is trivial, what is underweight. "One thing" is all that will be left. To find, to love, and to enjoy the Saviour. There is nothing else. This is "the good part."—*Vaughan.*

CHAPTER XI.

CRITICAL NOTES.

Ver. 1. The time and place when this incident occurred are indefinite, but there can be no doubt that we have not here part of the Sermon on the Mount, put out of its place. The form of prayer here given differs very considerably (by omission) from that in Matt. vi. 9-13; as given in the best authorities it runs as follows: "Father, Hallowed be Thy name. Thy kingdom come. Give us day by day our daily bread. And forgive us our sins; for we ourselves also forgive every one that is indebted to us. And bring us not into temptation." It is almost certain that both the longer and shorter forms of the prayer were given on separate occasions, with the exception of the doxology, found in St. Matthew, which dates from the time when the prayer came into liturgical use.

In a certain place.—If this incident took place shortly after that last recorded—the visit of Jesus to Bethany—this place may be the Mount of Olives or Gethsemane. **As John.**—This fact is not elsewhere recorded.

Ver. 2. **Hallowed be Thy name.**—"God's name is not merely His appellation, which we speak with the mouth, but also and principally the idea which we attach to it—His Being, as far as it is confessed, revealed, or known" (*De Wette*). **Hallowed.**—"Kept holy," "sanctified in our hearts." **Thy kingdom come.**—The spread of Christ's kingdom on earth and His triumphant reign hereafter (His second coming).

Ver. 3. **Daily bread.**—No better English word than "daily" can be got to render the peculiar Greek word found only here and in Matt. vi. 11, but considerable diversity of opinion has existed as to the precise signification of the term employed. Some have rendered it "sufficient," "proper for our sustenance"; others, "for the coming day"; others, "spiritual bread" (*Vulg. supersubstantialem*). But all these meanings are to some extent implied in our phrase "daily bread"—suitable for our necessities, and provision for the immediate future; and though the primary reference is to literal food, reference to spiritual nourishment is not excluded.

Ver. 4. **Forgive.**—Two words are used—"sins" and "debts" ("every one that is indebted to us"); we cannot forgive sins, but can release others from their obligations to us. **As.**—*I.e.*, "in the same manner as," not "to the same extent as," nor "because." **Lead us not into temptation.**—God does not tempt to evil, but He may place us in circumstances in which we may feel our weakness and be in danger of yielding to temptation This is virtually a prayer for some way of escape to be opened up to us.

Ver. 5. **At midnight.**—In the East people often travel by night, to avoid the heat.

Ver. 7. **My children,** etc.—*I.e.*, "my children, as well as I, are in bed."

Ver. 8. **Importunity.**—Lit., "shamelessness," "impudence"—*i.e.*, continued knocking and asking. For importunity in prayer see Isa. lxii. 23-33; Gen. xviii. 6, 7; Matt. xv. 27, 28.

Ver. 9. **And I say unto you.**—The parable is not a conclusive argument. We know that a man can be harassed into giving, but how can we know that importunate prayer can prevail upon God? We know it upon Christ's authority: He here pledges His word that it is so.

Ver. 11. **Bread.**—There is a certain resemblance between the things asked for and those which might be substituted for them—a stone like bread, a fish like a serpent, an egg like a scorpion. No father with ordinary human feeling would mock his child by giving him useless or hurtful things in place of food.

Ver. 13. **Holy Spirit.**—The best of all gifts. St. Matthew says "good things" (vii. 11).

Ver. 14. **Casting out a devil.**—There seems to be little doubt that this miracle is the same as that in Matt. xii. 22, as wrought apparently in Galilee. In St. Matthew's Gospel there is, however, no precise mention of time or place. It is quite hopeless to attempt to fix the exact order in which the events occurred. **Dumb.**—And *blind* (Matt. xii. 22).

Ver. 15. **Some of them.**—"Pharisees" (Matt. xii. 24), "scribes which came from Jerusalem" (Mark iii. 22). **Beelzebub.**—The form of the name in Greek is Beelzebub; the original Hebrew word is Baal-zebub, the form of Baal worshipped at Ekron. The meaning of the latter name is *Baal* or *Lord of the fly*, a designation which has parallels in classical mythology. The meaning of the form of the name Beelzebub is either *Lord of dung*, so called in derision by the Jews, or *Lord of the dwelling*, as prince of the lower world (cf. Matt. x. 25, "Master of the house"), or *Lord of idols*, and therefore, as here, "the chief of the devils."

Ver. 16. **A sign from heaven.**—In proof of His Messiahship. Perhaps a portent like those foretold by Joel (ii. 30, 31).

Ver, 17. **Every kingdom.**—The kingdom of evil as an organisation with a personal head

may be torn by discords, but being wholly evil must be unanimous in its opposition to the kingdom of God. "An organisation which acts against itself, its own distinctive aims, must destroy itself." The same reasoning is applied to the case of a house and of an individual person.

Ver. 19. **Your sons.**—*I.e.*, your disciples. The Pharisees countenanced cases of exorcism wrought by spells and incantations, and perhaps in some instances actual miracles of the kind were accomplished by faith in God and by invocation of the Divine Name. Christ by no means seems to deny the validity of all the cures. As matters stood, therefore, collusion with Satan was not the necessary explanation of casting out devils; and the holiness of Christ's character, as well as the air of authority with which He wrought miracles, were additional reasons against such a dishonourable explanation of His mighty deeds.

Ver. 20. **The finger of God.**—An allusion to Exod. viii. 19. St. Matthew has "the Spirit of God" (xii. 28), which is practically the same thing.

Ver. 21. **A strong man.**—An illustration possibly taken from Isa. xlix. 24. The strong man is Satan; He that overcomes him is Christ.

Ver. 23. **He that is not with Me.**—There is no middle course between Christ and Satan.

Ver. 24. **Dry places.**—Desert regions. According to Jewish ideas the special abode of demons. **Seeking rest.**—In misery when he is not tormenting a man.

Ver. 25. **Swept and garnished.**—But empty, and inviting the re-occupation of the evil spirit.

Ver. 26. **Seven other.**—The number suggests completeness—every form and variety of evil. **Worse than the first.**—Cf. Heb. vi. 4-6, x. 26-29; 2 Pet. ii. 20, 21. "The parable was an allegory, not only of the awful peril of relapse after partial conversion, but also of the history of the Jews. The demon of idolatry had been expelled by the Exile, but had returned with the sevenfold virulence of letter-worship, formalism, exclusiveness, ambition, greed, hypocrisy, and hate; and on the testimony of Josephus himself, the Jews of that age were so bad that their destruction seemed an inevitable retribution" (*Farrar*).

Ver. 27. **A certain woman.**—This incident is peculiar to St. Luke. The arousal of ignorant enthusiasm in the mind of a hearer, on these stern and authoritative words being spoken, is a very natural circumstance. Probably the woman caught sight of "His mother and His brethren" on the outskirts of the crowd, as St. Matthew speaks of their presence in connection with this discourse (see Matt. xii. 46-50). **Of the company.**—Rather, "out of the multitude" (R.V.)

Ver. 29. **Were gathered thick.**—Rather, "were gathering together unto Him" (R.V.). **Jonas the prophet.**—Omit "the prophet," taken probably from the parallel passage in St. Matthew.

Ver. 30. **A sign.**—*I.e.*, by his three days' and three nights' entombment in the fish (Jonas i. 17).

Ver. 31. **The queen of the south.**—1 Kings x. 1-13. The Queen of Sheba; supposed from this passage in St. Luke to be Yemen in Arabia. **A greater than Solomon.**—Lit., "more than,' "somewhat greater." So, too, in the next verse.

Ver. 32. **They repented.**—See Jonah iii. 5.

Ver. 33. **No man,** etc.—The connection of vers. 33-36 with what precedes them is somewhat obscure. Jesus had been assailed by His enemies, both with the charge of performing mighty works by the aid of the powers of evil and with a clamour for a sign from heaven to prove the celestial source of His mission, and of the miraculous powers which seemed to authenticate it. Jesus answers in effect, "The sign for which you ask will be given. Jonas was a sign to the Ninevites, and so shall the Son of man be a sign to this generation." The sign shall be open, public, capable of being read by all men. This is part of the very nature of a sign: no man, when he has lighted a candle, conceals it; that is no sign which is not seen. But in order that a sign may convince, the minds of those to whom it is given must be healthy and unbiassed. The light which is given to all can only profit those whose vision is healthy and natural; and so only those who are free from prejudice can appreciate the spiritual light" (*Speaker's Commentary*). **Lighted a candle.**—The figure is one several times used by Christ in different connections. Cf. Matt. v. 15; Luke viii. 16; Mark iv. 21. **A secret place.**—Rather, "a covered place," "a cellar" (R.V.). **A bushel.**—Rather, "the bushel" (R.V.); so also "the stand" (R.V.), reference being made to the well-known utensils to be found in an ordinary Eastern house.

Ver. 34. **The light of the body.**—Rather, "the lamp of the body" (R.V.). The eye here means the conscience. **Single.**—Not distorted by prejudice.

Ver. 36. **If thy whole body,** etc.—"Only when thy body is wholly illumined, without having even an obscure corner left therein, will it become so bright and clear as if the full brilliancy of a bright lamp illumined thee; in other words, thou wilt be placed in a normal condition of light" (*Van Oosterzee*). A gradual growth in purity and holiness is depicted, which results in the removal of everything that hinders the reception of Divine truth, and in the subjection of every part of the being to that truth.

Ver. 37. **Besought.**—Simply, "asked" (R.V.). **To dine.**—Rather, "that He would *breakfast* with him." The word used means a noon-day meal = our late breakfast or luncheon.

Ver. 38. **Washed.**—The washing was a ceremonial act, and cleanliness was not the object of it. The ablutions, which had become most elaborate and frivolous, were not based even upon Levitical law, but upon Pharisaic tradition and the so-called Oral law.

Ver. 39. **Now.**—*I.e.*, "as things are." **Make clean**, etc.—In Matt. xxiii. 25 a similar figure is used. There is, however, this difference: there the inside of the cup and platter are said to be full of extortion and wickedness—*i.e.*, got by wrongful means and used profligately; here it is to the inward part—the spiritual condition of the men themselves—that reference is made.

Ver. 40. "Did not He who made the *body* (that which is without) make the *mind and soul* also (that which is within)?" What folly to attend to the cleanness of the one and to ignore the foulness of the other!

Ver. 41. **Give alms of such things as ye have.**—Rather, "give for alms those things which are within" (R.V.). Christ returns to speak of the literal contents of cup and platter: "Be not anxious about the outward part, but rather attend to its contents, and do but give alms therefrom, and the food and everything else shall be pure to you" (*Bloomfield*). A deed of unselfishness and goodwill would make a change in the whole inward condition.

Ver. 42. **Tithe mint**, etc.—As commanded in Deut. xiv. 22. No proportion was observed between greater and less commandments—those based on eternal principles and those of a local or temporary character. **Judgment and the love of God.**—Hebraism for justice and equity (cf. Micah vi. 8).

Ver. 43. The sin of pride is rebuked; the desire to be prominent and to secure reverent salutations from their brethren. The places in the synagogue nearest to the reading-desk, where the elders sat, were specially coveted.

Ver. 44. **Scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites!**—Omit these words; omitted in R.V. Taken probably from the parallel passage in Matt. xxiii. 27. **Graves.**—Unsuspected pits of corruption. The figure in St. Matthew's gospel is somewhat different—"whited sepulchres," outwardly beautiful.

Ver. 45. **One of the lawyers.**—This man felt that his official ecclesiastical position should shield him against such reproaches. As a class the lawyers, or scribes, were inclined to Pharisaism.

Ver. 46. **Burdens grievous.**—The details of ceremonial obedience were multiplied and became an intolerable yoke (cf. Acts xv. 10); and some of those who laid stress upon them were guilty of the inconsistency of neglecting them themselves.

Ver. 47. **Build sepulchres.**—*I.e.*, ostentatiously separate themselves from the sins of their ancestors in rejecting the prophets, and yet are guilty of the same wickedness in rejecting John the Baptist and Christ.

Ver. 48. **Ye allow.**—*I.e.*, "consent to" (R.V.). In a sense, respect for the dead prophets was in itself an offence against the living. Instead of hearkening to the voice of living representatives of the Divine will, they set up against them the reputation and authority and teaching of those who had long passed away.

Ver. 49. **The wisdom of God.**—This is a very peculiar phrase, and has excited considerable controversy. There is no passage in the Old Testament which corresponds verbally with this apparent quotation. There can be no doubt, however, that Christ alludes to 2 Chron. xxiv. 20-22, and more especially to xxxvi. 14-21 of the same book. It may be that since there is not formal quotation this peculiar phrase is used: the method of Divine procedure is described rather than the historical examples of it cited. "The wisdom of God" is probably equivalent to "the wise God." God, in His wisdom, sees fit to follow such and such a course.

Ver. 51. **Abel.**—The first martyr in the strife between holiness and unrighteousness whose history is found in the first historical book of the Old Testament. **Zacharias.**—2 Chron. xxiv. 20, 21: the last historical book of the Old Testament.

Ver. 52. **The key of knowledge.**—Cf. Matt. xiii. 52, xvi. 19. Knowledge, *i.e.*, of God, of which the Scriptures were the key. "The scribes, by arrogating to themselves exclusive authority to interpret the Scriptures, while they did not interpret them truly, either for their own use, or for the good of those whom they instructed, kept the key of knowledge shut up and useless" (*Speaker's Commentary*).

Ver. 53. **And as He said these things unto them.**—Rather, "and when He was come out from thence" (R.V.). **Began to urge Him.**—Or, "to press upon Him" (R.V.). "They surrounded Him in a most threatening and irritating manner, in a scene of violence perhaps unique in the life of Jesus" (*Farrar*).

Ver. 54. **That they might accuse Him.**—Omitted in R.V.; but evidently the words are a fair description of the motives of His adversaries, though not part of the text of the Gospel.

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 1—13.

Christ Teaching how to Pray.—St. Luke seems to preserve the original setting of the Lord's prayer, and St. Matthew the full liturgical form of the prayer.

I. **Note the mould for the disciples' prayers.**—It is properly not the "Lord's prayer," but the servants' prayer. It is not a formula, but a pattern. All the essentials are preserved in this shorter version. 1. Invocation. There is first the child's cry to the Father. All Christian prayer begins with that, and Christ makes it possible so to begin, by giving to those who believe on His name power to become sons of God. Consciousness of sonship, confidence in the Father's love, the child's yearning towards Him, and the assurance that He hears, are all expressed in that one word, and without these our prayers are of small account. 2. Petitions. Those bearing on God's glory must be first, and those bearing on ourselves second. God's "name" is His revealed character. It is "hallowed" when worthy thoughts of Him and corresponding emotions dwell in men. God's kingdom comes where His name is hallowed. It is that order or constitution of things in which He rules, not over ignorant tools or reluctant slaves, but over willing, because loving, sons. Its seat is within; its manifestation is outward. All social and individual good is comprehended in that prayer, for the hallowing of the name of the Father is the sole foundation of glad obedience to His sway, which is love, joy, and peace, for men and nations. The second class of desires—those for the supply of the suppliants' wants—begin at the bottom and climb up. Mark that we are not to say "my" but "our." Brotherhood follows sonship. Bread, not dainties; bread sufficient, not superfluous; bread for to-day, not for to-morrow;—how many would be content with that? The prayer for God's glory comes first, because that is greatest; but that for bread comes first in its series, because it is least. The need for pardon is as universal and more crying than that for bread. It is the beginning of the spiritual life, but in this connection is meant for all stages thereof, and implies some previous experience, inasmuch as it makes our forgiving the reason for our being forgiven. While it is true that we cannot receive pardon into an unmerciful heart, a prior truth is that we must have experienced that pardon before becoming truly and habitually merciful. An unforgiving Christian is a monster, and will turn out unforgiven; but a heart that forgives, and has never sought and found God's pardon, is as much of a contradiction.

II. **A parable of prayer.**—The central point of it is the power of persistent importunity, which is illustrated by a seemingly most incongruous narrative. The man in bed with his children, who gets up at last for as selfish reasons as had kept him lying, is a repulsive picture of selfish indolence, both when he refuses and when he gives. But the very contrast between that temper and the love of the Father, to which prayer appeals, is the point of the story. "If" such a miserable creature, "being evil," is conquered by persistence, "how much more shall your heavenly Father give?" is the lesson here too. The contrast is complete. Selfishness and perfect love, slothful indifference to need and unwearied, all-embracing, never-resting beneficence, a yielding at last to save annoyance and get rid of an unwelcome presence and a yielding which has been delayed for our good, and gives joyfully as soon as we are capable of receiving. But is not the story so violently unlike God as to lose its power for the intended purpose? Not if we keep in mind the "How much more." Persistent asking can melt even such a rock as that. What can it not do when it appeals to an infinite pity and a Divine desire to give?

III. **The confidence of prayer.**—Our Lord adds to the parable His assurance of the power of persistent prayer, and confirms it by an analogy which sets the parable in its right light. "Ask" "seek" and "knock," perhaps, express a

gradation. Desires breathed to God are not in vain, but they must be accompanied with seeking which is effort. Knocking implies repetition as well as earnestness. Here, then, is another lesson to the disciples, teaching them how to pray. Prayer is to be accompanied with appropriate effort, and to be persevering. But in what region of experience are these unconditional promises fulfilled? Surely not in this world of bitter disappointments, and baffled desires, and frustrated quests! It would be a questionable blessing if all our desires in regard to outward benefits were granted, and the Father in heaven would be less wise than many an earthly father, who knows that an indulged child is a "spoiled" child. The abounding promise is true absolutely in the spiritual realm, where fuller knowledge of God, a more Christ-like character, and more blessed communion with Him, wait for all who desire them and seek them in God's way. The closing analogy lifts the child's prayer to its true place. Mark the parallel between the "which of you" in the parable, and the "of which of you" in ver. 11 (R.V.). By the former our experience as petitioners is brought to illustrate the truth taught; by the latter, our experience as givers. Fatherly love is taken for granted; the thing enforced is confidence in fatherly wisdom. Jesus charges "evil" on all men, and emphatically exempts Himself. And then He bids us not to think that the grudging giver of the parable represents God, but to take the purest, most unselfish love which we know, and purify it yet more by taking away all taint, and to think of that as a dim shadow of the infinite love and wisdom which in the heavens hears and answers our poor cries.—*Maclaren.*

SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS ON VERSES 1—13.

Ver 1. *Before the Lord's Prayer.* "As He was praying."—This prayer preceded the giving of His own prayer for the perpetual use of His Church and people below. It is impossible for us to exaggerate the importance of the occasion. Was not the occasion worthy of a special prayer of Christ to consecrate it? We must not presume to speak confidently where God has not spoken. But not on that account should we shrink from a serious pondering of mysteries too high and too deep for us: may it be but with reverence that we turn aside to see this great sight, the Saviour rising from His own prayer to give inspiration for ever to the prayer of others. Might not He be praying, in that prayer of preface and prelude, that the spirit of the prayer He was about to prescribe might be indeed the spirit in all future ages of His disciples and of His Church? That the filial heart might be the religion of His people—the filial and the brotherly? That sinners might be enabled to view aright their own standing—as sinners, yet sons; sons still, however sinful; not waiting to be made sons, but emboldened to claim and to exercise a sonship, which is theirs by birth, in right of a Divine creation, a Divine redemption, and a Divine evangelisation? That in this sonship, of right theirs, yet all of grace, they might see and feel to be included all mankind, however widely severed and dissociated by birth and place, by thought and phrase, by habit and custom in things secular or in things sacred? That His Church might ever be interested in the work of God, His cause and His glory, and might ever give the first place in its prayer to that which concerned these? That the great message of the forgiveness of sins might be so written upon the hearts of His people that they might be able to use it with quietness and confidence for their daily comfort and strengthening, forgetting the things behind and reaching forth always to the things before? That thus His Gospel might approve itself to the conscience and heart of mankind, as indeed the power of God unto salvation, a religion of light, life, and love, spreading blessing everywhere

around it, and, like the crucified Lord whose living witness it is, lifted above earth while planted upon it, drawing all men unto it, and so unto Him?—*Vaughan.*

Vers. 1-13. *Lessons on Prayer.*

I. **The need of help in prayer.**

II. **The pattern prayer.**—It is full of simple trust; it is unselfish; it is simple; it is reverent; it is spiritual.

III. **Importunate prayer.**

IV. **Promises for prayer.**—*Taylor.*

Ver. 1. "*When He Ceased.*"—While continuing His journey, the Lord remained faithful to His habits of personal devotion. He did not content Himself with that constant direction of the soul towards God, which has so often been supposed to be the meaning of the precept, "Pray without ceasing." There were in His life special times, positive acts of prayer. This is indicated in the words that follow: "*when He* ceased."—*Godet.*

Prayer the Distinguishing Mark of God's Children.—Speech distinguishes men from animals; speech rising into prayer distinguishes the children of God from the children of this world.

A Desire to be Like Christ.—They observed in their Master, while He prayed, a strange separation from the world, a conscious nearness to God, a delight in the Father's presence, and a familiarity in communion with the Father, which seemed to them like heaven upon earth. Fondly desiring to partake of these blessed privileges, they besought their Master to show them the way.—*Arnot.*

"*Teach us to pray.*"—We forget that we are *to learn* to pray; and that prayer is to be learned, as all other things, by frequency, constancy, and perseverance.—*Law.*

Social Prayers of Jesus.—The request and its occasion, taken together, convey to us incidentally two pieces of information. From the latter we learn that Jesus, besides praying much alone, also prayed in company with His disciples, practising family prayer, as the head of a household, as well as secret prayer in personal fellowship with God His Father. From the former we learn that the social prayers of Jesus were most impressive. Disciples hearing them were made painfully conscious of their own incapacity, and, after the Amen, were ready instinctively to proffer the request, "Lord, teach us to pray," as if ashamed any more to attempt the exercise in their own feeble, vague, stammering words.—*Bruce.*

The Disciples' Request.—The request was brought before the Lord Jesus on a remarkable occasion, or at least at a moment of great solemnity. The Lord was praying in a certain place.

I. Perhaps it was a fixed place, an understood place, which He had chosen for the purpose.

II. It appears, too, that He was occupied in this way for some time. This seems to follow from the expression "when He ceased."

III. It is evident likewise that while He was so occupied they watched and waited. No one ought, if it can be avoided, to be interrupted during the exercise of prayer.

IV. But there was more than this in the case of Jesus. They were manifestly filled with reverential awe.

V. Yet they longed to learn something of this power of intercourse with our Father in heaven. They remembered, too, how John the Baptist had spoken of this intercourse—how he had given instructions to his disciples concerning prayer—and when the Lord had "ceased" they laid their request before Him: "Lord, teach us to pray."

VI. It was a request which led to great results. Never was a question which brought an answer more prolific of benefit to mankind.—*Howson.*

A New Stage in the Life of the Disciples.—The disciples had, doubtless,

been accustomed to pray, but it was a new and further stage in their disciple-life when they thus expressly asked some further and fuller teaching in prayer. It was one thing to pray; it was another thing to feel their need and defectiveness in this so much that they directly ask for help, not only to pray better, but, as it now seemed to them, to pray at all. "Lord, teach us to pray" is always a new stage in disciple-life.—*Maccoll.*

"*As John also taught his disciples.*"—In this beautiful half sentence we learn something concerning the Baptist which we should never have known otherwise, something which may teach us for our own benefit.

I. We have abundant information in the Gospel narrative respecting the Baptist's sternness, courage, faithfulness, his summoning all men to repentance, his self-denial, his fearlessness in rebuking sin in high places, his utter devotion to Christ, his deep humility, his consciousness that he was only a messenger preparing the way for One greater than himself. But these for the most part were severe qualities, containing even what we may call an element of harshness. Where in all this do we perceive any traces of that tenderness and patience which are implied in the statement that he "taught his disciples to pray"?

II. Let us look at the matter from another point of view. St. John is named in the New Testament beyond the limits of the Gospel History. His great shadow is, indeed, cast across all the Scriptural narrative of the history of the earliest Church. But all this does not touch in the least what we find in this beautiful half-sentence of our text. Nay, the very grandeur of John the Baptist seems, at first sight, almost in contrast with the other impression. For in teaching how to pray there is personal sympathy, minute attention, consideration, and gentleness. We hardly expected to find this in the Baptist, but we do find it; and is it not a great example?—*Howson.*

Vers. 2-4. *The Warrant and the Liturgy of Prayer.*

I. **The Lord's Prayer is Christ's warrant for prayer.**—It settled, once for all, the great question of praying. "When ye pray"—as, of course, you do pray. Prayer is sometimes called an instinct. It is an instinct of the original nature—the nature made in God's image, after God's likeness—would that the fallen being always found it so! Certainly prayer has no exemption from the assaults of a scoffing generation. Thankful ought we to be that we have our Saviour's express warrant for it. The Lord's prayer is that first and before all else. His example would have been something. His permission, His encouragement, His command to pray, would have been more. But this form of words is a sort of sacrament of prayer, an outward visible sign presenting to the very senses the assurance of the inward spiritual grace attending and following.

II. **The Lord's Prayer is the one inspired liturgy of the Christian society.**—"When ye pray, say," is a warrant for the lawfulness of forms of worship. As such, it supplies a want. It guarantees uniformity, so far as uniformity is a condition of unity. The Lord has in it instituted a liturgy for the perpetual security of harmony and sympathy in the addresses of His people to the God and Father through Him. Let us make much of this gift of gifts as a substantial bond of union among all Christian people, however widely, in other respects, divided and separated. They have a common prayer, if not a Common Prayer-Book. They who unite in the Lord's Prayer join in the one liturgy which has come down from heaven.

Beauty and Value of the Lord's Prayer.—The beauty and value of the lessons in the Lord's Prayer arise from: 1. The tone of holy confidence. It teaches us to approach God as our Father (Rom. viii. 15), in love as well as holy fear. 2. Its absolute unselfishness. It

is offered in the plural—not for ourselves only, but for all the brotherhood of man. 3. Its entire spirituality. Only one petition is for any earthly boon, and that only for the simplest. 4. Its brevity, and absence of all vain repetitions. 5. Its simplicity; which requires, not learning, but only holiness and sincerity, for its universal comprehension.—*Farrar.*

The Lord's Prayer.

I. **Contents.**—1. Christ teaches us to pray as well for temporal as for spiritual necessities. 2. But still more for spiritual than for temporal. One petition only for daily bread; five are devoted to higher concerns. 3. The glorifying of the name of God must stand yet more in the foreground than the fulfilment of our necessities.

II. **Frame of mind.**—The Saviour here teaches us to pray: 1. In deep reverence. 2. In child-like confidence. 3. In a spirit of love for others.—*Van Oosterzee.*

I. **The address.**—1. The filial relation to God. 2. The fraternal relation to our fellow-men. 3. Heaven our destination (faith, love, and hope respectively, all combining to bring us into a true frame of mind).

II. **The petitions.**—1. Those which concern the glory of God. 2. Those which express the wants of men.

Devotion to God and Acceptance of His Gifts.—Devotion to God and acceptance of His gifts are contrasted in the Lord's Prayer.

I. Devotion *to His name, to His kingdom, and to His will.*

II. Acceptance of His gifts in reference to the *present*, the *past*, and the future.—*Lange.*

The Petitions.—Having risen to what forms the highest and holiest object of believers, the soul is engrossed with its character (first petition), its grand purpose (second petition), and its moral condition (third petition); in the fourth petition the children of God *humble themselves* under the consciousness of their dependence upon Divine mercy even in temporal matters, but much more in spiritual things, since that which, according to the first portion of this prayer, constituted the burden of desire, can only be realised by forgiveness (fifth petition), by gracious guidance (sixth petition), and deliverance from the power of the devil (seventh petition).—*Meyer.*

God and Man.—The prayer sets forth (1) God's relation to man, and (2) man's relation to God.

I. Petitions which have to do exclusively with **God.** 1. *Thy* name be hallowed. 2. *Thy* kingdom come. 3. *Thy* will be done. These occur in a *descending* scale—from Himself down to the manifestation of Himself in His kingdom; and from His kingdom to the entire subjection of its subjects, or the complete doing of His will.

II. Petitions which have to do with **ourselves.**—1. "Give *us* our bread." 2. "Forgive *us* our debts." 3. "Lead *us* not into temptation." 4. "Deliver *us* from evil." These occur in an *ascending* scale—from the bodily wants of every day up to our final deliverance from all evil.—*Brown.*

Ver. 2. "*When ye pray, say.*"—That briefest, tersest, fullest of all forms of prayer, the only exhaustive one, the only perfect and sufficient, because all-embracing and all-comprehending, one. How can we put into words all that the Lord's Prayer had in it for the Church and for the Christian? I do not believe that childhood or youth, or even middle life, or anything short of old age, can at all fully appreciate the Lord's Prayer. It is condensed, it is deep, it is difficult. No commentary and no catechism can elucidate without diluting, or improve without spoiling it. Not until that age comes which demands above all things the real and the strong and the substantial, the thing that can be leaned upon and rested upon and (when the time comes) died upon, can any man know in him-

self all that the great Lord did for us when He answered that request, "Teach us to pray," and answered it in the particular form to which eighteen centuries have appropriated the grand title "The Lord's Prayer." Let us earnestly ask ourselves whether we have been faithful to the precept, "When ye pray, say"? Do we make full use of ourselves of the prayer? Do we, in our use of it, think into it, and think out of it, some of its hidden treasures of grace? Do we take literally enough its companion words in St. Matthew, "When ye pray, use not vain repetitions . . . your Father knoweth what things ye have need of before ye ask Him. . . . After this manner therefore pray ye"? Is not the old weary round too often trodden in our praying, as if indeed the Lord's Prayer were not?—*Vaughan.*

Our Intercessor.—Just as we have our Saviour as our Intercessor in heaven, so we, in our prayers on earth, take the words of our Intercessor to help us.—*Cyprian.*

"*Our Father, who art in heaven.*"—This implies (1) that we have access to God, and (2) that we may rely on Him with full and unshaken confidence.

"*Our Father.*"—Not "My Father." The plural reminds us (1) of our brotherhood in Christ, and (2) of the duty of common prayer. God is our Father (1) because He is our Creator and Sustainer, and (2) because we are His adopted children by faith in Jesus (Gal. iii. 26).

A Personal God.—This phrase is a denial of Atheism, Pantheism, and Deism, for it recognises a God, a Personal God, who is our Father through Christ.

"*Hallowed be Thy name.*"—Cf. Mal. i. 6. A son honoureth his father, and a servant his master; if, then, I be a father, where is Mine honour? and if I be a master, where is My fear?

General Character of the Prayer.—The prayer is that the existence of God may be believed, His attributes and perfections adored and imitated, His supremacy acknowledged, and His providence owned and trusted in.—*Bloomfield.*

Fulfilment of this Petition.—We can fulfil this prayer (1) by joining with our brethren in the public worship of God; (2) by reverence of demeanour in the house of God; (3) by refraining from sinful and profane talk; and (4) by reverencing everything belonging to God—His word, His day, His sacraments, His ministers, and His people.

"*Thy kingdom come.*"—1. God's spiritual rule over the souls of men. 2. The extension of His Church, as of His visible kingdom. 3. His heavenly kingdom, which is to come after the resurrection, and to endure for ever.

"*Thy will be done.*"

I. Because it is the will of the author of our being and the fountain of all existence.

II. God's will should be done by us because it is supported by the whole constitution of things.

III. God's will is to be done by us because it is a perfect will, a righteous and loving will, the will of a father.

IV. God's will is to be done because it rests on perfect knowledge and the widest survey of things.—*Leckie.*

Submission of Our Wills to God's Will.—Our wills are to be sacrificed to the will of God; we are (1) to obey His commandments, and (2) to suffer what He may lay upon us with faith and submission and contentment.

"*As in heaven.*"—"Bless the Lord, ye His angels, that excel in strength, that do His commandments, hearkening unto the voice of His word" (Ps. ciii. 20).

The Trinity.—The first three petitions are inseparably *triune*: the name to be hallowed, of the *Father* just invoked,

of the *Son* whose kingdom is to come, of the *Spirit* through whose inworking the children of God are disciplined and enabled to do His will.—*Stier.*

Ver. 3. "*Give us day by day our daily bread.*"—This teaches us (1) that everything we enjoy is the gift of God; (2) that as God is willing and able to give, we should not be overwhelmed by earthly anxieties and cares; (3) that our desires should be modest and reasonable; and (4) that we should ever be thankful for having received from God so much more than daily bread.

"*Give us.*"—The prayer (1) acknowledges that we are indebted to God for our *simplest* boons; (2) asks for them *all*; (3) asks them only day by day; (4) and asks for no more (cf. Prov. xxx. 8).—*Farrar.*

The Present, the Past, and the Future.—As the prayer for daily bread raises us above care for *to-day*, and the prayer for the forgiveness of sins is meant to quiet us concerning the *past*, so is the prayer against temptation a weapon for the uncertain *future.*—*Van Oosterzee.*

Ver. 4. "*Forgive,*" *etc.*—The last three petitions have regard to (1) the beginning, (2) the progress, and (3) the end of spiritual life in the world; the worshipper confesses his guilt, deprecates danger, and asks for deliverance from the evils to which he is exposed.

"*For we also forgive.*"—As the first invocation put away all idolatry and image-worship, so is all murder, and anger, adultery, stealing, slandering, and whatever other evil to our neighbour there may be, put away from the heart and will of him who prays the fifth petition and abides in it.—*Stier.*

"*Indebted to us.*"—We cannot forgive sins, as such—that belongs to God; but only as obligations from man to man, represented by the commercial phrase "indebted."

"*Lead us not.*"—The memory of past faults suggests the idea of present weakness, and excites a fear of falling into sin in time to come.

Opportunity and Desire.—Our prayer is, Let not the tempting opportunity meet the too-susceptible disposition. If the temptation comes, quench the desire; if the desire, spare us the temptation.—*Farrar.*

"*Deliver us from evil.*"—The expression is a military term, which describes the deliverance of a prisoner who has fallen, or who is on the point of falling, into the power of the enemy. The enemy is the Evil One, who lays snares in the path of the faithful. They, conscious of the danger which they run, and of their own weakness, ask God not to permit them to be taken in the snares which may have been set for them by the adversary.—*Godet.*

"*Temptation . . . evil.*" 1. Concealed pitfalls. 2. Open dangers. The petition teaches us (1) *humility*—we are to ask for help against *all* temptations, even the smallest, and not to be led *near* them; and (2) *caution*—for if our prayer is to be effectual, we must shun evil and the appearance of evil.

Vers. 5-13. *The Efficacy of Prayer.*—This is proved by—

I. An example of how importunity avails, even in the case of a disobliging neighbour.

II. Daily experience (vers. 9, 10).

III. The fatherly character of God (vers. 11-13).

Ver. 5-10. *Indifference overcome by Prayer.*—After Jesus had taught His disciples how to pray, He went on to speak to them in a parable that seems to cast a new light on some of those relations of man to God which are to be affected by this mysterious agency. For instead of representing

the Divine nature as open and tremulous to our cry, it is represented to us here as if wrapped in a slumber heavy as midnight, and only to be awakened by our persistent and most urgent endeavour. The same view of matters is presented in the parable of the Importunate Widow and the Unjust Judge. The first feeling we have about the matter is either that there has been some mistake in the way these parables are reported or that it is hopeless for try to understand them. We say, "This householder asleep at midnight! What can this mean?" I think the meaning is that Jesus would teach us in this way what we are learning in many other ways—that the best things in the Divine life, as in the natural, will not come to us merely for the asking; that true prayer is the whole strength of the man going out after his needs, and the real secret of getting what you want in heaven, as on earth, lies in the fact that you give your whole heart for it, or you cannot adequately value it when you get it. So, "Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you" means, "Put out all your energies, as if you had to waken heaven out of a midnight slumber, or an indifference like that of the unjust judge." The parable teaches something in our life we seldom adequately consider—viz., what might be called the indifference of God to anything less than the best there is in man—the determination of Heaven not to hear what we are not determined that heaven shall hear.—*Collyer.*

Vers. 5-8. *Duty of Hospitality and Neighbourliness.*—We are here taught incidentally: 1. The duty of hospitality, and that not grudgingly, or of necessity, but cheerfully shown. 2. The duty of friendly and neighbourly accommodation.

Vers. 5-7. *A Contrast.*—All the circumstantial features form a contrast to the Friend in heaven, who never gives such an answer (though it may at first seem so to unbelief). God does not sleep, He never shuts His door against us; He has no favourite children who divert His attention from us; He does not think it a trouble to hear, and to grant. And though man sometimes is really *not able* to help, yet God is always both willing and able.—*Stier.*

A Parable on Importunate Prayer.—Jesus was well aware how God often shows Himself so little like a father that those who trust in Him are tempted to think Him rather like a man of selfish spirit, who cares only for his own comfort. Such precisely is the representation of God *as He appears* in the parable of the Selfish Neighbour.

I. **The relevancy of the parable requires that His character should be regarded as representing God—not as He is, indeed, but as He seems to tried faith.**—It is thus tacitly admitted by Jesus that, far from giving His children what they need before they ask, God often delays for a lengthened period answers to prayer, so as to present to suppliants an aspect of indifference and heartlessness. The didactic drift of the parable is: You will have to wait on God, but it is worth your while to wait. Man can be compelled to hear by importunity and excessive knocking. God is not a man to be compelled, yet it may be said that the apparent reluctance of Providence can be overcome by persistent prayer which refuses to be gainsaid or frustrated, continuing to knock at the door with an importunity that knows no shame. In other words, with full consciousness how much there is in the world which seems to prove the contrary, Jesus asserted the reality of a Paternal Providence continually working for the good of those who make the kingdom of God their chief end.

II. It must be observed that, while giving this assurance to His disciples that God would attend to their spiritual welfare, **Jesus did not lead them to expect that in this sphere there would be no occasion for exercising the virtue of patience.**—On the contrary, it is clearly

implied in the parable that the delays which make God assume so untoward an aspect take place in connection with all the objects referred to in the Lord's Prayer: the advancement of the kingdom, daily bread, the personal spiritual necessities of disciples. Hence we learn that even the Holy Spirit may not be given at once in satisfying measure to those who earnestly desire it, though sure to be so given eventually. The Holy Spirit is given in ample measure to all earnest souls, but not even to the most earnest without such delays as are most trying to faith and patience.—*Bruce.*

I. **This ever-mindful God, our loving Father, has a way of His own, and we must meet Him in His own way.**—He is very willing to give good gifts—more so than our earthly fathers. But He must be entreated to give them.

II. **Ye shall receive, but not without asking. And then, too, not always at once.**—This is the lesson of the parable. Because of His importunity, the man got what he wanted. He would not be put off. He asked till he got.

III. **How much more will our Heavenly Father give good gifts.**—especially that best gift, His own Holy Spirit—the Spirit of Christian peace, and joy, and love, and holiness—if we ask, and ask again, and will not let Him go until He blesses us!—*James Hastings.*

How God Appears to the Timid Mind.—The parable is intended to set forth, not the actual way in which God ought to be regarded, but how He may be represented to a man, by his ignorance and fear, by one who is in need, and has ventured at some midnight hour to knock at God's door. Now that He has begun to ask, why should he leave off? Let him continue to ask. Importunity and a little delay will do him good in this first venture. He will come back more confidently next time, for God will seem more a friend than He was before.—*Maccoll.*

Utter Selfishness Depicted.—The utter selfishness of the man to whom the appeal is made is vividly depicted. 1. Though addressed as "friend," he omits any such appellation in his reply. 2. His first words are rude, surly, and abrupt. 3. He details the obstacles that stand in the way of granting the request—the trouble involved in opening the door, and the risk of awakening the children.

Ver. 5. "*At midnight.*"—He designed us to understand that if a man, unwillingly roused from his sleep by some petitioner, is compelled to give, with how much greater kindliness we may expect bounty at the hands of Him who "never slumbereth" and who is the very person who rouses us to call us upon Him.—*Augustine.*

"*Three loaves.*"—*I.e.*, cakes of bread. There is no mystical significance in the number—it is simply an appropriate detail in the parable: one loaf for the guest, one for the host who sits down at table with him, and a third in reserve.

Importunate Faith.—When the heart, which has been away on a journey, returns suddenly at midnight (in the time of greatest darkness and distress) home to us—that is, comes to itself and feels hunger—and we have nothing wherewith to satisfy it, God requires of us bold, importunate faith.—*Meyer.*

Ver. 7. "*Trouble me not.*"—The reluctance is real: but God's reluctance is apparent only, and even this appearance arises from reasons which work for our best good.

Ver. 8. "*Importunity.*"—*I.e.*, shamelessness. How expressive the word, and how instructive! It teaches us the nature of true prevailing prayer. The prayer which gains its end is prayer which knocks till the door is opened, regardless of so-called decencies and proprieties, which it seeks till it obtains, at the risk of being reckoned impudent,

which simply cannot understand and will not take a refusal, and asks till it receives.—*Bruce.*

Importunity in Prayer Reasonable, and Incumbent upon us.

I. **Because of the majesty and holiness of Him whom we address, and our own weakness and sinfulness.** Indifference and lukewarmness are out of place.

II. **Because of the great value of the spiritual deliverances and blessings we implore.**

Encouragements to Importunity in Prayer.

I. **It tends to quicken our desires**

II. **Such prayer has the promise of being answered.**

III. **The record in Scripture of successful importunate prayers.**—Jacob, Elijah, the Syro-phenician woman, St. Paul, and Christ Himself.

Ver. 9. "*I say unto you.*"—A marked distinction is to be drawn between the use of this phrase in the preceding verse and that made of it here. The former is unemphatic—any one would admit that such "shamelessness" would be likely to prevail in the circumstances described; any one could say, "He would be sure to rise and give whatever was asked." But in this verse Christ emphatically assures us on His own testimony that like importunity does avail in prayer to God. Our warrant for believing in the efficacy of importunate prayer rests, not upon analogies or arguments, but upon the testimony of Christ Himself.

1. *Asking, Seeking, Knocking.*—We *ask* for what we *wish.* 2. We *seek* for what we *miss.* 3. We *knock* for that from which we feel ourselves *shut out.* —*Brown.*

"*It shall be opened.*"

"Fervent love,
And lively hope with violence assail
The kingdom of the heavens, and overcome
The will of the Most High; not in such sort
As man prevails o'er man; but conquers it,
Because 'tis willing to be conquered, still,
Though conquered, by its mercy conquering."
Dante (Parad. xx.).

Ver. 10. *Receiveth . . . findeth . . . it shall be opened.*"—Two of the verbs are in the present, the third is in the future; and this last is because the opening of the door is not the action of the person who knocks, but of another within.

Asking Apparently in Vain.—If any complain that they have "asked," "sought," "knocked in vain," let them be reminded—

I. **That prayer is not always answered immediately.**—The reason why God sometimes delays His gifts may be because that which is long looked for is sweeter when obtained, but that is held cheap which comes at once.

II. **That is often an act of the truest love to withhold a favour, however earnestly prayed for.**

III. **That prayer, though sometimes actually refused, for merciful reasons, at the time, is sometimes, perhaps always, eventually answered in a different and far higher sense than was expected or desired.**—*Burgon.*

The Most Wonderful of the Parables.—In some respects this parable and that of the Unjust Judge, are the more wonderful and precious of all the parables. The rest present such views of Divine grace as may be shadowed forth by the ordinary manifestations of human character and action—such as a shepherd bringing back his sheep, or a sower casting his seed into the ground; but these two go sheer down through all that lies on the surface of human history—down through all the upper and ordinary grades of human experience—and penetrate into the lower, darker, meaner things at the bottom, in order to find a longer line wherewith to measure out greater lengths and breadths of God's compassion.—*Arnot.*

Vers. 11, 12. *Bread, Fish, Eggs.*—

The three articles of food are not taken at haphazard. Bread, hard-boiled eggs, and fried fish, are the ordinary articles used for food by a traveller in the East.

The outward resemblance between the wholesome articles of food and the useless or hurtful substitute, renders the form in which the lesson is cast all the more picturesque and happy.

Ver. 11. *God's Giving.*—God gives us (1) more than we ask, (2) what we cannot ask; (3) against our asking.

Ver. 13. "*Being evil.*"—Original sin is here very distinctly implied.

No Flattery of the World in Scripture.—Scripture does not commend itself to the world by speaking well of it; more wonder is it that Scripture has been received by men as God's Word.—*Wordsworth.*

Christ Implies His own Sinlessness.—Not "*we* being evil": an indirect but unmistakeable testimony to His own sinlessness.

"*How much more.*"—He has both (1) will to give, and (2) wisdom to give good things only. He will give us as largely as we can receive of His own Holy Spirit.

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 14—36.

Neutrality Impossible in Religion.—This miracle of casting out the devil from the dumb man served to bring the claims of Christ before those who witnessed it. They were, as it were, compelled to make up their mind to accept Him or to reject Him as their Saviour and Lord. He was evidently armed with supernatural power, and admission of this fact should naturally have led to an acceptance of His teaching. The kingdom of God had come, and men were called to choose what attitude towards it they would take up. Yet the minds of the people were undecided; some were merely astonished at the prodigy they had witnessed, others demanded a further sign of His Divine authority, while a third class boldly accused Him of collusion with Satan—of being aided by Satanic power in order to deceive the people more completely. Our Lord refuted this calumny by appealing to the teaching of common-sense, and by pointing out that all successful exorcism was performed in the Divine name and by the power of God—the strong being overcome by One yet stronger. He then declared that those that were not with Him were against Him, or, in other words, that there is no neutrality possible in matters of religion.

1. **Absence of positive attachment to Christ involves hostility to Him.**—As head of the kingdom of God and in conflict with the powers of evil He represents a cause which concerns every living man. There is no alternative between accepting Him and rejecting Him—between being on the side of holiness and being opposed to it. Men may stand outside of other movements—political, social, artistic, literary, or philosophical—and assert that they are incapable of judging between the merits of contending parties, or that they are not interested in the questions debated. But in the strife between good and evil none can be neutral: to do evil and to acquiesce in evil done are treason against God. There is but a difference in degree of culpability between those who openly range themselves on the side of evil and those who refuse to take a place on the side of righteousness. Distaste for holiness is akin to positive love of sin. Christ here brings this home to the consciences of men. Love for God is inextricably involved with allegiance to the Son of God manifest in the flesh, and those who reject Him who was sent, reject Him by whom He was sent. The rejection may be accompanied with malignant feelings and with open outrage, but it is none the less rejection if the summons to follow Him is declined in the most courteous terms.

II. **A pretended neutrality is only a prelude to a worse state.**—The heart of man is like a house prepared for habitation; if it is not occupied by a spirit of holiness it will be seized upon by an evil spirit. That which is strongest will hold it. The appearance of neutrality between good and evil may for a time be kept up; there may be an absence of openly vicious tendencies in the life, as well as of faith in the Saviour and loyalty to His person. But this mere varnish of decency and respectability will not strengthen the character and enable it to stand against a renewed and more determined assault of evil. Forces are at work that will inevitably degrade the nature that is not consciously in communion with God and Christ, or that deliberately refuses the better part. "The last state of that man is worse than the first."

SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS ON VERSES 14—36.

Ver. 14. *The Dumb Spirit.*—It is thus still. While the devil has possession, the man is dumb. Only when the devil is cast out by the word of Jesus can the dumb speak. The indication of possession in this instance was the silence. There is a very true sense in which every man naturally, and without God, has in him a dumb spirit, and can only lose that spirit under the healing touch of Christ.

I. **The curse of a bad temper.**—The sullen silence, the overcast brow, the morose reserve, the speechless displeasure, priding itself on its tenacity and perseverance—is not this indeed an example of possession by a dumb spirit? At such times you are under Satanic influence.

II. **The pre-occupied, self-engrossed life.**—Excluding others from all confidence, having in reality no partner and no associate, giving out in social converse the merest superficialities of thought, and in domestic intercourse the veriest dregs and refuse of one's being. Does the description sound unamiable? It is so. This is not the man for love, for love is not in him. But is the description exaggerated? Has it no counterpart! Alas! too often is it to be found. The lips may speak, but the soul speaks not: the devil that possesses is not only debasing, but dumb.

III. **A more nearly universal experience.**—The absence of spiritually helpful speech. The silence of most on the highest themes. A true Christian will use his gift of speech in the service of his Master. What name can we give to that use of speech which leaves out or refuses this high object? With most, alas! as to any value or blessing bestowed on others by our gift of speech, we might as well have been bereft of it. The spirit possessing us has been no better than a dumb spirit.

IV. **It has been so towards men.**—We have done no good with our speech. And how has it been towards God? Our text stands in immediate connection with a passage on prayer. Possession by the evil one makes us dumb Godward. We all, naturally, hang back from prayer. Is prayer a command? We disobey it. Is it a privilege? We scorn it. Any excuse is enough to put it aside. Books, amusements, are welcome to us if they come instead of, and form an excuse for, neglecting prayer. How can you doubt being under some malign influence if you are prevented from holding communion with your heavenly Father?

V. **But the gospel of Jesus Christ comes to our help.**—It humbles, that it may raise. The text which condemns, also promises. "When the devil was gone out, the dumb spake." Has it not been found true a thousand times! The profane, the deceitful, the blasphemous, the frivolous, the impure, have learned to pray, and to praise. There is magic in the contact of Christ's power. It transforms souls, and fulfils the words "When the devil was gone out, the dumb spake. And

all the people gave praise to God."—*Vaughan.*

"*It was dumb.*"—As if the miracle were done as a sign illustrative of this teaching to pray. For this is the real difficulty that many have as to prayer. They are dumb, at least to God, because an evil spirit has got possession of them, and another spirit is needed, that they may begin thus to speak. The very readiness to pray, although long dumb, may be the first sign of such a wonder, as the gift of the Holy Spirit, silently wrought. It is the very finger of God that casts out of men this dumb, prayerless spirit, and all others of the same evil class.—*Maccoll.*

"*Dumb.*"—This man, possessed by a devil, was both dumb and blind (Matt. xii. 22). Some of Christ's cures were wrought (1) on persons who appealed for help; (2) on some, as the paralytic, who, with their own consent, were brought to Him; (3) on some whom He chanced to meet (chap. vii. 12; John v. 5); and (4), in this instance, on one brought to Him without his own consent.

Three Classes of Spectators.—Three classes of people behold this miracle: 1. Those who are for Christ, and marvel as they recognise the Divine power manifested by Him. 2. Those who are against Him, and ascribe the work to the powers of evil. 3. Those who are neutral, and ask a fresh sign, to convince their wavering minds.

Vers. 14-16. *A Terrible Accusation.*—The cure having been immediately and completely successful, those present expressed their feelings. From the midst of this multitude, plunged in astonishment, some are heard to state a most terrible accusation. There was, they said, collusion between Jesus and Satan: Satan, in order to secure credit for Him, has given Him this power over the possessed. Others, more moderate in appearance, demand that Jesus, to free Himself from such a suspicion, should work a miracle of a kind different from these cures—a sign proceeding undeniably from heaven, the seat of Divine power; then it will be evident that His power is derived from a holy source.—*Godet.*

Ver. 15. "*But some of them said.*"—It is as if the cast-out devil had just entered into these, to make them blind with a more wicked blindness, and, from being a dumb devil, had, for a change, become one speaking blasphemously.—*Stier.*

"*He casteth out.*"—It is well worthy of notice that the enemies of Christ do not deny the *fact* of the miracle having been wrought, though their hatred of Him led them to draw this injurious inference from the fact.

"*Through Beelzebub.*"—The imputation was that Satan had, as principal, entered into a compact with Jesus, as subordinate. He had entered into this compact, it was insinuated, for the purpose of putting down the inestimably beneficent influence of the Pharisees. Hence, it was alleged, all the strictures and criticisms of Jesus on the godly ways of the godly people! Power was given from beneath, power even to cast out demons, so that the people might be thoroughly deceived.—*Morison.*

Ver. 16. "*From heaven.*"—Such as the manna from heaven given by Moses: the fire called down by Elijah. A sign was offered by Isaiah to Ahaz "either in the depth or in the height above" (Isa. vii. 11). The demand was akin to the third temptation in the wilderness.

Vers. 17-26. *The Accusation Refuted; the True Explanation Given.*

I. Jesus refutes the blasphemous explanation of His cures (vers. 17-19).

II. He gives the true explanation of them (vers. 20-26).

Ver. 18. "*Divided against himself.*"

—The assertion of the Pharisees assumed that there was an organised kingdom of evil with a personal ruler. Our Lord uses this assumption as a terrible fact, which, however, proves the absurdity of the charge made against Himself. This organised kingdom of darkness, because it is only evil, is racked with discords and hatred, but against the kingdom of God it is a unit. The point of the argument here is, not that discords are fatal, which is not always the case, but that an organisation which acts against itself, its own distinctive aims, must destroy itself.—*Popular Commentary.*

"*How shall his kingdom stand?*"—Satan would, according to their supposition, have been exerting his power, not only to set this particular person free from his dominion, but to confirm the whole doctrines and precepts of Christ, which were all directly opposed to the kingdom of Satan, and calculated and destined to overthrow it. Such a supposition, therefore, was quite inconsistent with the craft and sagacity of the devil, and was altogether untenable.

Ver. 20. "*With the finger of God.*"—An allusion to the *ease* and *despatch* with which His mighty works were done.

Vers. 21-23. *Entire Moral Independence is Impossible.*—The palace is freed from the usurped dominion of the strong man, only to become the willing recipient of the Stronger than he. But subjection to Christ is no bondage; it is the very law of liberty.—*Brown.*

Vers. 21, 22. *The Two Warriors.*—This figure of the two warriors, one of whom takes up his stand fully armed on the threshold of his castle, ready to defend it, and the other comes suddenly and beats him down and divides the spoil among his followers, is taken from Isa. xlix. 24, 25; the prophet applies it to Jehovah delivering His people from the hands of the heathen oppressor. There is a truly epic majesty in the picture of the two adversaries, and there is no other saying of Jesus which gives such a striking impression of His consciousness of the sublimity of His position and the greatness of His work.—*Godet.*

Christ the Conqueror of Satan.—One of the most comprehensive of the Saviour's titles. There are five steps by which our Lord advances to this victory over Satan.

I. **When He vanquished him in Himself.**—Through the body, through the mind, through the spirit—in the wilderness.

II. **By His works.**—Not only by His bodily healings, where He dispossessed Satan, but in those cases where the devil himself was present in the struggle. Those who were possessed by demons, and delivered from them, were the most outstanding monuments of Christ's power and mercy.

III. **By His death.**—By submitting to death He redeemed us. His death availed as an atonement for the sins of men; it removed the obstacle of unforgiven and uncancelled guilt which was the very strength of Satan's kingdom. Since then the kingdom of the devil has become contracted in its limits, and weakened in its dominion.

IV. **By His life.**—His heavenly life, into which His resurrection introduced Him, and to which the ascension sealed Him. As the living, enthroned Saviour, He imparts the life-giving Spirit. The Spirit alone can extirpate evil, and break the power of Satan in the individual life. This is the individual victory in the case of each separate redeemed soul.

V. **By His future judgment.**—In the consummation of all things, Satan and his angels will be adjudged to their final doom by the enthroned Saviour.—*Vaughan.*

Ver. 22. *The Strong Man.*—The strong man has indeed been overcome,

and his power to harm diminished. Yet ought we not therefore to be careless, for here the Conqueror Himself pronounces him to be strong.

Ver. 23. *Decision.*—Our Lord has been exposing the folly and perverseness of those who would ascribe His power over evil to a compact with evil. He shows that there is a natural and an irreconcileable antagonism between evil and good, between the Saviour and the enemy of man. And He says that each particular person must take a side in that conflict. Whoever does not take the one side, as a matter of course takes the other. By not siding with Christ he sufficiently indicates that he sides against Him. It is a lesson of judgment, to guide us in our estimate of ourselves. It says: "Remember the necessity of decision between Christ and evil. Do not suppose that a merely negative state will suffice for salvation. If you are not with Christ He must look upon you as against Him; practically you are so, and in the final judgment such will be your doom." Do the words sound harsh and overstrained? Severe though they may sound in connection with religion, I am sure that we feel the force of our Lord's words in connection with human life.

I. **With its business.**—How worthless is half-hearted co-operation! We reject vague, vacillating support. It is almost more provoking than direct opposition. A man ought to know his own mind. To be destitute of the quality of decision and determination is to be useless.

II. **With life's friendships.**—What is a friend worth who is distrustful and doubting? You expect loyalty towards yourself, even against appearances.

III. **So must it be with Christ.**—He looks for decision in aim and affection. He is worthy of it. And, having made up our minds about Him, we ought to be bold, resolute, unflinching in our avowal of love and loyalty. "He that is not with Me" is His own description of a half-Christian. Such an one never seeks His company, is never truly "with Him."

V. **But to be with Christ means more—it means to be on His side.**—In the daily strife we have chosen to be on Christ's side. We are in the struggle, and Christ is concerned in that struggle, interested in its progress and in its end. We cannot be neutrals. If we try to be so He speaks of us in this sad fashion: "He that is *not* with Me."

VI. **This does not necessarily imply active opposition to Christ.**—The expression is negative. It implies the absence of interest, of cherishing faith and love, of claiming your position as a son, and living up to it. It implies that it has not been a great and constant object with you to gain heaven, and here to live as an expectant heir of heaven. And for *practical* purposes, and so far as the final personal issue is concerned, the faint-hearted, cowardly, treacherous soldier of Christ is rather an enemy to Him than a friend.—*Vaughan.*

None can be Neutral.—Every one must take part in the contest. Neutrality is impossible. To attempt to stand by and merely watch the work of Christ is at once to join the other side. There are two scales of the balance, and there is nothing but these two. Any weight withdrawn from the one scale, of necessity goes into the other. The declaration is one of the most solemn and far-reaching statements in the whole of the Bible.—*Plummer.*

"*He that is not with Me.*"—Our Lord has proved that He is the stronger, that He is the Messiah, working miracles by the spirit of God; the alternative is therefore presented in a new form: *Christ* or *Satan.* The Pharisees decided for Satan, and were consistent in their opposition. Sentimental admirers of Christ are simply inconsistent enemies.—*Popular Commentary.*

False Prudence.—A false Gamaliel-prudence thinks to save itself by saying, "If only we are not fighting against God," and leaves the kingdom and work of God to take its course, without helping it by confession or by action, and thereby coming to the knowledge that it is from God. Let the indolent and undecided only not mock, not persecute, that is thought to count for something in their favour. But this is the middle party of whom Christ knows nothing, and of whom He makes no account; them He condemns and hands over to His enemies. —*Stier.*

Two Classes of Men.—There are three classes in every community: the *friends* of Christ, the *foes* of Christ, and the *neutrals*. The Bible, however, recognises but two classes: good and bad, sheep and goats, children and rebels.

I. **What is it to be with Christ?**—It is (1) to have sympathy with the principles for which His kingdom exists, and (2) to be identified with Him in carrrying out those principles. Many are *for* Him in proportion to those who are *with* Him.

II. **The evils of neutrality.**—1. The neutral man hangs as a dead weight upon the Church. 2. He paralyses those who are in active service. 3. Indecision leads not unfrequently to an utter betrayal of Christ to the enemy.

Vers. 24-26. *The Perils of a Vacant Heart.*—It will never do to wish for the absence of evil, and yet not to desire the presence of God.

I. **We must never, in any work we try to do in God's name, set before ourselves, or others, a negative aim.**

II. **We should realise the spiritual capacities of the human heart, that it may become the throne of God.**

III. **There is great need of patience to bring the life more and more perfectly in subjection to the love of God.** —*Paget.*

The Parable of the Demon's Return.—The parable grows out of the previous declaration, "He that is not with Me, is against Me." It illustrates, in a very vivid way, the impossibility of deserting Satan without joining Christ, the impossibility of keeping aloof from Christ without falling into the power of Satan.

I. **Christ is not contrasting the imperfect and uncertain methods of Jewish exorcists with His own.**—This interpretation is read into the narrative. It is not found there. We do not need to concern ourselves with the literal truth of a parable such as this.

II. **The expelled spirit is restless and ill at ease.**—He can only be at rest where he can inflict harm. He still calls the man's soul "*my* house." He knows in what condition the house is likely to be. He speaks of it as a sure possession, and a return to the former abode shows that this expectation is correct.

III. **The house of the soul is empty.** —This is placed first as the main evil, and the chief cause of the ruinous end. There is a grievous defect in this condition. The man is well satisfied with himself. There is no humility, no fear of being enslaved a second time, and so, no earnest seeking for Divine support, no imploring of the Holy Spirit to come and dwell in the heart from which Satan for the moment has departed. The aversion to sin is merely temporary; there is no yearning after holiness. An attempt is made to occupy an untenable position, to renounce the devil without becoming the bond-servant of Jesus Christ.

III. **The return of the foul spirit.**—As there is no protection against unworthy tenants, the evil spirit seeks some choice companions to come and share in the work of destruction, and they quickly make the ruin complete. Is there not written here very plainly the history of many a human soul? Though we renounce the devil, he will not renounce us. He watches his opportunity, and comes back with sevenfold subtlety and violence, and quickly has us more completely in his

power than before. He comes this time *to stay*. It is, perhaps, not our old sin that at once begins again; but new forms of sin, less conspicuous, perhaps, but just as fatal, beset us—as the Jews, cured of the worship of idols, took to the worship of the letter of the law, and to covetousness, which is idolatry; or as a man, who has conquered intemperance in drink, falls a victim to pride and intemperance in language and conduct. The experience of thousands has proved that forces which are quite sufficient, even singly, to induce a man to abandon some sinful course, are unable, even when combined, to keep him in the right way. It is only when Christ, through His Holy Spirit, is made a welcome tenant that the liberated soul is secure. Safety from Satan's bondage can be made sure in no other way than by abiding under the sway of Him whose service is perfect freedom.—*Plummer.*

Three Stages in the History of a Soul.

I. **A change for the better.**—A partial, temporary reformation.

II. **It becomes again a prepared and inviting habitation for the unclean spirit.**—Since it is empty, swept, and garnished.

III. **The last and worst state.**—Evil habits resumed having sevenfold power, and deliverance from them hopeless.

Three pictures.

I. **A dilapidated dwelling-house.**

II. **The return of the tenant.**

III. **The last plight of the tenant worse than the first.**

Three Lessons.—1. Men can make new circumstances, but circumstances cannot make new men. 2. An increase of material and intellectual resource adds to the perils of humanity unless accompanied by a restoration of the soul which inherits and dominates the larger possession. 3. In proportion as life's environment is enlarged and enriched, the urgency of spiritual regeneration is intensified and increased. —*Berry.*

Two Things Needed.—Two things are wanting to make the state of improvement or reformation permanent. 1. The unclean spirit has not been conquered and bound; he has only gone out, and can return when he will. 2. The house is not inhabited by a new and stronger power; the Spirit of God has not taken the place of the evil spirit now for a time away from his habitation.

Ver. 24. "*Dry places, seeking rest.*" —He has a certain pleasure in all that is waste and desolate, in ruined paradises, and overthrown glory. How can a devil find rest, which the creature can find only in God? He has lost it for ever; he seeks it in vain, in all waste places, which otherwise please him; he seeks it especially in vain, there, where God the Lord of creation will have His rest, and where, therefore, the devil also, if he can force an entrance, finds himself relatively best—namely, in man.—*Stier.*

"*Seeking rest.*"—"Rest" and "quietness," "sitting still," "patient abiding," is the portion of the good; but "the wicked are like the troubled sea when it cannot rest." "There is no peace, saith my God, to the wicked." The unclean spirit "goes to and fro in the earth, walks up and down in it," restless and miserable. He seeketh rest, but findeth none.

Ver. 26. "*More wicked.*"—Not more depraved, for they are all equally depraved, but worse in their power to destroy and in their consequent obstinacy (cf. Mark ix. 29).

"*Enter in and dwell there.*"—Had that house been guarded by watchfulness and prayer, this sad result had been impossible. The goodman watching against the thief's approach would not have suffered his house to be broken through; and the devil, resisted

by the prayer of faith, would have fled away. The soul, aware of its weak points and those parts of its nature against which old sins might most easily direct their attacks, should have kept vigilant guard.—*Burgon.*

"*Last state is worse.*"

I. **The specific application to the Jews.**—The first possession, the early idolatrous tendency of the Jews; the going out, the result of the captivity in Babylon; the emptying, sweeping, and garnishing at their return (Pharisaism, a seeming reformation, but really an invitation to evil influences); the last state, the terrible and infatuated condition of the Jews after they had rejected Christ.

II. **Application to the history of Christianity.**—The reformation, the casting out of the evil spirit of idolatry, permitted by Rome—the house empty, swept, and garnished; swept and garnished by the decencies of civilisation and discoveries of secular knowledge, but empty of living and earnest faith. The re-possession, the final development of the man of sin.

III. **An application to individuals.**—External reformation, without permanent spiritual results, leading to a "worse state."—*Popular Commentary.*

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 27—36.

The Secret Cause of Unbelief.—It is evident that the incident recorded in vers. 27, 28, interrupted the discourse of Jesus, for after gently checking the unwise enthusiasm manifested by this hearer He resumed His teaching, and replied to those who had asked for a sign from heaven (ver. 16). We may take those who proffered this request as typical of persons who profess to be hindered by intellectual difficulties from accepting Christ, and who require these difficulties to be solved before they will take any further step. It is quite reasonable to regard them in this light, for they profess to be unconvinced by what they know of Him, and speak of attaining conviction if a sign which they can weigh and estimate is granted to them. Their minds are, they imply, undecided; further evidence of a kind fixed by them would turn the scale—produce and strengthen faith. In Christ's reply He reveals to them that their unbelief springs from an evil condition of heart.

I. **The revelation given in Christ is sufficient of itself to kindle and confirm faith.**—To the candid and unprejudiced mind it brings abundant proof of its authenticity and authority. Christ Himself is God manifested in the flesh and is His own best evidence; His holy life, His teaching, His death of self-sacrifice, and His glorious resurrection, are the central facts of Christianity. And to those who are unaffected, by them, no more convincing revelation could be given. They display a Divine purpose to redeem mankind and exhibit Christ as the conqueror of sin and death. They do not, indeed, solve all the intellectual questions that the mind of man can raise, but are amply sufficient to satisfy the longings and aspirations of the human heart. To those who turn aside from this revelation of God in Christ nothing further will be given.

II. **The necessary preparation for receiving Christ is a sense of need and a consciousness of sin.**—To those who are self-satisfied and self-righteous the gospel is unmeaning. Christ here contrasts the conduct of the queen of the south, who was attracted by the wisdom of Solomon, and that of the Ninevites, who repented at the preaching of Jonah, with that of those to whom He now spoke. The latter were lacking in the sense of ignorance and sin which the former displayed, and were therefore indifferent to the presence of one greater than Solomon and than Jonah. Consciousness of need would draw them to seek the heavenly wisdom that was in Him; conviction of sinfulness would dispose them to obey His summons to repentance.

III. **A darkened heart the secret of unbelief.**—It was not that light had been withheld from those to whom He spoke, and that thus they were still in darkness of error and unbelief. The light was shining and being displayed in the most conspicuous manner. But for the apprehension of the light a healthy eye was needed. Those, therefore, of prejudiced and wicked hearts were wanting in the very organ that would enable them to see the truth as it is in Jesus. On the other hand, a mind and heart enlightened and free from those prejudices which darken and make blind the soul will direct all our faculties and inclinations, and all the actions of the life, aright, as a light does the man who is travelling at night.

SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS ON VERSES 27—36.

Vers. 27, 28. I. **The woman's exclamation.**—The blessedness of the Lord reflected on His mother.

II. **Our Lord's amendment on it.**—It teaches us: 1. That the happiness of Mary herself consisted rather in her being a believer in Christ than in her being the mother of Christ. 2. That all true believers, as such, are more blessed than Christ's mother, as such. 3. That those who are believers are more blessed on that account than on any other.—*Foote.*

Ver. 27. "*A certain woman.*"—This woman truly represents devout Roman Catholics in their adoration of the virgin. The Ave Maria, as they use it, is but a repetition of her words, and their religious enthusiasm too often manifests the same unintelligent wonder which is here kindly reproved by our Lord.—*Popular Commentary.*

The Way of Obedience.—How many women have blessed the Holy Virgin and desired to be such a mother as she was? What hinders them? Christ has made for us a wide way to this happiness, and not only women, but men, may tread it—the way of obedience. This it is which makes such a mother, and not the throes of parturition.—*Chrysostom.*

Ver. 28. *Our Lord's Reply.*—Our Lord's reply is indeed wonderful.

I. **In reproof.**—He corrects in her the unapprehensiveness of His word, which had caused her to go no further into the meaning of it than this ordinary eulogy imparted, and gives her an admonition how to profit better by it in future.

II. **In humility.**—He disclaims all this kind of admiration for His humanity, and says, not "My word," but "the word of God," which is, in fact, the same, but takes the view off from Him, in His abasement, unto the Father who sent Him.

III. **In truth.**—He does not deny the honour thereby pronounced on His mother, but beautifully turns it to its true side—viz., that which was given her long since (chap. i. 45). Her blessedness consisted not so much in being His mother as in her lowly and faithful observance of the word of the Lord spoken to her (cf. chap. ii. 19, 51). Nor, again, does He deny that to have borne Him was an honour—"yes, indeed, but."

IV. **In prophetic discernment.**—It will be seen that this answer cuts at the root of all Mariolatry, and shows us in what the true honour of that holy woman consisted—in faith and obedience.—*Alford.*

Vers. 29-32. "*They seek a sign.*"—The only sign from heaven that would be given would be no mere empty display of supernatural power; but in the course of the ministry of Christ an event would happen which would recall the history of Jonah. As the Hebrew prophet, after his deliverance from death, preached repentance to the Ninevites, so Christ, after resurrection, would proclaim salvation to the world. That it is the resurrection and not the

preaching of Jonah that is the point of comparison is evident from the use of the future tense.

The mere presence of Christ should have secured credence for His teaching. Solomon did no miracles. neither was any prodigy wrought by Jonah at Nineveh. The wisdom of the one and the earnest preaching of the other were sufficient to attract and to persuade their contemporaries.

Ver. 29. "*Sign of Jonas.*"—The history of the Old Testament presents no more striking example of a wonderful preservation from certain death than that of the prophet Jonah; nay, it is singular in its kind, inasmuch as the prophet, although, as it were, shut up in death, and buried, yet came forth again to life. Therefore is this history recorded as a similitude and type of the resurrection of Christ, as, in the sphere of the type, a resurrection of one really dead was not yet possible. —*Stier.*

Vers. 31, 32. "*The queen of the south . . . the men of Nineveh.*"—1. Love of truth—manifested by the Queen of Sheba. 2. Repentance of sin and fear of the Divine judgment—manifested by the men of Nineveh. These contrast forcibly with the indifference and insensibility of those whom Christ now addressed.

"*A greater than Solomon . . . than Jonas.*"—1. A greater person. 2. A more important message. 3. A profounder wisdom.

Ver. 31. *The Contrast.*—1. A heathen woman and the Jewish people. 2. "The utmost parts of the earth" and "here." 3. Solomon and the Son of man.—*Godet.*

"*The queen of the south.*"—This incident is contrasted with the journey of Jonah. She came from the utmost parts of the earth—from the country that bounded the known world—to seek out the anointed of the Lord who was so much renowned, while Jonah went to the Ninevites to their own country.

Ver. 32. *Christ's Power and Wisdom.* —The Nineveh of this Jonah will be Rome, whose power will bow before the sign of the cross; and Greece will seek and find in this Solomon the true wisdom.—*Stier.*

Vers. 33, 36. "*See the light.*"—They wished a sign; a greater sign than Jonah is granted them, but to perceive it they must not (as they do) cover the light with a bushel, shut the eyes of their understanding.

On the one hand, by the resistance of the heart to Divine truth the soul gradually becomes darkened until it loses every trace of light. On the other hand, by receiving the truth into the heart the nature is gradually purified and enlightened, until it is transfigured and filled with a Divine glory, like that of Jesus on the Mount. The connection of this discourse with what precedes it is as follows: "I am not in collusion with Beelzebub; on the contrary, the kingdom of God has appeared among you. If you loved the truth, no startling miracle would be needed to convince you of this fact. Those whose vision is healthy see it at a glance; and their whole being will be enlightened and transformed by receiving the revelation I bring."

The heavenly light fails of its purpose (1) when it is set under a bushel; (2) when it falls on blind or diseased eyes.

Ver. 33. *Lamps and Bushels.*—The saying is a favourite and familiar one of our Lord's, occurring four times in the Gospels.

I. **A lesson as to the apparent obscurities of revelation, and our duty concerning them.**—There are no gratuitously dark places in anything that God says to us. His revelation is absolutely clear. We may be sure of that if we consider the purpose for which He spoke at all. There are

dark places, there are great gaps: but His own great word remains true, "I have never spoken in secret, in a dark place of the earth." If there be, as there are, obscurities, there are none there that would have been better away. For the intention of all God's hiding—which hiding is an integral part of His revealing—is not to conceal, but to reveal. It is good that there should be difficulties. He is not a wise teacher who makes things too easy. Patient attention will ever be rewarded. The desire to learn will not be frustrated.

II. **The saying gives us a lesson as to Himself and our attitude to Him.**—In the figure thus applied we have the thought that the earthly life of Jesus Christ necessarily implies a subsequent elevation from which He shines down on all the world. God lit that lamp, and it is not going to be quenched in the darkness of the grave. He is not going to stultify Himself by sending the light of the world, and then letting the endless shades of death muffle and obscure it. But, just as the conclusion of the process which is begun in the kindling of the light is setting it on high on the stand, that it may shine over all the chamber, so the resurrection and ascension of Jesus Christ, His exaltation to the supremacy from which He shall draw all men unto Him, is the necessary and, if I may so say, the logical result of the facts of His incarnation and death.

III. **A lesson as to the duties of Christian men as lights in the world.**—This metaphor frequently occurs in Scripture. The general teaching of such references is that Christian men, not so much by specific effort, nor by words, nor by definite proclamation, as by the raying out from them in life and conduct of a Christ-like spirit, are set for the illumination of the world. God's act of lighting indicates His purpose of illumination. What are we Christians for? To go to heaven? To be ourselves forgiven? Certainly. But is that the only end? By no means. He gave you His Son that you may give the gospel of His Son to others, and you stultify His purpose in your salvation unless you become ministers of His grace, and manifesters of His light.—*Maclaren.*

Ver. 34. "*The light of the body is the eye.*"—The eye gives light which it receives from without, and is not light itself. So the conscience lights the spirit by light from above.

It is plainly declared here that the truth revealed to man in the gospel is not something entirely foreign to his nature—something over against and outside of him—but akin to him, as the eye and the light are, as it were, made for one another. The same truth is taught in other parts of Scripture: the heavenly graft is akin to the tree in which it is inserted, or else it would not be assimilated to it (James i. 21); the leaven is not foreign to the meal in which it is hidden, or else it might as well be set in sand (Matt. xiii. 33).

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 37—54.

Besetting Sins of Religious Leaders and Teachers.—The Pharisees aimed at setting before the people an *example* of holiness which it was their duty to imitate; the scribes assumed to themselves the task of *instructing* them in the law of God. The one showed them what they should *do*, the other taught them what they should *believe*. And then, as now, the position of those who were set apart, or who set themselves up as leaders and teachers, was attended with no little spiritual danger. They were apt to become arrogant and self-complacent, and to affect an outward austerity very much at variance with their inward condition of heart and character. All through His earthly ministry the kind of righteousness which Christ taught and exemplified was antagonistic to that of

the Pharisees and scribes, and therefore we need not be surprised that on some occasions, as in the present, He came into direct collision with them.

I. **The first fault with which He charged the Pharisees was hypocrisy** (vers. 39-42).—They acted the part of righteous men, without being righteous at heart, and hence they laid stress upon all such practices as appealed to the outward eye, and were indifferent to the spiritual requirements of the law of God. Just as an actor assumes the dress of the character he wishes to portray, and adopts a tone of voice suitable to the part, and appropriate gestures, attitudes, and speeches, so did the Pharisees assume the outward guise of those who were intent upon honouring and serving God. They were zealous in practising all kinds of ceremonial purification, and in payment of tithes, and went, indeed, beyond the requirements of the law of Moses. Yet their fault did not consist in their extreme scrupulousness, but rather in neglect of moral and spiritual obligations. Beneath the pious exterior lay greed, and injustice, and hardness of heart, and self-indulgence. The sin they were guilty of is only too easily possible in Christian society—that of combining a sanctimonious profession of religion with a very lax moral practice.

II. **The second fault with which Christ charged the Pharisees was that of vainglorious ambition** (ver. 43).—They loved the praises of men, and sought to gain and wield power for the gratification of their own pride and vanity. Their *motive* was an evil one, and vitiated the influence for good which their profession of zeal for the honour of God might have exercised. For when the mask was taken away from their characters it became evident that they were seeking to promote their own self-advancement, and not the interests of true religion. The teaching of Christ, therefore, distinctly warns us that holiness does not consist merely in the performance of certain actions, but in the pure and righteous character of the motives that govern the life. His words on this occasion, too, describe the hurtful influence exercised by all spurious forms of religious life (ver. 44). Not only do they fail to promote righteousness, but they are like a poisonous contagion. The corruption is all the more deceptive because it is concealed, and it infects those who come into contact with it.

III. **A characteristic fault of the scribes was their laying stress upon the letter of God's Word rather than upon the spirit of it** (vers. 45, 46).—This is akin to the reproach addressed to the Pharisees, for literalism is closely allied to formalism. They rendered the Scriptures an oppressive burden by the minute rules which they deduced from them, and which they imposed upon all those whom they instructed. But for their own part they substituted knowledge for practice. Probably in all ages of the Church's history those may be found who perpetuate this fault—who set up their own interpretations of Scripture and deductions from it as of co-ordinate authority with the Word of God. And those who are most peremptory in insisting upon acquiescence in their rigid interpretation of Scripture generally enjoy a freedom which they deny to others. Their work seems to be that of imposing burdens, and not of sharing burdens.

IV. **Another characteristic fault of the scribes is their rancorous orthodoxy** (vers. 47-51).—They are in antagonism to living piety, and persecute it. They set up over against those who are the present mouthpieces of God's Spirit the authority of earlier teachers, whose opponents they would have been if they had lived in their times. And by their resistance to God's messengers they approve themselves as children of those who in earlier ages killed the prophets. God leaves no generation of men without His witnesses, and those who resist them share the guilt of those who were persecutors in times long past, even though they may sincerely believe that they abhor their actions. Such orthodoxy, which manifests itself in the statement and defence of a creed which is more a matter of the intellect than an inspiring influence upon the life, is a positive hindrance

to religion (ver. 52). It is like taking away the key of a door and hindering both ourselves and others from entering in.

SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS ON VERSES 37—54.

Vers. 37, 38. *A Violation of Hospitality.*—There can be little doubt that this Pharisee violated the laws of hospitality by inviting Jesus to his house for the purpose of watching Him, and of founding some accusation against Him. Others of the guests had the same hostility towards Him in their minds (vers. 45, 53). This fact explains the severity of tone manifested by Jesus throughout the scene. Except for grave reasons, He would not have spoken as He did in the house of His entertainer. There are times when higher obligations than the rules of good society must be respected.

Vers. 39, 40. *The Pharisees Rebuked.*—The Pharisees are rebuked (1) for being addicted *to meaningless rites*—for lustrations which had been instituted for the purpose of suggesting moral purity lost their significance when practised for their own sake; (2) for attending merely to external appearances; (3) for the folly of imagining that God was such an one as themselves, and would be satisfied with a mere pretence and show of righteousness; and (4) for the covetousness and greed by which they had enriched themselves, and which made them indifferent to the claims of the poor and unfortunate.

Ver. 41. "*Give alms.*"—There is no question here of the intrinsic merit of good works: Jesus is simply contrasting the positive value of a kindly deed with the worthlessness of mere outward observances.

"*All things are clean unto you.*"—Let them do one single loving, unselfish act—not for the sake of the action itself, nor for any merit inherent in it, but out of pure good-will towards others—and their whole inward condition would be different. Let those things, which had been the materials and instruments of sin and selfishness, become the instruments of love and kindness, and all things, both that which is without and that which is within, would be at once purified for them. In other words, as the cup and the platter, the outside of which they cleansed so scrupulously and sedulously, were defiled by the bad means by which their contents were procured, or the evil uses to which they were put, so they would be purified, not by any formal outward acts, but by that spirit of love which would dictate a right and charitable destination of their contents.—*Speaker's Commentary.*

Ver. 42. *Two Marks of Hypocrisy.*—1. To be more exact in and zealous for the observance of ritual and the traditions of men, than in and for the observance of the moral law of God. 2. In matters of morality to be more exact and strict in and for little things, than for things more grave and weighty. There is no commandment of God that we are at liberty to despise: yet we should have more regard to greater than to lesser duties.

Judgment and the Love of God.—The reference is to Micah vi. 6-8, where the prophet makes all acceptable religion to consist in "doing justly, loving mercy, and walking humbly with God."

Not to Leave the Other Undone.—The moderation and wisdom of Jesus shine out in these words; He does not at all desire prematurely to break the legal mould in which Jewish righteousness was cast, provided that it was not maintained at the expense of the real contents of the law.—*Godet.*

The First and The Last.—By all means be most minutely conscientious. But then see to it that ye do not (1)

put the last first, and (2) put off and put out the first altogether, contenting yourselves with the last and least. See to it, on the contrary, that (1) ye put the first first, and that then (2) ye do not put off and put out the last, but bring it in and yet keep it last.—*Morison.*

Ver. 44. *Whitewashed Tombs.*—Jews had a custom of whitewashing sepulchral stones once a year. At the time when our Lord used this metaphor to characterise the scribes and Pharisees, the tombs about Jerusalem had been recently whitewashed, and so were beautified for a season. As He spoke in the open air, the white stones must have been conspicuous on every side. The object of this whitewashing was not to embellish, but to point out the gravestone to the passer-by, that he might not tread on it or touch it. Later casuists pronounced the man unclean who casually stepped on a grave or touched a tombstone. This explains the saying of our Lord in the text. *It amounts to a charge against the Pharisees of concealing their true character from the people, and spreading contamination while no one suspected them of evil.—Fraser.*

Ver. 45. "*Reproachest us also.*"—In what a grievous state is that conscience which, hearing the Word of God, thinks it a reproach against itself; and, in the account of the punishment of the wicked, perceives its own condemnation!—*Bede.*

Vers. 46-52. *Besetting Sins of Theologians.*—The besetting sins of theologians: 1. Harshness and insincerity (ver. 46). 2. A rancorous and persecuting spirit (vers. 47-51). 3. Arrogance and exclusiveness (ver. 52).

Ver. 46. *Knowledge Substituted for Practice.*—Very rigid principles combined with very lax conduct. Undue attention to the intellectual side of religion is generally found accompanied by this moral deficiency.

"*Touch with one of your fingers.*"—This is opposed to taking up the burden upon the shoulders.

Vers. 47, 48. "*Ye build the sepulchres.*"—Ye build their tombs and adorn their monuments, but ye do not imitate their example; ye disobey their precepts, and slight their warnings, and rebel against their God, who has sent to you His Son, to whom all the prophets bear witness. And thus ye show yourselves the *children* of those who *killed* the prophets, and are even worse than your fathers, because ye add hypocrisy to impiety.

Resisting the Prophets. — Ask in Moses' time, Who are the good people? They will be Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob; but not Moses—he should be stoned. Ask in Samuel's time, Who are the good people? They will be Moses and Joshua; but not Samuel. Ask in the times of Christ, and they will be all the former prophets, with Samuel; but not Christ and His apostles.—*Stier.*

Ver. 51. *Abel . . . Zacharias.*—The murder of Abel was the *first* in the strife between unrighteousness and holiness, and as these Jews represent, in their conduct, both in former times and now, the murderer of the first, they must bear the vengeance of the whole in God's day of wrath. Our Lord mentions the murder of Zacharias, not as being the last, even before His own day, but because it was connected specially with the cry of the dying man: "The Lord look upon it, and require it" (2 Chron. xxiv. 22).—*Alford.*

"*This generation.*"—A great and rapid river, which should, for thirty or forty years together, have its current violently stopped—what a mass of water would it collect in so long a space; and if it should then be let loose, with what fury would it overrun and bear down all before it?—*J. Taylor.*

Accumulated Guilt.—It belongs to the fearful earnestness of the Divine retributive righteousness that when a generation concurs in heart with the wickedness of an earlier generation, it receives, in the final retribution of the accumulated guilt, as well the punishment for its own as also for the former sins which it had inwardly made its own.—*Van Oosterzee.*

Ver. 52. "*Key of knowledge.*"—Jesus represents knowledge of God and of salvation under the figure of a sanctuary: it was the duty of the scribes to lead the people into it, but they had locked the door and kept possession of the key. This key is the Word of God, the interpretation of which the scribes planned exclusively for themselves.—*Godet.*

Keeping the Key.—The scribes, by arrogating to themselves exclusive authority to interpret the Scriptures, while they did not interpret them truly, either for their own use, or for the good of those whom they instructed, kept the key of knowledge shut up and useless.

CHAPTER XII.

CRITICAL NOTES.

VER. 1. **An innumerable multitude of people.**—"The many thousands of the multitude" (R.V.); lit. "the myriads of the multitude." The discourse in this chapter is evidently in continuation of what has just been recorded: the cardinal sin of the Pharisees is dealt with, and freedom of speech is commended, in spite of the dangers which it provoked. **Unto His disciples first of all.**—Opinion is about equally divided as to whether the words should be thus rendered, or "say unto His disciples, First of all, beware ye." The former is retained in the R.V. So far as internal evidence is concerned, Christ's words seemed to be addressed to His disciples rather than to the multitude; and this distinction harmonises rather with the rendering of our version than with the other, which some editors prefer. **The leaven of the Pharisees.**—Cf. Matt. xvi. 6-12. The characteristic spirit of the Pharisees, which issued in a general corruption of the characters of those influenced by it. Leaven is most frequently used in Scripture as a symbol of evil. **Hypocrisy.**—The word "hypocrite," in its original sense, means an actor; one who assumes a part and adopts a name, dress, and manner of speaking, in harmony with it. The appropriateness of the figure for those who assumed an austerity and goodness which were foreign to them, for the sake of imposing upon others, is obvious.

Ver. 2. **For there is nothing covered.**—Hypocrisy is not only sinful, but *useless*: all secret words and sayings will one day be made public and open. The words have a different application in Matt. x. 26. There the reference is to the public proclamation of what the disciples have learned in secret from the Master.

Ver. 3. **In closets.**—"In the inner chambers" (R.V.); "in the store-rooms," the most secret part of the house. The same word is used in Matt. vi. 6, xxiv. 26. **Upon the house-tops.**—So that all in the streets can hear. "These sayings have a strong Syrian colour. The Syrian house-top presents an image which has no sense in Asia Minor, or Greece, or Italy, or even at Antioch. The flat roofs cease at the mouth of the Orontes; Antioch itself has inclined roofs" (*Renan*).

Ver. 4. **My friends.**—An unusual phrase. Cf. John xv. 13-15.

Ver. 5. **I will forewarn you.**—Rather simply "I will warn you" (R.V.). **Fear him, which after,** etc. Who is the person here referred to? Strangely enough, the words have been interpreted both of God and of Satan. The opinion of the majority of commentators is that God is meant as the "almighty dispenser of life and death, both temporal or eternal." But, on the other hand, Christ is here speaking of *enemies*; He warns His disciples not to fear those who can only hurt the body, and says there is reason to fear One who has power to "cast into hell," or, as St. Matthew says, "to destroy both body and soul in hell." If Satan is an enemy of the souls of men, and if those who yield to his solicitations share his punishment, there can be no difficulty in understanding this passage as alluding to him. Fear (or

terror) of a spiritual enemy of real power and malignancy is evidently meant here. No such emotion is represented in the Scriptures as belonging to man's relations with God. *Alford* understands the words as referring to God, and endeavours to draw a distinction between the phrase used in ver. 4 and that in ver. 5 to denote "fear"—in the one case the preposition ἀπό (fear of something coming *from* such and such a quarter) being used, and in the other case the simple verb—and understands by the one, "terror," and by the other the nobler "fear of God" so often commended to us in the Scriptures. But he does not support his argument by adducing any examples of the words being used to denote these varying ideas. **Hath power.**—Or "authority" (R.V. margin). The word is appropriate for indicating authority which may be used in subordination to a higher rule, and so is in harmony with the above interpretation. **Hell.**—Lit. "Gehenna," the place of punishment, as distinguished from Hades, the abode of the dead. Gehenna means simply the Valley of Hinnom, outside Jerusalem, so called apparently from the name of the original inhabitants or owners of it (Josh. xv. 8). It was polluted by the worship of Moloch (Jer. vii. 31), and was afterwards used as a receptacle for the rubbish and filth of the city. Large fires were kept burning in it, to prevent pestilence.

Ver. 6. **Are not five sparrows?**—St. Matthew speaks of two being sold for one farthing (x. 29). Evidently if four were bought at one time, a fifth was thrown in for nothing; yet not even *one* of these insignificant creatures is "forgotten before God."

Ver. 7. **Hairs of your head.**—Evidently a proverbial expression. Cf. 1 Sam. xiv. 45; 1 Kings i. 52; Luke xxi. 18; Acts xxvii. 34.

Ver. 8. **Before the angels of God.**—Allusion is here made to the last judgment, at which the angels of God are generally represented as present. The phrase in the parallel passage in St. Matthew is, "Before My Father which is in heaven."

Ver. 10. **It shall be forgiven.**—*I.e.*, on repentance. **Blasphemeth against the Holy Ghost.**—A wilful and deliberate state of sinning, against the clearest light and knowledge, which, from the very nature of things, must exclude from forgiveness. These words were spoken to encourage the disciples; they give assurance that God will be with them in their work, and that obstinate opposition to it would be severely condemned by Him.

Ver. 11. **Synagogues.**—The officials in each local synagogue had certain judicial powers. **Magistrates and powers.**—*I.e.*, higher tribunals, either Jewish or Gentiles.

Ver. 12. **For the Holy Ghost.**—This mention of the Holy Ghost as Paraclete, or Advocate, closely corresponds with Christ's teaching as recorded in St. John's Gospel, and is an interesting testimony to the historical character of the latter.

Ver. 13. **One of the company.**—Rather, "one out of the multitude" (R.V.). Perhaps the mention of magistrates and powers suggested to him Christ's acting as a judge and giving a decision in his favour. **Divide the inheritance.**—See Deut. xxi. 15-17. Whether the claim were just or not cannot be inferred from the narrative.

Ver. 14. **Man.**—Apparently in reproof. Cf. Rom. ii. 1, ix. 20. **A judge or a divider.**—The one may mean an ordinary judge, the other an arbitrator specially chosen to decide conflicting claims. There is no doubt an allusion to Exod. ii. 14.

Ver. 15. **Beware of covetousness.**—A better reading and translation is: "keep yourselves from all covetousness" (R.V.), *i.e.*, from every kind: the unlawful desire, the selfish enjoyment, of earthly goods. **For a man's life,** etc.—The passage is a peculiar one, and might be rendered, "for not because one has abundance does his life therefore depend on the things which he hath." "The meaning is, that abundance is not a necessary condition of existence: a man lives on what he possesses; all that is needed is a mere sufficiency" (*Speaker's Commentary*).

Ver. 16. **The ground,** etc.—This is not a case of riches acquired in any unlawful manner, but of riches derived from industrious labours and the bounty of heaven. Mere multiplication of his wealth, and selfish enjoyment of it, take up all his thoughts. **My fruits.**—Notice also in ver. 18 "*my* barns," "*my* fruits," "*my* goods," and in ver. 19 "*my* soul"; as though this last were a possession of which he was equally sure.

Ver. 18. **All my fruits.**—"Not a word of the poor" (*Bengel*). The word in the original is a different one from that in ver. 17, and may be rendered "my produce" or "my corn" (R.V.).

Ver. 19. **Take thine ease.**—The gathering together of his wealth, and his schemes for hoarding it (ver. 17), had disquieted him; he would now make his wealth the basis of rest and enjoyment. In the original there are simply four words, four verbs in the imperative, for the second half of this verse. The conciseness of style gives additional vividness to the picture.

Ver. 20. **Thou fool.**—Lit. "senseless"—wise though he was in worldly wisdom and in management of his property (ver. 18). **This night.**—As contrasted with "many years." **Shall be required of thee.**—As contrasted with "I will say to my soul." Lit., "they require thy soul; *i.e.*, either the angels of God as ministers of death, or, it may be, robbers who deprive him of life and carry off his wealth. No great stress need be laid on this, as the "they" is

not emphatic: the verb is impersonal. **Whose shall those things be?**—"Not that it matters to him into *whose* hands they pass: it is only an emphatic way of saying that they will not be *his*" (*Bloomfield*).

Ver. 21. **For himself.**—*I.e.*, for himself only. **Rich toward God.**—Elsewhere described as "laying up treasures in heaven," by almsgiving and benevolence. "He that hath pity upon the poor lendeth unto the Lord" (Prov. xix. 17).

Ver. 22. **Take no thought.**—Rather, "be not anxious" (R.V.). The meaning of the word "thought" has changed since 1611. Then it meant "anxiety" (see 1 Sam. ix. 5).

Ver. 23. **Is more.**—*I.e.*, is a greater gift. He who gave the greater may be relied upon to provide the less.

Ver. 24. **Consider.**—The word is a strong one: "observe carefully," "study." **Ravens.**—Cf. Ps. cxlvii. 9; Job xxxviii. 41. **Sow . . . reap . . . storehouse . . . barn.**—In reference to the parable of the Rich Man: *he* perished in spite of all his labour and anxiety; *they* live without labour or anxiety.

Ver. 25. **Thought.**—As in ver. 22. **Stature.**—Rather "age." The word means either the one or the other; but prolongation of *life* is the idea of the passage here. It would be a great thing to add a cubit to one's stature, while this is spoken of as a slight and insignificant trifle.

Ver. 26. The application of measures of space to time is not uncommon. See Ps. xxxix. 5; 2 Tim. iv. 7. A cubit is a foot and a half.

Ver. 27. **Lilies.**—Supposed by some to be the crown imperial lily, which grows wild in Palestine, by others the amaryllis lutea, by others the Huleh lily. Of the last Thomson says: "It is very large, and the three inner petals meet above, and form a gorgeous canopy, such as art never approached, and king never sat under, even in his utmost glory. And when I met this incomparable flower, in all its loveliness, among the oak woods around the northern base of Tabor, and on the hills of Nazareth, where our Lord spent His youth, I felt assured that it was this to which He referred" ("*The Land and the Book*"). **Solomon in all his glory.**—Cf. Cant. iii. 6-11.

Ver. 28. **The grass.**—The flowers mown down along with the grass. **Oven.**—"A covered earthen vessel; a pan wider at the bottom than at the top, wherein bread was baked by putting hot embers round it, which produced a more equable heat than in the regular oven" (*Alford*).

Ver. 29. **Doubtful mind.**—Tossed about between hope and fear. The figure is that of a ship raised aloft, at one moment on the top of the wave and then sinking down into the depths—an apt metaphor for anxiety.

Ver. 30. **Your Father knoweth.**—An additional reason for banishing undue anxiety about worldly things.

Ver. 32. **Little flock.**—The word for "flock" is itself a diminutive: the double diminutive is an indication of the deep feeling with which the words were spoken. Christ here presents Himself as the Shepherd (John x. 1*ff*). **The kingdom.**—If the higher and spiritual blessings are given, anxiety concerning food and raiment may well be banished. Preparation for this kingdom is commended in the verses that follow.

Ver. 33. **Sell that ye have,** etc.—Addressed to *officers* of the kingdom who were to be altogether free from earthly ties; though in a certain sense all should provide for themselves a "treasure in the heavens." **That faileth not.**—*I.e.*, that is inexhaustible.

Ver. 34. **Where your treasure is.**—The affection of the heart is not to be divided, but is to be concentrated on one object (cf. Matt. vi. 24).

Ver. 35. **Loins girded.**—An allusion to the long robes of the East, which those who wear them must bind up before they engage in any active employment. **Lights burning.**—The same lesson as in the parable of the Ten Virgins.

Ver. 36. **Men that wait.**—This is a different figure from the parable just named: servants waiting at home for their master's *return* from the wedding. **Wedding.**—The word may mean a feast or entertainment of any kind. No stress, therefore, need be laid upon the kind of feast.

Ver. 37. **Gird himself,** etc.—A prophetic view of this great act of self-abasing love is given in John xiii. 1*ff*. In the Roman Saturnalia masters and servants exchanged places for the day; but on that occasion the boon was granted to *all* servants, good and bad. This which Christ speaks of is an honour to faithful and vigilant servants. In Rev. iii. 20, 21, the figure is carried still further, and the promise is given of sharing His throne.

Ver. 38. **The second watch.**—*I.e.*, from nine to midnight. According to the Roman custom, adopted at this time by the Jews, the night was divided into four watches: from six till nine, from nine to midnight, from midnight to three, and from three to six. The first watch is not here mentioned, as return during it would be no test of the servants' vigilance, and as probably the feast would then be in progress. The fourth watch is not mentioned, as by that time the feast at which the master was detained would have been long over, and the day would then be breaking.

Ver. 39. **And this know.**—Rather, "this ye know" (R.V. margin). An appeal to common-sense. The figure is changed; the sudden and unexpected coming of the Son of Man is compared to the approach of a night-robber (cf. 1 Thess. v. 2; 2 Pet. iii. 10; Rev. xvi. 15). **Goodman.**—An archaic phrase. The paterfamilias. R.V. "the master." **Broken through.**—Lit. "dug through"; of mud walls.

Ver. 41. **Then Peter said.**—The high reward promised, rather than the duty enjoined, was in Peter's thoughts, and involved a certain measure of danger against which Christ warns him. It is noticeable that his question is not answered directly, but by implication. "Jesus continues His teaching as if He took no account of Peter's question; but in reality He gives such a turn to the warning which follows about watchfulness, that it includes the precise answer to the question" (*Godet*). Cf. chap. xix. 25, 26; John xiv. 22, 23, for a similar mode of answering questions. The reply of Christ is virtually that the larger the powers and opportunities entrusted to any servant, the greater is the degree of watchfulness which he needs to exercise, lest he should either neglect or abuse them.

Ver. 42. **Portion of meat.**—Cf. the description of the duties of presbyters, or elders, in Acts xx. 28.

Ver. 44. **Ruler over all.**—Probably referring to the history of Joseph (Gen. xxxix. 4).

Ver. 46. **Cut him in sunder.**—*I.e.*, put him to death in this manner. Cf. 1 Chron. xx. 3; Dan. ii. 5. **Unbelievers.**—Matt. xxiv. 51 has "hypocrites."

Ver. 47. **Prepared not himself.**—Rather, "made not ready"—*i.e.*, the things required (R.V.).

Ver. 48. **But he that knew not.**—The justice of the procedure is not quite so obvious in this case as in the preceding. "Such a servant cannot remain unpunished—not because he has not obeyed his Lord's will (for that was unknown to him), but because he has done that for which he deserved to be punished" (*Meyer*). **Ask the more.**—*I.e.*, than from others to whom less has been entrusted. Cf. with the teaching of this passage Rom ii. 12-15, in which the principle it states is applied to the Gentile world.

Ver. 49. **I am come.**—Rather, "I came" (R.V.). The tense refers to the historical fact of the Incarnation. Note in this the consciousness of pre-existence, as also of a heavenly origin in the last clause of the verse. **Fire.**—As a symbol of discord and violence. **What will I,** etc.—It is difficult to make out the precise meaning of the words. Probably the best rendering of them is—"And what will I?" (what do I desire now?) "O that it were already kindled!"

Ver. 50. **A baptism.**—Cf. Matt. xx. 22. To be plunged or immersed in sufferings. **Straitened.**—Pressed, distracted. Cf. John xii. 27. A premonition of Gethsemane and Calvary.

Ver. 51. **Division.**—Matt. x. 34 has "a sword."

Ver. 52. **For from henceforth.**—A better reading is, "For there shall be from henceforth five in one house divided," etc. **Three against two,** etc.—*I.e.*, the younger generation against the older.

Ver. 53. **The father,** etc.—The five members of the household are here specified: father, mother, son, daughter, and daughter-in-law.

Ver. 54. **To the people.**—Rather, "to the multitudes"; from which we would understand that the preceding words had been specially addressed to the disciples. He warns them also that the time is critical, upbraids them with spiritual blindness, for not being able to see it (vers. 54-57), and urges them to make, each one, *at once*, his peace with God (vers. 58, 59). **A cloud.** Perhaps, rather, "the cloud," the well-known prognostic of rain (1 Kings xviii. 44). In Palestine the rains come up from the Mediterranean. **Straightway.**—Rapid and certain conclusion as to the weather.

Ver. 55. **South wind.**—Coming across the desert. **Heat.**—Rather "a scorching heat" (R.V.).

Ver. 56. **Hypocrites.**—The insincerity lay in the fact that they chose not to see signs which were equally visible with those of the weather. "Among these signs were miracles (Isa. xxxv. 4-6); the political condition (Gen. xlix. 10); the preaching of the Baptist" (Matt. iii.) (*Farrar*).

Ver. 57. **Yea and why.**—"Even apart from signs, from the declaration of prophets, ye might, from what ye hear and see, recognise the signs of the times, and the person of the Messiah in Me" (*Bloomfield*).

Ver. 58. **When thou goest,** etc.—The figure is that of coming to an agreement with a creditor on the way to the court. **Officer.**—The gaoler, lit. "the exactor," whose duty it was to compel payment of the debt.

Ver. 59. **Mite.**—The smallest Greek coin then in use.

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 1—12.

The Disciples Encouraged.—The hostility manifested towards Christ, as described in the closing paragraph of the preceding chapter, was calculated to intimidate weak and wavering disciples, and even to shake the courage of the bravest amongst them. For it is evident that a large proportion, at any rate, of the crowd now assembled sympathised with the attitude towards Jesus taken up by their leaders. Accordingly our Lord, in the very presence of His enemies, addresses His disciples and encourages them to steadfastness in their allegiance to Him and His cause. By various kinds of inducements Jesus would now lead them to banish their fears.

I. **The promise of victory** (vers. 1-3).—The first encouraging fact on which Jesus laid stress was that in due time the hypocrisy of their enemies would be unveiled and the triumph of the gospel be complete and final. At the present time the teaching of the Pharisees, and the rules of conduct laid down by them, had great weight in Jewish society. But the day would come when the mask would be torn away; the corruption hidden beneath a pretence of piety would be brought to light, and the authority of these present guides and rulers of public opinion would crumble away. On the other hand, the disciples of Jesus, who were now abashed in the presence of their enemies, and who, as it were, scarcely dared to whisper in secret the truth they had learned from Him, would become His heralds, and proclaim to a listening world the teaching which He had entrusted to them. This assurance of future victory was a timely word of encouragement to the followers of Jesus. Just as there is nothing more likely to damp enthusiasm and to diminish activity than a dread of defeat, so the anticipation of winning the day gives fresh spirit and strength to the soldier in the midst of the fight. The same ground of encouragement which Jesus then gave to His disciples, exists still. All who are endeavouring in His name to overcome the ignorance and sin and misery that afflict human society, have reason to believe that the time will come when their efforts will be crowned with complete success.

II. **Assurance of Divine protection** (vers. 4-7).—In the second place Jesus encourages His disciples by assuring them that they were the objects of God's providential care. All the evil that man could do to them was, even at its worst, but trifling and insignificant. Man had power only to injure the body, and even that power could only be exercised within the limits fixed by the Divine decree. They should, therefore, be freed from all fear. The enemy, whom they had reason to dread, was one who might find an ally in their own hearts. The solicitations of the enemy of their souls to save their lives in the hour of danger, by renouncing their Saviour, were indeed to be dreaded. This was the only fear that they need entertain. Jesus, it is to be noticed, does not promise His disciples that in every time of danger their lives would be preserved. They might be called upon to forfeit life, but not without the consent of Him whom He taught them to regard as their heavenly Father. And in the most forcible terms He assures them that the providence of God extends to the minutest details of human life. The birds of the air are not forgotten by God; how much more will He care for His children! He numbers the hairs of their heads; how much more will He protect their highest interests! Let them banish all fears, therefore; they will not fall without God's consent, and God will not consent to anything which is not to be for their good.

III. **The reward of the faithful disciples; the punishment of the faithless** (vers. 8-10).—Fidelity to the Saviour and to His cause may entail pains and sufferings upon earth: but if they persevere unto the end, a glorious reward will be bestowed upon them. Their glorified Master will recompense them for

confessing Him to be their Lord by acknowledging them to be His own before the assembled hosts of heaven. But denial of Him must inevitably be followed by the loss of His love and favour in the day when all shall appear before Him for judgment. It is for them to decide, by their attitude towards Him, what is to be His attitude towards them. There will be nothing arbitrary or capricious in the rewards He will bestow or the punishments He will impose, but both will commend themselves as just to those who will receive them. For a moment Jesus turns from the disciples to the crowd that surrounds them, and speaks of a worse sin than cowardly denial of Him as Lord and Master, and of the heavier punishment which that sin entails. Faithlessness towards Him, or even misguided antipathy towards Him, are grave offences, but they may be forgiven; but deliberate resistance to the Holy Spirit is a sin that can never be forgiven. The sinner who resolutely banishes from himself the light-giving, sanctifying influences of that Spirit, and who hates goodness, shuts himself out from the possibility of salvation.

IV. **The promised aid of the Holy Spirit** (vers. 11-12).—Well might the disciples fear that they would not be able to bear worthy testimony to their Master when exposed to the dangers of which He now forewarned them. And therefore Jesus reassures them, and promises that in their hour of need they would be sustained by that Spirit whom their enemies blasphemed. Many and various would be the tribunals before which His followers would be called to stand; they would be confronted with the representatives of ecclesiastical and worldly power, but they would receive supernatural help to enable them to endure the trial. Let them not premeditate defence! Words would be given them to speak which their adversaries would not be able to gainsay or resist. They would be taught both what to say and how to say it, and not only to defend themselves, but also to render testimony in favour of their Lord. Thus it was with St. Peter and St. Stephen before the Sanhedrim, and with St. Paul before Felix and Festus; they not only maintained their own integrity, but also proclaimed the gospel of which Christ had appointed them ministers.

In all these ways, therefore, did Jesus seek to strengthen His disciples. He infused into their hearts the hope of victory; He confirmed their faith in the almighty power of their heavenly Father; He spoke of the glorious reward which those faithful to Him might anticipate receiving, and of the penalty which cowardice would draw upon itself; and, finally, gave assurance of a Divine aid which would enable the weakest and most timid to rise to heroism in the day of trial and persecution.

SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS ON VERSES 1—12.

Vers. 1, 2. *Hypocrisy and Truth.*

I. **The doom of hypocrisy.** — Its triumph is short-lived, for the mask that conceals the true character of pretenders to godliness will be torn away.

II. **The triumph of truth.**—The words now spoken by disciples in secret will resound through the whole world. Evil done in secret, and truth spoken in secret, will both come to light, and men will condemn the one and approve the other.

Ver. 1. *Two Kinds of Hypocrisy.*—Hypocrisy is of two kinds:—

I. **Pretending to be what we are not.**

II. **Concealing what we are.**—Though these are so closely allied that the one runs into the other, it is the latter form of it against which our Lord here warns His disciples.—*Brown.*

Self-Deception.—Hypocrisy is not merely for a man to deceive others, knowing all the while that he is deceiving them, but to deceive himself

and others at the same time; to aim at their praise by a religious profession, without perceiving that he loves their praise more than God's, and that he is professing far more than he practises. —*Newman.*

Vers. 2, 3. *The Place and Function of the Lamp.*—The disciples are to beware of the leaven of the Pharisees, one element of whose hypocrisy it was to withhold from the common people the light of their own better knowledge; neither going into the kingdom of heaven themselves, nor suffering those who would have entered to go in. The disciples, unlike the Pharisees, are not to withhold any light which they possess; for God intends nothing to be concealed from any man. Whatever *is* covered is to be uncovered. Whatever is hidden from us is hidden, not by God, but by the limitations of our own faculty, and will be disclosed as we train our faculty of perception and outgrow its limitations. So far as we *can* see, we *may* see; and what we see not yet we shall see soon. Yes, and, as we are expressly taught here, so far as we can see we may *speak*, and *must* speak. For as it is the will of God that nothing should be covered except that it may be uncovered, so also it is the will of Christ that whatever He or His disciples have spoken in darkness shall be heard in the light; whatever they have spoken in the chamber shall be proclaimed from the house-top. The same rule is to govern *their* words which governed *His* words. What He had taught them privately, that they were to teach openly (Matt. x. 27); and now He adds that whatever *they* taught privately, that their successors were to teach openly. They were to have no mysteries, no "economy," no truths reserved for the initiated.—*Cox.*

Ver. 2. *A Warning and a Promise.*

I. **A warning** against the hypocrisy which comes from fear of man.

II. **A promise and a consoling hope** for the faithful.

Ver. 3. "*Shall be heard in the light.*"—"All that ye, on account of persecutions shall have taught in secret, will, at the victory of My cause, be proclaimed with the greatest publicity."—*Meyer.*

The Course of the Gospel.—St. Luke has described the course of the gospel from the *closet* of Mary in Nazareth to the *house-tops* of the city of Rome.

Vers. 4-9. *Three Arguments against Fear.*

I. **That drawn from the impotence or limited power of the most malicious enemies.**—They can "kill the body" and can do no more.

II. **That drawn from the providence of God,** without whose will not even the slightest injury can befall us.

III. **That drawn from the fact that in the day of judgment** Christ will acknowledge as His those who have been faithful to Him, and deny those who have denied Him.

Vers. 4-6. *A Mid-Course.*—The state of mind Christ here seeks to cultivate is midway between fear and implicit trust.

I. He urges them on to earnestness by pointing out spiritual dangers to which they are exposed.

II. He preserves them from faint-heartedness by speaking of God as their protector.

Vers. 4, 5. *The Place of Fear in the Gospel.*—There is a place for fear in the gospel. Some readers of the Bible, some preachers of the gospel, have thought that fear was a dangerous, even a forbidden principle, under the dispensation of the fulness of times. They have made this one of the chief points of difference between the law and the gospel. This is a hasty inference. Our Lord says, "Fear Him, which, after He hath killed, hath power to cast into hell"; says it to His disciples—says it to those whom, in the very same sentence, He calls

His "friends." Paul bids his Philippian converts work out their salvation "with fear and trembling"; Peter commends a "chaste conversation coupled with fear"; and even John, who speaks of "perfect love casting out fear," yet uses this, in the Revelation, as a characteristic of the faithful—"them that fear Thy name." Fear *has* a place in the gospel, may we but find it. But it is not, as some would make it, the *whole* of religion. But there are three things the proper objects of gospel fear: 1. Sin and wickedness, 2. Our ghostly enemy. 3. Everlasting death.—*Vaughan.*

Ver. 5. "*Whom ye shall fear.*"—The Christian, though having Christ for his friend (ver. 4), and God as His protector is not above all "fear." The great enemy is still near, and his malice is deadly and unsleeping.

Vers. 6, 7. *Divine Providence.*

I. **Christ here teaches that God's government of the world extends to the minutest detail in the lives of all His creatures.**

II. **That this is not rule of a blind law, but of a loving Father.**—Nothing is left to chance, and we have every encouragement to confidence in Him, and to commit ourselves in prayer to His protecting power.

Ver 7. *Safety while Work is Unfinished.*—The servant of Christ is immortal so long as his work is yet unfinished.

Vers. 8, 9. *Confession and Denial of Christ.*—The context shows plainly that it is a practical, consistent confession which is meant, and also a practical and enduring denial. The Lord will not confess the confessing Judas, nor deny the denying Peter; the traitor who denied Him in act is denied; the apostle who confessed Him, even to death, will be confessed (cf. 2 Tim. ii. 12).—*Alford.*

I. **Gentle allurement.**
II. **Grave menace.**

Ver. 8. *The Promise.* 1. How base, then, to refuse our testimony to Christ, when on His part He offers His testimony to us by way of reward! 2. How much more Christ promises than that which He requires from us! *The Threatening.* (1) Not only will the names of the cowardly be blotted out of the book of life, but (2) He will bear testimony against them and take away all hope of their admission into the heavenly kingdom.

Ver. 10. *The Sin against the Holy Ghost.*—St. Luke records the utterance to the disciples of that same dread sentence which St. Matthew and St. Mark give as addressed to the blaspheming Pharisees — showing conclusively that Christians are not out of reach of that danger which in open enemies is blasphemy, and in false friends is a "doing despite." St. Luke connects this sin with that of denying Christ. His warning is addressed to disciples. They may deny Christ and be forgiven: "to him that blasphemes against the Holy Ghost it shall not be forgiven." Thus he prepares us for later disclosures which shall show how a Christian may blaspheme against the Holy Ghost, and, so doing, sin beyond forgiveness.—*Vaughan.*

Rejecting the Preaching of the Apostles.—The history of Israel fully proves the truth of this word of warning. That nation did not perish because of the sin of having nailed the Son of man to the cross. Otherwise the day of the crucifixion would have been its day of judgment, and God would not have offered for forty years longer forgiveness of this act of rejection. It is the rejection of the preaching of the apostles—the obstinate resistance offered to the Spirit of Pentecost—that filled up the measure of Jerusalem's sin.—*Godet.*

Sins Against the Spirit.—Other forms of sin against the Holy Spirit are referred to in Scripture:—

I. To resist the Spirit (Acts vii. 51),

or to vex the Spirit (Isa. lxiii. 10). The action of those who refuse to turn from their evil ways.

II. To grieve the Spirit (Ephes. iv. 30) —as believers do when they allow themselves to be carried away by sin. But to blaspheme is of one's own free will, with full knowledge to hate and withstand the Holy Spirit. The reason why this sin cannot be forgiven is not that the fountain of God's pity is closed up, but that the fountain of penitence and faith is dried up in the sinner's heart.

Ver. 11. *Promised Help.*—The disciples are forewarned that they would be cited, not only before Jewish, but also before heathen tribunals, and are promised direct, immediate help from above for all cases in which they would need it. The promise is of a twofold nature.

I. Help would be given them to frame their defence.

II. They would be assisted to deliver their testimony on behalf of Christ. The Acts of the Apostles contains the record of many instances of the fulfilment of this promise.

Ver. 12. *The Authority of the Apostles.* —Not unjustly is the Saviour's promise of the assistance of the Holy Spirit regarded as one of the strongest grounds of the high authority in which the word and writings of the apostles stand. The manner of the Spirit's working may be incomprehensible, but it is evident that we are to understand an entirely extraordinary immediate influence; for it was to be given them "in that hour." The promise of this assistance extended as well to the *substance* as to the *form* of their language, and this help was to support them so mightily (cf. chap. xxi. 14, 15) that it would be morally impossible for their enemies to persevere in offering them resistance.—*Van Oosterzee.*

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 13—21.

The Rich Fool.—Christ's unusually stern and cold answer disclaims a commission, either from God or man, to decide squabbles about property, or to put such decisions in force. He lays down principles and supplies motives which dominate and purify the sphere of conduct connected with wealth; but He will not narrow Himself into a mere arbitrator of family feuds. If the man and his brother would lay to heart His next words, the feud would arbitrate itself. It is for others to trim the branches; he proceeds to dig up the root. The request is made the occasion of the general warning against covetousness—against all forms of undue desire after, and delight in, worldly good. Mark the only reason here assigned for the warning (ver. 15). "Life" simply means physical life, and the one reason our Lord gives for His warning is that worldly goods cannot keep alive. The abundance of the things which he possesseth can do much for a man; but one thing they cannot do, on which all the rest of their power depends —they cannot keep the breath in him, and, if it is out, they are of no more use. "Threadbare morality," it may be said—"scarcely worth coming from heaven to tell us;" but Jesus did not disdain to repeat familiar truths, and no commonplaces of morals are too threadbare to be reiterated, until they are practised. There are but two stages in the parable: I. **What the foreseeing rich man said to himself**; and (II.) **What God said to the blind rich man.** There is something very grim and terrible in the juxtaposition of these two elements of the picture, enhanced, as it is, by the long-drawn-out statement of the man's projects, and the brevity of the Divine word which smites them to dust.

I. **What the foreseeing rich man said to himself.**—He has made his money honestly in the innocent occupation of a farmer. God's sun has shone on the fields of the unthankful, and his abundant harvest—what has it done for him?

It has only added to his cares. He has no gratitude and no enjoyment yet. How clear and deep an insight Jesus had into the misery of wealth when He made the first effect of prosperity on this man to be reasoning within himself and perplexity as to what he was to do! How many rich men cannot sleep for wondering how they are to invest their money! This man is provident and enterprising. He sees quickly and clearly, and makes up his mind promptly to face the necessary expenditure entailed by prosperity. He has many of the virtues which commercial communities adore. Perhaps if the farmer had looked about him he could have found some empty barns not far off and some bare cupboards that would have taken the surplus and saved the new buildings. But that does not occur to him. "All my corn and my goods" are to be housed as "mine." Looked at from the world's point of view, he is a model man of business. He adds to all his other claims on the world's esteem, that he is just about to retire, on a well-earned competence, to enjoy well-deserved leisure. His ideal of enjoyment is somewhat low. But how unconsciously he acknowledges that wealth has hitherto failed to bring peace! "Take thine ease" confesses that there has been no ease yet in his life, and unless he has really "many years" to live, there will have been none. His case is that of many prosperous men nowadays, who have no tastes but the coarsest, and who, when they go out of business, are miserable. They cannot eat and drink all day, and they have killed so much in themselves, by their course of life, that they care nothing for books, or thought, or nature, or God, and so live empty lives, and try to fancy they like it.

II. **What God said to the blind rich man.**—How awfully "God said unto him" breaks the thin tissue of the man's dreams! The important points, in brief speech, are the Divine designation of every such life as folly, the swift snatching away of the soul, and the unanswerable question as to the ownership of the wealth. God addresses men in their true characters. When He does, the man knows himself for what he is, and others know him. The end of every self-deceiving life will tear down the veils, and the conscience will echo the Divine voice, and feel, "I have played the fool, and have erred exceedingly." All lives greedily gripping to earthly good, and making it the be-all and end-all, are folly, and so is the presumption that reckons on many years. The soul which he had called "my soul" is demanded from him. He called it his, but he cannot keep it. A good man, dying, commits his soul into the Father's hands, but this "fool" would fain cling to life, and has reluctantly to surrender it to the stern voice which demands and will not be put off. The grim reality of death, set by the side of the shattered projects of self-indulgent life, shows what a fool he is. And the last touch which perfects the picture of his folly is the question which he cannot answer, "Whose shall they be?" and the bitter irony of "thou hast prepared." What foresight, which did not foresee the possibility of leaving them! What preparation, which got the things ready for a moment which never came! The parable is finally pointed to a specific application. "So is he" refers both to the folly and the fate of the man. The same absurdity is committed and the same end is certain, though not always with the same startling suddenness and completeness. Come how it may, the separation of the worldly soul from all its "goods" is sure to come, and "he that getteth riches," or sets his heart on them, "shall leave them in the midst of his days, and at his end shall be a fool." The sin and folly lie, not only in amassing, but in doing so for self; and the only way to escape the snares of worldly wealth is to be "rich toward God." "Toward God" is the antithesis to "for himself," and the whole clause describes the only wise use of earthly good as being its consecration to the service of God.—*Maclaren.*

SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS ON VERSES 13—21.

Vers. 13-21. *The Rich Fool.*—"Man does not live by bread alone." Christ tells the history of a man who forgot that—1. His history is a parable; but how real! and how often has it applied! In the Bible alone we have Balaam, Achan, Nabal, Gehazi, Judas, Ananias, These men were fools, utterly being overwhelmed in their covetousness. 2. But, again, to how many does it apply—to how few does it *not* apply, though in a less overwhelming manner, in our daily life! The very phrases that are current in men's mouths testify to this. "What is he worth?" they say. 3. "Every good gift cometh down from above." To learn that, and never forget it, is the way to rise above covetousness. This rich fool said, "*my* fruits" and "*my* barns," and "*my* soul." And so it came to pass that there was no way by which God could teach him that none of it was his, except the one way, that last and terrible way—by taking away his life. Paul said to the Corinthians, "All things are yours," and he named "the world" and "life" among them. But then he added, "Ye are Christ's." —*Hastings.*

Vers. 13-15. I. **The Saviour's refusal to interfere.**—1. He implied that it was not His *part* to interfere. 2. It was implied that His kingdom was one founded on spiritual disposition, not one of outward law and jurisprudence. 3. He refused to be the friend of one, because He was the friend of both.

II. **The source to which He traced this appeal for a division.**—Covetousness.

III. **He proceeds to give the true remedy for covetousness.**—"A man's life," etc.; a true consolation and compensation for the oppressed and the defrauded.—*Robertson.*

Ver. 13. *A Type of the Wayside Hearer.*—1. This man who interrupted Christ while preaching on this occasion had just heard Him utter the words, "Magistrates and powers," and these suggested to him the topics on which his thoughts were habitually fixed—his dispute with his brother about their patrimony. 2. And so it happened to him according to the parable of the sower. The truth he had heard did not get into his mind, hardened as it was, like a beaten path, by the constant passage through it of current thoughts about money; it was very soon forgotten altogether, caught away by the god of this world, who ruled over him through his covetous disposition.—*Bruce.*

Misplaced Discontent.—Men misplace their discontent. They are very well satisfied with what they *are*; they are only dissatisfied with what they *have*: whereas the very reverse ought generally to take place; and the only desire which we ought to set no bounds to is that of increasing in godliness.

Use of the Passing Incident.—This incident becomes a text for a sermon on covetousness. And thus the Holy Spirit teaches us to consider every event of our lives as an occasion for applying to ourselves the words of Christ. He instructs us to read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest the holy gospel in such a manner that we may be able to bring its precepts to bear on the principal occurrences, public and private, of our own lives and of the world's history.—*Wordsworth.*

Ver. 14. "*Who made Me a judge?*" —Reasons why Christ refused to interfere—

I. **His interference would have encouraged the delusion that the Messiah would be an earthly ruler.**

II. **He wished to draw a distinction between the kingdoms of this world and the government of His Church.**

III. **Because he saw that this man was neglecting graver matters than the inheritance which he wished to be shared with him.**

A Higher Office than Arbitrator of Property.—With great propriety He declines interference with matters of this world who came not down on their account; nor does He, who was Judge of quick and dead, to whom belonged the final disposal of the souls of men, condescend to be an arbitrator in men's contentions about their property.—*St. Ambrose.*

The Error of Moses not Repeated.—Christ will not repeat the error of Moses (Exod. ii. 14), and thrust Himself into matters that do not concern Him. His work was from the inward to the outward, and so He kept within the limits of that moral and spiritual world from which alone an effectual renovation of the outer life of man could proceed.—*Trench.*

A Lesson to All Religious Teachers.

I. **Their influence in the external relations of life is great, but only when it is indirectly exercised.**

II. **It is broken when they interfere directly with secular and political matters.**—When ministers of religion keep within their proper sphere, all parties look up to them, and they are often the means of mollifying the bitterest feelings and reconciling the most conflicting interests.—*Brown.*

Ver. 15. *Covetousness.*

I. **This is one of the red flags our Lord hung out which most people nowadays do not seem much to regard.**—Christ said a great deal about the danger of riches; but not many persons are afraid of riches. Covetousness is not practically considered a sin in these times. A man may break the tenth commandment, and be only regarded as enterprising. The Bible says the love of money is the root of all evil; but every man who quotes the saying puts a terrific emphasis on the word "love," explaining that it is not money, but the love of it, that is such a terrific root.

II. **To look about one, one would think that a man's life did consist in the abundance of the things he possesses.**—Men think they become great just in proportion as they gather wealth. So it seems, too; for the world measures men by their bank account. Yet there never was a more fatal error. A man is really measured by what he *is*, and not by what He HAS. You may find a shrivelled soul in the midst of a great fortune, and a grand, noble soul in the barest poverty.

III. **The chief thing is to gather into our life all the truly great and noble things of character.**—Here are two texts which settle the question: "Whatsoever things are true, honest, . . . think on these things"; "Add to your faith virtue," etc."—*Miller.*

The Fool's Fourfold Mistake.

I. **As to the true gauge of the worth of life.**—He valued his days by the money he could make in them. Men like him sell their soul for money—abandon heart culture, the amenities of life, the choice delights of home life, for money. Now, worth means, not wealth, but quality of character, purity, sweetness, nobility, truth. If a millionaire is of worthless character, he dies a pauper.

II. **As to the true use of his superfluity.**—He had more than he needed. This made him think of building bigger barns. It is well to have an overplus, but to what use are we to put it? To make provision for sickness, old age, death? Yes, and after that is done to be a trustee for the orphan, the widow, the poor.

III. **As to the true way of being merry.**—This man talks in a strange way to his soul. What does his soul say in response? "I am ill at ease. I cannot be merry. I cannot eat gold or corn." It is a profound mistake that one can be made happier by a bigger house, or a "place in the country." More likely to be at "ease" with a daily wage than as an anxious, speculating business man. "Ease!" Yes! get it from a clean conscience and a pure heart. Money, rank, and power, cannot give it.

IV. **As to the tenure of his life.**—He thought of "many years." He had only one day left. He had a good title for earth, but no lease, and he had no title for heaven. The soul that night crept out from it all—all its wealth—a poor beggar, into God's presence. How full of warning is the record of this man's mistakes!—*F. B. Meyer.*

A Warning Against Avarice.—So far as the request had to do with secular matters Christ refused to accede to it; but so far as it revealed a faulty moral condition it entered within the Saviour's province to deal with it. Though not a judge of civil questions, He was a Redeemer from sin—from avarice no less than from hypocrisy. Nor are his followers in slight need of the warning He gives: for avarice is a sin which may attack those who have triumphed over lusts of the flesh, and who are in many other respects exemplary in spirit and life.

"*Covetousness.*" "*All covetousness*" (R.V.); both (1) that which leads a man to desire the possessions which rightly belong to another, and (2) that which sets an exaggerated value upon earthly goods. Whether the petitioner were in the right or the wrong, he was evidently in danger of one form or other of this sin.

"*A Man's Life.*"—There is a contrast here between the earthly natural life and the true life—between his "living" and his "life": the one is sustained by what he *has*, the other depends upon what he *is*. Possession of worldly goods may (1) for a time secure a measure of ease and comfort, but (2) it may overlay, hinder, and strangle the higher nature.

Money a Test of Character.—The philosophy which affects to teach us a contempt of money does not run very deep; for, indeed, it is clear that there are few things in the world of greater importance. And so manifold are the bearings of money upon the lives and characters of mankind, that an insight which should search out the life of a man in his pecuniary relations would penetrate into almost every cranny of his nature. He who knows, like St. Paul, both how to spare and how to abound, has a great knowledge; for if we take account of all the virtues with which money is mixed up—honesty, justice, generosity, charity, frugality, forethought, self-sacrifice—and of their correlative vices—it is a knowledge which goes near to cover the length and breadth of humanity: and a right measure of manner in getting, saving, spending, giving, taking, lending, borrowing, and bequeathing, would almost argue a perfect man.—*H. Taylor.*

Possessions and Life.—Not from the possession of many goods, but from the will of God, who lengthens or shortens the thread of life, does it depend whether one remains long and quietly here in life or not. One may be preserved in life without possessing goods, and also remain in the possession of goods and unexpectedly lose life.—*Van Oosterzee.*

Vers. 16-21. *This Parable Teaches*—

I. That God maketh His sun to shine and His rain to fall on the just and on the unjust.

II. That the increase of riches increaseth care.

III. That worldly men's possessions are their "good things"—such they esteem them, and such is their whole portion from God.

IV. Great estates and enjoyments of this life have a very enticing quality in them: 1. They make us loth to die, and willing to think we shall live many years. 2. They lull the soul to sleep. 3. They entice us to sinful mirth and luxury.

V. He that hath most may have his soul taken from him in a night.

VI. A man is no longer owner of the goods of this life than he can keep an earthly possession of them.

VII. When he dies he knoweth not where these things shall be.

VIII. That it is the greatest folly imaginable to spend all one's time and strength in getting and laying up treasure upon earth, and in the meantime neglecting to be rich towards God.—*Pool.*

Ver. 16. "*A parable.*"—To teach (1) how short and transitory life is; (2) that riches are of no avail for prolonging it; and (3) that the great duty of all, both rich and poor, is to be rich toward God.

A Fault often Condemned in the New Testament.—There are more parables, I believe, in the New Testament against taking no thought about heavenly things, and taking too much thought about earthly things, than against any other fault whatsoever.—*Hare.*

"*The Ground,*" etc.—Christ selects the most innocent method of acquiring riches, that which most obviously tended to lead the mind constantly to thankful acknowledgment of God, and thus makes this wretched harvest-joy all the more frightful and all the more impressive a warning to every man.—*Stier.*

"*A Certain Rich Man.*"—The character here drawn is exactly that of a prudent worldly man, who rises from inferior circumstances to great affluence by assiduous industry and good management, and then retires from business, to spend the latter part of his life according to his own inclinations. His is the sort of life which is often held up as a model to young men. He figures here as a warning. All who desire to be successful in business, as he was, should keep in mind the words of the Psalmist: "He gave them their request, but sent leanness into their soul."

Vers. 17-20. *The Miseries of the Worldly Rich Man:*—

I. Discontent.

II. Anxieties and cares.

III. False hope.

IV. The terror of losing all his goods.

Vers. 17-19. *The Worldly Character.*—1. Activity in promoting his own temporal interest. 2. Selfish love of ease and pleasure. The "soul" which he addresses is the seat of the emotions and of the power of enjoyment—not the spiritual element in man.

Ver. 17. "*What shall I do?*"—Not what *should* I do? Scarcely any other words could more vividly depict his utter and unconscious selfishness. That all he has is to be secured for himself and for his own exclusive benefit is assumed as a matter of course—the only difficulty is as to the precise method of doing this.

"*I have no room.*"—Thou *hast* barns—the bosoms of the needy, the houses of the widows, the mouths of orphans and of infants.—*St. Ambrose.*

"*My fruits.*"—Compare the speech of Nabal (1 Sam. xxv. 11), who says, "Shall I take *my* bread, and *my* water, and *my* flesh that I have killed for *my* shearers?" And on the very next day his heart died within him, and he became as a stone; and in ten days after he died. Contrast the words in Deut. viii. 10-18, and David's language, 1 Chron. xxix. 12-14.

Ver. 18. "*This will I do.*"—*Man proposes.*

I. **How boastful!**—He speaks of his barns and fruits as though he, and he only, had any share in producing them, any right of ownership in them.

II. **How shortsighted!**—He speaks of the "many years" as a matter of certainty, when he must have known the uncertainty of life.

III. **How selfish!**—His aims are all selfish. There is no provision made for others. His life is entirely self-centred.

IV. **How unworthy!**—His idea of

life is a low one. Indolent ease, eating, drinking, and merrymaking. Pity for the sorrows of others; charity for the aged and poor; provision for those who had helped to make him rich; — all these are forgotten. — *W. Taylor.*

Ver. 19. "*I will say to my soul.*"— What folly! Had thy soul been a sty, what else couldst thou have promised to it? Art thou so bestial, so ignorant of the soul's goods, that thou pledgest it the foods of the flesh? And dost thou convey to thy *soul* the things which the draught receiveth?—*St. Basil.*

"*Thou hast many goods.*"—The devil does not now endeavour to deceive us by saying, "Ye shall not surely die." He knows that so notorious a cheat would never pass upon us; but yet for fear, lest we should undervalue the allurements of the world, he whispers in our ears, "Ye shall not die *so soon.*" And "Although thou hast not *all* that thou canst wish for, thou hast *many* goods"; and "Though thou canst not enjoy them *always*, yet they are laid up for *many years*"; and what hast thou to do but "take thine ease, eat, drink, and be merry," as if thou wert to live for ever? Behold the best that we can make of the most happy state we hope for here.

Little Satisfaction Yielded by Wealth. —He unconsciously confesses how little satisfaction his wealth has brought him; he looks for rest, but it is only in the distant future, when the intended work shall have been completed, that he can hope to obtain it.

This Parable found in Germ in Ecclesiasticus.—Cf. Ecclus. xi. 17-19: "The gift of the Lord remaineth with the godly, and His favour bringeth prosperity for ever There is that waxeth rich by his wariness and pinching, and this is the portion of his reward: whereas he saith, I have found rest, and now will eat continually of my goods; and yet he knoweth not what time will come upon him, and that he must leave those things to others, and die."

Ver. 20. "*Thou fool.*"—Why is this man called a fool?

I. Because he deemed a life of secure and abundant earthly enjoyment the summit of human felicity.

II. Because, having acquired the means of realising this, through prosperity in his calling, he flattered himself that he had a long lease of such enjoyment, and nothing to do but to give himself up to it. *Nothing else is laid to his charge.—Brown.*

Loss.—He comes before the judge with a lost *name*, for God calls him "Thou fool"; with a lost *soul*, for it is taken away from him by force; with a lost *world*, for it he has to leave behind him; and with a lost *heaven*, for in heaven he has laid up no treasure.

Contrasts.—Note the contrasts: 1. "*Thou fool*," though he has manifested *worldly prudence.* 2. "*This night*," as opposed to "*many years.*" 3. The "*soul*" in the one case, at its ease, eating, drinking, and making merry; in the other, demanded, rendered up, judged.

Vain Preparation. — "Prepared"— "made ready;" "but *not for thyself.*"

Fourfold Folly.—His folly is fourfold: 1. He forgets God, the giver of his wealth. 2. He appropriates all he receives for himself. 3. He counts these things the food of his *soul.* 4. He does not think of the daily possibility of death.

Moderation.—A wise man will desire no more than what he can get justly, use soberly, distribute cheerfully, and leave contentedly.—*Bacon.*

Riches Without Godliness.—The gloom of barrenness has besieged your mind;

and while the light of truth hath departed thence, the deep and profound darkness of avarice has blinded your carnal heart. You are the captive and slave of your money; you keep your money, which, when kept, does not keep you; you heap up a patrimony which burdens you with its weight; and you do not remember what God answered to the rich man, who boasted, with a foolish exultation, of the abundance of his exuberant harvest. Why do you watch in loneliness over your riches? Why, for your punishment, do you heap up the burden of your patrimony, that, in proportion as you are rich in this world, you may become poor to God?—*Cyprian.*

"*Shall be required.*"—From the righteous his soul is not *required*, but he commits it to God and the Father of spirits, pleased and rejoicing, nor finds it hard to lay it down, for the body lies upon it as a light burden. But the sinner who has enfleshed his soul, and embodied it, and made it earthy, has prepared to render its divulsion from the body most hard; wherefore it is said *to be required* of him, as a disobedient debtor that is delivered to pitiless exactors. —*Theophylact.*

The Parable brings vividly before us Four Considerations:—

I. The embarrassment which wealth, and especially a sudden accession of wealth, may bring to a man who is not under the guidance of high and true principles.

II. Here is an example of the love of property, as such, and apart from anything that can be done with it.

III. There is that in the human soul, even when most forgetful of its true destiny, which refuses to take pleasure for ever in the mere handling money or any sort of matter, as a thing to be rejoiced in for its own sake.

IV. The whole scheme of definite enjoyment may collapse: no man has a right to presume upon the future.—*Liddon.*

Ver. 21. *False and True Riches.*—The contrast between the false and the true riches is implied in the two phrases, "to lay up treasure" and "to be rich."

I. The one is to hoard up laboriously *things* which are outside one's self.

II. The other is an actual condition of wealth and happiness.

Rich Towards God.—There is a contrast between "laying up treasure *for* oneself" and being "rich *towards* God." God cannot be enriched or impoverished. That man is rich toward God who lays up treasure in heaven, and so he is rich indeed (cf. 1 Tim. vi. 17). By being rich towards God he becomes rich for ever.

"He who is rich *for himself*, laying up treasures *for himself*, is by so much robbing his real inward life, his life in and toward God, of its resources; he is laying up store for, providing for, the *flesh*; but the *spirit*, that which God looketh into and searcheth, is stripped of all its riches" (*Alford*).

The evil is not in the treasure, nor in laying up treasure, but in laying up treasure for oneself. A case like this, where the sinner is respectable, honest, and prosperous, shows the true nature of sin—it is a devotion to self, not to God; and laying up solely for self is, therefore, a sin, according to the judgment of Christ.

Change the Place of Riches.—God desires not that thou shouldst lose thy riches, but that thou shouldst change their place. He has given thee a counsel, which do thou understand. Suppose a friend should enter thy house, and should find that thou hadst lodged thy fruits on a damp floor, and he, knowing by chance the tendency of those fruits to spoil, whereof thou wert ignorant, should give thee counsel of this sort, saying, "Brother, thou losest the things which with great labour thou hast gathered; thou hast placed them in a damp place; in a few days they will corrupt."—"And what, brother, shall I do?"—"Raise them to

a higher room"—thou wouldst listen to thy brother, suggesting that thou shouldst raise thy fruits from a lower to a higher floor; and thou wilt not listen to Christ, advising that thou raise thy treasure from earth to heaven, where that will not, indeed, be restored to thee which thou layest up—for He bids thee lay up earth, that thou mayest receive heaven, lay up perishable things, that thou mayest receive eternal.—*Augustine.*

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 22—34.

Anxious about Earth, or Earnest about the Kingdom.—The warnings against anxiety are another application of the prohibition of laying up treasures for self. Torturing care is the poor man's form of worldliness, as luxurious self-indulgence is the rich man's.

I. **The prohibition against anxious care** (vers. 22-23).—The disciples who were poor men might think that they were in no danger of the folly branded in the foregoing parable. They had no barns bursting with plenty, and their concern was how to find food and clothing, not what to do with superfluities. Christ would have them see that the same temper may be in them, though it takes a different shape. The temper here condemned is "self-consuming care," the opposite of trust—a frame of mind that is incompatible with prudent forethought and strenuous work, since it both hinders from seeing what to do to provide daily bread, and from doing it. Reasons against this anxious care: 1. *It is superficial.* It forgets how we come to have lives to be fed and bodies to be clothed. We have received the greater, life and body, without our anxiety. The rich fool, in the preceding parable, could keep his goods, but not his "soul" or "life." How superficial, then, after all, our anxieties are, when God may end life at any moment! Further, since the greater is given, the less which it needs will also be given. The thought of God as "a faithful Creator" is implied. We may trust Him for the "more": we may trust Him for the "less." 2. *Examples of unanxious lives abundantly fed.* The ravens have "neither storehouse nor barn." In these particulars the birds are inferior to us, and, so to speak, the harder to care for. If they, who neither work nor store, still get their living, shall not we, who can do both? Our superior value is in part expressed by the capacity to sow and reap; and these are more wholesome occupations for a man than worrying. 3. *The impotence of anxiety* (ver. 25). The supposed addition, if possible, would be of the very smallest importance as regards ensuring food or clothing, and, measured by the Divine power required to effect it, is less than the continual providing which God does. That smaller work of His, no anxiety will enable us to do. How much less can we effect the complicated and wide-reaching arrangements needed to feed and clothe ourselves! Anxiety is impotent. It only works on our minds, racking them in vain, but has no effect on the natural world, not even on our own bodies, still less on the universe. 4. *Examples of unanxious existence clothed with beauty.* Christ here teaches the highest use of nature, and the noblest way of looking at it. It is a visible manifestation of God, and His ways there shadow His ways with us, and are lessons in trust. Christ appeals to Creation as witnessing to a loving care in heaven. That appeal teaches us that we miss the best and plainest lesson of nature, unless we see God present and working in it all, and are thereby heartened to trust quietly in His care for us, who are better than the ravens, because we have to sow and reap, and than the lilies, because we must toil and spin. Ver. 29 adds to the reference to clothing a repeated prohibition as to the other half of our anxieties, and thus rounds off the whole with the same double warning as in ver. 22. It paints the wretchedness of anxiety as ever tossed about between hopes and fears,

sometimes up on the crest of a vain dream of good, sometimes down in the trough of an imaginary evil. We are sure to be thus the sport of our own fancies, unless we have our minds fixed on God in quiet trust, and therefore stable and restful. 5. *Such undue anxiety is pure heathenism* (ver. 30). The nations of the world who know not God make these their chief good, and securing them the aim of their lives. If we do the like we drop to their level. What is the difference between a heathen and a Christian, if the Christian has the same objects and treasures as the heathen? That is a question which a good many so-called Christians at present would find it hard to answer. 6. *Faith in God as our Father should dispel anxious care.*—This is the crowning reason. What has preceded it might be spoken by a man who had but the coldest belief in Providence. But how should we be anxious if we know that we have a Father in heaven, and that He knows our needs? He recognises our claims on Him. He made the needs and will send the supply. Our wants are prophecies of God's gifts. He has made them as doors by which He will come in and bless us. How, then, can anxious care fret the heart which feels the Father's presence and knows that its emptiness is the occasion for the gift of a Divine fulness? Trust is the only reasonable temper for the child of such a Father. Anxious care is a denial of His love, or knowledge, or power.

II. **An exhortation to set the affections on the true treasure** (vers. 31-34).—This points out the true direction of effort and affection, and the true way of using outward good so as to secure the higher riches. Life must have some aim, and the mind must turn to something as supremely good. The only way to drive out heathenish seeking after perishable good is to fill the heart with love and longing for eternal and spiritual good. To seek "the kingdom"; to count it our highest good to have our wills and our whole being bowed in submission to the loving will of God; to labour after entire conformity to it; to postpone all earthly delights to that, and to count them all but loss if we may win it;—this is the true way to conquer worldly anxieties, and is the only course of life which will not at last earn the stern judgment, "Thou fool!" This direction of our aims is to be accompanied with joyous, brave confidence. How should they fear whose desires and efforts run parallel with the "Father's good pleasure"? They are seeking, as their chief good, what He desires, as His chief delight, to give them. Then they may be sure that if He gives that, He will not withhold less gifts than may be needed. If they can trust Him to give them the kingdom, they may surely trust Him for bread and clothes. Mark, too, the tenderness of that "little flock." They might fear when they contrasted their numbers with the crowds of worldly men; but, being a flock, they have a Shepherd, and that is enough to quiet anxiety. Seeking and courage are to be crowned by surrender of outward good, and the use of earthly wealth in such manner as that it will secure an unfailing treasure in heaven. The manner of obeying the command varies with circumstances. For some the literal fulfilment is best; but sometimes the surrender is rather to be effected by the conscientious consecration and prayerful use of wealth. That is for each man to settle for himself. But what is not variable is the obligation to set the kingdom high above all else, and to use all outward wealth, as Christ's servants—not for luxury and self-gratification, but as in His right and for His glory.—*Maclaren.*

SUGGESTIVE COMMENT ON VERSES 22—34.

Vers. 22-31. *The Cure for Covetousness.*—Jesus well knew that over-anxiety about worldly things would always be a great snare, even to those who know and love their Lord. Hence He puts before them full and sufficient reasons why His followers should not be over-anxious about their bodily needs.

I. **See what God has already given.**—Will He, who has given life, withhold what life needs?

II. **See God's care for birds and flowers.**—Evidences of God's thoughtful, loving providence abound on every side. If the ravens are fed, and the lilies clothed, will He neglect His immortal, redeemed servants?

III. **How useless is fretful anxiety!**—It does no good. You can neither add to stature, nor length of days.

IV. **How unworthy it is.**—The heathen who do not know God may well give themselves up to a life of mere worldly care and pleasure. But is this conduct befitting the children of the kingdom?

V. **There is God's unfailing promise.**—"Seek . . . and all these things shall be added." Care for His interests, and He will care for yours.—*W. Taylor.*

Vers. 22-40. *Against being Pre-occupied by Things of the World.*

I. The believer may renounce the pursuit of worldly riches because of a strong confidence in the goodness of his heavenly Father in matters pertaining to this life (vers. 22-34).

II. Because of the superior blessings which he anticipates obtaining at the coming of his Lord (vers. 35-40).

Anxious, Restless Solicitude about Earthly Things Forbidden.

I. The Giver of life and the Creator of the body may well be trusted to give the food that sustains the life and the raiment the body needs.

II. God's care for animals and plants.

III. The uselessness of such solicitude on our part.

IV. Anxiety about earthly things unchristian and heathenish.

V. God adds everything to those who *first* seek His kingdom.

Vers. 22-24. *A Precept, an Argument, and an Illustration.*

I. The precept: "Take no thought," etc. (ver. 22).

II. The argument in support of it (ver. 23). He who gave the greater will give the less.

III. The illustration from nature (ver. 24).

Ver. 22. "*Therefore I say unto you.*"—It cannot be said too often that the avaricious are not to be found exclusively among the rich. *Augustine* says, "God judges men to be rich or poor, not by the amount of their possessions, but by their dispositions." Our Lord turns at once to the disciples, who had neither fields nor barns, and exhorts *them* to beware of avarice, anxieties, and worldly cares.

As the believer is not (1) to aspire after the possession of *superfluous* wealth, so is he not (2) to be unduly anxious even about the *necessaries* of life. He is the servant of a kindly Master, who will provide him with food and clothing.

Ver. 23. "*Meat;*" "*raiment.*"—The illustrations that follow are drawn from (1) the animal, (2) the vegetable world—the ravens are fed by God, the lilies clothed by Him.

"*The life is more than food.*"—You turn it exactly round: food is meant to serve life, but life forsooth serves food; clothes are to serve the body, but the body forsooth must serve the clothing. And so blind is the world that it sees not this!—*Luther.*

Ver. 24. "*Sow;*" "*reap;*" "*storehouse;*" "*barn.*"—All refer to the preceding parable of the Rich Fool. From the "storehouse" seed is brought out for sowing; in the "barn" the wheat is deposited to be used for food.

Vers. 24, 27. *Birds and Flowers.*—The birds of heaven, the flowers of the field: how simple, how beautiful, this contemplation of nature, as Adam before the fall beheld it in Paradise!—*Stier*

Ver. 27. "*The lilies.*"—As the beauty of the flower is unfolded by the Divine

Creator Spirit from *within*, from the laws and capacities of its *own* individual life, so must all true adornment of man be unfolded from *within* by the same Almighty Spirit (cf. 1 Pet. iii. 3, 4). As nothing from without can defile a man (Matt. xv. 11), so neither can anything from without adorn him.—*Alford.*

"*They toil not, they spin not.*"—Neither "toil"—as men, for the materials of clothing; nor "spin"—as women, whose office it is to give shape to those materials, and make them fit for use. Consolation is intended for either sex.—*Burgon.*

"*Solomon.*"—"The lily belongs to the paradise of God, Solomon's glory to the hot-house of art."—*Stier.*

Ver. 28. "*Clothe you.*"—This may also be applied as an assurance of a glorious resurrection. If in each successive spring, after the winter's frost and death, God clothes the flowers of the field with the apparel of such fresh verdure and beautiful colours, will He not much more clothe you with the bright raiment of a glorious body, like to that of the angels (chap. xx. 36), and of Christ (Phil. iii. 21)?—*Wordsworth.*

Vers. 29-32. *Cares.*

I. The cares which consume men of the world (vers. 29, 30).

II. The only care that should engross the believer (vers. 31, 32).

Ver. 29. "*Of doubtful mind.*"—The phrase really means and implies "tossing about on the open sea"; so that we might paraphrase it, "Do not toss about in the windy offing, when you may ride safely in the sheltered haven."—*Cox.*

Ver. 31. "*Added unto you.*"—So to Solomon were given, not only the wisdom which he had asked, but also the temporal benefits for which he had not asked.

"The way to obtain spiritual bessings is to be importunate for them; but the way to obtain temporal blessings is to be indifferent about them. Solomon had *wisdom* given him, because he asked it; and *wealth*, because he did not ask it" (*Henry*).

Ver. 32 "*Fear not.*"—1. They have no reason to fear want. 2. Or the various other afflictions and calamities of life. 3. Or spiritual enemies. 4. Or death.

"*Little flock.*"—The phrase suggests (1) cause of fear, and also (2) the more special care on the part of God which is needed and is exercised.

Christ's Flock.—How Christ's people come to be His flock.

I. By the express appointment of God.

II. By the purchase of His atoning death.

III. By His actually bringing His people into His fold.

Ver. 33. "*Sell what ye have and give alms.*"—Our Lord's words are diametrically opposed to modern socialism. The latter would make laws to *take* away wealth; the former inculcates love that *gives* away.

Ver. 34. *Detachment and Attachment.* In proportion as the faithful thus creates for himself a treasure above, *detachment* from earth is transformed into *attachment* to heaven. For it is a law that the heart follows the treasure. From this results the new attitude of the faithful which is described in the words that follow. The heart, disengaged from the burden of earthly possessions, like a balloon after its fastenings have been severed, springs up to meet the Master, who is on His return, and for whom every faithful one is waiting unceasingly.—*Godet.*

"*For where your treasure is.*"—The human heart, little by little, appropriates to itself the style and nature of the treasure to which its whole thought is

directed. Whoever constitutes his god of gold, his heart becomes as cold and hard as metal; whoever takes flesh for his idol becomes more and more sensual, and takes on the properties of that which he loves above everything; but whoever has invisible treasures keeps eye and heart directed upon the invisible world, and whoever has no higher good than God accords to Him the first place in his love. This is the key to the precious saying of one of the Fathers, "O Lord, since thou hast made us for thyself, our heart is uneasy within us, until it rests in Thee"—*Van Oosterzee.*

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 35—38.

The Kind Master.—The parable of the Dutiful Servant (xvii. 7-10) is the complement of this parable of the Kind Master. The one of these parables, without the other, is not perfect. For if the one teaches us how to think of ourselves, the other teaches us how God thinks of us, when we do that which it is our duty to do. While the one sets forth the diligence and lowliness of the servant, the other sets forth the friendliness and bounty of the Master. *The form of the parable.* A certain Oriental lord has gone to the wedding of a friend. The festivities on such occasions were spread over many days, a week at least, sometimes a month. Consequently his servants could not tell to an hour, or even to a day, when he would return. But however long he delayed his coming, they kept a keen look-out for him. When night fell, instead of barring up the house and retiring to rest, they girt up their long outer robes, that they might be ready to run out at any instant to greet him; they kindled their lamps, that they might run safely, as well as swiftly, on his errands; they even prepared a table for him, in case he were hungry and tired by his journey home. In this posture, with these preparations, they await his coming. And when he comes, he is so pleased with their fidelity and thoughtfulness that, instead of sitting down to meat or hastening to his couch, he girds up his loins, bids his servants sit down to the very banquet they had prepared for him, and comes forth from his chamber to wait upon them. The main points of the parable are—

I. **The watchfulness of the servants.**—What does this symbolise? As these servants waited for the coming of their master, so we are to wait for the coming of our Master. The second advent of Christ is the great and special promise of the New Testament, as His first advent was the great and distinctive promise of the Old Testament. The anticipation of the second advent of Christ has come under suspicion because of fanatical and morbid minds having cherished it in a carnal and literal form. But we may frame some such reasonable conception of the promise as well make it a real power and a potent factor in our lives. Strip it of all mere accidents of form and date, and reduce it to its more simple and general terms, and what does it come to? It comes at least to this: that, somewhere in the future, there is to be a better world than this—a world more wisely and happily ordered; a world in which all that is now wrong will be righted; a world of perfect beauty and growing righteousness;—in a word, a world in which He who once suffered for and with all men, will really reign in and over all men. His spirit dwelling in them, and raising them towards the true ideal of manhood. And is not that a reasonable hope? Is it not a great hope? Does it not make a vital difference to us whether or not we entertain it? But if we believe in this great promise, if we cherish this great hope, then can we with patience wait for it. And this is the very posture which our Lord here enjoins. He would have us to be like servants who watch for the coming of their Lord, that, when He comes, they may open to Him immediately. He would have us believe in, and look for, the advent of a better world, in which all the wrongs of time will

be rectified. He would have us sustain ourselves under all the toils and sorrows of our individual lot, and under the still heavier oppressions of the world's lot, by looking forward to that end and purpose of the Lord God Almighty which will vindicate all the ways in which we have been led, and all the painful discipline by which we have been tried and purified and refined.

II. **The kindness of their Master.**—What does it symbolise? It means that whatever we have done for God, He will do for us—that when He reckons with us, we shall receive our own again, and receive it "with usury." It is but a metaphorical expression of that great law of retribution which pervades the whole Bible, but the happier face of which we are too apt to overlook—that whatever a man sows, that shall he also reap, *that*, and all that has come of it. The Divine reward will be at once equitable and bountiful. If in this present life we have shown some capacity for serving God in serving our fellows, we may be sure that in the life to come we shall receive the harvest of our service; we may be sure that God will do for us all that we have done for Him, and a great deal more. But what, after all, is the best part of a man's reward for faithful and diligent use of any faculty here? It is that his faculty, whatever it may be, is invigorated, developed, refined, by use. If, then, I have here used my faculty and opportunity for serving God in serving my fellows, I may hope, I may believe, that hereafter my best reward will be an enlarged faculty of service and ampler opportunities for exercising it. If I have served the Master, He will serve me; but He will serve me best and most of all by making me a more skilful, faithful, and happy servant. Is there anything arbitrary in such a reward as this, or anything unreasonable, or selfish, or base, in my hope that I may receive it? On the contrary, is it not most reasonable, is it not in accordance with the most scientific interpretation of the facts of observation and experience, to believe that my capacity for service will grow by use? Is it not a very noble and unselfish reward for having in any measure done my duty here, that I should be able to do it more effectually and happily hereafter? Let us watch, then, for the coming and kingdom of Christ; let us cherish the pure, unselfish hope that, if we serve Him in this life, He will serve us in the life to come, and serve us most and best of all by making us more capable and accomplished servants.—*Cox.*

SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS ON VERSES 35—38.

Ver. 35. *Preparedness.*—1. "*Loins girt about*"—to run with speed and freedom to meet his Lord. 2. "*Lights burning*"—to run with safety.

Ready for the Road.

I. Christ enjoins the disciples to be ready and equipped for the journey, that they may pass rapidly through the world, and may seek no fixed abode or resting-place but in heaven.

II. As they are surrounded on all sides by darkness, so long as they remain in the world, He furnishes them with lamps, as persons who are to perform a journey during the night. The first recommendation is to run vigorously, and the next is to have clear information as to the road, that believers may not weary themselves to no purpose, by going astray.—*Calvin.*

Ver. 36. "*Watch.*" The state of mind here commended consists (1) of an ever-present thought of God and of our responsibility towards Him, and (2) of an anticipation of the future coming of Him who is our Saviour and Judge.

"*Open immediately.*"—The watchful Christian is one who would not be over-agitated if he found that Christ was coming at once. Few will thus *open immediately.* They will have something to do first; they will have to get ready. They will need time to collect themselves, and summon about

them their better thoughts and affections.—*Newman.*

"*Wait for their Lord.*"

I. With eager longing.

II. With joyous expectation. "Immediately." At the first sound of His knock.

Christ's Second Coming.—Christ returns to all from the heavenly wedding at the end of the world, when He has taken to Himself His Bride, the Church; to each individual He comes, when He stands suddenly before a man at the hour of death.—*Theophylact.*

Ver. 37. *Different Effects Produced by Christ's Coming.*—Among the professed servants of Christ, though all will be more or less be taken *by surprise* when He comes, some (1) will be able to receive Him at once and with glad welcome; but some (2) though faithful in the main, will be somewhat unprepared, and unable to greet Him with full cordiality; while some (3) will be overwhelmed with confusion at their utter unfaithfulness being brought to light.

The Blessedness of the Faithful.

I. The momentary separation is closed, and they are admitted to closer fellowship with their Lord.

II. He transforms them from servants into honoured guests.

III. He bestows upon them the administration of all His possessions.

Ver. 38. "*Blessed are those servants.*"—The more tardy His arrival, the greater is His satisfaction with those servants whom He finds watching. Christ here plainly teaches that His second coming will be very much more distant than the apostles themselves thought, and that the patience and faith of His servants who look for Him will be put to a severe test. The same fact of delay is alluded to in the parables of the Ten Virgins and of the Talents (Matt. xxv. 5, 19).

By the omission of the first and fourth watches, Christ seems to hint that His second coming will not be (1) so soon as impatience expects, nor (2) so late as carelessness supposes.

Vers. 39, 40. *A Serious Crisis for Some.*—The Parousia, that event so glorious and so welcome to the faithful servants of Jesus, is for the world a serious and dread crisis. He who returns is not only a Master well-beloved, who gives to each that which he has sacrificed for Him, but also a thief, who will then take away all that they have not been able to guard.—*Godet.*

The Prepared and the Unprepared.—Those ready find Him a friend: only those not ready find His coming as uncomfortable as that of a thief.

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 41—49.

Watching for the King.—There are many comings of the Son of Man before His coming in final judgment, and the nearer and smaller ones are themselves prophecies. So we do not need to settle the chronology of unfulfilled prophecy in order to get the full benefit of Christ's teachings here. In its moral and spiritual effect on us, the uncertainty of the time of our going to Christ is nearly identical with the uncertainty of the time of His coming to us.

I. **Watchfulness because of our ignorance of the time of His coming.**—What is this watchfulness? It is, literally, wakefulness. We are beset by perpetual temptations to sleep, to spiritual drowsiness and torpor. Without continued effort our perception of the unseen realities, and our alertness for service, will be lulled to sleep. Christ bases His command on our ignorance of the time of His coming. It was His purpose that from generation to generation His servants should be kept in the attitude of expectation, as of an event that might come at any time, and must come at some time. The parallel uncer-

tainty of the time of death, though not what is meant here, serves the same moral end, if rightly used, and is exposed to the same danger of being neglected, because of the very uncertainty, which ought to be one chief reason for keeping it ever in view. Any future event which combines these two things—absolute certainty that it will happen, and utter uncertainty when it will happen—ought to have power to insist on being remembered, at least till it is prepared for, and would have, if men were not so foolish. Christ's coming would be often contemplated if it were more welcome. But what sort of servant is he who has no glow of gladness at the thought of meeting his lord? True Christians are "all them that have loved His appearing."

II. **The picture and reward of watchfulness.**—It is to be observed that watchfulness is not mentioned in this portraiture of the watchful servant. It is pre-supposed as the basis and motive of his service. So we learn the double lesson, that the attitude of continual outlook for the Lord is needed if we are to discharge the tasks which He has set us, and that the true effect of watchfulness is to harness us to the car of duty. A Church or a soul which has ceased to be looking for Him will have let all its tasks drop from its drowsy hands, and will feel the power of other constraining motives of Christian service but faintly, as in a half-dream. On the other hand, true waiting for Him is best expressed in the quiet discharge of accustomed and appointed tasks. The right place for the servant to be found, when the Lord comes, is "so doing" as He commands, however secular the task may be. Observe, further, the interrogative form of the parable. The question is the sharp point which gives penetrating power, and suggests Christ's high estimate of the worth and difficulty of such conduct, and sets us to ask for ourselves, "Lord, is it I?" The servant is "faithful," inasmuch as he does his Lord's will, and rightly uses the goods entrusted to him; and "wise," inasmuch as he is "faithful." For a single-hearted devotion to Christ is the parent of insight into duty, and the best guide to conduct; and whoever seeks only to be true to his lord in the use of his gifts and possessions, will not lack prudence to guide him in giving to each his food, and that in due season. Such faithfulness and wisdom (which are, at bottom, but two names for one course of conduct) find their motive in that watchfulness which works as ever in the great Taskmaster's eye, and as ever keeping in view His coming, and its rendering account to Him. The reward is, that faithfulness in a narrower sphere leads to a wider. The reward for true work is more work, of nobler sort and on a grander scale. That is true for earth and for heaven. If we do His will here, we shall one day exchange the subordinate place of the steward for the authority of the ruler, and the toil of the servant for the joy of the Lord.

III. **The picture and doom of the unwatchful servant.**—This portrait presupposes that a long period will elapse before Christ comes. The dimming over of the expectation, and doubt of the firmness, of the promise is the natural product of the long time of apparent delay which the Church has had to encounter. It will cloud and depress the religion of later ages, unless there be constant effort to resist the tendency and to keep awake. It was an "evil" servant who said so in his heart. He was evil because he said it, and he said it because he was evil; for the yielding to sin and the withdrawal of love from Jesus dim the desire for His coming, and make the whisper that He delays a hope; while, on the other hand, the hope that He delays helps to open the sluices, and let sin flood the life. So an outburst of cruel masterfulness and of riotous sensuality is the consequence of the dimmed expectation. The corruptions of the Church, especially of its official members, are traced with sad and prescient hand in these foreboding words, which are none the less a prophecy because cast by His forbearing gentleness in the milder form of a supposition. The dreadful doom of the unwatchful servant is cast into a form of awful

severity. The cruel punishment of sawing asunder is his. What concealed terror of retribution it signifies, we do not know. At all events, it shadows a dreadful retribution, which is not extinction, inasmuch as, in the next clause, we read that his portion—his lot, or that condition which belongs to him by virtue of his character—is with the unbelievers. That is not the punishment of unwatchfulness, but of what unwatchfulness leads to, if unawakened. Let these words of the King ring an alarm for us all, and rouse our sleepy souls to watch, as becomes the children of the day.—*Maclaren.*

SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS ON VERSES 41—49.

Ver. 41. "*Then Peter.*"—This apostle was the one who afterwards most needed the admonition (Matt. xxvi. 41), and in so sad a manner forgot it. Those who stand in most danger are often slowest to profit by words of warning.

Ver. 42. "*Faithful and wise.*"—Faithful comes before wise, because the true wisdom of the heart comes from faithfulness. Motives to faithfulness:—

I. **Love.**—Which is sufficient of itself.

II. But where love is defective, considerations of **prudence**—a salutary fear, which Christ here commends to us.

The portion of steward in the kingdom of God is—

I. One of honour.

II. One of usefulness.

III. One of responsibility.

Ver. 43. "*Blessed.*"—I. He is already blessed in his deed.

II. It is a new and increased blessedness so to be *found* of his lord.

III. He is promised a high promotion, from a few things to many things.

Vers. 45-48. *Punishment of evil-doers* is here represented—

I. As no mere affectionate chastisement for the moral reformation of the erring, but as just retribution.

II. As varying in degree according to the guilt incurred—according to the measure of knowledge the servants had of their Lord's will, and the measure of their disobedience.

Vers. 45, 46. *Carelessness*:—

I. Trusting to a longer delay of the Master.

II. The ease with which carelessness leads to unbridled insolence and dissoluteness.

III. The severe punishment of such carelessness.

Ver. 45. *Negligence.*—Negligence leads to two great sins:—

I. Hardness and caprice towards others.

II. Slothfulness and wantonness as respects the servant himself.

Ver. 46. *A Divided Heart.*—The heart of the negligent sinner is divided between the duty he owes and the vicious indulgences he is determined to have; his punishment corresponds to his fault—"will cut him in sunder."

Answer to Peter's Question.—It is not difficult for Peter to draw from these two pictures of the faithful and the unfaithful steward the answer to his question. Yes, watchfulness, with the fidelity which results from it, is a sacred duty for all believers, but it is still more incumbent upon those of them who are honoured with the special confidence of their Master, and charged with the superintendence of their fellow-servants, as Peter and the other apostles were shortly to be. Their fidelity would receive a glorious recompense; but their neglect would be esteemed still more culpable than that of others, and would draw upon them a severer chastisement.—*Godet.*

Ver. 47. *A Warning to Rulers in the Church.*—It ought to be remembered that those who are appointed to govern the Church do not err through ignorance, but basely and wickedly defraud their Master of His right.—*Calvin.*

Ignorance no Excuse.—Ignorance does not free from condemnation; for—1. If we seek to know God's will, we may discover it. 2. Ignorance is always accompanied by gross and shameful negligence.

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 49—59.

The Signs of the Times.—The fact that in the mission and work of Christ upon earth a new epoch in the world's history had opened was clearly realised by the Saviour Himself; it was, however, but imperfectly comprehended by His disciples, and quite hidden from the people at large. In this section of the gospel history Jesus gives expression to His own feelings of concern at the greatness of the work given Him to do, and the sufferings through which alone He could bring it to a successful issue. He then forewarns the disciples of the sharp conflict between faith and unbelief which would result in every community where the gospel was preached; and, finally, He upbraids the multitude with the spiritual blindness which prevented their recognising the significance and solemnity of the times in which they were living.

I. **The actual state of matters so far as it concerned Himself** (vers. 49, 50).—The conflict with the Pharisees was an indication of a widespread war between the forces of good and evil, which was to result from His work on earth. The fire-brand had been cast upon the earth, and from it a great conflagration would ensue. He had kindled in the hearts of the disciples a love of heavenly things, which they were to spread abroad; and all the efforts of the earthly-minded would be directed to oppose and extinguish it. And He recognises that one of the results of this conflict will be sufferings and death for Himself; nay, He realises the fact that His passion is needed for completing the work which He came to earth to accomplish. Without the cross His teachings and His miracles would fail to produce the great change on human society which it was His purpose to effect. This utterance of His strikingly illustrates the union in Him of the human and the Divine natures. With genuinely human feelings He shrinks from the conflict, but with Divine knowledge and love He anticipates the results that will flow from His self-sacrifice, and longs for it to be accomplished. These mingled feelings recur in a more intense form at a later period of His life (John xii. 27; Matt. xxvi. 38), but were never entirely absent from His mind during the whole period of His public ministry. The fact that He so clearly foresaw the sufferings and death which were attached to His redeeming work brings into clearest relief His love for mankind and His devotion to the will of the Father.

II. **The disciples forewarned of their participation in the strife** (vers. 51-53).—They were probably anticipating the erection of a Messianic kingdom, characterised by peace and prosperity of a material kind, and needed to be prepared for a very different state of matters. Peace was not to be the first and immediate result of His work, if by peace was to be understood comfortable outward conditions of life. The peace which He bequeathed to His disciples was a state of heart: being delivered from bondage and fear, and reconciled to God. The relation which Jesus sought to establish between Himself and all who accepted Him as their Lord and Saviour was higher and more sacred than any other, and acknowledgment of His unique claims was certain to lead to conflict, not only between Himself and the world, but between the members of human society. Men would begin to distinguish themselves as adversaries and subjects of His kingdom. And it is one proof of the profound significance of Christ's

work in the world that this strife should spring up wherever the gospel is preached. Men feel that they have to do with One whose claims override all others and extend to every department of life; and if these claims are not accepted they provoke resistance. And every one who accepts Christ as Lord and Master needs to keep in mind that He insists upon absolute devotion to Himself, even if this means the rupture of the nearest and dearest ties that bind him to his fellows.

III. **The multitude upbraided for their blindness and heedlessness** (vers. 54-59).—Jesus now turns to the people at large, who do not realise the gravity of the circumstances in which they are placed, and who are plunged in carnal security and impenitence. He upbraids them with their blindness to the importance of the crisis, and urges them to take advantage of the time which yet remains to them for making their peace with God. He contrasts the shrewdness and prudence which they display in the ordinary affairs of life with their slowness to comprehend the things that concern their spiritual welfare. The real explanation of the discrepancy is that they are interested in things that concern their earthly welfare, but are indifferent to their highest welfare. A sinful heart means a darkened understanding (cf. Rom. i. 21; Eph. iv. 18). The very appearance of Christ upon the earth pointed to the necessity of reconciliation with God: it was to effect this that He came, and therefore indifference to Him and to His teaching meant exposing oneself to the greatest danger. All who heard Him had the opportunity of becoming reconciled to Him whom they had offended, and whose claims they could not of themselves satisfy. Let them beware of allowing the day of grace to pass, and of compelling God to deal with them according to the strict demands of justice.

SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS ON VERSES 49—59.

Vers 49-53. *The Conflict.*—My conflict hastens apace; Mine over, yours begins; and then let the servants tread in their Master's steps, uttering their testimony entire and fearless, neither loving nor dreading the world, anticipating awful wrenches of the dearest ties in life, but looking forward, as I do, to the completion of their testimony, when, after the tempest, reaching the haven, they shall enter into the joy of their Lord.—*Brown.*

The Critical Nature of the Time.—The critical nature of the time (1) as concerned Jesus Himself—vers. 49, 50, (2) as concerned the disciples (vers. 50-53). "Is it a time," said Elisha to the faithless Gehazi, "to buy lands and oxen, when the hand of God is on Israel?"—that is to say, when the Assyrian is at the gates of Samaria? Jesus speaks in the same way to the disciples about Him, "Is it a time for the believer to propose, as the aim of his life, the peaceful enjoyment of worldly property, at the moment when the great conflict is about to begin?" —*Godet.*

Ver. 49. "*Fire on the Earth.*"—By "fire" here we are to understand the higher spiritual element of life which Jesus came to introduce into this earth, with reference to its mighty effects in quickening all that is akin to it, and destroying all that is opposed. To cause this element of life to take up its abode on earth, and wholly to pervade human hearts with its warmth, was the lofty destiny of the Redeemer. —*Brown.*

The Gospel a Fire.—Our Lord says here, in the plainest way, that while the object of His coming is to give peace, the effect of His coming will too often be to send fire on earth.

I. **The text calls the gospel a fire.**—A fire is a power. How fire spreads, glows, rages, devours! When the gospel is called a fire, we mean not a

name, an idea, a poor faint, creeping thing, which may be disregarded and let alone, but a great, active, at last a victorious and irresistible force. Never suppose that the gospel is an insignificant or despicable thing.

II. **There are hearts and places in which the gospel is not a fire.**—There are families where the gospel in the heart of one causes discord and division. The only alternative must be the backsliding of the one, or the conversion of the rest. So long as the gospel is not a power, it is not a fire; it causes no breach and no division. Therefore we are constrained to wish for such signs of its working. The fire is the sign of the peace. If there be no fire, the gospel will be a mere balm, a mere soporific, a mere lullaby of the soul.

III. **What is the lesson of the text for each of us?**—Is the concord of our homes due to the gospel? Is serving Christ the secret of family union? Let the fire be a fire of cleansing, and a fire of quickening, and a fire of devotion. Is your home disorganised? What has divided you? Was it the fire of the gospel which severed? Are you intolerant of the devotion and service which others render to Christ? It must needs be that the gospel divides; but woe to them by whom that division comes! We do not wish to spread division by the gospel; but even if this be the effect, we recognise there one of the signs of the work of grace. Division is a sign that life is there. It means an end to fatal lethargy. It is the work of the ministry to bring the gospel home. It is something to have it preached in our churches; it is more to have it preached, even to dispeace and division, in our homes.—*Vaughan.*

"*Already Kindled.*"—The disciples having falsely imagined that, while they were at ease and asleep, the kingdom of God would come, Christ declares, on the contrary, that there must first be a dreadful conflagration, to kindle the world. And as some beginnings of it were, even then, making their appearance, Christ encourages the disciples by the very consideration that they already feel the power of the gospel. "When great commotions," says He, "shall already begin to kindle, this is so far from being a reason why ye should tremble, that it is rather a ground of strong confidence; and, for my own part, I rejoice that this fruit of my labours is visible."—*Calvin.*

"*To send fire.*"—"Everything fertile in results is rich in wars" (*Renan*). The fire when it burns on all sides consumes chaff and straw, but purifies silver and gold.

Ver. 50. *The Passover before the Passion.*—Jesus expresses with perfect candour the emotion that fills His mind. The thought of the terrible suffering He is to endure is before His mind, and weighs upon Him like a nightmare until it is over. The first evidence of this feeling is in this passage; a second time it comes to view while He is in the temple (John xii. 27)—"Now is My soul troubled; and what shall I say?" A third time it breaks forth in all its vehemence in the garden of Gethsemane.

The Secret of the Saviour's Earnestness.—1. His belief in a Divine commission. 2. His belief in the solemnity of time. We, too, however, have a mission to fulfil, and our time for fulfilling it is appointed and proportioned by God. If these convictions possessed our souls, would they not kindle a Christlike earnestness? (1) They would dispel the delusions of time. (2) They would overcome the hindrances to submission. (3) They would break down the impediments of fear.—*Hull.*

Vers. 51-53. *The Gospel an Occasion of Division.*

I. The fact that the gospel of Christ shall be the occasion of division and contention in the world is easily verified. The heart of every believer is an example. The history of the gospel

in every country into which it has been introduced establishes it.

II. The causes of the division. Hatred of the truth; hatred of a holiness which rebukes sin; hatred of authority such as the gospel claims.

III. Results of this division. The world is convinced of sin. The faith and patience of believers are called forth and strengthened.

Ver. 51. "*Peace.*"—This saying may distress weak minds; for (1) the prophets everywhere promise peace and tranquillity under the reign of Christ, and (2) Christ is our peace (Eph. ii. 14), and the very office of the gospel is to reconcile us to God. But we must remember that this peace is associated with faith, and exists only in the hearts and consciences of the godly. The corrupt nature converts the inestimable gift into a most destructive evil.

The Result of Christ's Coming.—Our Lord speaks not of the *intention* with which He came into the world, but of the sad *result* of His coming, which was to be (owing to the corruption of man's fallen nature) strife and division.

Ver 52. *Strife Sometimes Better than Peace.*—Better is strife, when it brings one near to God, than peace, when it separates one from God.—*Gregory Naz.*

Vers. 54-59.—*Two Great Faults:*—

I. **Blindness**, in not being able to discern the significance of this time, as they did the signs of the natural heavens (vers. 54-56).

II. **Want of prudence** in not repenting and becoming reconciled to the law of God while yet there was time (vers. 57-59).

Vers. 57-59. *The True State of the Case.*—Why do ye not discern of yourselves your true state—that which is just—the justice of your case as before God? You are going (the course of your life is your journey) with your adversary (the just and holy law of God) before the magistrate (God Himself); therefore by the way take pains to be delivered from him (by repentance and faith in the Son of God), lest he drag thee to the judge, and the judge deliver thee to the exactor, and the exactor cast thee into prison.—*Alford.*

Vers. 58, 59. "*When thou goest,*" etc. —Our Saviour seems to say: In a merely temporal matter, you are careful to act thus prudently. While the day of mercy yet lasts, should you not discover the like anxiety to avail yourselves of it? through Me to obtain deliverance from the wrath of God, before it be too late?—*Burgon.*

CHAPTER XIII.

CRITICAL NOTES.

VER. 1. **There were present.**—The phrase is a peculiar one, and might be translated, "then there came up" or "arrived," perhaps to bring tidings of this outrage. **Whose blood.**—The phrase is highly dramatic: the persons had been slain in the Temple, and their blood had been mingled with that of the sacrifices they were offering. **Pilate.**—This incident is not recorded in history. But similar events are known to have happened: Josephus tells of murders and massacres in the Temple, and of Pilate's cruelty in repressing outbreaks. As these persons were Galilæans, we have, perhaps, here an explanation of the enmity between Pilate and Herod (xxiii. 12). Pilate had, we know, about this time put down an insurrection in Jerusalem with great severity (see xxiii. 19).

Ver. 2. **Suppose ye.**—This thought was in their minds, though apparently they did not express it. What they regarded as a judgment upon others Christ advised them to take as a warning to themselves. Great public calamities may be signs of God's displeasure, but it is a superstitious abuse of the doctrine to hold that the particular sufferers are greater sinners than other men.

Ver. 3. **Ye shall all likewise perish.**—It is not for those who, by their sins, are liable to like judgments of God to pass sentence on others and to infer their exceptional guilt. The words are doubtless prophetic of the manner in which myriads perished in the siege of Jerusalem by the Romans.

Ver. 4. **Those eighteen.**—An incident well known at the time, but of which we have no further information than is here given. Tower in Siloam is evidently a tower on the city walls near the Pool of Siloam, at the south-east corner. "It is an ingenious, but of course uncertain, conjecture of Ewald that the death of these workmen was connected with the notion of retribution, because they were engaged in building part of the aqueduct to the Pool of Siloam, for the construction of which Pilate had seized some of the sacred Corban-money (*Jos. B.J*, II., ix. 4)" (*Farrar*). It is noticeable that these two incidents are of a different character: the first was death inflicted by the cruelty of man; the second, death by accident. **Sinners.**—Lit. "debtors," a different word from that in ver. 2.

Ver. 5. **Likewise.**—Prophetic also of deaths by falling buildings in the siege and capture of Jerusalem by the Romans.

Ver. 6. **A certain man had a fig-tree.**—This parable is peculiar to St. Luke, and tells of impending destruction because of long-continued abuse of God's mercy. The fig-tree is the Jewish nation, the vineyard is the Church, the owner of the vineyard is God, and the vine-dresser is Christ (or, according to another interpretation, Christ is the owner, and the vine-dresser the Holy Spirit). It is hard not to see some reference in the seventh verse to the three years of Christ's ministry. This is not, however, fatal to the identification of the owner with God, and of the vine-dresser with Christ, as in Christ's coming to seek fruit God might be said to come. The objection to the identification of the vine-dresser with the Holy Spirit is that it represents Christ as one to be interceded with—a view of His character quite contrary to the spirit of the New Testament. It is useless to say that we should not press the parable too far by such identifications, as in the parables expounded by Christ Himself (those of the Sower and the Tares) every detail is shown to be significant.

Ver. 7. **Three years.**—Apart from the allusion above noted, the time here specified is that within which a fig-tree, if it is going to bear fruit, should show some signs of fertility. **Cumbereth.**—Lit. "make of none effect," "make idle." It takes the place of a tree that might yield some fruit, and impoverishes the ground by drawing nutriment from it.

Ver. 8. **Lord.**—*I.e.*, "sir." **Dig about it.**—*I.e.*, dig holes for casting in manure.

Ver. 9. **Well.**—This word is supplied to fill up the broken sentence. There is great solemnity in the significant gap left in the speaker's words—in the suggestion that amendment is barely possible, but that a certain time will be allowed to see if it will take place. **After that.**—Omitted in R.V., but of course the words are understood in any case.

Ver. 10. **In one of the synagogues.**—Time and place are indefinite; probably in Peræa.

Ver. 11 **A spirit of infirmity.**—(Cf. Acts xvi. 6, "a spirit of Python"). *I.e.*, an evil spirit (cf. v. 16)) who had the power of producing bodily weakness.

Ver. 12. **When Jesus saw her.**—She does not seem to have asked to be cured; but the language of the ruler of the synagogue implies that she expected or hoped for cure, and therefore she may be credited with a measure of faith. **Thou art loosed.**—The negative part of the cure—the relief from the evil spirit that had bound her.

Ver. 13. **Laid His hands on her.**—The positive part of the cure—the imparting of strength.

Ver. 14. **Said to the multitude.**—It is noticeable that he did not address his rebuke to Christ directly, but covertly spoke against Him in his words to the people. **Ought to work.**—His folly is shown in his implied statement that the bestowal of Divine grace and help is a kind of working by which the Sabbath is profaned.

Ver. 15. **Thou hypocrite.**—Rather, "ye hypocrites" (R.V.)—*i.e.*, the ruler and those about him, or those of the Pharisaic sect to which he belonged, and which favoured such criticism. The hypocrisy or insincerity consisted in pretending a zeal for the Sabbath, when the real motive of the speech was to stir up enmity against Jesus. **Doth not each one of you?**—*I.e.*, they themselves broke their own rule about the Sabbath, in order to show mercy to their cattle. The instance is an apt one: the woman bound down by her infirmity is as helpless as the beast tied to the manger.

Ver. 16. **Ought not this woman?**—"Ought"—a repetition of the ruler's phrase in ver. 14. The contrast is very strongly put—it is between a dumb animal and, not merely a human being, but one of the chosen people—"a daughter of Abraham" (by blood and by faith); the few hours of deprivation which a beast might be forced to endure by delay in watering are contrasted with her eighteen years' servitude.

Ver. 17. **And when He had said.**—Rather, "and as He said these things" (R.V.). **All His adversaries.**—Which implies that a number of them were present. **All the people rejoiced.**—Though He had abandoned Galilee, and Jerusalem had been hostile to Him, He still seems to have enjoyed a measure of popularity in Peræa (cf. Matt. xix. 1, 2).

Ver. 19. **Like a grain of mustard seed.**—So small in size as to be a proverbial comparison among the Jews for anything exceedingly small. **Garden.**—Matt. xiii. 31 has "field." **A great tree.**—Omit "great," omitted in R.V. The plant in question sometimes grows as high as a man on horseback. The points of comparison are the insignificant beginning and the great outward extension of the kingdom of God founded by Jesus Christ. **Birds of the air.**—*I.e.*, birds attracted by the pungent seed of the plant. **Lodged.**—*I.e.*, found a shelter (cf. ix. 58). The Church is a place of shelter and of food.

Ver. 21. **Leaven.**—"Except in this parable, leaven in Scripture (being connected with corruption and fermentation) is used as a type of sin. See xii. 1; Exod. xii. 15-20; 1 Cor. v. 6-8; Gal. v. 9. Here, however, the only point considered is its rapid, and unseen, and effectual working" (*Farrar*). The idea, too, of the wholesome effect produced by leaven in the making of bread may be associated with the figure. **Three measures of meal.**—Probably the amount usually kneaded at one time (Gen. xviii. 6). The various allegorical explanations of this detail that have been given are more than usually frivolous and far-fetched. **Till the whole was leavened.**—The process of change resulting in a complete transformation. This is a companion picture to that of the mustard seed, the latter setting forth the outward *extension* of the kingdom, the former the inward transformation effected by it. The comparison may also be extended to the effect produced by the gospel upon the character of the individual believer, when external life and habits, and the whole inner being, come under the influence of Christian truth.

Ver. 22. **Went through cities,** etc.—Not a direct journey. **To Jerusalem.**—The last journey through Peræa to Jerusalem.

Ver. 23. **Then said one.**—Probably a Jew (see ver. 28); he can hardly have been a disciple. The question he asked was one frequently debated in Jewish schools, some maintaining universal salvation, others limiting it to a few elect (2 Esdras viii. 1). It is plain that by salvation is here meant final acceptance with God and entrance into heaven. Christ does not directly answer the question, but turns the attention of his hearers to the *sort* of persons that will be saved, rather than to their relative *number*. In ver. 29, however, the fact that the saved will be many in number seems to be hinted at.

Ver. 24. **Said unto them.**—Not simply to him who asked the question; the answer Christ had to give deserved the attention of all. **Strive.**—In the plural; the word used is a very strong one, being taken from the contests in the arena, and might be rendered: "strain every nerve to force your way in." **Strait gate.**—Rather, "narrow door" (R.V.): the word "gate" having been probably taken from Matt. vii. 13. **Seek to enter in.**—*I.e.*, evidently by some other way than the narrow door of repentance and faith. There may be a contrast between *seeking* (*i.e.*, desiring) and *striving*.

Ver. 25. **When once.**—Lit. "from the time that." There is great force in the abrupt transition from ver. 24 to ver. 25. "The image of the closed door is preserved. The master of the house, at a certain hour, rises from the table and closes the door, so that even the inmates who may be lingering out too late are not only refused admission, but are not recognised as members of his family" (*Speaker's Commentary*). Some commentators have sought to tone down the harshness of the passage by punctuating it differently: "Shall not be able when once the master," etc. The result is a faulty, clumsy construction of sentences in both the Greek and the English. **Open to us.**—Entrance claimed as a right based on former acquaintanceship, or, in other words, upon external privileges rather than worthiness of character.

Ver. 26. **In thy presence.**—A very different thing from "eating and drinking with Him" (cf. Matt. xxvi. 29; Rev. iii. 20). The Christian can scarcely fail to think of the Lord's Supper as an illustration of eating and drinking in Christ's presence.

Ver. 27. **Workers of iniquity.**—This is a peculiar phrase; it means "persons engaged in the hire and receiving the wages of unrighteousness." In the corresponding passage in St. Matthew the word translated "iniquity" means "lawlessness"; the word here used means "unrighteousness"—"disregard of the fundamental principles of God's kingdom." This is an indication of the independence of the two accounts of the discourse.

Ver. 28. **Weeping and gnashing of teeth.**—The signs respectively of grief and rage. **Thrust out.**—Rather, "cast forth without" (R.V.), "cast forth" because as Jews they had been born in the covenant.

Ver. 29. **And they shall come.**—"In this and the preceding verse is the real answer to the question of ver. 23 given: 'They shall be *many*; but what is that to you if you be not among them?'" (*Alford*).

Ver. 30. **There are last,** etc.—*I.e.*, some who are first to believe will fall from their high place, and *vice versâ*. This has been strikingly fulfilled in the ruin of the Oriental Churches, which were the first to be founded and were once in a flourishing condition. The Mother Church of Jerusalem, too, has declined, while Gentile offshoots have flourished.

Ver. 31. **The same day.**—A better reading is, "In that very hour" (R.V.). **Pharisees, saying,** etc.—We are certainly led to understand that these Pharisees had been sent by Herod to induce Jesus to leave his territory. If the intimation of Herod's desire were a mere invention of the Pharisees it would be difficult to understand the epithet Christ applied to him. Probably Herod had no real desire of the kind; he had become sufficiently unpopular by the murder of the Baptist, and had no inducement to add to his guilt by further violence against Jesus. Besides, when Jesus was afterwards in his power he abstained from injuring him. But the excitement connected with Christ, and Herod's own superstitious fears, would doubtless make him anxious for the Saviour to leave the country. His *cunning* is shown by his endeavouring to secure this end in an underhand way, and by his using his enemies, the Pharisees, as his tools in the matter. **Will kill thee.**—Rather, "would fain kill thee" (R.V.); *i.e.*, "will" is not a mark of the future tense, but the verb "to desire."

Ver. 32. **That fox.**—An emblem of cunning and mischief. This is the only recorded example of Christ's speaking of any one in terms of sheer contempt. The rest of the verse has been the subject of great discussion. What are the three days specified? and what is meant by "being perfected"? Some have taken the time specified as referring to present labours ("to-day"), to future labours ("to-morrow"), and to His final sufferings at Jerusalem ("the third day I shall be perfected"). It is difficult, however, to understand the days in any other than a literal sense. The meaning would, therefore, be that Jesus would still remain for three days in Herod's terrritories, and would still engage in those mighty works that had excited his apprehensions, and carry through His plan to the very end. The only serious objection to this interpretation is that the words "I shall be perfected" would seem to suggest more than merely bringing to an end the miracles of healing in the district of Peræa; but no other meaning is possible if the days specified are to be taken as literal days.

Ver. 33. **I must walk.**—Rather, "I must go on My way" (R.V.), the word used by the Pharisees in ver. 31 ("depart"). Christ *is* on His way out of the territory of Herod, but He is not urged by the fear of that king's malignity; He is not afraid of death, for He is going to meet death in Jerusalem. **It cannot be,** etc.—There is terrible irony in these words. Christ speaks of His life as being safe until He arrives in Jerusalem. It is almost a moral impossibility, His words imply, for a prophet to perish except in that city, which had monopolised the slaughter of the prophets. The death of John the Baptist was an exception to the rule.

Ver. 34. **O Jerusalem!** etc.—Rather, "which killeth . . . stoneth . . . sent unto her" (R.V.). **How often.**—Reference is here made to visits of Jesus to Jerusalem and of labours there which St. Luke and the other Synoptists do not record. **As a hen.**—It has been said that the figure of the eagle in Deut. xxxii. 11, 12 is emblematical of the spirit of the Old Testament, and this in the present passage of the spirit of the New Testament. The contrast between "I would" and "ye would not" is very startling: the power of man to resist and defeat the merciful purposes of God.

Ver. 35. **Desolate.**—The best MSS. omit the word, but it or some such term is needed to complete the sense. In the R.V. it is inserted in italics. The Divine Glory had departed from the house (cf. Ezek. x. 18, xi. 23). **Ye shall not see Me.**—Judicial blindness, the veil remaining still upon the heart of the Jewish people. **Until the time,** etc.—The words quoted were actually used on Christ's triumphal entrance into Jerusalem a short time after this, but we cannot think that the prophecy was in any sense then fulfilled. It is more probable that a mistaken understanding of these words led to their being employed on that occasion. Christ here speaks of a second coming in the far-distant future and associates it with the penitence and faith of the Jewish nation, which will then receive Him as the Blessed One.

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 1—5.

Accidents not Judgments.—Whenever any great public calamity happens, there are never wanting persons who are ready to point out the special sin which has provoked it; and it is noticeable that they are, as a rule, more indignant at those who suffer wrong than at those who do wrong. They are eager to utter their harsh censures, while other men sit silent with dismay; they interpret the Divine Providence according to their private prejudices and theories, and, therefore, often contradict each other; and they carefully exclude *themselves* from the operation of the vengeance—"Whatever happens to them is a trial, while whatever happens to their neighbour is a judgment."

I. **The false inference.**—To affirm that, by an invariable and most merciful law, sin entails punishment—national sins national punishment, personal sins personal punishments—is the duty of every Christian teacher; but to fix the times and assort punishments to sins, to affect to stand midway between heaven and earth and interpret the mysteries of Providence, is simply stark presumption in any uninspired man. It is not given to the sons of men to comprehend the goings of the Inhabitant of Eternity. The sweep of eternity is large, and gives scope and verge for the play of retribution beyond the reach of mortal eye. To play the interpreter, and say, "This punishment is a judgment on that sin," is to play the fool. The Holy Scriptures affirm the mystery and delay of retribution; that it is not measured in mortal scales; that the sweep and fall of its scourge are not traceable by mortal eyes. They teach us that those "whose feet are *swift* to shed blood" often outrun the pursuing vengeance for a time, and for a long time—nay, beyond all bounds of time. They teach that many offences escape whipping here, though, sooner or later, the impartial lash falls on all.

II. **The true lesson to be drawn from calamities.**—The gospel teaches us a more excellent way of interpreting the facts of life than that of these presumptuous discoverers of judgments. Instead of dwelling on the mysterious fate of our neighbours, it bids us come quite home, and repent, lest we ourselves should likewise perish. It teaches us in effect that no evil is so evil as the spurious goodness which, separating us from our fellows, cries to its neighbours, as from a superior platform, "Stand down there, for I am holier than thou." It teaches us that the accidents by which we suffer, so far from being personal judgments on personal sins, are parts of that great mystery of evil which is now suffered to task our thoughts and try our faith, in order that, by-and-by, it may lead in a complete beatitude, a profounder rest, an eternal good and joy. The only safe moral we can draw from the judgments of God, or what seem to us His judgments, is the warning, "Except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish." Let us take the warning, and not judge one another any more. We are too apt, when we see any forlorn and solitary brother sitting, like Job, among the potsherds, to sit down beside him, like Job's comforters, and hand him the very sharpest and roughest of the sherds that he may scrape himself withal. We are too apt, when any calamity befalls our neighbours, to assume that they must be sinners above all other men, and to speculate—sometimes in their hearing—on the crimson and scarlet dyes of their guilt. We need, therefore, to remember that accidents are not judgments, that accidents are not even *accidents*, since they are all ordered of God, and form part of that gracious discipline by which He lifts us through the graduated and rising circles of His service. They are sent for *our* sakes, who only stand and witness them, as well as for the sake of those who suffer them; not that we may judge others, but that we may examine ourselves.—*Cox.*

SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS ON VERSES 1—9.

Vers. 1-9. *Three Motives to Repentance.*—We need to remember the spiritual tension, the awful feeling of urgency, if we would do justice to our Lord's threefold summons to repentance.

I. The story of the Galilæans was probably carried to Jesus as a person who made Messianic claims of some sort, and who might be expected to show a practical interest in the honour of the country. Jesus startles His informants by the abrupt diversion of interest. He saw in the death of these Galilæans, with all its atrocity of circumstance, a picture and prophecy of the doom, which, within a single generation, should overtake the whole of the Jewish people. The moral motive to repentance is plain here. A tragic ending, a life cut short, is not to be a mere nine day's wonder. It is a voice from heaven, an emphatic voice, to stagger and shock the careless, and to make them think seriously of God.

II. The next case is different. It was an accident. Has an accident a "moral"? If not, why did our Lord utilise this pure "accident" in a moral interest? In the lips of an unfeeling man such language would be unpardonably offensive. It is the use of it by such men that has brought it to discredit. But Christ's interest in repentance was an absorbing passion. Such accidents ought, if we take Christ's example here as a law, to help in the conversion of all who are awed and startled by them. Such emotions of pity, awe, sympathy, are not to be wasted. To see men moved, moved deeply, and yet not permanently, not to the point of changing their life to the bottom, and putting it right with God—this was what straitened Christ's spirit, and moved Him to speak with such startling vehemence.

III. The insertion of the parable of the fig-tree at this point, even though it were spoken on another occasion, rounds off the lesson on repentance, it presents the same appeal, with the same importunity, on what seems to be at first totally different ground. The urgency of massacres and accidents, which do not happen every day, or at every door, can easily be evaded by most men. "These things are not likely to happen to *us*. It is absurd to make the bare supposition of them a motive in life." Christ's answer to this sceptical mood is the parable of the fig-tree. He seems to side with the mood, but does not allow it to evade His earnestness. Massacre and accident *are* extraordinary resources of which God avails Himself; but His goodness also—which is so unbroken in your life—is also designed to lead you to repentance. God tries every way, because men seek to evade Him by every way. He tries exceptional severity, because men take His goodness for granted; He tries uniform, ever-renewed, patient goodness, because He is good, and severity is His strange work. But it would be a fatal error to presume on His goodness. The parable ends with the same inexorable refrain as the verses about the Galilæans and the fall of the tower. Not to repent is perdition—if neither severity nor goodness startle men, they are lost. These stern, passionate utterances are the expression of the intense love of Christ. No one has ever loved like Jesus Christ, so no one has ever spoken with such awful severity and urgency. No one has been so pained with soul-travail for the conversion of men.—*Denney.*

Vers. 1-5. *The Lesson of Evil Tidings.*

I. **How men use evil tidings.**—Jesus was from Galilee. Men are always too ready to gossip about the misfortunes of others. Christ had just been speaking about God's judgments on men who knew His will and did it not. The bystanders at once named the destruction of the Galilæans by Pilate. Why? Because they thought the sudden death of these men was a mark of God's displeasure at some grievous sin.

II. **How Christ would have them used.**—How quickly Christ saw the thoughts which had led the speakers to utter their evil tidings! He saw in them a fault which we are all too apt to fall into—the fault of always forming unkind judgments about people in misfortune; of always thinking, and even sometimes saying, the worst we can of people. Christ rebukes them for their want of charity, and cautions them for the future. God's judgments will fall upon *all* unrepentant sinners.—*W. Taylor.*

Rash Judgments.—We are taught here—1. To beware of rashly judging others. 2. Not to be too hasty in interpreting afflictive dispensations of Providence against ourselves. 3. To be thankful for our own preservation. 4. That it is our duty to mark and improve calamities, and especially violent and sudden deaths. 5. The necessity of genuine repentance.—*Foote.*

Sin and Punishment.

I. Punishment does follow upon sin.

II. Yet God spares more than He signally punishes.

III. Therefore no one can conclude from such instances that those who are punished are worse than their neighbours.

IV. The best use we can make of remarkable examples of this kind is to examine ourselves and to repent of our sins.

Ver. 1. "*Blood . . . mingled with their sacrifices.*—The suggestion is: God must have been specially angry with these Galilæans, who were cut off by a heathen, in God's house, at His altar, and when engaged in the act of worshipping God. The argument is similar to that of Job's friends (Job iv. 7, viii. 20, xxii. 5).

Vers. 2-9. *Punishment and Long-Suffering.*—Christ's answer consists of two parts.—

I. A plain and literal threatening of general destruction to all who do not repent.

II. A new challenge to the repentance which alone can save, in a parable which exhibits long-suffering as an argument to repentance, and which passes from the people as a whole to each individual.

Ver. 2, 3. "*Sinners above all the Galilæans.*"—Our Saviour does not say that the calamity which had overtaken these Galilæans was *not* a punishment for sin. He contests not about *that*, but rather seems to agree to them so far, and draws that warning out of it. He only corrects the misconceit it seems they were in, in thrusting it too far off from themselves, and throwing it too heavily upon them that sacrificed. —*Leighton.*

Ver. 3. "*Ye shall all likewise perish.*" —Jesus, with prophetic insight, immediately discerns the significance of this fact. In this carnage, wrought by the sword of Pilate, He sees the prelude of that which the Roman army would accomplish soon in every part of the Holy Land, and especially in the Temple—the last refuge of the nation. In fact, forty years later, all that remained of the Galilæan people was gathered in the Temple, and suffered, under the Roman sword, the penalty incurred by their present impenitence. —*Godet.*

Signal Chastisements — 1. Signal chastisements inflicted upon sinners by God warn us of His righteous anger against sin, and should lead us to examine ourselves and consider what we deserve. 2. His kindness and forbearance in sparing others who are equally guilty should be regarded by us as an invitation to repentance.

"*Repent.*"—Repentance implies.—1. A change of mind. 2. Conviction of sin. 3. Grief on account of sin. 4. Hatred of sin. 5. Actual reformation. 6. Faith in the Redeemer.

Our Inability to Trace the Connection between Suffering and Sin.—Christ affirms, and all Scripture affirms, that the sum total of the calamity which oppresses the human race is the consequence of the sum total of its sin; nor does He deny the relation in which a man's actual sins may stand to his sufferings. What He does deny is the power of other men to trace the connection, and thus their right, in any particular case, to assert it.—*Trench.*

"*Likewise.*"—The correspondence between what had happened to these Galilæans and what was to happen to the Jewish people is very striking. 1. In both cases the punishment was inflicted by the heathen. 2. The time was that of the Passover, when sacrifices were being offered. 3. They were slain with the sword.

Vers. 4, 5. "*Upon whom the tower fell.*"—Our Lord introduces this incident as showing that whether the hand of man or (so called) accidents, lead to inflictions of this kind, it is in fact but one Hand that doeth it all (cf. Amos iii. 6). There is also a transference from the Galilæans—a despised people—to the inhabitants of Jerusalem, on whom the fulness of God's wrath was to be poured out in case of impenitence. —*Alford.*

Ver. 5. *True and False Ways of Regarding Calamities.*

I. Light-minded persons are inclined to deny the intimate connection between natural and moral evil.

II. Narrow-minded persons are disposed to interpret all such calamities as judgments upon exceptional guilt.

III. The true way to regard them is as a call to repentance.

"*Likewise perish.*"—In like manner with the former instance, this prophetic word of Jesus was literally fulfilled at the destruction of Jerusalem; houses and public buildings were burned and overthrown, and multitudes perished in the ruins.

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 6—9.

The Barren Fig-Tree.—No doubt this parable, in its primary reference, set forth the then state of the Jewish people—the pains that had been spent upon them, the meagreness of spiritual results that had been yielded by them, and the certainty of Divine retribution if there were not a speedy change in their condition. But the solemn lessons which it contains are equally applicable to every individual whose life has been subjected to religious influences, and who has failed to yield the fruits of righteousness.

I. **The worthless tree.**—Note that it enjoyed special advantages. It was planted in good soil, and it was attended to by one who both knew how to apply, and was diligent in applying, helps to its growth and fruitfulness. It was not a tree growing wild among the rocks, or on the road-side, which the passer-by might strip of its scanty fruit, and which no one would be surprised at finding devoid of figs, even in the season when they were naturally to be expected. Nor can we fail to see the spiritual meaning of this. From those who are outside the influences of religion little can be expected. But from *us*, who are placed in the most advantageous conditions; who have been taught the truth as it is in Jesus from our earliest years; who have enjoyed all the helps and privileges the Church can give; to whom God's Word is so familiar that we are in danger of losing reverence for it;—much is expected. There was no fruit upon this fig-tree. Yet it was not dead; and was probably all the more richly clothed with pretentious foliage because it bore nothing. Instead of being a fruit-bearing tree, it had become a tree of the ornamental kind, and—for it represents a being with moral responsibilities—it had no right to make the change. It was not planted for ornament, but to yield fruit; if it did not yield fruit, it had no claim to its

place in the vineyard. In it, therefore, we have a picture of the mere profession of religion, as contrasted with genuine, vital religion. The person whom the fig-tree represents is in the Church; he has all the advantages of that position; he clothes himself in the guise and uses the language of the Christian. But one thing is wanting. He yields no fruit; no one is any the better for his existence; he exercises no good influence. Even in the case in which he is not a mere deceiver, masquerading as a religious person, all the privileges and blessings he enjoys go to his own nourishment—to feed his own self-complacency—and he is of no use or service to God or man. He is never known to do a generous, kindly, Christ-like action, or to assist in any good cause. And this is the great test of the value of a life. The goodness Christ requires is something that imparts itself and not something that merely pleases the eye. It yields fruit, which serves to feed and nourish the spiritual life of others.

II. **The patient owner.**—He is impoverished and disappointed by the fruitlessness of the tree. Its fruit would have value for him as an article of food and merchandise, and he is all the poorer for its absence. In the same way, and in as absolute a sense, *we* belong to God, our life has been ordered for us by Him, the place we occupy is that which He has assigned to us, and it is adapted to the purpose for which He has chosen it—viz., that of our yielding the fruits of righteousness and holiness. Some may be more favourably situated than others, but all have it in their power to yield *some* fruit. Note the patience and perseverance of the owner: "Behold, these three years I come, seeking fruit on this fig-tree." More than three annual visits are implied. The fig-tree bears three times in the year—in early spring, in summer, and in autumn—fruit of different degrees of lusciousness and value. So that we are at liberty to think of the owner of this fig-tree as coming time after time during these three years, to see if there were any signs of fruit. *Our* Master also is patient. If He were not, what would become of us? If He did not know how to wait, which of us would not, long ago, have come under His sentence of condemnation? He comes to us every season—that is to say, whenever new circumstances occur in our lives, when there are fresh influences brought to bear upon us, or we pass into a new phase of experience. A great sorrow or a great joy befalls us, we are put into different conditions, and He comes in due time to see what gain we have made. And He is not easily discouraged, even if the condition of matters that meets His eye is unsatisfactory. He comes time after time to see if there is in summer what there was not in spring, if in autumn what was not in summer. He is slow unto anger, and time after time re-visits the tree, in spite of previous disappointments. And if we pass to the spiritual side of things, we see that He does more than visit the tree periodically. He Himself creates those new circumstances, He arranges those new events which are to our lives what the changes of season are to the tree. He sends them for the very purpose of exciting to fruitfulness, and every time that He has thus dealt with a life, or acted upon it, He draws near to it, to see if at last it is beginning to yield fruit. When, after protracted patience, there is no prospect of fruit, His sentence is simple and clear: "Cut it down; why cumbereth it the ground?" The decision of the owner is all the more serious for the reason which he alleges. The tree is useless. It has been planted there to bear fruit; it does not bear it, and there is no reason for any longer preserving it. It is taking up the space which might be occupied by a fruitful tree; it is not only doing no good, but it is hindering good from being done. The spiritual truth which is thus pictorially set forth is a very solemn one. God is patient, but there is such a thing as exhausting even His patience, and as making further long-suffering ridiculous. He waits long, but a time may come when He will be forced to leave to their fate those who are resolutely set upon disappointing Him.

III. **The loving intercessor.**—The owner has pronounced the sentence of condemnation, but an intercessor is found in the vine-dresser. He has a love for all the trees that are within his care; he loves this tree, not only for the fruit which it may yield, but also for its own sake. However, it is very noticeable that it is only a *respite* that he asks for. The success of his intercession is beforehand and by himself subordinated to the success of his undertaking. I will do so-and-so with it, and try all in my power to correct the defect; but if failure attend my efforts, I will not have a word to say in its behalf. There is a deep spiritual meaning in this. We are the subjects of intercession, but this intercession has conditions attached to it. There *is* One who loves us profoundly—loves us for our own sakes, independently of what we may become, or, to use this figure, of the fruit we may bear. But at the same time He knows that eternal life can only be given to those who live unto God, and who, by their fruits, give evidence of the genuineness of their faith in God and love for Him. He intercedes for us—that is, He asks for time to make use of every means within His power for stirring us up to be fruitful in all good works. The vine-dresser in the parable would have had no ground to stand upon, no reason to plead, if he had put in a word for sparing a tree that had proved itself hopelessly barren. And so in the spiritual side intercession avails in the case of those who, though backward and disappointing at first, yield to the heavenly influences brought to bear upon them, and begin to live unto God. The mercy which is shown to the penitent, whatever may have been the depth of their guilt, warrants no inference of mercy being shown to those who are finally impenitent. The plain, definite, solemn warning which the parable contains is, one may say, one of the means which the Heavenly Vine-dresser uses to make us bestir ourselves. The words are calculated to shake us out of indifference, and to urge us to begin at once to bear fruit towards God, in a devout and holy life.

SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS ON THE VERSES 6—9.

Vers. 6-9. *The Unfruitful Fig-Tree.*

I. **The vineyard.**
II. **The fig-tree in a vineyard.**
III. **The fig-tree visited.**
IV. **The fig-tree doomed.**
V. **The fig-tree spared.**

I. **The promise of fruit.**
II. **Patient waiting.**
III. **Deserved condemnation.**
IV. **Loving intercession.**

The Lessons of the Fig-tree. I. **For the Jewish Church.** 1. Its privileges. 2. Its unfruitfulness. 3. God's forbearance.

II. **For the individual Jew.**

III. **For the individual Christian.**—1. The value of Church membership. 2. Individual responsibility. 3. Unfruitful Church members need warning. 4. The day of grace is drawing to an end. What then?—*W. Taylor.*

The Teaching in the Parable—

I. Cuts up all pleas of negative goodness.

II. Calls on us to examine ourselves whether we be barren or fruitful, and to follow out the result aright, whatever it may be.

III. Calls on us to be thankful to the Lord for sparing us hitherto.

IV. Warns us not to abuse God's mercy so as to presume upon it for the future.

The Parable also Teaches—

I. That a solemn responsibility attaches to those who are within the pale of revealed religion and of the Church.

II. That God notes the length of time that men continue fruitless under the means of spiritual culture.

III. To be cut down is the rich desert of all the fruitless.

IV. The purpose of the mercy that is

shown to them is to produce a change in them.

V. Genuine repentance, however late, avails to save.

VI. The final destruction of those who are, after all forbearance, found fruitless, will be pre-eminently and confessedly just.

Ver. 6. "*Fig-tree in his vineyard.*"—The most frequent emblem for the Jewish people is the vine. Here the fig-tree is chosen to imply advantages bestowed for a definite purpose, to be withdrawn if that purpose is not served. Vines belong to a vineyard: a fig-tree can only find a place in it by the choice of the owner of the vineyard. So God, of His own free will, chose Israel to occupy a special place in the world, and to fulfil special duties in the education of the world in spiritual things.

"*Sought fruit.*"—Cf. Isa. v. 2: "He *looked* that it should bring forth fruit." He has a *right* to it, and will *require* it.

From Whom Results are Expected.—The time when God thus comes is not the day of judgment only; for the tree is represented as allowed to stand, with a view of its beginning to yield fruit. It is *now*, therefore, during our present state, that God comes seeking fruit from us. He expects results—

I. From those who have received a Christian education and are familiar with holy examples.

II. From the faithful sermons we have heard.

III. From the trials of life which are designed to discipline the soul.

"*Fruit.*"—There is a wonderful fitness in the simple image running all through Scripture which compares men to trees and their work to fruit. The three kinds of works whereof Scripture speaks may all be illustrated from this image.

I. **Good** works, when the tree, having been made good, bears fruit after its own kind.

II. **Dead** works, such as have a fair outward appearance, but are not the genuine outgrowth of the renewed man—fruit, as it were, fastened on externally, alms given that they may be gloried in, prayers made that they may be seen.

III. **Wicked** works, when the corrupt tree bears fruit, manifestly after its own kind. Here it is, of course, those good fruits of which none are found; both the other kinds of fruit the Jewish fig-tree only too abundantly bore."—*Trench.*

Ver. 7. "*Cut it down.*"—Threatenings precede judgment; in this the love of God is manifested, for the threatenings may excite a penitence which will avert judgment.

"*Cumber the Ground.*"—Why does it not only bear no fruit, but *also* hinder the land from bearing any, by occupying the place of a better tree? It is itself sterile and it sterilises the soil. 1. It occupies space. 2. It shuts out the sun. 3. It impoverishes the soil.

Ver. 8. "*Dig about it,*" *etc.*—Sometimes affliction may turn the soul to God; sometimes the bounties with which He enriches us may have the same effect.

Time Left for Repentance.—The idea of God's final sentence being delayed, that time may be left men to repent, runs all through the Scriptures. Before the Flood, there was appointed a space of a hundred and twenty years (Gen. vi. 3); Abraham intercedes on behalf of Sodom (*ib.*, xviii. 23, *seqq.*); the destruction of Jerusalem did not follow till forty years after the ascension of Christ; and the coming of Christ is delayed through the long-suffering of God (2 Peter iii. 9).

Ver. 9. *Intercession for a Respite.*—Nature of Christ's intercession: not that the sins of men may go unpunished, but that the sentence may

for a while be suspended, to prove whether they will turn and repent.

The Significance of the Special Pains taken with the Tree.—The special treatment accorded by the vine-dresser to the barren tree represents the marvellous deeds of love wrought by Jesus in His death and resurrection, and afterwards in the gift of the Holy Spirit and the preaching of the apostles, in order to rouse the nation from its impenitence. This parable informs those who hear it that their life hangs by a thread, and that that thread is in the hand of Him who speaks to them. —*Godet.*

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 10—17.

Work which Hallows the Sabbath.—This incident took place as Jesus was teaching in one of the synagogues on the Sabbath-day. This reminds us of the comparative prominence and frequency of these Sabbath-day cures. It is quite plain that nothing but the blindest Pharisaism, in its design to misinterpret Jesus and His work, could have led men to suppose that there was anything in these deeds of His inconsistent with the true observance of the day, or with the spirit of the Divine law. It is as obvious, on the other hand, that only a secularism equally blind and a similar misconstruction of His acts, could find in these Sabbath miracles any intention to abolish the day, to take away aught of its sacredness, or loose a jot of its Divine obligation. It was a reward for the faithfulness and diligence of these diseased folks, who, in spite of their ailments, were found in God's house on the sacred day, that they should there meet with their gracious Deliverer.

I. **The miracle.**—The sufferer made no application to Jesus for healing. She had come to the synagogue because it was her wont, and because the effort to reach it and share in its blessing was one of the ways in which she fought against the advance of her malady. Jesus saw her and singled her out for a signal instance of His mercy. The expression afterwards used when He turned the attention of the ruler and all the congregation to her case, shows how deeply and tenderly He had looked into it. "Lo!" he said, "see how long she has suffered." Her bent form and furrowed face were to Him as a book in which He read the story of her eighteen years' bondage and of her patient struggle to sustain her infirmity. Her faithful attendance on Divine worship, and perhaps other features, to which we have no clue in the narrative, lighted up to Him her genuine, religious, spiritual character. For by the title He gives her hardly anything so commonplace can be meant as merely that she was a Jewess. In all probability it was intended to point her out as one of that inner circle of pious, believing Israelites—the class to which belonged His own mother, the parents of the Baptist, Simeon and Anna—those, namely, "who were looking for the consolation of Israel." He called her to Him; He spoke the word of liberation; then He laid His hands upon her, and immediately she was cured. There were apparently two elements in the case to be dealt with; one physical—dorsal paralysis; the other nervous or mental—some infirmity which paralysed the will. With His word and touch together the cure was done. The word, majestic and commanding, proclaimed her free from the subtle bond, the root of the mischief, which chained her will. Then His hand laid on her, a sensible act to her faith, gave strength and suppleness to the disused muscles. As the woman rose erect from her long, sad bondage, her grateful piety broke forth in the instant into an irrepressible thanksgiving, a voluntary act of praise before all the people.

II. **The indignation of the ruler of the synagogue.**—The scene had become very offensive to the narrow mind of the presiding elder. The reputation of Jesus for piety and wisdom was by this time so universally acknowledged, that it

was no doubt practically impossible for the most prejudiced synagogue ruler to prevent His taking part in the service. Even the president of a Peræan country synagogue had not been able to do so. Jesus was already noted for having set aside Pharisaic opinion as to Sabbath work. This particular Pharisee had probably hoped that no conflict of opinion would arise on the occasion. But that in open congregation, in the place of worship where he ruled, the daring innovator should perform one of His Sabbath-breaking cures was too much for him. It quite overcame any little sense and proper feeling he possessed. He broke out into angry vituperation. Not daring to attack the Lord directly, nor even the thankful woman, in a covert and cowardly manner, he spoke at them both.

III. **Christ's defence of Himself.**—The Saviour answered him with a pungent and well-merited rebuke. "You reproach the people, but your quarrel is really with Me. You pretend to be zealous for the law, but you are only jealous of My work. You Pharisees deserve no credit for even conscientiously mistaken views about the sanctity of the seventh day. Your ideas of its observance are quite sane and sensible so soon as a question arises affecting your own material interests. You would have no scruples in relieving the wants of a suffering animal on that day by a certain amount of Sabbath labour. But when I loose from long years of Satanic bondage one of your human sisters, a daughter of the chosen family, and do it with no labour at all, you are filled with horror at the breach of the Sabbatic law." Such hypocrisy is its own complete self-exposure. But this trenchant reply of Jesus completely shuts the mouths of His adversaries, and brings the admiration of the hearers to a height; for not only the words He had spoken, but the glorious things He had done, filled them with joy. Let us note the spiritual lesson of the woman's story. She had come to her accustomed place in the synagogue in spite of all weariness and difficulty; and a blessed piece of work it was for her. Had she not gone that day to the place of worship, it is next to certain she had never met with Jesus. In the way of her usual waiting upon God—a troublesome routine it might have seemed to many—she got the blessing; not merely relief from her bodily chain, but, if we have read her character aright, the glorious liberty of those who saw in Christ Jesus the Lord's salvation. What good cheer is in the story for those who, amid bodily infirmities, mental oppression, or household burdens and afflictions—tempting them to defer their duty to God's house—find their way statedly thither! Every minister knows that these are often the most blest of all the company that gathers in God's house. For the Master of the house sees them and calls them to Him To the drooping spirit, to the burdened heart of those who come there just because He bids them, He oft comes, as it were, all unbidden, and makes them glad with an unexpected visitation.—*Laidlaw.*

SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS ON VERSES 10—17.

Ver. 10-17. *The Infirm Woman in the Synagogue.*—The third time our Lord, by a miracle of healing, stirred up the wrath of the ecclesiastical rulers at His supposed violation of the Sabbath-day.

I. **The danger of falling, all unconsciously, into formalism.**

II. **Often seeming zealous championship for the truth is really zeal for the promotion of our own theories and ideas.**

III. **Our Lord's five actions.**—He sees, calls, heals, touches, and lifts up this infirm woman. He does so still with infirm souls.—*Dover.*

A Scene in the Sanctuary.—I. **An exemplary worshipper.**

II. **An unlooked-for reward.**

III. **Pretended zeal for the Sabbath.**

IV. **Unanswerable rebuke.** — *W. Taylor.*

Christ's Treatment of Women.—There is great beauty in the behaviour of Christ to women, whether it be the woman of Samaria, whose deep wound He probes so faithfully, yet with so light a touch; or the child of Jairus, to whom He speaks in her own dialect, holding her hand; or the widow of Nain, whom He bids not to weep; or she whose many sins were forgiven her, loving much; or Mary, for whose lavish gift He found so pathetic an apology—"She hath done it unto My burial." This woman He would not heal from a distance, as though an alms was being flung to her; but neither was it for Him to attend upon her needlessly—such efforts that she can yet put forth must be made, and so He calls her to Him, lays His hand upon her, speaks kind words that name not the humiliating cause of her complaint; and even when the adverse criticism of the ruler requires Him to say all, His only thought of her is sympathetic—to Him she is honourable, as one of the holy race, and pitiful, as, to its owner, a helpless creature that needs drink on the Sabbath day. He will not refuse release and refreshment to His own. Satan had bound one who belonged by formal covenant to another, and Jesus dwelt with lingering pity on the long period of her thirst, whom He had led away to the watering.—*Chadwick.*

Ver. 11. *A Noble Character.*—The noble character of this woman is plainly indicated by a number of particulars stated concerning her:—

I. Her faith—for she is *a daughter of Abraham—i.e.*, not merely a Jewess, like the other women in the synagogue, but one of kindred spirit with her great ancestor.

II. Her steadfast resistance to the encroachments of her malady.

III. Her zeal in attending upon Divine worship.

IV. Her devout thankfulness, openly expressed, on being healed.

"*Spirit of infirmity.*"—Her sickness, having its first place in her spirit, had brought her into a moody, melancholic state, of which the outward contraction of the muscles of her body, the inability to lift herself, was but the sign and the consequence.—*Trench.*

"*Bowed together.*"—Probably she did not perceive that Jesus was present; but Jesus saw *her.*

Ver. 12. "*Loosed.*"—This expresses the setting free of her muscles from the power which bowed them down, and then (ver. 13) the laying on of the Divine hands confers upon her strength to rise and stand upright. It would be, in such a case, one thing to be loosed from the stiffening of years, and another to have strength at once conferred to stand upright.—*Alford.*

Ver. 13. "*He laid his hands on her.*"—The miracle is (1) a representation of the gracious work of Christ on the soul. 2. It is an illustration of the kindness of the Saviour to afflicted, weak, and contrite disciples.

Five Kindly Actions.—In the healing of this woman our Lord did five things: He compassionately *saw* her; He *called* her; He *healed* her; He *touched* her; and He *lifted her up.* Thus does He also perfectly cure a sinful soul. He sees it, in His compassion; He calls it, by His internal inspiration; He heals it, by remitting its sin; He touches it, by the afflictive chastenings of His hand. He raises it up to things above, in the warmth of Divine love.—*Ludolphus.*

Ver. 14. "*Answered with indignation.*"—The ruler of the synagogue is restrained, by some measure of awe, from openly attacking Jesus; He abstains also from directly rebuking the woman who had been healed, but most ridiculously reproves the innocent multitude. It is very significant that he admits the fact of healing.

Ver. 15. "*Loose his ox or his ass.*"—Our Lord varied, from time to time, the arguments with which He abolished the fanatical formalism of the Pharisees

respecting the Sabbath. Sometimes He appealed to His own inherent authority (John v. 17-19); sometimes to Scriptural precedents (chap. vi. 3-5), or to common-sense and eternal principles (*ibid.*, vi. 9). Here, as in chap. xiv. 5, He uses an *argumentum ad hominem*: they allowed men to loose and water their *cattle* on the Sabbath, to abridge a few hours' thirst; was, then, this suffering *woman* not to be *touched*, not to be *spoken to*, to end eighteen years of suffering?—*Farrar.*

Ver. 16. "*Ought not.*"—To the "ought" of ceremonial obligation (ver. 14) Christ opposes the "ought" of moral obligation—the Divine necessity of love.

There is here a Threefold Contrast:—

I. "Ox or ass" and "daughter of Abraham."

II. Fastened to the stall, and "bound by Satan."

III. A few hours of thirst and eighteen years of suffering.

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 18—21.

In these two parables our Lord sets forth a bright and cheering aspect of the future of the kingdom, exhibiting in the first of them its growth from small beginnings to great magnitude, and in the second its transforming influence on the mass in which it is deposited.

I. **Outward growth.**—The parable of the little mustard seed, as that of the sower, takes the process of vegetation as emblematic of the growth of the kingdom; but the sower barely appears, though His agency is part of the essence of the representation, and the place where the plant grows is "His garden." But the seed is now the kingdom itself, and the only points brought into notice are the contrasted smallness of the beginning and bulk of the growth at the end. Jesus does not speak as a botanist, but in popular language; and it is enough to know that the mustard seed was a common proverbial illustration of extreme minuteness, and that the herb was a miracle of growth as compared with its tiny origin. The application is too plain to need any interpretation. It strikes home at once to the many among the first listeners who had recoiled from the (as it seemed to them) dreadful down-come from the long-cherished national hopes to the obscure Galilæan peasant and His handful of followers. He stole into the world in a despised corner of a despised land. He gathered a few believers, spoke some gentle words, laid His hands on a few sick folk, and then died. What proud incredulity would have curled the lips of men of influence and culture in that day, if they had been pointed to Him and His disciples, and bidden to see there the mightiest force, destined to universal dominion! The lesson is not less needed now than then. God's great things have ever small beginnings, even as the seed of the "big trees" in California is smaller than that of many a much humbler conifer. The world's great things begin large and dwindle fast. We have to learn reverence for the smallest seed which has vitality, and confidence that the quantity, and still more the quality, of the life in the little black packet of latent possibility is not measured by its size. So we shall not be led away by vulgar admiration of the big, which we mistake for the great and Divine, nor discouraged and impatient if a heritage be not "gotten hastily at the beginning." The parable brings the small seed into sharp contrast with the large results, and implies the world-wide spread of the kingdom. The picturesque touch of the birds lighting on the branches is probably an allusion to Ezek. xvii. 23, and a definite prophecy of the coming of the nations to partake in its blessings. The fowls of the air sing among the branches. Souls weary of flight fold their tired wings, and find rest, shelter, and joy there.

II. **Inward change.**—The parable of the leaven completes the picture of the

growth of the kingdom by describing its inward operation, as the former does its outward growth. It spreads in space and increases in bulk; but it transforms inert matter into its own nature, and thus grows by assimilation. The eccentric interpretation of the leaven as the emblem of evil is disposed of by observing that it is the kingdom, and not its corruption, which is like unto leaven, and by remembering that the meal is improved, not spoiled, by it. The main lessons lie (1) in the *addition* of the leaven to the meal, teaching that the quickening influence comes from without; that, in a word, if human society is ever to contain a kingdom of heaven, and be transformed thereby, it must be imparted, not developed. They lie (2) in the *hiding* of the leaven, by which is taught the same truth of secret beginnings as in the former parable. They lie (3) in the *manner* of the leaven's working, which is fermentation. So the gospel stirs up movement in the dead man. Christ comes to bring peace at the end, but He must first bring a sword. Leaven works from within outwards. The gospel is planted in the depths of the individual spirit, and gradually permeates the whole being. It works underground in society, and only re-models institutions as the result of having remodelled men. The lesson lies further in the assimilative power of the leaven, which changes each particle of the meal, and, by means of each in turn, transmits the transforming power to the outer unleavened particles. It lies, finally, in hopes suggested by that "till the whole was leavened," which foretells the permeating of the mass with quickening influence, and the complete assimilation of the individual to it.—*Maclaren.*

SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS ON VERSES 18—21.

The Kingdom of God.

I. **Its rapid growth.**

II. **Its transforming power.**

Emblems of the Kingdom.

I. **Lessons from the mustard seed.**—1. Its personal teaching. 2. Its prophetical teaching.

II. **Lessons from the leaven.**—1. The source of grace. 2. The secrecy of its workings. 3. The certainty of its success.— *W. Taylor.*

The Kingdom of God.

I. **Its gradual extension.**—Our Lord corrects the fatal error of His countrymen, that the kingdom of God would come as a sudden outbreak of Divine power. It is to grow, from small beginnings, in the hearts of men. How gradual it is in the individual we know from sad experience. How gradual among the nations the observation of eighteen hundred years has shown us. Yet we must never despair. Seed has in it the germ of life, a power of endless development, and is certain to fulfil in God's own time its marvellous destination.

II. **Its secret growth.**—Not to be inaugurated by pomp and circumstance, or by the literal appearance of the Son of Man in the clouds of heaven. Jesus corrects this error in the parable of the leaven. He teaches the quiet, unobtrusive character of true religion—how unnoticeable is its first infusion; how far beneath the human eye its growth. Religion is a hidden life, and it works spontaneously, by its own secret vitality, till it leavens the whole mass of society.—*Griffith.*

Fulfilment of the Prophecies here Contained.

I. The way in which these parabolic prophecies of the spread of the gospel have already been fulfilled is a proof of its divinity.

II. These parables open up delightful views of the future history of the Church, and furnish us with a call and an encouragement to exert ourselves for the universal diffusion of the gospel.—*Foote.*

Increase of Bulk and Change of Character.—In the one parable, that of the Mustard Seed, the kingdom is conceived of as a visible society, which is susceptible of increase in its bulk by addition to the number of its membership. In the other parable, that of the Leaven, the kingdom is conceived of as a moral or spiritual power, which is susceptible of increase in the transforming influence which it exerts on those who are subject to its operation. —*Bruce.*

The Conversion of the World.

I. The process is to take its rise from small and very unpromising beginnings, and yet shall prevail speedily to a vast extent.

II. The change is to be wrought by pacific means only, without the intervention of any force or violence whatsoever.

The Mustard Seed.

There are three great chapters in the history of Christ's kingdom.

I. **The germ.**—It is something new. It is small at first.

II. **The growth.**

III. **The glory.**—The kingdom is one, though belonging to all ages and nations. It is a world-wide kingdom. It blesses and only blesses. It will yet become very great. We may be very hopeful about the future of the kingdom. —*Wells.*

Mustard Seed.

I. **The kingdom of heaven: its apparent insignificance.**

II. **Its vitality.**

III. **Its future grandeur.**

Leaven.

I. The **kind** of change which Christianity works in the world.

II. The **method** by which this change is wrought.

The Kingdom of God has Two Kinds of Power.

I. A power of **extension**, by which it gradually embraces all peoples, and—

II. A power of **transformation**, by which it renews gradually the whole of human life. The natural symbol of the first is a seed, which in a brief space of time attains an increase disproportioned to its small size at first; that of the second, a small portion of leaven, which is capable of exerting its regenerative influence upon a large mass.—*Godet.*

Vitality and Influence.

I. Inherent vitality; development from within.

II. Contagious influence; a change wrought from acquiring a new force from without.

Progress and Growth.

I. Progress from a small beginning to a glorious consummation.

II. The cause of growth—the inherent, unquenchable life of the kingdom.

III. The manner of growth—silent, secret, unobserved.

Hopefulness and Patience Inculcated. —These parables inculcate (1) hopefulness, and (2) patience amid circumstances fitted to breed despondency and discouragement.

Vers. 18, 19. I. **General reference.** —In the *general* sense, the insignificant beginnings of the kingdom are set forth; the little babe cast in the manger at Bethlehem; the Man of Sorrows, with no place to lay His head; the crucified One; or, again, the hundred and twenty names who were the seed of the Church after the Lord had ascended. Then we have the kingdom of God waxing onward and spreading its branches here and there, and different nations coming unto it.

II. **Individual reference.**—The *individual* application of the parable points to the small beginnings of Divine grace; a word, a thought, a passing

sentence, may prove to be the little seed which eventually fills and shadows the whole heart and being, and calls all thoughts, all passions all delights, to come and shelter under it.—*Alford.*

Ver. 19. "*A tree.*"—The greatness of size attained by the mustard plant in the East causes it to rank as a tree as compared with garden herbs, though not as a great tree as compared with other trees.

"*Lodged in the branches.*"—Christ's kingdom shall attract multitudes by the shelter and protection which it offers; shelter, as it has often proved, from worldly oppression, shelter from the great power of the devil. Itself a tree of life whose leaves are for medicine and whose fruit for food, all who need the healing of their soul's hurts, all who need the satisfying of their soul's hunger, shall betake themselves to it.—*Trench.*

The Lesson of the Parable.—The lesson of the parable obviously is: (1) that the kingdom of heaven was to be, and was, small and apparently insignificant in its beginning; but (2) that it was to rise into a magnitude that would far overtop all rival institutions. The Jews expected that it would begin as a full-grown tree, and they were scandalised at the apparent insignificance of our Lord's position and following.

Vers. 19-21. "*A man . . . a woman.*"—The two actions of sowing seed and of making bread are appropriated and assigned to a man and a woman respectively, in accordance with the different occupations usually followed by those of each sex. Any identification of the woman with the Church is therefore out of the question.

Vers. 20, 21. I. **General reference.**—In the penetrating of the whole mass of humanity, by degrees, by the influence of the Spirit of God, so strikingly witnessed in the earlier ages by the dropping of heathen customs and worship—in modern times more gradually and secretly advancing, but still to be plainly seen in the various abandonments of criminal and unholy practices (as, *e.g.*, in our own time of slavery and duelling, and the increasing abhorrence of war among Christian men), and without doubt in the end to be signally and universally manifested.

II. **Individual reference.**—In the transforming power of the "new leaven" on the whole being of individuals. In fact, the parable does nothing less than set forth to us the mystery of regeneration, both in its first act, which can be but once, as the leaven is but once hidden, and also in the consequent renewal of the Holy Spirit, which, as the ulterior working of the leaven, is continual and progressive.—*Alford.*

Ver. 21. "*It is like leaven.*"—The leaven—1. Only acts upon meal—it would produce no effect upon sand—so there is an affinity between the gospel and man's nature. 2. It penetrates to every part of the mass in which it is placed. 3. It operates gradually. 4. It produces a wholesome change—renders the meal more suitable for food.

"*Took and hid.*"—"Took" from without, "and hid"—*i.e.*, put it where it seemed lost in the larger mass.

"*The whole was leavened.*"—1. The whole heart of each man (1 Cor. x. 5). 2. The whole world (xxiv. 47).

A Secret Influence.—The gospel has such a secret, invisible influence on the hearts of men—to change them and affect them, and all the actions that flow from them—that it is fitly resembled to leaven; so mixed thoroughly with the whole that, although it appeareth not in any part visibly, yet every part hath a tincture from it.—*Hammond.*

A Permanent Change.—Just as it is impossible that the leaven, after it is once mixed with the dough, can ever again be separated from it, because it has changed the nature of the dough; in like manner it is impossible that Christians can be severed from Christ.

The Spiritual Leaven.

I. Christ, the Son of God, became man and dwelt among us.

II. Converted men, women, and children, are let into the openings of corrupt humanity, and hidden in its heart.—*Arnot.*

"*Leavened.*"—The parable indicates that the influence is internal and noiseless, not dependent upon external organisation so much as upon quiet personal agency and example, since the leaven transforms the dough lying next, until it is all leavened.—*Popular Commentary.*

"*The whole.*"—1. The individual. 2. The family. 3. Society at large.

The Two Main Ideas Illustrated by the Parable are—(1) that the kingdom of heaven, when Divinely introduced into the mass, did not attract attention, but (2) it began silently to operate, and will continue to operate until the whole of human society is brought under its influence.

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 22—30.

The question, "Lord, are there few that be saved?" might in itself be the anxious inquiry of a devout mind, animated by a true love for others. But the tone of Christ's reply inclines one to conclude that the question had been inspired by frivolous curiosity. Our Lord does not say anything as to the number of the saved, but He speaks of "*many* who will seek to enter into the kingdom of heaven and not be able." The reasons for this state of matters are that the door of entrance is narrow, and exertion is needed for pressing in at it, and that one day the door will be shut. From the nature of the reply which Christ makes we are justified in concluding that the man who put the question had no doubt about his own salvation, and trusted in his privileges, as a son of Abraham, as raising him above all danger of losing the inheritance of eternal life. Our Lord, however, warns him and all who were present of the conditions on which entrance into the kingdom of heaven is based, and of the danger of being excluded from it. He uses the familiar figure of a feast to which guests are invited, and describes the attitude taken up by the Master of the house towards guests and towards would-be guests.

I. **The Master of the house.**—This can be no other than Himself, for in ver. 26 He speaks of eating and drinking at the tables of men, and of teaching in the streets of their cities. We note, therefore, the contrast which He implies as existing between the relations which He then held with men and those which one day He would assume. Now He is an ambassador from God, persuading men to be reconciled to Him, and laying the foundation of a lasting peace between heaven and earth. But a time will come when He will sternly banish from His presence those who have refused to accept Him as their Lord, and to obey His commands. The supreme authority to open and shut the door of the kingdom of heaven, which He here claims, is in striking contrast to His present circumstances. There is at first something repellent in the sternness of attitude which He represents Himself as assuming towards some who will seek to enter in. But a moment's consideration convinces us that there is nothing unjust or unduly harsh in His procedure. Those whom He excludes are the self-righteous and hypocritical—those who, under a guise of discipleship, have been "workers of iniquity" (ver. 27). The very idea of such persons being admitted, without

undergoing a change of character—for in their supposed dialogue with Him they do not seem to recognise the necessity for any such change—is utterly absurd. Heaven would cease to be heaven if the ungodly were received indiscriminately into it. However sad, therefore, it is to think of any of us excluded from it, we cannot accuse the Master of the house as manifesting injustice in the course which He takes. On the contrary, we see His broad and generous love displayed in the invitation given to all who dwell in the earth to press into the kingdom. Not alone from the favoured nation of Israel, but from east and west, north and south, does He anticipate receiving guests at the heavenly banquet.

II. **The guests who obtain admittance.**—They are those who "strive"—those who are really in earnest in religion and put forth their whole strength to secure entrance into the kingdom of heaven. They realise the greatness of the blessings which it implies, and are determined to make them their own; they discern the obstacles that lie in the way of the fulfilment of their desire, and resolutely overcome them. Such obstacles consist in the weakness of the carnal nature, which cannot for long continue in any holy enterprise; in the temptations which beset the life; and in the severe requirements of the law of God. But those who are found worthy to enter the kingdom of heaven recognise their own weakness, and in humility rely upon Divine strength; they trust, not in themselves, but in their Saviour and God. Hence, though the door into the kingdom is too narrow to admit the self-righteous and unbelieving, it allows those who draw near in humility and faith to enter in. "To strive" implies not only great, but also *sustained* effort—an attitude and endeavour steadily maintained from day to day. Religion, therefore, is not merely a mood belonging to special times and occupations, but it is an influence that should tell upon every department of the life. While doing *many* things, the Christian can still be bent upon doing the *one* thing; in all that engages his attention and employs his powers he can find opportunity for honouring and serving God. Genuine holiness is a distinguishing mark of those who are guests in the heavenly kingdom. It is the result of their humility and faith and endeavour, and qualifies them to partake in those spiritual blessings which God has reserved for them that love Him.

III. **The would-be guests who are excluded.**—They seem to be excluded by the will of the Master of the house, but they are really self-excluded. They have not *striven*, and therefore have failed to find entrance. In other words, they have not been in earnest in religion—they have been content with merely professing devotion to Christ, and have all through been "workers of iniquity." They claim to know Christ, but *He* does not know them as belonging to Him. Another master has had them in his service, and from him they must receive their recompense. The knowledge of Christ upon which they lay such stress is merely external. They have been in His presence, but have not been in communion with Him; they have heard His voice, but have not obeyed His word. The privileges they have enjoyed, but by which they have not profited, turn to their condemnation. Those who thought highly of themselves, and stood prominently forward as professed disciples, find themselves on their true level at the last—and in a low place. Others, upon whom they may have looked with contempt, come to the front, and are welcomed to the feast, from which they are excluded. And how great will be the misery of those who are thus "thrust out" Christ hints in the significant phrase, "there shall be the weeping and the gnashing of teeth"—sorrow and pain, in comparison with which all other emotions and sensations of that type are as nothing. It is in mercy that Christ reveals the suffering to which those who reject God and goodness doom themselves; He draws aside the veil that we may be warned, and may take advantage of the day of grace and of the offer of salvation.

SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS ON VERSES 22—30.

Vers. 22-30. *Who may Enter the Kingdom?*

I. **Few or many?** An idle and useless question.

II. **None enter without personal effort.**

III. **Some will never enter.**

IV. **Some will be too late in seeking to enter.**

V. **Some will enter from unexpected quarters.**—*Taylor.*

Ver. 23. "*Are there few that be saved?*"—The inquirer was evidently doubtful as to whether many would be saved, but had no doubt that he himself would be saved. Many, like him, are very much interested in questions of religion which have no direct bearing upon conduct, but are merely speculative. Christ here refuses to gratify a prurient curiosity, and advises arduous endeavours to enter into the kingdom of God.

How the Question may be Asked.—This question may (1) be asked *haughtily* by one who has his mind made up on the point, and is prepared to contradict a reply which does not meet with his approval. (2) It may be uttered *good-naturedly*, with vague good wishes and hopes on behalf of self and others. (3) It may be proposed with a measure of *anxiety* and godly fear.

What Sort rather than How Many.—It rather concerns us to know *what sort* of persons will be saved, than *how many* or *how few*.

Ver. 24-30. *The Necessity for Striving.*

I. The duty of earnest and strenuous diligence in religious life.

II. The reason for this duty.—Every one may be saved, but many will not, through their own fault. Many who think they are secure of a place in the kingdom will find themselves shut out (vers. 24-28). While others, who might be supposed, from their meagre advantages, to be unprepared for it, will find an entrance into it.

Ver. 24, 25. **Two great dangers.**

I. **The door is a narrow one.**—Too narrow to admit those who are burdened with sinful habits, and those who are puffed up with a trust in their self-righteousness.

II. **The door will one day be shut.**—The time of probation will draw to an end; the offer of mercy which has been slighted will be withdrawn.

Ver. 24. "*Strive.*"—1. By earnest prayer. 2. By strenuous resistance to temptation. 3. By avoiding all occasions of sin. 4. By attending diligently on every means of grace.

"*Strive to enter.*"—Difficulties in our way.

I. From our own natural state. 1. Ignorance. 2. Unbelief. 3. Aversion to good, and proneness to evil.

II. From the nature of a religious life, it requires—1. Faith. 2. Repentance. 3. Mortification of sinful desires. 4. Self-denial.

III. From the opposition of enemies.

"*The strait gate.*"

I. **Where does it stand?**—Not above the sky; it is here on earth, at the entrance of the path to the mansion.

II. **The difference between striving and seeking.**—It is a real distinction. There may be seeking without striving, inquiry without eagerness.

III. **The inability of many to enter.** This has nothing to do with the purposes of the Most High, but only with the strength of man. The strength of nature is perfect weakness in the mortal struggle; but how fully, how sufficiently, has help been provided!—*Smith.*

"*Will seek to enter in,*" etc.—Where *striving* is necessary, mere *seeking* or

desiring will not avail. Entrance is refused (1) to those also who seek too late (Prov. i. 28, 29; Isa. 1-15; John vii. 34; Heb. xii. 17), and (2) to those seek to come in by other ways than by the one Door (John x. 9, xiv. 6).

"*Not be able.*"—1. Because they seek half-heartedly. 2. Or seek in the wrong way. 3. Or seek too late.

An Exhortation and a Warning.

I. **Strive.**—Lit. "agonise," obey and fulfil the holy will of God, whatever struggles or sacrifices may be involved in so doing—put forth the intensest effort of which you are capable.

II. **Many will seek and not be able.**—Many, indeed all, have a desire to be admitted into heaven, but only some are willing to undertake the arduous labour which is needed to secure entrance into that kingdom.

"*Seek . . . and not be able.*"—Some seek admission into the favour of God and eternal happiness without conversion, or faith in the Divine Saviour; others seek the blessing in a slothful manner, or in the use of such means as God has never appointed; others, with reserves for their worldly interest, reputation, or sinful pleasures, or for avoiding reproach or persecution. In these and similar ways, many come short of salvation, notwithstanding convictions, temporary seriousness and earnestness, and partial reformation. But it is by procrastination especially that men "will seek to enter in and not be able."—*Scott.*

"*Hath shut to the door.*"—He who will not open the door of his heart in this life to the Saviour when He knocks, will knock in vain there for the Saviour to open His door to him.

Ground for Suspecting that we are not Striving.—If my religion is only a formal compliance with those modes of worship which are in fashion where I live; if it cost me no pain or trouble; if it lays me under no rules or restraint; if I have no careful thoughts and sober reflections about it;—is it not great weakness to think that I am *striving to enter in at the strait gate?*—*Law.*

Unseasonable Seeking.—It is not the weakness of the endeavour which is blamed, but its being *out of season*, the right time having been squandered away. This is represented as not less culpable, nor less extreme in the dangerous nature of its consequences, than the want of all effort. He who has not sowed in spring must expect no success, how earnestly soever he labours in harvest.—*Olshausen.*

Vers. 25-27. *A Note of Warning*—

I. No nearness of external communion with Christ will avail at the Great Day, in place of that "holiness without which no man shall see the Lord."

II. The *style* which Christ announces that He will then assume—that of absolute Disposer of men's eternal destinies—and contrast this with His "despised and rejected" condition when He uttered these words.—*Brown.*

Fruitless Seeking.—These verses contain two examples of fruitless and vain seeking to enter—

I. They knock and call, but too late.

II. They appeal, but in vain, to their acquaintance with the master of the house. Observe the striking climax: first, standing some time without, then knocking, then calling, finally reminding of former acquaintance; but all in vain.

Ver. 25. "*When once the Master,*" *etc.*—Awfully sublime and vivid picture. At present He is represented as in a *sitting* posture, as if calmly looking on to see who will "strive" while entrance is practicable. But this is to have an end, by the great Master of the house Himself rising and shutting the door, after which there will be no admittance.—*Brown.*

The Closed Door.—A reason why this striving is so important: because there will be a day when the gate will be *shut*. The figure is the usual one, of a feast, at which the householder entertains (in this case) the members of his family. These being assembled, he rises and shuts the door, and none are afterwards admitted.—*Alford.*

Ver. 26. *Eaten and Drunk in Thy Presence.*—1. External acts of communion with Christ. 2. Outward privileges enjoyed. Neither of these will avail us if in the meantime we have been workers of iniquity.

"*In thy presence.*"—Very different from the drinking "with you" of which He speaks in Matt. xxvi. 29, and from the "I will sup with him and he with Me" in Rev. iii. 20.

"*Taught in our streets.*"—1. Salvation brought very near. 2. The absence of the disposition of heart which would lead to receiving His words and doing them.

Claiming a Right.—The earnestness is not that of those seeking for mercy, but of those claiming a right, and basing their claim on something merely external.

Ver. 27. "*Workers of iniquity.*"—Those in the employ of, and receiving the wages of, unrighteousness.

Ver. 28, 29. *Many in the Kingdom of God.*—In these verses the real answer to the question of ver. 23 is given: "They shall be *many*, but what is that to you, if you be not among them?"

Ver. 28. "*Weeping and gnashing of teeth.*"—1. Sorrow at the loss of privileges and blessings. 2. Rage at seeing others enter on the possession of them.

Ver. 30. "*Last which shall be first,*" *etc.*—1. Those disadvantageously placed, who overcome obstacles in their way. 2. Those highly privileged, who do not avail themselves of the opportunities within their reach. The Church at Jerusalem, and the Oriental Churches, furnish illustrations of the latter.

"*First which shall be last.*"—Prodigals often repent, and get before decent moralists; the Gentile converts obtained the priority to the Jewish nation; splendid hypocrites apostatise, and open persecutors become preachers of the gospel, and those who have been the grief and reproach of families and neighbourhoods, sometimes become their chief credit and blessing; whilst plausible characters are by this very circumstance rendered more inveterate against the truth.—*Scott.*

An Encouragement and a Warning.—1. An encouragement to those called late in life. 2. A solemn warning to those called early, urging them to be humble and ever mindful of their unworthiness before God, lest they be overtaken by others, or forfeit their reward altogether.

They must be on their guard against trusting to appearances or to the permanence of present circumstances and conditions: priority in time is not necessarily priority in position.

"This word should strike terror into the heart of the greatest saints" (*Luther*).

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 31—35.

Courage and Compassion.—There could be no doubt of the hypocritical character of the concern which these Pharisees manifested for the safety of Jesus, or of the enmity of the prince whose designs were now disclosed to our Lord. Yet he was not intimidated by the news conveyed to Him, nor did He break off His beneficent labours to save Himself by flight. His reply was animated by a calm dignity and an heroic courage. "So far from being interrupted in My ministry by any tidings you bring, be they false or true, by your wish or by

Herod's wish, to be rid of My presence at once, I shall proceed on My way. I shall do as before I have done. I shall put forth My powers, casting out devils, healing sick for the present, for the future; and only at a remoter period will My life and course reach their appointed end." Nor was it that He refused to believe that a violent end was in store for Him. He knew that He should die in that city to which He was now journeying, and His heart was filled with grief—not at the thought of His own sufferings and death, but at the thought of all the miseries which rejection of Him would draw down upon her—miseries against which He would fain have protected her. This union of unshaken courage with infinite tenderness is very wonderful and affecting, and make the lamentation which He uttered over Jerusalem one of the most pathetic passages which history contains. These words of Christ are full of instruction and warning.

I. **We, too, need to be on our guard against the craft and malice of enemies.**—We are exposed to the wiles of one who but seeks to allure and to drive us from following the path of duty, and whose subtilty and malice we cannot by our own strength overcome. Our own hearts are only too apt to betray us, by becoming allies of our enemies, and by trying to persuade us to avoid the risks which fidelity to God seems to involve. Our true safety lies in our having that wisdom which will enable us to discern the snare of the enemy, under whatever guise it may be concealed, and in our committing our souls to God in well-doing as unto a faithful Creator.

II. **The serenity and courage of Christ should be an example to us.**—He was not to be deterred from the path of duty by the menaces of enemies or by the solicitations of weak friends. He continued to prosecute His work faithfully and boldly, notwithstanding every threat and danger. Let us, then, persevere in the path of duty, and believe that God will restrain the wrath of men, and bring us safely through every danger, until our appointed time arrives. The place, time, and manner of our death are in God's hand, and, like those of Christ, are determined. It is good, too, that, like Him, we should regard the period of our life here as short, that we may be diligent in doing the work that lies before us; and that we should regard death, not as interrupting, but as completing, our course.

III. **The expostulation with those who had resisted His invitations is full of significance for us.**—It implies very real and great dangers to which we are exposed. He would not have spoken in such solemn tones of the protection He would have afforded to those who now rejected Him, if dangers of the most terrible kind did not threaten them. The judgments of God upon the doomed city, the penalties of a broken law, the punishment due to those who have wilfully rejected the salvation brought near to them—are all in His mind's eye as He speaks these words. And the same dangers of being cut off in sin and being overwhelmed in sudden and hopeless ruin still hang over those who are impenitent. His words distinctly imply, also, that all who betake themselves to His protection are safe, and that He is ready to receive even the worst of those who have despised and rejected Him, if only they will betake themselves to Him in humility and penitence. In many ways He warns us of our danger—in the expostulations of conscience, in the invitations of the gospel, and in the events of life, which are all governed by His providence, and which daily illustrate the wrath of God against sin, and the blessedness of obedience to Him. He points out, too, in this utterance, the true reason of rejection of salvation: "Ye would not." However we may deceive ourselves, aversion of heart is the secret of refusal to accept Christ as a Saviour. "Ye will not come unto Me, that ye might have life." And, finally, He warns His hearers of a time when He will return, clothed with Divine power and authority, to judge the world, and when all must meet Him face to face. Only those who receive Him will then welcome Him, and say, "Blessed be He that cometh in the name of the Lord."

SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS ON VERSES 31—35.

Vers. 31-35. *The Saviour and His Adversaries.*

I. We may learn from this passage the craft and malice of the enemies of the gospel and of our salvation.

II. The example of Christ should teach and encourage us not to be deterred from the path of duty by any threatenings of enemies or misgivings of weak friends.

III. It teaches that Christ was, indeed, perfected by His sufferings—perfected as a Saviour for us.

IV. He here appears as expostulating with those who have hitherto resisted His invitations.

Vers. 31, 32. "*Herod will kill thee.*"—Our Lord not merely gave an answer to the Pharisees, which would have been enough if their word of alarm had been a mere audacious lie, devised by themselves, but charged them to take back His reply to Herod—"that fox," that creature of cunning and deceit. As for the menace to His life, Jesus despised it. He was going up to Jerusalem, knowing that He would be killed. But Herod could not kill Him. The Prophet could not die but at Jerusalem. The metaphor here was meant to express that the Lord Jesus saw through and despised the cunning wiles of the Tetrarch. The man was a selfish intriguer, neither good nor strong, but cunning, subservient—a jackal to the imperial lion at Rome. The epithet is certainly a startling one. It must have sounded to the Pharisees like the crack of a whip. But there is no need to apologise for it, as though it were unworthy of Him who was meek and lowly in heart, and as if it had fallen from His lips incautiously. It was calmly spoken. It expressed a just feeling of scorn for a tricky and crafty character. There is a contempt that is noble, as well as a contempt that is ignoble. Noble scorn may dwell in the heart along with tender compassion and fervent love. That man cannot be the disciple of Christ who breathes intrigue and practises deceit. Those who please Him are men of simple faith and honest purpose. Without these a man is liable to be described by the Lord's withering epithet, "that fox."—*Fraser.*

"*Depart hence.*"—It was in the interest of the Pharisees to see Jesus depart into Judæa, where he would fall under the power of the Sanhedrim. And it also suited Herod best for Jesus to quit his territories; for, on the one hand, the excitement which His presence caused among the people was bound to disturb him; and, on the other hand, he was certainly unwilling to burden his conscience by adding another murder to that of the Baptist. Jesus, however, knew the Pharisees too well to believe that they were interested in His welfare, and recognised in the message they brought a plot in which Herod was chief conspirator. His reply contains a severe but merited rebuke: "Not daring to show the teeth ef the lion, thou hast recourse to the tricks of the fox."—*Godet.*

Vers. 32-35. "*I do cures to-day and to-morrow.*"—The words may be paraphrased as follows: "I have to exercise My blessed office for a certain time. For this time, however, I must walk and work, and no power can touch Me (Mine hour is not yet come); but in Jerusalem it will come, and then will ye gain power over Me. Your victory, however, will be your ruin, and Him whom ye shall have rejected, ye shall never more behold till the day of His final return."

A Revelation of the Saviour's Heart.

I. Jesus displays His perfect knowledge of what is in man as He unveils the cunning and hypocrisy of His enemies.

II. He manifests a holy serenity in carrying on His beneficent labours,

though he is conscious that a cruel death awaits Him in the near future.

III. He laments over the miseries which His enemies are preparing for themselves by their rejection of Him.

IV. He anticipates with joy the last and most glorious scene of all, when Israel will repent of her unbelief, and receive Him as her Saviour and Lord.

Vers. 32, 33. "*Go ye, and tell.*"—Christ's reply is addressed—1. To Herod. Be reassured: My activity, which consists in ministering to the suffering, is drawing to an end: three days only remain—but those three days, no one, not even thou, mayest cut short. 2. To the Pharisees. They, too, may reassure themselves: their victim will not escape them; He is on the way to the city which has ever been the murderess of the prophets.

Ver. 32. "*That fox.*"—Distinguished by craftiness, and malice, and cowardice. Herod probably did not wish to kill Jesus, but to get Him out of His territory. To threaten thus without really purposing to carry out the threat, and to use Pharisees, his opponents, to report the threat, is the cunning of "that fox."

The Message to Herod.—"Tell him from Me that My times are set in the eternal counsel of God, and when My prefixed time is accomplished for My labours and sufferings I shall, in spite of all the opposition of earth and hell, be perfected and enjoy My full glory."—*Hall.*

Respect for Rulers.—There is no need to seek to clear our Saviour from the appearance of having violated the law which forbade speaking evil of the ruler of the people (Exod. xxii. 11-28). The prophets all along had no hesitation in severely reproving kings and princes. Thus Elijah tells Ahab that it was he that troubled Israel, and Isaiah calls the rulers of the Jews "rulers of Sodom and princes of Gomorrah." Much more might He who had sent the prophets use like freedom in rebuking sin.

Lamb-like Patience, Lion-like Courage.—Over against the fox, the Saviour appears in lamb-like patience, but also in lion-like courage.—*Van Oosterzee.*

Ver. 33. "*The third day I shall be perfected.*"

I. Christ's clear vision of the successive steps of His work yet remaining.

II. His calm and deliberate purpose to go through with His work, unmoved by the menaces of His enemies.

III. His consciousness of the rapid march of events—of His death now not far off.

"*I must walk,*" *i.e.*, "depart" (as in ver. 31), or "go on my journey." Christ was, indeed, journeying out of Herod's territory, but not because of Herod's threat. So far from being scared away by fear of death, He knew that in the city to which He journeyed He would meet certain death.

"*It cannot be.*"—There would be a certain moral unfitness, a violation of custom, in the murder of a prophet anywhere but in Jerusalem. The words are instinct with a terrible irony.

John the Baptist had indeed been an exception to the rule; he had not been slain in Jerusalem. But that city could scarcely allow its monopoly to be again infringed upon, and that within so short a space of time.

Vers. 34, 35. *The Lamentation of Love.*—We have here a typical exhibition of grace: 1. *Indiscriminate grace.* 2. *Inviting grace.* 3. *Ineffectual grace.*

Ver. 34. "*Them that are sent.*"—Not treating the ambassadors of God as clothed with that inviolable sanctity which protects from injury the ambassadors of an earthly sovereign.

"*As a hen.*"—The similitude condescendingly employed by our Saviour

is one of the homeliest possible, but inexpressibly felicitous and significant. It graphically represents the Saviour's intense and tender solicitude and desire. How lofty, too, the self-consciousness which it bespeaks! The whole of the Jews belonged to Him as His brood. He *could* cover and protect them all. He could do, too, without them, although He longed after them; but they could not do without Him.—*Morison.*

Protection Withdrawn.—Like a bird of prey which hovers in the air above its victim, the enemy threatens the inhabitants of Jerusalem. Jesus, who had, up to this, been sheltering them under His wings, as a hen her chickens, withdraws; they remain exposed and are reduced to defend themselves. Such is the representation of matters given here.—*Godet.*

The Hen and Chickens. — Christ's word carries such intrinsic dignity that we do not need to fear the familiarity of the metaphor. The words express Christ's feeling for the people of Jerusalem in view of their city's hastening doom. Coming after words of stern warning, this saying reveals a most pathetic sorrow. Remember how complete was His knowledge of the sin of Jerusalem. He recalled its past blood-guiltiness. He foresaw its coming treatment of Himself and His apostles. Yet He lamented over it, and His compassion yearned to rescue its people from destruction. His repeated visits, at personal risk, had been fruitless. They would not come to Him that they might have life. To this day the relations subsisting between Jesus Christ and the Jewish nation at large throughout the world may be expressed in His own words, "I would, but ye would not."

I. **The illustration employed implies that the danger was at hand.**—Perdition is imminent. Christ is a present Helper to those who come to Him.

II. **How simple the way of salvation!**—How sure and perfect the defence! Those who trust in the Saviour are completely covered by His righteousness and strength.

III. **It is a grief to Christ to have His offer of salvation slighted.**—No one knows as He does the awfulness of the doom from which He rescues His people, or their weakness and helplessness before the impending judgment.

IV. **What joy of faith and restfulness of love are under the covert of Christ's wings!**—There His people dwell together in unity. Loved of the Saviour, they learn to love one another.—*Fraser.*

"*And ye would not.*"—The teaching of Scripture regarding the *will* includes the following points:—

I. Whether men are to be saved or lost hinges entirely upon their own will: "*ye would not.*"

II. The will of man is utterly indisposed and disabled from yielding to Christ (John vi. 44).

III. When the will is effectually gained, and salvation thus obtained, it is in consequence of a Divine operation upon it (Phil. ii. 13). How the fact of the Divine action is to be reconciled with our freedom is left unsolved, and perhaps will always remain so.

Eternal Blessings Lost only with Our Consent.—A man may lose the things of this life against his will; but, if he loses eternal blessings, he does so with his own consent.—*Augustine.*

Ver. 35. "*Your house*"—*i.e.*, the Temple: but *their* house now, not the Lord's.

"*Desolate.*"—Deserted of its Divine Inhabitant—a spiritual ruin to be followed by material ruin.

"*Your house is left.*"—By these words Jesus frees Himself from the charge laid upon Him by His Father—viz., the salvation of His people. He is in exactly the same circumstances as the Divine Shepherd represented in the

picture which Zechariah draws of the last attempt which Jehovah makes to save the flock appointed to the slaughter (Zech. xi. 10-14).

"*Until the time.*"—Until that day, the subject of all prophecy, when the repentant people shall turn with true and loyal hosannas and blessings to greet "Him whom they have pierced" (Deut. iv. 30, 31; Hos. iii. 4, 5; Zech. xii. 10, xiv. 8-11).

CHAPTER XIV.

CRITICAL NOTES.

VER. 1. **One of the chief Pharisees.**—Rather, "one of the rulers of the Pharisees" (R.V.). The phrase is a peculiar one, since the Pharisees, as such, had no rulers; it may refer to some influential Rabbi, or to some member of the Sanhedrim. **To eat bread.**—The Jews were accustomed to give feasts on the Sabbath (all the food having been cooked the day before), and in the writings of the early Fathers there are many allusions to sumptuous eating and drinking among the wealthier Jews on that day. (Cf. Neh. viii. 9-12; Tobit ii. 1.) The phrase "to eat bread" is a Hebraism which is often used to denote "to feast," "to make good cheer." **They watched Him.**—Rather, "they were watching Him" (R.V.). It would seem as if they went further and laid a trap to ensnare Jesus. The man with the dropsy seems not to have been a guest, but to have been planted among the company in the sight of Jesus. This appears from the phrase (ver. 2) "before Him," and (ver. 4) "let Him go"—as of dismissing him from the room.

Ver. 3. **And Jesus answering.**—*I.e.*, knowing their thoughts and, replying to them, though they were unexpressed (cf. v. 22). **Is it lawful?**—They were in a dilemma; for if they answered in the negative they exposed themselves to an overwhelming retort like that given in chap. xiii. 15, while if they answered in the affirmative their whole case against Jesus would fall to the ground.

Ver. 4. **Held their peace.**—And even thus could not avoid giving an answer to the question. They did not forbid the miracle, by declaring that it was unlawful to heal on the Sabbath day. **Took Him.**—*I.e.*, took hold of Him, laid His hands upon him.

Ver. 5. **An ass or an ox.**—The balance of evidence is about equal in favour of "a son or an ox," or "an ass or an ox." The R.V. retains the latter in the text and relegates the former to the margin. The natural connection between "ass" and "ox" (cf. xiii. 15) may account for that reading. The other is a more difficult reading, and therefore more likely to have been the original one, according to a well-known canon of criticism. The reading "son" suggests two different kinds of ownership—"one of your children, or even one of your cattle." **Fallen into a pit.**—Rather, "into a well" (R.V.). There is a certain analogy between the disease and the accident—dropsy, and death by drowning. **Pull him out.**—Rather, "draw him up" (R.V.).

Ver. 6. **Could not answer Him.**—Silent, but not convinced: obstinacy and spiritual pride sealed their minds against the force of His reasoning.

Ver. 7. **Put forth a parable.**—The miracle was wrought, evidently, before the feast began. From the emulation among the guests, and from the allusion in ver. 12 to friends and rich neighbours, this seems to have been a formal and luxurious entertainment. The word "parable" is used in a wide sense; the words are to be taken literally, but suggest a great moral lesson (ver. 11). **Chief rooms.**—Rather, "chief seats" (R.V.); the middle places on the triclinium were counted the most honourable.

Ver. 8. **A wedding.**—Rather, "a marriage feast" (R.V.); perhaps to avoid making the rebuke on this occasion too pointed. At a marriage, too, rules of procedure might be more

carefully insisted upon. **Sit not down.**—It need scarcely be said that the pride that apes humility violates the spirit of this teaching. There should be genuine self-abasement.

Ver. 9. **He that bade.**—The person who has authority to decide such matters. **Begin.**—This vividly suggests the reluctance and lingering with which a presumptuous guest leaves the higher and goes down to the lower place. **Lowest room.**—The other good places having been taken possession of in the meantime.

Ver. 10. **That when he**, etc.—A consequence that may follow, though not designed and led up to by the guest. **Worship.**—Rather, "glory" (R.V.), as distinguished from "shame" (ver. 9).

Ver. 11. **Abased.**—Rather, "humbled" (R.V.). For an example of such humiliation see Isa. xiv. 13-15, and of such exaltation Phil. ii. 5-11. These words (vers. 7-11) had been addressed to the guests. Christ now addresses the host.

Ver. 12. **Call not thy friends**, etc.—*I.e.*, hospitality is not to be confined to such feasts; ostentatious and interested motives are also discouraged. Returns are made by friends and rich neighbours, so that real hospitality is not manifested by such feasts. Over and above the intercourse and civilities of social life are the claims of charity; the former are presupposed as ordinarily taking place, and common-sense forbids us to suppose that Christ here condemns them. He Himself, by being present on this and similar occasions, sanctioned them.

Ver. 13. **Call the poor.**—As a different and somewhat unusual phrase for "call" is given in ver. 13, some have supposed that the one implies an ostentatious invitation and the other a more unobtrusive one. But this seems rather too far-fetched. The poor: cf. Neh. viii. 10; Matt. xxv. 35.

Ver. 14. **Resurrection of the just.**—If the phrase "of the just" is to be taken as having a distinct meaning (which we can scarcely doubt it has), Christ here refers to the twofold resurrection. See 1 Cor. xv. 23; 1 Thess. iv. 16; Rev. xx. 4, 5.

Ver. 15. **Blessed is he.**—The recompense at the resurrection of the just (ver. 14) suggested to this guest a great banquet in the kingdom of the Messiah at which the faithful Israelite would sit down in company with Abraham and Isaac and Jacob (cf. xiii. 28). He extols the greatness of the privilege. Christ warns him and the others, in the parable that follows, that the privilege will by no means be so generally recognised or embraced by the Jewish people as was commonly thought. There seems to be nothing especially vapid or affected in the exclamation of this guest. **Eat bread.**—See on ver. 1.

Ver. 16. **A certain man.**—The giver of the feast represents God. **A great supper.**—"The kingdom of God, the feast of fat things in Isa. xxv. 6; completed in the marriage-supper of the Lamb, but fully prepared when the glad tidings of the gospel were proclaimed" (*Alford*). **Bade many.**—*I.e.*, the Jewish nation, especially the religiously-minded among them—rulers, Pharisees, and doctors of the law—those enjoying highest religious privileges. The invitation was given through Moses and the prophets.

Ver. 17. **Sent his servant.**—As was usual in the East (cf. Matt. xxii. 3, 4). If the servant is to be identified with any one historical person, it can only be with Christ Himself; but John the Baptist, the Apostles, and others after them, delivered a message like this. **All things.**—"All" is not in the original, but may fairly be inserted, as it is implied in the sense of the passage.

Ver. 18. **And they all.**—The underlying idea is that but few of the Pharisaic class responded to Christ's invitation. **One consent.**—"Consent" is also inserted by the translators; it might have been equally well rendered, "with one voice." All are worldly-minded, though each has his different preoccupation, and expresses himself differently in asking to be excused. All, by alleging excuses, admit that they feel they are under a kind of obligation which they choose to set aside. **Go and see it.**—Rather, "go out [into the country] and see it" (R.V.). **I must needs go.**—The reply is still a courteous one, the excuse being pressure of business.

Ver. 19. **I go to prove them.**—No necessity alleged, but simply the fact that he is going; he has made plans which he will not alter. Still, he feels that some excuse is needed for his conduct.

Ver. 20. **I cannot come.**—Abrupt refusal, without any attempt at excuse. His "I cannot" is equivalent to "I do not want." According to the Mosaic law (Deut. xxiv. 5) a newly married man was free for a year from military service; but exemption from the hardships of war is a very different thing from slighting the claims of friendship. "Commentators usually dwell upon the *weakness* of the excuses offered. So far from that the first two reasons are very plausible, and the last very strong. And why? They seem to have been *purposely* made as strong as such reasons ordinarily are, in order to show that *no* reasons of any kind will be admitted as valid by the heavenly Inviter, who enjoins us *first* (*i.e.*, above all) to seek His kingdom and righteousness, and allows of no plea for neglecting that duty" (*Bloomfield*).

Ver. 21. **Go out quickly.**—No time is lost, either in the parable or in fact, in finding fresh

guests. **Streets and lanes of the city.**—*The city* still, among the Jews. **The poor,** etc.—Publicans, sinners, and harlots; lost sheep of the house of Israel. The guests at the banquet correspond to those described in ver. 13.

Ver. 22. **Yet there is room.**—"Both nature and grace abhor a vacuum" (*Bengel*).

Ver. 23. **Highways and hedges.**—Outside the city; this refers to the calling of the Gentiles. **Compel them.**—By moral suasion: had physical force been permitted, why should those who had first refused have been left to themselves? The word "compel" no doubt refers, in the first instance, to the circumstances of the parable: the time was short, the banquet could not be deferred, and the master was anxious for every seat to be occupied. Of course it has its spiritual counterpart in the earnestness with which zealous servants of Christ will press the claims of the kingdom of God (cf. 2 Tim. iv. 2).

Ver. 24. **For I say unto you.**—Here Christ speaks in His own person, half continuing the parable and half expounding it. For "you" is in the plural, while in the parable the master has been giving commands and directions to *one* of his servants.

Ver. 25. **There went with Him.**—*I.e.*, journeyed with Him; many, if not most, of them being on their way to one of the feasts in Jerusalem. The multitudes were attracted by Christ's teaching and works, and He wished to teach His followers the wide difference between an outward and a real adhesion to Him. He spoke these stern words to sift the multitude. The purpose of self-sacrifice by which He was inspired lent force to His utterances. "The nearer the approach of His own self-sacrifice, the more distinct and the more ideal are the claims which He makes" (*Meyer*).

Ver. 26. **Cometh unto Me.**—This is descriptive of outward adhesion. **Hate not.**—The word cannot be understood of *active* hatred, since Christ commands us to love even our enemies, but denotes a deep and heartfelt alienation from all ties, and affections, and feelings, that would interfere with devotion to Christ. The clue to whatever difficulty the words might, at first sight, suggest is to be found in the phrase "and his own life also." Life here means animal life; not life in the highest sense. In the same manner in which a man is called to control and repress and subordinate his lower life to higher claims, at any cost of feeling, is he to deal with the other relationships in which he finds himself. "Let the *hate begin here*, and little explanation will be further wanted. It need hardly be observed that *this hate* is not only consistent with, but *absolutely necessary* for, the very highest kind of love. It is that element in love which makes a man *a wise and Christian friend*, not for time only, but for eternity" (*Alford*).

Ver. 27. **Bear his cross.**—*I.e.*, submit to any sufferings, however severe, to which his devotion to Christ might expose him.

Ver. 28. **Sitteth not down.**—Deliberate and careful consideration (so in ver. 31) of ability to complete the undertaking.

Ver. 31. **Or what king . . . ?**—The former illustration lays stress upon *the folly*, this upon *the danger*, of following Christ without having duly considered what is involved in discipleship—what self-renunciation must be exemplified. The purpose of the illustrations seems to be to enforce the necessity of earnestness and deliberation in entering upon and discharging the obligations of the spiritual life.

Ver. 33. **That forsaketh not,** etc.—In other words, "counting the cost" (ver. 28), which may be that of forsaking the interests, and affections, and possessions, of this present life.

Ver. 34. **If the salt have lost,** etc.—The life of the merely nominal Christian is compared to salt that has lost its characteristic properties and is useless for any purpose. The office of the follower of Jesus is to be a salutary influence in the world, by which it is to be preserved from corruption. The figure was evidently one frequently used by Christ (cf. Matt. v. 13; Mark ix. 50). The loss of savour is an illustration drawn from actual fact. "It is a well-known fact that the salt of this country (gathered from the marshes in dry weather), when in contact with the ground, or exposed to air or sun, does become insipid and useless" (*Thomson:* "The Land and the Book").

Ver. 35. **Neither fit,** etc.—Of no use as manure, or to be mixed with manure. **Men cast it out.**—A fit emblem of the contempt which even the worldly-minded have for any who fall away from Christian practice—who have the name of disciples, but have lost all that differentiates them from the children of this world. **He that hath ears,** etc.—Words that no doubt closed the discourse (cf. chap. viii. 8).

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 1—6.

There is little that is specially characteristic about this miracle. On other occasions than this Jesus healed disease by a word, or by a touch; on other occasions, as on this, He gave offence to those who were anxious to find it by

healing upon a Sabbath, and amply vindicated His action, to the confusion of His adversaries. Yet the incident here recorded is not, by any means, superfluous or wanting in suggestiveness; it gives us a vivid picture of a scene in the life of Jesus, in which both the graciousness of the Saviour and the sullen malice of His adversaries are set forth.

I. **The graciousness of the Saviour.**—This was manifested, first of all, in His consenting to accept the invitation of the ruler of the Pharisees to eat bread in his house. After the preceding scenes, a certain measure of courage, as well as of kindly feeling, is implied in our Lord's sitting down at table with members of that party, whose hostility to Him could not be concealed. Yet the righteous anger and indignation which the conduct of the Pharisees had, from time to time, excited in the mind of Jesus, did not exasperate Him against them; the Divine compassion which He manifested towards publicans and sinners was not withheld from those who were blinded by prejudice, and led astray by a delusion as to their own righteousness. The patience and love of the Saviour toward those who were animated by dislike to Him, are, indeed, more wonderful than His compassionate treatment of the outcast and defiled; just as, in the parable of the Prodigal Son, the patience of the Father with the harsh elder brother surprises us more than his kindness to the returning penitent. He knows that He is the object of their malicious suspicions, even if they have not laid a snare for Him, and yet He utters no reproaches against them. On the contrary, He reasons calmly with them, in order to convince them of their error and to win them to a better mind. Then, too, we see the graciousness of the Saviour in the cure of the man with the dropsy. The sight of the sufferer awoke pity in His heart, and though no direct petition for relief was offered to Him, the mute appeal was sufficient to call forth His miraculous power. He not only had compassion upon those who besought His help, but also upon those who stood in need of it, even if they were too timid or faithless to apply to Him for relief. And no sooner has Jesus healed him than He dismisses him from His presence, apparently to spare him the acrimonious criticism which the sight of a cure wrought on the Sabbath might provoke (cf. xiii. 14).

II. **The sullen malice of Christ's enemies.**—They were not ashamed to violate the laws of hospitality by narrowly watching to find some cause of offence, or ground of accusation, in His conduct in private life, on an occasion when He might be expected to be somewhat off His guard. The feast was a formal and elaborate one, but the spirit of love was absent from it. So far from avoiding controversy with their guest, they lay in wait for Him. Nor did they lay aside their hostility when His words of calm wisdom overthrew their theories and arguments, and left them silent in His presence. They could not answer Him, and yet they refused to be persuaded by Him. Could we have a more striking illustration of the power of religious prejudice to blind the eyes and deaden the feelings of those who cherish it? They were in the presence of the Incarnate Son of God, and yet they could not discern His Divine Majesty! They saw the sufferer delivered in an instant from a dreadful form of disease, and yet felt no gladness—their thoughts were taken up with the frivolous question as to whether the miracle could be lawfully wrought on that day! They did not see that their own souls were smitten with a spiritual disease, and that they were rejecting Him who alone could heal them. And in all ages religious prejudices exercise the same baneful influence upon all who indulge in them—they make men hard-hearted towards their brethren, and they come as a thick veil between the soul and Christ, so that His words cannot be understood nor His gracious working recognised.

SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS ON VERSES 1—6.

Vers. 1-24. *Lessons from the Great Teacher.*

I. **In Sabbath-keeping.**
II. **In true humility.**
III. **In true hospitality.**
IV. **In God's hospitality.**—*Taylor.*

Vers. 1-6. *The Dropsical Man.*—The miracle with the account of which this chapter opens gave rise to a conversation of graphic originality, carried on by a series of parabolic illustrations. Chiefly, perhaps, for the sake of introducing these is the healing narrated. The incident in itself is not dwelt upon, and the reasoning which arose upon it closely resembles previous cases of Sabbath healing. The number of these, and the living detail with which they are recorded in the gospels, are noteworthy. Jesus puts signal honour on this day as a day for public worship and for showing acts of mercy. His example must ever remind Christians that care for the poor, the sick, and the ignorant, are duties specially fitted for the Lord's Day. It is consecrated by His Spirit for the service of man, as well as for the worship of God.—*Laidlaw.*

Ver. 1. *One of the Chief Pharisees.*—In this last period in which the hatred of the Pharisees against Him was most distinctly expressed, the Saviour does not withdraw from them. Obviously Jesus hoped, by the power of the truth, to gain over for Himself and the cause of God the better disposed, at least, among them.

A Treacherous Invitation.—The invitation of the Pharisee was a treacherous one. He was carrying out the policy indicated in xi. 53, 54, and had set this diseased man in a place where he would catch the attention of Christ, in order to see what He would say or do. "Behold" in ver. 2 implies something unusual and unexpected; and this circumstance implies that the presence of the diseased man was not accidental.

"*To eat bread.*"—It belongs to the peculiarities of St. Luke that he loves to represent to us the Saviour as sitting at a social table, where He most beautifully reveals His pure humanity, through table-talk which, more than that of any other "was seasoned with salt" (Col. iv. 6), and was addressed, first to the guests (vers. 7-10), then to the host (vers. 11-14), and, finally, on occasion being given (ver. 15), to both (vers. 16-24).—*Van Oosterzee.*

"*They watched Him.*"—The kindness and long-suffering of Christ in accepting the invitation of the Pharisee are very noteworthy, when we consider the bad faith displayed in the desire to find something in His words and deeds out of which they might frame an accusation against Him.

They watched whether He would not transgress their Sabbath restrictions: that was the way that they kept the Sabbath.

Ver. 2. "*There was a certain man before Him.*"—The Pharisees argued (1) that Jesus could not ignore the presence of a man conspicuously placed in front of Him; (2) that perhaps He might fail in the cure of a disease exceptionally inveterate; (3) that if He *did* heal the man on the Sabbath day there would be room for another charge before the synagogue or the Sanhedrim. —*Farrar.*

Christ Moved by the Sight of Suffering.—The sight of the suffering man standing there silent moved the heart of Jesus, as the Pharisees had justly expected that it would.

Ver. 3. "*Sabbath day.*"—Our Lord studiously and designedly selected, rather than avoided, the Sabbath day for the performance of His miracles of

mercy. The five distinct instances recorded were probably but a few out of many. Add to which, that they seemed, humanly speaking, to cause offence; which our Lord would have avoided, were it not for some great purpose or principle.—*Williams.*

"*Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath?*"—The question was an embarrassing one. If they answered Yes, the occasion of finding fault was taken away; if No, they were open to the charge of want of compassion.

Ver. 4. "*Let him go.*"—A delicate courtesy is indicated in the man being thus dismissed after being cured, before the conversation is resumed upon the work of mercy which had been wrought in his case.

Vers. 5, 6. *Christ and the Sabbath.*—The teaching to be derived from the Sabbath healings, as recorded in the gospels, may be summarised as follows: 1. We see that Jesus took pains to emphasise the humane element in the original institution as a day of rest, while He rescued it from the exaggerations of Pharisaism. 2. He gave it the sanction of His own observance as a day of public worship and religious congregation. 3. By these deeds of healing He put singular honour upon it as a day for showing mercy.—*Laidlaw.*

Ver. 5. "*Answered them.*"—Again, it is said, "He answered them," although they had held their peace. That is because their minds were full of fierce, rebellious thoughts; and thoughts are *words* in the ears of Him with whom we have to do.—*Burgon.*

"*Son or ox*" (R.V.)—The argument proceeds from a thing of greater value to one of less. "You deliver your *children*, and even your oxen, on the Sabbath; shall not I much more deliver My creatures and My children?" If "ass" were the true reading, it should follow "ox"; the Scriptures often say "ox and ass," never "ass and ox." In Deut. v. 14, in the law of the Sabbath, "son" stands first in the list of rational creatures, "ox" in that of irrational.

Inconsistency of the Pharisees.—As on other occasions (xiii. 15; Matt. xii. 11), the Lord brings back those present to their own experience, and lets them feel the keen contradiction in which their blame of Christ's free work of love sets them with themselves, in that, where their worldly interests were at hazard, they did that very thing whereof they now made an occasion against Him.—*Olshausen.*

Ver. 6. "*Could not answer.*"—Nothing is said, however, about their being convinced of error. Prejudice and malicious feelings are not always to be overcome, even by the best-ordered arguments.

The Truth Exasperates Them.—The truth, which did not win them, did the only other thing which it could do—exasperated them the more; they replied nothing, biding their time (cf. Matt. xii. 14).—*Trench.*

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 7—14.

Lessons to Guests and Hosts.—The lawyers and the Pharisees at this feast scrutinised eagerly the conduct of Jesus, in order to bring home to Him the charge of Sabbath-breaking. And He, on His part, took notice of their procedure, and in due time spoke words of kindly counsel to them. We read that "*they* watched Him," and also that "*He* marked how they chose out the chief seats" at the table. Yet there was a vast difference between their spirit and His. Their action was something like treacherous espionage, while His was like that of a father who gently reproves his children's faults.

I. **A lesson to guests: a lesson of humility** (vers. 7-11).—We should rob these words of all their value if we took them as merely a counsel of worldly prudence: for in that case they would enforce an artificial rather than a real humility, and even make an affected humility the cloak for selfish ambition. We should rather take the words as enjoining a genuine and unaffected humility, as teaching that the only distinction that deserves a thought is that which is freely bestowed on men of a lowly and a kindly spirit. We may take the parable as setting forth a truth which experience abundantly confirms—viz., that even the most worldly and selfish of men have a sincere respect for the unworldly; that the only men whom they can bear to see preferred before themselves are those who are of a spirit so gentle, and sweet, and unselfish, as not to grasp at any such preference or distinction. Even the world meets us in very much the same spirit that we take to it. If we push men out of our way, they push back; if we plot and strive against them, they plot and strive against us: whereas if we show ourselves friendly, they are not unwilling to be our friends; if we are unaffectedly meek and pure, they honour us for virtues which they may not themselves possess. Those who are most ambitious of rule and of occupying places of distinction are often, if not generally, devoid of the qualifications needed for the post they covet, and men are glad when they see such persons authoritatively commanded to take a lower seat. While those of meek and quiet spirit are unaffectedly surprised when they are summoned to take a more honourable or conspicuous post. Yet these are precisely the men whom we all delight to honour and to see honoured—the men of whose spirit and usefulness we are most assured, and of whose capacity for any work they can be induced to take we are confident. We cheerfully give them the "worship" or glory they do not seek. Because they abase themselves we rejoice in their exaltation.

II. **A lesson to hosts: a lesson of benevolence to the poor** (vers. 12-14).—As the guests are warned against a pride which might lead to shame, so the host is counselled not to waste his wealth in exercising an ostentatious and interested hospitality. Again the words of Christ bear the appearance of worldly wisdom. Friends and kinsfolk and rich neighbours return the hospitality they receive: the poor cannot repay kindness shown to them, but recompense will be made at the resurrection of the just. Appeal seems to be made to a mercenary motive—that of expecting a reward in heaven for good deeds done upon earth; but in actual life it will be found that no one will busy himself with kindly deeds merely for the sake of a future reward. Consideration for others will awaken and strengthen all the better feelings of the heart, and banish the mercenary spirit. The mention of reward emphasises the fact that acts of benevolence have a high spiritual value in the sight of God, and will draw down upon him who does them the Divine favour and blessing. These words of Christ teach the same lesson as that contained in the parable of the Unjust Steward, who diligently made use of present opportunities for providing for himself shelter and comfort in the day of need.

SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS ON VERSES 7—14.

Vers. 7-14. *Jesus at the Feast.*

I. **What He said about men's feasts.**—1. A word to the guests. 2. A word to the host.

II. **What He said about God's feasts.**—1. It is different as regards those invited. 2. It is different as regards Him who invites.—*Stock.*

The Exhortation to Humility.

I. Guests ought to humble themselves, by selecting the lowest place.

II. Hosts should humble themselves, by inviting the poorest to their tables.

Vers. 7-11. *The Lowest Seats at Feasts.*—This parable deserves a passing notice,

if it were only to give occasion for pointing out the prominent place which the great truth that the kingdom of God is for the humble occupied in the thoughts of Jesus, as evinced by the fact of His uttering two parables to enforce it. That he who humbleth himself shall be exalted, and he who exalteth himself shall be abased is, in the view of Christ, one of the great laws in the kingdom of God. On the surface this portion of our Lord's table-talk at the Sabbath feast wears the aspect of a moral advice, rather than of a parable. But through the medium of a counsel of prudence relating to ordinary social life, the Teacher of the doctrine of the kingdom communicates a lesson of true wisdom concerning the higher sphere of religion. The evangelist perceived this, and therefore he called this piece of advice a *parable*—most legitimately, inasmuch as a parable has for its aim to show, by an example of human action in natural life, how men should act in the sphere of spiritual life. Christ had no serious intention to give a lesson in social deportment, and the parabolic element in His words is confined to this, that instruction valid only for the religious sphere is couched in terms which seem to imply a reference to ordinary social life. Jesus reminds His fellow guests that there is a society in which humility is held in honour, and pride gets a downsetting. That He is thinking of this sacred society is apparent from His manner of expressing Himself.—*Bruce.*

The Ambitious Guest.

I. **These verses obviously enforce an important social principle applicable to our daily life.**

II. **They bear also on religious duties—our life in relation to God.**

III. **The more directly spiritual application.**—In spiritual things the highest place is the most excellent and most desirable. 1. We are commanded to aim at perfection. 2. We are not to be satisfied with our present condition. 3. Christ's love alone can give us a title to even the lowest room in the heavenly world.—*Brameld.*

This Parable Teaches—

I. That the law of Christ justifieth none in any rudeness or incivility.

II. That the disciples of Christ ought to have a regard to their reputation, to do nothing they may be ashamed of.

III. That it is according to the will of God that honour should be given to those to whom honour belongeth; that the more honourable persons should sit in the more honourable places.—*Pole.*

A Higher Place.—1. Every man ought to desire a higher place. 2. There is a wrong way of getting place. 3. There is a right way of getting place. 4. As a general rule, high character will be called into the higher place.

Ver. 7. "**A parable.**"—The use of this word, as well as the general principle laid down in ver. 11, prepares us to find more than a maxim of worldly prudence in this saying of our Lord. Christ here teaches humility in the deepest sense of the word. Let each take the lowest place before God, or, as St. Paul says, "esteem others as better than himself" (Phil. ii. 3). It is God who fixes the true place of each, and His judgment is independent of ours. If we sincerely think ourselves deserving of a low place, we shall not thereby lose our true place.

Secret Dispositions Discovered.—The dignity of these words appears in this, that without any appearance of profoundness or severity, they lay bare the secret disposition at the foundation of the external behaviour they condemn. —*Schleiermacher.*

Vers. 8-10. "*Sit not down in the highest room.*"—Cf. Prov. xxv. 6, 7: "Put not forth thyself in the presence of the King, and stand not in the place of great men; for better it is that it be said unto thee, Come up hither, than that thou shouldest be put lower in the

presence of the Prince whom thine eyes have seen."

Vers. 9, 10. *Sense of Shame and Lawful Pride.*—It is noticeable that He who created man such as he is, here, and in ver. 29, appeals to man's sense of *shame* (ver. 9), and to his sense of *pride* (ver. 10).

Ver. 9. "*Begin with shame.*"—No shame attaches to him who takes a low place, but shame is felt by him who is sent down from a higher place.

Ver. 10. "*Friend.*"—No such gracious appellation is addressed to him who had been asked to give up his place to a more honourable guest (ver. 9).

This Teaching Exemplified by Christ.—Now, what Christ commanded others He Himself did; for when He came into this world He reclined in the manger, and He died reclining on a cross. Neither at His birth nor at His death could He find any more lowly place.—*Bellarmine.*

False Humility Excluded.—All that false humility, by which men put themselves lowest and dispraise themselves of set purpose to be placed higher, is by the very nature of our Lord's parable, excluded; for that is not *bonâ fide* to abase oneself. The exaltation at the hands of the host is not to be a *subjective end* to the guests, but will follow true humility.—*Alford.*

Ver. 11. *Spiritual Counsels.*—The counsels which Christ had given—"Be not proud, lest thou be put to shame; be lowly, so shalt thou be exalted"—are here deepened and spiritualised. They are not mere prudential maxims, therefore, but condemn the Pharisaical pride of the Jews in relation to the kingdom of God.

Vers. 12-14. *The Highest Kind of Hospitality.*—Jesus, as it were, does not interfere with the hospitality we may show to relatives and friends—He leaves it in its own place; but He commands us to manifest a kindness of a higher and more spiritual type in caring for the poor and unfortunate.

Ver. 12. "*Call not.*"—*I.e.*, "prefer to show mercy to the poor." The paramount importance of one duty is here stated by comparing it with another, and by preferring it to the lesser, as in Matt. ix. 13.

Repayment by God.—The recommendation Christ here gives is rendered all the more gracious in its form by its being represented as more for our interest to show a kindness which will draw down a recompense from God than a hospitality which men will repay.

Friends, Relations, Rich Neighbours.—There is a gradation in the order of persons named whom we are likely to invite to our table. 1. Our friends—from a delight in their society. 2. Our brethren and relations—from a sense of duty. 3. Our rich neighbours—from the honour they confer on us by coming, and the hope of receiving an invitation from them in return.

"*Lest they also.*"—A fear which the world does not know.—*Bengel.*

Disinterested Kindness.—Jesus certainly did not mean us to dispense with the duties of ordinary fellowship. But since there was no exercise of *principle* involved in it, save of reciprocity, and selfishness itself would suffice to prompt it, His object was to inculcate, over and above everything of this kind, such attentions to the helpless, and provision for them, as, from their inability to make any return, would manifest their own disinterestedness, and, like every other exercise of high religious principle, meet with a corresponding gracious recompense.—*Brown.*

Vers. 13, 14. "*Thou shalt be recompensed.*"

I. We may reasonably expect a

recompense from heaven for such good works as we do, for which we are not recompensed on earth.

II. That God's recompense of us, for doing our duty in obedience to His commands, is often deferred until the resurrection of the just; but then it will not fail obedient souls.

Ver. 13. "*Call the poor.*"—What the Saviour here commends to others He has Himself fulfilled in the most illustrious manner. To the feast in the kingdom of God He has principally invited not such as were related to Him after the flesh, or those from whom He might hope for recompense again, but the poor, the blind, etc., in the spiritual sense of the words. But for that reason also He has now joy to the full in the kingdom of the Father, and a name that is above every name.—*Van Oosterzee.*

Ver. 14. "*The Resurrection of the Just.*"—Jesus speaks, in John v. 28, 29, of the general resurrection. Here He distinguishes between a first and a second resurrection (cf. chap. xx. 34-36), and His teaching is further developed in the later apostolic writings (1 Thess. iv. 16; 1 Cor. xv. 23; Rev. xx. 5, 6).

Earthly and Heavenly Rewards.—Let us, therefore, not be disappointed and troubled at not receiving a recompense from men on earth; rather let us be troubled when we receive it, lest we learn to look only for reward on earth, and so lose our reward in heaven. —*Chrysostom.*

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 15—24.

The Feast Refused.—Pious sentiment is cheap, and many a man who has little other religion has his mouth full of beautiful speeches about the desireableness of heaven. Jesus seems to have detected the false ring in this seemingly devout aspiration, and therefore to have met it with this story of the refused feast, which warns the speaker and others to be sure that they are not excusing themselves from a banquet for which they profess to long.

I. **The preparation of, and invitations to, the feast.**—The use of this emblem to denote spiritual blessings is rooted in Old-Testament prophecy (Isa. xxv. 6, lv. 1-3). It is a "great" feast, both in regard of the rich and satisfying food and of the ample room. It provides "enough for each, enough for all, enough for evermore"; it meets all the hunger and need of the soul. The preparation of the feast, and the invitations, cover a long time—the whole past ages of Israel's history, during which law, and sacrifice, and prophecy, had been aiming to make men ready for receiving the kingdom, and had been summoning them to partake of its blessings. A second invitation was given in the preaching of John the Baptist, of our Lord Himself, and of the apostles during His life. The fact of a more pressing summons being sent at the moment of readiness marks the solemn significance of the hour at which He was speaking. His coming makes "all things ready," and is the critical moment to which all the ages have been tending. Present decision was called for, and not pious platitudes. We, too, have to learn the awful importance of the present moment, and to beware of losing the awakening consciousness of that in smooth generalities about any future. How we behave to God's invitation, that peals in our ears to-day, settles how we shall fare in the future.

II. **The astonishing unanimity of refusal.**—In ordinary life people would scramble for invitations to such a grand feast, especially if a great man gave it. But the improbability of the incident is the very point of it. "They all with one consent." This is the miserable strangeness of the fate of God's invitations to the highest good. No others are treated so. Mark the increasing rudeness of the speakers. The first pleads a "must needs"; the second merely

states his intention—"I go"; the third bluntly says, "I cannot," and omits the courtesy of asking to be excused. The true lesson from all three is, that innocent and right things keep men away from the gospel feast, and that, however different the objects which are preferred to it, the spirit which prefers them is the same. These excuses do not cover all the reasons—which are excuses only, and not reasons—for refusing the feast. But they suggest that by far the most common is some form or other of preferring the poor delights of time and sense, and they prepare the way for the stringent requirements, in ver. 26, of giving up all to be a disciple. There was no real incompatibility between the true enjoyment of farm, merchandise, or wife, and accepting the invitation; nor is there any between discipleship and the fullest use and truest enjoyment of earthly good; but the incompatibility is made by our false estimate of these. Because we put them first, therefore they shut us out from the feast. Put it first, and it does not shut us out from them.

III. **The needy who do not refuse.**—Note—1. The action of the giver of the feast. His settled purpose that some shall partake of it is not to be foiled. God's provision shall not be wasted, and if it be refused by some foolish souls who prefer husks to bread, and leeks and garlic to manna, the tables shall not stand without guests. The Divine mercy is not to be thwarted, but, with persistent variation of direction, works on to its end undiscouraged. True, the structure of the parable required the second invitation to appear as an afterthought; but that does not detract from the wonderful representation it gives of the inexhaustible patience and unwearied, continuous invitation of the master of the feast. 2. The success of the second invitation. The recipients are still in the "city." They are the same classes as Jesus had just bid His hearers ask to their feasts (ver. 13). They have no farm or oxen to see after. In the historical application they represent the "publicans and harlots," the outcast classes who hung on to the theocracy, but, though Jews by descent, were scouted by the class to whom Jesus was speaking. In the wider reference they are the people who know their own needs, and have found themselves to be hungry and poor, having infinite need of salvation, and nothing of their own to win it with. "Yet there is room." How that hints of the boundless spaces in the festal halls, of the ample provision for all!

IV. **The invitation extended and made more urgent.**—The vagrants who house in the fields and under the hedges are further down in misery than the poor in the city. Historically they represent the Gentiles outside the polity of Israel, and it is in accordance with the spirit of St. Luke's gospel that this transference of the offer of salvation to them should have been recorded by him. But the representation embodies the great truth of which that transference was but an exemplification; namely, the destination of the gospel for all, and its special mission to the lowest. The increase in urgency corresponds to the distance from the banquet and the degradation of the invited. First the message was a simple "Come"; then it was to be a "Bring" them in; and now it is, "Constrain them." The pleading earnestness increases with the need and the sense of unfitness for so great an honour. Complacent indifference, which made sure of a right to eat bread in the kingdom, and would give up nothing for it, was left alone; but poor wretches, who could scarcely believe that the feast was meant for them, were prayed with much entreaty to receive the gift. How grand and wonderful a view of the Divine longing to bestow blessings lies in that word, given as the motive of the host's command, "that my house may be filled!" God cannot be satisfied with empty spaces at His table. He does not rest till all the ample spaces are crowded with "the great multitude, which no man can number," so all-embracing is His love, so strong His desire to impart the bread, enough and to spare, which He has prepared for all the

hungry. Historically, the closing threat foretells the exclusion of the Israel of that day as a whole from the feast, but it does not necessarily imply that individuals who separated themselves from the mass, and changed refusal into acceptance, should be debarred access to it. No threatenings are unconditional, and no refusal need be final. Acceptance is always possible, and no refusal need be final.—*Maclaren.*

SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS ON VERSES 15—24.

Ver. 15. "*Blessed is he that shall eat bread.*"—This guest seems to have formed an erroneous idea of the nature of the kingdom of God: 1. He evidently regarded it as affording privilege, rather than as imposing obligations. 2. He thought that, as a Pharisee and an Israelite, he was sure of entrance into it. 3. He thought of that kingdom as belonging to the future, and as having little bearing upon present conduct. The sentimental guest flattered himself that he appreciated the good things of the kingdom; and Christ, knowing how apt men are to deceive themselves in such matters, went on to show him how little reliance is to be placed on the interest in things Divine which he and others took credit for.—*Bruce.*

An Unexceptionable Remark.—As a saying, the guest's remark was unexceptionable. But as he uttered it, it was only a mere pious remark. He was not a true disciple of Jesus, and had probably no intention of becoming one, so *he* was one who would never eat bread in the kingdom of God, since he was determined not to accept the invitation to the marriage-supper of the Lamb.—*Hastings.*

"*Blessed is he.*"—The words sound like those of Balaam, "Let me die the death of the righteous, and let my last end be like his". (Numb. xxiii. 10), a wish only to be safe and happy *at last,* while rejecting all present invitation to turn to God and live.

Feeble Excuses.—I. **The spiritual provision.**—It is abundant, gracious, glorious.

II. **The wide invitation.**—There is room for many. Many must come.

III. **The feeble excuses.**—1. Worldliness of spirit. 2. Absorption in commercial pursuits. 3. Relative obligations.

IV. **The angry host.**—Displeased because His generosity is not appreciated. Because He has given the strongest proof of His goodness. His displeasure is irreconcileable.—*Stevenson.*

Excuses.—**They are typical excuses.**—1. Cares of wealth. 2. Pursuit of wealth. 3. Attractions of earthly ties.

II. **None of them is a good reason for refusal.**

III. **In each case what caused refusal was nothing wrong in itself.**

The Invitation Refused.—The power of mental pre-occupation in producing indifference or aversion to the doctrine of the kingdom Jesus illustrates in a popular manner in the parable of the Great Supper. The forms of pre-occupation therein mentioned are such as are most suited to parabolic narration—such, namely, as arise from the business and pleasures of ordinary life. They are not the only forms, or even the most important, or such as beset the class of men represented at the dinner-table when the parable was spoken. The pre-occupations of the wise and learned were of a more dignified and respectable character.—*Bruce.*

Near the Kingdom, but Not In It.—Christ spoke the parable to point out the difference between being invited to enter the kingdom and being in it, and to show that the invitation will only aggravate the doom of those who refuse to comply with it. He intends to teach the Jews, and through

them to teach us, that those who are near the kingdom may in the end come short of it—that those who stand high in spiritual privileges may be excluded—may exclude themselves—from the kingdom of God.—*Arnot.*

The Gracious Character of the Kingdom.—The parable teaches that the kingdom of heaven is not for the full, but for the hungry. Everything in it is significant of grace: 1. The selection of a feast as an emblem of the blessings promised implies that they are a free gift from God. 2. The behaviour of those invited first—being full, they despise the Divine gift. 3. Those who are empty and destitute value it. 4. The avowed motive of the repeated invitations—that the house may be filled.—*Bruce.*

Ver. 16. "*A great supper.*"—The kingdom of heaven (1) *Satisfies* those who hunger and thirst after righteousness. 2. It brings *joys* beyond compare. 3. It brings all who believe into holy *fellowship* with each other.

A Fit Emblem.—The blessings of salvation are in Scripture fitly compared to a feast—

I. Because of their rich variety and abundance.

II. Their suitableness to our spiritual wants.

III. The high satisfaction and enjoyment which they yield.

"*Many.*"—*I.e.*, the whole Jewish people—by the Baptist, by His apostles, by His disciples, and by Himself.

Ver. 17. "*His servant.*"—The office of summoning the world to enter the kingdom of God is one, and the commission to all those who hold it is the same; hence, but one servant is spoken of. This unity of teaching and preaching is the holy inheritance of the Church from her one Lord.

"*For all things are now ready.*"—A suggestion of the splendid abundance of the feast prepared.

The Nominally Religious.—It is implied that these men had tacitly, or in some other well-understood way, accepted the first invitation. They gave no intimation that they intended to decline—they gave the provider of the feast reason to expect their presence. They were, therefore, representatives of those who were nominally, but not really, the people of God. They were within the reach of privileges which they did not value, and were understood to be well-disposed towards God, until their true character was revealed by their being asked to make a decisive choice between God and the world.

Vers. 18-20. *Worldliness of Spirit.*—The *temper* of these self-excusers is threefold; the *excuses* themselves are threefold; their *spirit is one.* The first alleges a necessity—he *must* go and see his land; the second not so much as this, only his own plan and purpose; the third not so much as either of these, but rudely asserts, I cannot (*i.e.*, I will not) come. *All* are detained by worldliness, in however varied forms.—*Alford.*

Innocent, but Fatal.—Land—oxen—a wife;—all innocent; perhaps all needful; all certainly fatal. They loved them too much, or the gospel too little. Their love for them was perhaps not excessive; it might have been but little; but, at all events, their love for the gospel was less. Or their love for the gospel might have been great, very great; but their love of the world was greater. Still, it all came to one and the same end for God will not have a divided heart. It is the choice of the two which is presented at all times. To have married a wife was provided for in the law as a sufficient plea not to go forth to war; but the gospel is higher in its requirements. "He that loveth wife or children more than Me, is not worthy of Me."—*Williams.*

Ever-Recurring Forms of Danger.—It may be observed that in describing the reception which the gospel would meet with, our Lord mentions the very things which He notices in speaking of the old world and of Sodom. He omits all mentions of their great crimes, but chooses out, for their resemblance to the last day, points innocent in themselves, but of an absorbing worldly nature. In the days of Lot, which are likened to the end of the world, "they bought and sold" (chap. xvii. 28)—as here the excuse is, "I have bought oxen, and I go to prove them." In the former, "they planted, they builded"—as here the plea is, "I have bought a field; I must needs go to see it." Again, in the days of Noah and of Lot "they married and gave in marriage"—and the gospel in the parable is rejected, because "I have married a wife, and therefore I cannot come." The same things, therefore, are true of the days of the Son of Man, as appears from Scripture; whether we speak of Christ's final coming, or of the Christian dispensation generally.—*Burgon.*

The Thorns which choke the Word.—The three excuses answer to the three things which are said to "choke the Word" in the parable of the Sower (viii. 14)—"the care of this world," "the deceitfulness of riches," and "the pleasures of this life."

Different Degrees of Contumacy.—One may trace here a rising scale of contumacy: 1. The first of these guests would be very glad to come, if only it were possible, if there was not a constraining necessity keeping him away. 2. The second alleges no such constraining necessity, but is simply going upon sufficient reason on another errand. 3. The third has engagements of his own, and declares outright, "I cannot come."—*Trench.*

Hindrances to Faith and Obedience.

I. "The lust of the eye and the pride of life" too often detain men from Christ.

II. In some cases the business and cares of life have the same effect.

III. In other cases it is the pleasure of the world that is a hindrance.

The Excuses Frivolous.—These various excuses are all frivolous; they simply veil a disinclination to come to the feast. For all these persons had been informed of the coming feast, and could have chosen another day for attending to the various concerns which they now plead as excuses.

Ver. 18. *Spiritual Possessions, Occupations, and Joys.*—All these excuses had been anticipated and refuted by our Lord's teaching that there is *another field* for which we ought to sell all and buy it (Matt. xiii. 44)—*another plough* to be followed (Luke ix. 62); and now He teaches that there is *another marriage-feast* to be preferred before all earthly nuptials—a marriage-feast in which the soul is not only a guest, but is espoused as a bride to Christ (2 Cor. xi. 2).—*Wordsworth.*

"*With one consent.*"—One motive inspired them all: indifference towards, or dislike of, him who had invited them.

"*To make excuse.*"—By so doing they acknowledge their obligation to appear at the feast. In like manner comparatively few of those who lead irreligious lives repudiate religious obligations, however poor the excuses may be which they bring forward to excuse their neglect of them.

"*Have me excused.*"—"*Me.*" Whatever may be the case with *others*, who can and ought to come, I am obliged to ask thee to excuse *me.*

Ver. 20. "*A wife.*"—Marriage—the closest and most sacred of all ties—here stands for *all* earthly ties; just as oxen and land stand for all worldly goods and possessions whatsoever. "Surely he takes the text in too large a sense, that, because it says 'a man

shall leave all and cleave to his wife,' therefore he shall leave God. It is but the father and mother on earth, and not the Father of heaven, that for her we may forsake" (*Feltham*).

"*I cannot come.*"—"The persons mentioned before excused themselves civilly. This man bluntly declares 'he cannot come.' Some damn themselves in a rude and brutal, others in a civil, well-bred manner" (*Quesnel*).

His language is all the more brusque because he is assured that he has a more plausible and adequate reason for refusing the invitation than others.

Ver. 21. *Angry.*—The dislike or hatred which lay beneath the excuses calls forth anger on the part of the master. Cf. 2 Sam. xxii. 27: "With the froward Thou wilt show Thyself unsavoury."

"*Streets and lanes.*"—Still within the city, so that by the class here summoned we are to understand the outcast classes among the Jews, as distinguished from the Pharisees and scribes to whom the invitation was naturally first addressed, and who had as a class rejected it.

"*The maimed, the halt, and the blind.*"—"The maimed," whom no woman would marry (ver. 20); "the halt," who could not follow the plough (ver. 19); "the blind," who could not see fields or anything else (ver. 18).—*Bengel.*

Ver. 22. "*Yet there is room.*"—1. A word of encouragement to those who desire, but have not ventured to come in. 2. A summons to fresh zeal on the part of those charged with the duty of bringing in guests.

Vers. 23, 24. *Unlikely Guests.*

I. The guests, brought in from the highways, and hedges, and lanes, may in the first intention, represent the spiritually-neglected Jewish populace, as opposed to the self-satisfied scribes and Pharisees.

II. The principle involved is; the kingdom and its blessings are for the hungry anywhere and everywhere; there is plenty of room, and I will have my house full.

III. The probable application is: privileged Israel self-excluded by her indifference; unprivileged heathendom rendered eligible by destitution.—*Bruce.*

Ver. 23. "*Highways and hedges.*"—Those in the heathen world needing, and many of them longing for, salvation.

As ver. 21 is the subject of the first part of the Acts of the Apostles (chaps. i-xii., the conversion of the Jews), so vers. 22, 23 contain that of the second part (chap. xiii. to the end, the conversion of the heathen).—*Godet.*

The Need for Haste.—The time was short, and the master of the house could not wait; therefore he bade his servant urge these new guests to fill the house without delay.

"*Compel.*"—Use so much zeal and importunity that they may feel constrained to come in (2 Tim. iv. 2).

Force and Persuasion.—The two kinds of compulsion are illustrated in the history of St. Paul. Saul as a persecutor compelled men and women to return to or to remain in the Jewish fold; as a servant of Christ he strove to urge and persuade his hearers to enter the Christian fold.

Timidity Overcome.—The poor outcasts would doubtless naturally be timid about entering the rich man's house; they would scarcely dare to accept the invitation. A friendly compulsion is necessary in their case. Those really unwilling to come—the guests first invited—are not compelled to attend the feast.

Inducements to Accept the Invitation.—Inducements to persuade acceptance of the gospel invitation: 1. Your

naturally miserable and perishing condition. 2. The consideration that "all things are now ready." 3. That many guests have entered. 4. That "yet there is room." 5. That rejection of the invitation now means exclusion from the feast of heavenly glory hereafter.

"*Filled.*"—The great love of God desires a multitude of guests; not a seat that is prepared is to be allowed to remain vacant. The number of the elect is proportioned beforehand to the riches of the Divine glory, and this can only find complete reflection in a certain number of human beings. The invitation will therefore last, and consequently the history of our race will be prolonged, until that number is reached. Thus it is that the Divine decree is reconciled with human liberty. The number of those saved is, comparatively to the number of those called, small, no doubt; nevertheless, in itself, the number of the saved is great.—*Godet.*

"*That my house may be filled.*"—He has so made provision that He must have people that eat, drink, and are merry, though He should make them out of stones.—*Luther.*

Spiritual Wretchedness not a Ground of Safety.—However, let it be well observed that to be in a spiritually wretched state does not confer a favour, or imply safety. These men were saved, not because they were spiritually very low, but although they were spiritually very low; they were saved, although the chief of sinners, because Christ invited them and they came at His call. The more moral, and more privileged, who were first invited, would have been as welcome and as safe if they had come.—*Arnot.*

Ver. 24. "*For I say unto you.*"—In matter of form these words belong to the parable, but no doubt the look and manner of Jesus, as He put this threat in the mouth of the host whose invitation had been so indifferently treated by the guests first summoned, made those present feel that He and they were the type of persons really meant.

"*My supper.*"—Our Lord half passes from the parable and speaks words which seem to express His own decision rather than that of the giver of the feast. By so doing He warns His hearers of the risk they were running in rejecting Him—they were acting like those who had excluded themselves from the feast. "My supper, to which I not only invite you, but which I, as the Son, with the Father, have Myself prepared for you!"

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 25—35.

Thorough-going Disciples.—Complete surrender of earthly things as the indispensable condition of discipleship is the teaching of this passage. Crowds followed Christ, but He will have no recruits enlisted on false pretences, and rather discourages than stimulates inconsiderate adhesion. The clear presentation of difficulties stifles no genuine earnestness, but rather fans the flame. Christ would have the light-minded crowds, following Him with curiosity, understand that it is no holiday stroll nor triumphal march in which they are joining, but a procession to a cross. So, if they are not ready for that, they had better not come after Him, and, at any rate, must come with their eyes open, if at all.

I. **Our Lord lays down the law of discipleship.**—There is a twofold requirement, the solemnity of the statement of which is increased by that repeated "He cannot be My disciple." 1. The first requirement refers to the *heart.* Jesus claims the subordination, and, if necessary, the sacrifice of all other love to the supreme love to Himself, as the prime, indispensable condition of all disciple-

ship. We need not wonder at that strong word "hate." The "hate" which embraces all whom nature and God bid us love, and our own lives also, cannot be the earthly passionate loathing, attended by desire to harm, which goes by that name, but detachment of heart consequent upon supreme attachment of heart to Jesus—the purifying of earthly love by loving only in Him, rigid subordination of the closest ties, and the readiness to sacrifice the tenderest of these when they come in the way of our higher love to Christ. Mark the tremendous claim which Christ here makes, in assuming His right to the throne in all our hearts. What gives Him the right, and how can He satisfy the love which He demands? Surely He who thus speaks must be conscious of Divinity, or His claim is blasphemous. Surely He not only is, but does, what deserves and draws, and will bless with full fruition the fullest love of every heart. 2. The second requirement applies to *conduct*. The first calls for the surrender of the dearest; the second, for the acceptance of the most painful. There is here a veiled allusion to Christ's own cross, as if He had said, "I, on this journey in which you are following Me so blindly and eagerly, am going to My cross. If you could see, it is already lying on My shoulder. If you follow Me, you, too, will have to carry a cross." Note the two halves of conduct which together make up real discipleship—taking up each the cross which is his own, and imitating Christ. Every true Christian has his own special burden of humiliation, difficulty, self-denial, to carry. The cross is heavy, and hard to carry; but unless we do carry it, we are not His. And all the procession of cross-bearers go after the Lord. If we follow after Him, our crosses grow light, remembering His, and with Him for leader and companion.

II. **Two illustrative similes enforce the law.**—1. *The rash builder.* This sets forth discipleship in its aspect of building up the noble and conspicuous structure of a Christ-like character. That is the life-long work of a true disciple. Life is not for enjoyment, nor for worldly ends, but for building up a holy character, and all outward things are but scaffolding to further the building. Expenditure is needed to secure this end. Building costs money. The building of ourselves takes and tasks all the resources of a life-time. In other words, we are not disciples unless we surrender self and all we have. It plainly follows that there must be deliberate, open-eyed recognition of what being a Christian involves, at the beginning, if there is not to be failure long before the end. But if we find that we have not the power to build, are we to give up the attempt? No. For they who know that they can do nothing of themselves are they who will most humbly look for, and most certainly receive, the grace that will keep them steadfast and growing; and they who fail are precisely those who begin with swaggering self-sufficiency. The bystanders mock, as they have a right to do. Thorough-going Christians may be disliked, but they are respected. Earnestness awes and sometimes excites hostility, but inconsistency only amuses. 2. *The rash soldier.* This presents Christian life as a warfare. There is not only need for continuous effort, as in building, but for continual struggle with an enemy stronger than ourselves. Our Lord here warns men not to begin the conflict unless they are prepared to fight it out to the death. Does He, then, advise a man who feels himself too weak to conquer evil to give up the struggle and to become its tributary slave? That would be a counsel of despair. If we find that we have not enough force to meet the enemy, the recognition of our weakness, and the abandonment of all trust in self, will bring an ally into the field whose reinforcements will make us more than conquerors.

III. **The final warning.**—Entire self-surrender is necessary in order to our realising the ideal of the Christian life in our own characters. It is also necessary in order to the discharge of the Christian's office to society. The true disciple, who has forsaken all, and taken up his cross and gone after Christ, is

the salt. The action of such souls on the community is to arrest corruption, and by diffusing a penetrating and sometimes biting, but always purifying, influence to sweeten and hallow what is on the road to putridity. There is need, however, for watchful renewal, day by day, of the self-surrender; for the saltest salt may lose its savour. It is a slow and often unconscious process. The salt keeps shape, colour, bulk—only the invisible savour is gone; but everything worth keeping goes with it. How can the loss be repaired? There is nothing in the world that can re-salt it. Of course, our Lord does not here close the door to the possibility of going again to Him, and getting from Him a fresh gift, even of the grace which we have so carelessly spilt; but what He means is, that since disciples are to give, and not get, savour, there are none to give it them if they lose it. He is always there to give, but that is not the point in hand. Christians who are not acting as salt are doing no good at all. Saltless salt is utterly useless, and by no means ornamental. The only thing to do with it is to cart it away. It may do to lay on a path, but that is all it is good for. Stern words from gentle lips! But they are true, and need to be laid to heart by the professing Christians of this as of every time.—*Maclaren.*

SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS ON VERSES 25—35.

Ver. 25. "*Great multitudes.*"—Christ reads their hearts and foresees the future; He knows that multitudes will fall away from Him, and multitudes cry "Crucify Him" (chap. xxiii. 21). And so He winnows them by prophecies of tribulation and trial; as Gideon winnowed his thirty-two thousand until he had brought them down to three hundred (Judges vii. 1-8).

The Fickle Crowd.—Christ placed no confidence in the multitude loosely attached to Him; He knew that a day of temptation would scatter them. "They that are with Him are called and chosen and faithful" (Rev. xvii. 14), and such, and such only, will abide with Him to the end.

Vers. 26, 27. "*If any man come . . . and hate not.*"—Discipleship may involve (1) the sacrifice of affections—the breaking of earthly ties, and (2) the endurance of persecution.

Ver. 26. "*Come to Me.*"—*I.e.*, outward attachment to Jesus. "*Be My Disciple.*" *I.e.*, genuine attachment to His person and spirit.

Recruits Warned of Hardship.—Recruiting-sergeants commonly keep out of view what is hard, painful, and dangerous in the service for which they would enlist men; but Christ desired that none should join themselves to Him without a clear knowledge beforehand of all to which they were engaging themselves. So to St. Paul, at his conversion, is shown what great things he must suffer for Christ's name's sake (Acts ix. 16). Ezekiel, at his first commission, is told that the men to whom he is sent are like thorns, briars, and scorpions (Ezek. ii. 6).

"*Doth not hate.*"—We must *hate* all things—our friends, our relatives, our own lives—if they draw us from Christ. We are to love our enemies; and that man is best loved who, if he tempts us from God by words of carnal wisdom, is not heard.—*Wordsworth.*

The Principle already Sanctioned by Scripture.—According to Deut. xxi. 18-21, when a man showed himself utterly vicious and impious, his father and mother should be the first to take up stones to stone him. Jesus here simply spiritualises this command.—*Godet.*

Divinity Implied by the Claims Christ Makes.—What man, that was not man's

Maker as well as his fellow, could have required that father and mother, wife and children, should all be postponed to Himself; that, where any competition between His claims and theirs arose, He should be everything, and they nothing; that not merely these, which, though very close to a man, are yet external to him, but that his very self, his own life, should be hated, when on no other conditions Christ would be loved? God might demand this of His creatures, but how could Christ, except as He also stood in the place of God, and was God?—*Trench.*

Christ Demanding Hatred.—This demand must have staggered many who were now following Jesus. It was meant to sift the heterogeneous crowd. This crowding after Him was not discipleship; they could only become disciples—they could only obtain those blessings which he had to bestow—at a certain "cost." This cost they ought to "count." And these are His terms: "If any man come to Me, and hate not his father," etc. Those who heard Him must have understood Him to mean that His claims were paramount, and, in case of conflict, were to override the claims of the nearest and dearest relatives. His words were well adapted to sift the crowd: the unspiritual would probably be driven away by them in disgust, while those who were attached to Jesus, in virtue of their spiritual susceptibility, would probably still cling to Him and wait for His own explanations. Of this paradox about "hating" father and mother we say (1) that the whole spirit of Christ's life and teaching was enough to prevent His disciples from understanding the word in its bare, bald, and literal meaning. Christ did not "trample under foot everything that is human—blood, and love, and country." So far from commanding His disciples to hate their friends, He exhorted them to love even their enemies. He Himself respected the ties of natural relationship. He wept over Jerusalem. When on the cross He thoughtfully cared for His mother. He taught that the spirit of hatred and contempt was the very spirit of murder, and He took little children into His arms and blessed them. None could learn from Him that He demanded from His followers that they should love Him alone. 2. The word "hate" cannot here mean that we ought to love our relatives and friends with a diminished affection. This interpretation would be opposed to the teaching of Christ and the genius of Christianity. "Love one another," says Christ, "*as I have loved you.*" "Husbands, love your wives," says Paul, "*even as Christ loved the Church.*" What limits shall we set to affection which is thus inculcated? Pure and unselfish love cannot be excessive. We may, indeed, love the Divine Lord too little; but we cannot love any human being too much. And we shall never love the Divine Lord more by merely loving our human friends less. 3. The words "hate his own life also" are the key to the whole aphorism. A disciple is to hate his relatives and friends in the same sense in which he is to hate himself. A man can hate what is mean and base in himself; he can hate his own selfish life. Not in the bald, literal sense, for he still cares for his own true, best life, and wishes that to be developed and strengthened. But he does, in a sense, hate himself when the self in him rises in rebellion against God, and Christ, and duty. Now, in this sense also a man may hate his relatives and friends. He may hate that in them which is mean and base. He may hate that in them which seeks to drag him away from Christ. He may hate the selfishness lying in their love for him, which leads them to tempt him into sin. He may hate the selfishness lying in his own love for them, which tempts him to disobey God in order to please them, or in order to retain their friendship. Just as he hates all selfish life, so he may hate all selfish love; and this hatred he may manifest in deliberately choosing to renounce the favour and affection of his friends, rather than recant his allegiance to Christ. It is

here that we are to look for the explanation of Christ's demand for hatred; in the positive *revulsion of feeling* with which the faithful soul turns away from the temptations of affection, and in the positive *sacrifice of friendship* which may be involved in allegiance to duty. The strongest and truest love is that which is capable of the courage and self-sacrifice involved in the infliction of necessary pain. And, therefore, just as he who "hateth his life in this world" really "keeps it unto life eternal," so he who, according to Christ's paradox, "hates" his friends, really loves them with a deeper, more abiding, and more unselfish affection.—*Finlayson.*

Ver. 27. *His Cross.*—*I.e.*, his sufferings, whatever he may be called upon to suffer in My name, even as I actually bear the cross and suffer upon it. Christ here speaks prophetically of His own crucifixion — an event not likely to be foreseen by merely human wisdom, as the cross was not a Jewish form of punishment.

Vers. 28-32. *Building and Fighting.*—The Christian has two kinds of work to do—building and fighting (cf. Neh. iv. 17).

I. The *positive* aspect of the Christian life; the erection of a structure which arrests the attention of men, and for the building of which all the resources available will be required.

II. The *negative* aspect of the Christian life; a perilous war with a powerful king, which involves the possibility of being called upon to lay down one's life for the cause.

A Bad Beginning; a Disastrous Close.

I. Christ warns His hearers, and all in later times, *of the shameful close* which may attend a service begun in a spirit of vain self-confidence.

II. He points out to all *the only wise course* for avoiding such perils as would thus be before them.

Want of Due Deliberation.

I. The *folly* of an inconsiderate profession of religion.

II. Its *danger.*

Ver. 28. "*A tower.*"—Something more than an ordinary house—a considerable edifice, specially fortified, which cannot fail to arrest the attention. In like manner a Christian life professes to be something more and better than an ordinary life—to have stronger and more enduring elements in it; and the world can judge whether the profession is actually realised or not.

"*Sitteth not down first.*"—The sitting down first, and considering well from the very beginning all that is involved in the continuing and finishing, is to commence with deep thoughtfulness, not rashly and superficially, in contrast with that thoughtless running after Him which was witnessed at this time and which the Lord intends to humble and repel.—*Stier.*

"*Counteth the cost.*"—In the spiritual building, the only true counting of the cost is that a man should see his own absolute incompetence and emptiness. The counting of the cost must always issue in the discovery of the utter inadequacy of his own resources, and the going out of himself for strength and means to build.

Ver. 30. "*Was not able to finish.*"—In the "building" which is implied in discipleship, the completion may be righteously demanded and expected of all who have begun; in this case the not continuing brings its own fitting disgrace in the sight of God and man. The world is compelled to respect the sincere and thorough-going Christian; it has nothing but contempt for the half-hearted, who give up the object which they profess to aim at—the salt that has lost its savour is trodden under their feet.

Vers. 31, 32. "*Cometh . . . with twenty thousand.*"—The king coming with twenty thousand soldiers is God, whose sanctifying power and discipline must ever be in conflict with our independent life and will until they are completely subject to His power. So far from the prince of this world being this king, man is naturally at peace with him, and Christ would not advise surrender to him.

Ver. 31. *Self-assertion a Mode of Fighting with God.*—He fights with God, as truly, though in another way, as the openly ungodly, who would fain be anything in His sight, who, face to face with God, would assert *himself* at all; who does not renounce all that he hath, and, as that which is the dearest to him, and cleaves closest to the natural man, himself and his own righteousness the first of all. The Pharisee in the parable (xviii. 9-12) reckoned up all that he had wherewith to meet Him who resisteth the proud and giveth grace only to the humble; the publican, on the contrary, avowed his own inability even to look his adversary in the face—and therefore, exclaiming, "God be merciful to me a sinner," he threw down his arms, and sought, while there was yet time, "conditions of peace."—*Trench.*

Ver. 32. "*Desireth conditions of peace.*"—Nothing is said here of scorn or shame, since to pray for peace in the presence of the more mighty one involves no disgrace, but is rather an act of praiseworthy prudence.

Ver. 33. *The Claims of Christ's Love.*—Christ did not make things too easy for His disciples. Three times in this discourse is the tremendous sentence repeated, "He cannot be My disciple," each time with a condition of discipleship harder and sterner than before. Hating our life, carrying our cross, forsaking all we have—why, claims like these we should have thought, would have earned either a bitter resentment or a silent disdain from most men, but for two circumstances—separately attractive, together invincible—His sincerity and His worthiness. He meant what He said, and He merited what He claimed. Those claims of His can only be met by us, and satisfied for Him, through the wondrous method of sacrifice. He claims acceptance, docility, imitation, service, trust, love.—*Thorold.*

"*Forsaketh not.*"—Nevertheless, it is not enough to forsake all that we have, unless also we forsake ourselves. —*St. Gregory.*

Ver. 34. "*Salt is good.*"—If a man, who ought to teach others, and to preserve them from corruption, lose his savour, and become reprobate, how shall he be seasoned?—*Bede.*

The Need of Entire Self-sacrifice.—How significant is this admonition of the Lord, following instantly on the absolute necessity of entire self-sacrifice! "Salt is good, but if the salt have lost his savour, wherewith then shall it be seasoned?" The inference is indisputable. The salt of the Christian life is sacrifice, and if the spirit of sacrifice die out of it, and the essence of that spirit, which is love, become chilled, and its activities and devotions presently diminish, and decay, and disappear, the salt of the life is gone, and its growth paralysed, and its influence killed, and its testimony silenced. The bane of the Church of God, the dishonour of Christ, the laughing-stock of the world, is in that far too numerous body of half-alive Christians who choose their own cross, and shape their own standard, and regulate their own sacrifices, and measure their own devotions; whose sacrifices do not deprive them of a single comfort from one year's end to another, and whose devotions never make their dull hearts burn with the love of Christ.—*Thorold.*

CHAPTER XV.

CRITICAL NOTES.

VER. 1. **Publicans and sinners.**—*I.e.*, tax-gatherers, odious to the whole nation on account of their occupation and their unscrupulousness in carrying it on, and persons from whom the religiously minded held aloof because of their gross and sensual life. The parables imply that they came to Jesus because they were penitent—a fact which should have led the Pharisees to rejoicing rather than to murmuring.

Ver. 2. **Murmured.**—*I.e.*, among themselves. **Receiveth sinners**, etc.—An important and affecting testimony to Christ's attitude towards the sinful; He admits them into the circle of disciples, and treats them as now worthy, because of their penitence, of fellowship with Him.

Ver. 4. **What man.**—The word is emphatic. Christ appeals to ordinary human feelings—pity for the lost, desire to recover a valuable possession, and parental solicitude (in the three parables respectively)—as explaining and justifying His conduct. **An hundred sheep.**—This parable illustrates the Divine *compassion*, as the loss of one out of a hundred would be no great matter to the owner. **The wilderness.**—*I.e.*, the plains on which sheep were pastured. **Until he find it.**—Persistent and careful search (cf. Ezek. xxxiv. 6-11 *ff.*).

Ver. 5. Not mere self-interest, but love and pity, explain the gentleness with which the shepherd treats the sheep when he finds it (cf. Isa. xl. 1, 2). "No blows are given for the straying—no hard words; mercy to the lost one—and joy within himself—are the shepherd's feelings; the sheep is weary with long wanderings—he gives it rest" (*Alford*).

Ver. 6. **When he cometh home**, etc.—The joy is so great that it needs to be imparted. Those who have fellow-feeling with the shepherd, who are animated by the compassion he manifested, rejoice with him; so would the Pharisees and scribes have done, when they saw sinners recovered from the error of their ways, if they had partaken of the spirit of Christ.

Ver. 7. **Joy in heaven.**—A glimpse into the unseen world (cf. Matt. xviii. 10). **Just persons.**—The reference is to those who thought themselves righteous, and who had never been guilty of the conduct figuratively represented by the straying of the sheep. The truly penitent enter into a more blessed condition than that of those who have never risen above a higher standard of conduct than that of mere legal obedience.

Ver. 8. **Ten pieces of silver.**—This parable illustrates the *preciousness* of the human soul. The loss of one out of ten is a much more serious one than that in the preceding parable. Perhaps the ten coins were a set worn as an ornament, according to the custom of Eastern women. The piece of money specified is the Greek *drachma* (worth about 8*d.*), and equal to the Roman penny (*denarius*). **Light a candle.**—Rather, "a lamp" (R.V.). The houses in the East were commonly without windows.

Ver. 9. **Which I had lost.**—Observe the difference between this and "which was lost" in ver. 6. In the one case the bewildered animal wanders away, in the other the piece of silver is an inanimate thing, unconscious of its own value and loss. A certain fitness in the comparison to a coin arises from the latter bearing the image and superscription of a king. So, too, the soul though lying in the dust, and unaware of its miserable state, bears traces upon it of Him in whose image it was made and to whom it belongs.

Ver. 10. **In the presence of the angels.**—And shared by them, as is implied in the words "Rejoice with me."

Ver. 11. **A certain man.**—Our heavenly Father, since Christ never represents Himself thus. He always speaks of Himself as a Son, though often as a possessor, or lord. **Two sons.**—*I.e.*, to represent the professedly religious and openly irreligious classes of men, whose presence led to the discourse. Both are Jews. The idea that the elder son represents the Jews and the younger the Gentiles seems foreign to the parable; for (1) the Jew can scarcely be said to be the elder son, as the call of Abraham took place a couple of thousand years after the Creation, and (2) the reception of the Gentiles into the kingdom of God was not yet plainly revealed. But in character the sons may be said to be representative of mankind, for we have in them examples of two great phases of alienation from God—the elder is blinded by his self-righteousness, the younger degraded by his unrighteousness.

Ver. 12. **The younger.**—As the more thoughtless and easily deceived. **Give me the portion**, etc.—Not an unheard-of request, though it does not seem to have been customary among the Jews to do as here described. Something like it, however, occurs in the life of Abraham

(Gen. xxv. 6). The law prescribed that two-thirds fell to the elder son (Deut. xxi. 17). "In this case the father reserves to himself the power during his life over the portion of the first-born" (ver. 31) (*Alford*). The yielding to the request of the younger son strikingly sets forth the permission of free-will to man, and also the fact of God's bestowing many gifts upon even the unthankful and disobedient. The request indicates a state of mind from which every kind of sin takes its rise—the desire to be independent of God and to enjoy a liberty which is just another name for licence. So was it with our first parents, who were attracted by the prospect of "being as gods, knowing good and evil."

Ver. 13. **Not many days.**—The purpose he had had in view was soon disclosed. **Far country.**—To be rid of all restraint. The distance to which he wanders suggests a likeness to the strayed sheep of the earlier parable (ver. 4); his manner of life in the far country recalls the condition of the silver piece lying in the dust (ver. 8). **Wasted.**—From this he gets his name of "the prodigal," the waster (Latin, *prodigus*).

Ver. 14. **When he had spent all.**—Probably very soon, as the course of sin is usually a brief one. **Began.**—This marks a crisis in his life. **To be in want.**—He had "spent his money for that which is not bread" (Isa. lv. 2). "This famine is the shepherd seeking his strayed sheep—the woman sweeping to find the lost. The famine, in the interpretation, is to be *subjectively* taken—he begins to *feel* the emptiness of soul which precedes either utter abandonment or true penitence" (*Alford*). In this figurative manner the weariness and disgust which naturally result from a sinful course are set forth.

Ver. 15. **Joined himself.**—The word is a strong one—"he clave unto"—became a hanger-on—sponged upon another, and was forced to do dirty work. **A citizen.**—Rather, "one of the citizens" (R.V.) We may take this "citizen" as representing the tyrannous power of sin. The Prodigal had broken away from a loving father, and found himself in subjection to a hard task-master. **To feed swine.**—Doubly degrading—the task of a slave, and one intensely repulsive to a Jew. This represents the degradation at the *end* of a sinful course to which a man is subjected, as it were, against his will.

Ver. 16. **He would fain.**—He craved and got his desire (cf. for similar use of the verb, chap. xvi. 21). He was driven to assuage his hunger with what could scarcely be called food. **Husks.**—Not pods of some other fruit, but the fruit of the carob-tree, used for feeding domestic animals. **No man gave.**—*I.e.*, anything else, anything better. It is absurd to imagine that it means "No man gave even husks to him." He could provide himself with *them*, even if the swine were thereby stinted in their food. The desertion by those on whom he had wasted his substance, and whom he had probably reckoned as friends, is a very natural touch in the parable.

Ver. 17. **He came to himself.**—Sin is in reality a being beside oneself: true life is that lived, not in gratification of self, but in subordination to God and in communion with God. Here we are evidently on a higher spiritual plane than in the two preceding parables; the whole process of loss and recovery is transacted within the soul of the Prodigal. It is of his own free-will that he wanders away; but then, his return is voluntary also. **How many hired servants!**—His own hard lot as a hired servant reminds him of the happier condition of those of the same class in his father's house. **And I.**—Who am still a son, though an unworthy one.

Ver. 18. **I have sinned.**—Perhaps rather, "I sinned"—referring not merely to the riotous life he had lately led, but to the initial act of leaving his father's house (so in ver. 21). **Against heaven and before thee.**—In the spiritual interpretation these two are one and the same; it is the parabolical form that necessitates the double expression.

Ver. 19. It is noticeable that he nowhere gives up his sonship. He uses the address "father," and asks to be reinstated in his place as a son (though he confesses that he is unworthy of it). For even in the request which he thinks of proffering, but which he afterwards omits, he does not wish to become a hired servant, but to be made *as* one of the hired servants.

Ver. 20. **Arose and came.**—Not always the *usual* course followed, but certainly the *proper* course—for the Prodigal is now an example of penitence. **A great way off.**—The idea is suggested by the father's having been on the outlook for the son's return, and of his having been animated by a love which made him quick-sighted to discern the distant figure of the penitent Prodigal. The running to welcome, and the touching signs of joy at the son's return, correspond to the "seeking" in the other parables, for they strengthen the resolution of the penitent, which might not have been strong enough to enable him to carry through his purpose.

Ver. 21. It is significant that he omits the request to be made "as a hired servant." The love with which he was met awakens the filial spirit in all its intensity, and any such request would have been a kind of outrage.

Ver. 22. **Said to his servants.**—His joy is too full to allow him to answer his son; he instantly issues orders to the servants to celebrate his return. **Bring forth.**—A better reading is, "Bring forth quickly" (R.V.). **Best robe.**—For him who came in rags. "*Best.*"

—Lit., "first." No reference to a dress he had formerly worn as a son—for it was as a son that he had left his father's house. **Ring,** etc.—Signs of being a free man. Slaves wore no rings and went bare-footed.

Ver. 23. **The fatted calf.**—Reserved for some special feast or anniversary. **Let us eat and be merry.**—Joy again alluded to as resulting from recovery of the lost, as in vers. 6, 9. "*Us*" —including servants, as entering into the joy of their Lord (Matt. xxv. 21, 22).

Ver. 24. **Was dead.**—Cf. Rev. iii. 1; Eph. v. 14, ii. 1; Rom. vi. 13, for similar comparison of a state of impenitence to that of death.

Ver. 25. **Now, his elder son.**—A reproof to the Pharisees and scribes. Some have wished the parable had closed with ver. 24. But the elder son is still a son and in need of repentance. In one respect he is, though less heinously guilty than his brother, in greater danger, because of the risk of self-deception. "As regards the penitent, this part of the parable sets forth the reception he meets with from his *fellow-men*, in contrast to that from his *father*" (*Alford*). **In the field.**—Probably working—part of the hard, but self-chosen service of which he complains in ver. 29. **Music and dancing.**—Surely this mention of appropriate signs of joy on such a solemn occasion should prove that these amusements are not necessarily worldly, or sinful, or unbecoming, for a Christian. **Meant.**—Lit., "might be."

Ver. 27. **Safe and sound.**—Lit., "in good health." "A very prosaic rendering of the father's enthusiastic and even poetical utterances" (vers. 24, 32) (*Speaker's Commentary*). No stress need, however, be laid upon this—the servant simply describes matters as they appear from his point of view.

Ver. 28. **Entreated him.**—As Christ was now by this parable entreating the Pharisees and scribes.

Ver. 29. **Lo, these many years,** etc.—He does not say "father," and he speaks of his past service as having been like that of a slave. **Neither transgressed.**—The virtual boast of the Pharisaic party (cf. chap. xviii. 11, 12). **Never gavest me a kid.**—This answers to the younger son's "give me" (ver. 12); a similar sin in both cases—a separation of their interests from the interests of their father. **My friends.**—Respectable people, very different from my brother's disreputable associates. The "kid" is contrasted with "the fatted calf."

Ver. 30. **Thy son.**—He will not say "my brother." **Devoured thy living.**—Implying blame to his father for giving him the means and opportunity for running riot. **With harlots.**—A detail implied, perhaps, in ver. 13, but out of place on his brother's lips. Only the bitterest jealousy could have prompted the reproach. **Killed for him.**—"Making him not only my equal, but my superior,"

Ver. 31. **Son.**—The father still affectionate even towards the self-righteous and uncharitable son. **Ever with me.**—No need for *extraordinary* joy in his case. **All that I have.**—Rather "all that is mine is thine" (R.V.). The younger son had wasted his share; all that the father had was the elder son's. There is no impoverishment to the righteous in consequence of favour shown to sinners (cf. Matt. xx. 14).

Ver. 32. **It was meet.**—The form is general—"it was a right" thing—justifying the joy and leaving it still open for the elder son to join in it. **Thy brother.**—In contrast with the words "thy son" (ver. 30).

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 1—10.

The Lost Sheep and the Lost Coin.—These parables illustrate the fact that a more active interest in any possession is aroused by the very circumstance that it is lost. The sheep that is lost is not on that account disregarded by the shepherd, but receives for the time greater attention than those that remain in the fold. The piece of money that has gone a-missing becomes on that very account of greater immediate importance to the woman than all she has safe in her jar in the cupboard. So it is with God. The very circumstance that men have strayed from Him evokes in Him a more manifest and active solicitude in their behalf.

I. **God suffers loss in every sinner that departs from Him.**—To the Pharisaic mind this was a new light on the character of God. The Pharisee himself trusted little to tenderness, much to rigid law. Naturally he thought of God also

as standing upon His rights, enforcing His will by compulsion, and with equanimity punishing and driving into permanent exile those who had strayed from Him. It is a revelation to them to hear that the lostness of the sinful is God's loss; that God suffers more than the sinner in the separation. For God loves the sinner, and this love is wounded, whereas the sinner has no love for God that can be wounded by separation. It is God who suffers, and not the heartless sinner, who, without a thought of the wounds he is inflicting, goes his own wretched way, and courts the destruction which Christ died to save him from. All the broken-heartedness of parents who, year by year, watch the failure of their efforts to lead some misguided child to well-doing; all the crushing anguish of wives who see their husbands slowly hardening in vice and sinking out of the reach of their love; all the varied misery that love must endure in this sinful world;—is after all but the reflection of what Infinite Love suffers in sympathy with every sinner who spurns it and chooses death. Look at the sorrow of God in Christ, and say whether the loss which God suffers in your separation from Him is true or feigned.

II. **The very fact of our being lost excites action of a specially tender kind towards us.**—God does not console Himself for our loss by the fellowship of those who have constantly loved Him. He does not call new creatures into being to fill up the blank we have made by straying from Him. He would rather restore the most abandoned sinner than blot him from his place to substitute an archangel. So long as things go smoothly, and men by nature love God, and seek to do His will, there is no anxiety, no meeting of emergencies by unexpected effort, hidden resources, costly sacrifice. But when sin brings into view all that is tragic, and when utter destruction seems to be man's appointed destiny, there is called into exercise the deepest tenderness, the utmost power of the Divine nature. This appears in—(1) the *spontaneity* of the search God institutes for the lost. The shepherd, missing one of his flock, straightway goes in search of it. He does not expect that it will seek him; he goes after it. He knows the recovery of the sheep depends wholly on himself, and he prepares for trouble, provocation, risk. And so God is as truly beforehand with the sinner as the shepherd with the sheep. The initiative is God's, and all that you desire to do in the way of return to righteousness is prompted by Him. He has already sufficiently shown that He is alive to the emergency and that no trouble is too great, no sacrifice too great, while there is a possibility of saving the human soul. (2) God's search is also *persistent*. The woman of the parable sweeps out every dusty corner; she shakes out every article of clothing; she lifts boxes that have not been lifted for years; she carefully searches drawers where she knows the coin cannot be; she reads the face of every one who has come near her house for a month; she exhausts every possibility of finding her piece of money. And so God makes diligent search. He leaves no stone unturned. With active, intelligent, unwearied search, He strives to win the sinner to purity and love. Christ astonished men on earth by the company into which He found His way, and by the affection with which spoke to low and worthless people; and so does He still, by means less observable, but equally efficient, seek to win men to the recognition of His love, and of all the good He makes possible.

III. **The exceeding joy consequent on the restoration of the sinner.**—The joy is greater than that over "the just which need no repentance," because the effort to bring it about has been greater, and because for a time the result has been in suspense. So that when the end is attained there is a sense of clear gain. The value of the unfallen soul may intrinsically be greater than the value of the redeemed; but the joy is proportioned, not to the value of the article, but to the amount of the anxiety that has been spent upon it. To the sinner,

then, these parables say, It is your unspeakably happy privilege to give God joy. There is no joy comparable to the joy of successful love; of love, that is to say, not only recognised and returned, but which succeeds in making the object of it as happy as it desires, and does so after many repulses and misunderstandings and hazards. This is God's greatest joy. When God succeeds in securing the happiness—the inward purity and rectitude, and therefore the happiness—of any one who has been estranged from Him, there is joy in heaven. What can more worthily give joy to intelligent beings than the increase of goodness? This joy we have it in our power to give to God.—*Dods.*

SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS ON VERSES 1—10.

Vers. 1, 2. *Christ in Society.*—It is astonishing how often we read of Jesus being at feasts. He began His ministry by attending a wedding. Matthew made Him a feast, and He went and sat down among the publican's motley guests. He invited Himself to the house of Zacchæus, another publican. Indeed, His eating with this class of persons came to be notorious. But He repeatedly dined with Pharisees as well. There was no fear of Him, in any company, obscuring His testimony for God. In these occasions of table-talk He dignified life, and embraced golden opportunities of doing good. You will be surprised to find how many of His words are spoken to His fellow-guests at meals. Some of His most priceless sayings, which are now the watchwords of His religion, were uttered in these commonplace circumstances. —*Stalker.*

Receiving Sinners.—We are indebted to the Pharisees for this testimony to our Lord, and His way with men. He takes His text from their lips. They would make Him a sinner because He seeks to save such sinners as they have never thought of saving. They would have it understood that He prefers such sinners; that these form the best material out of which His disciples and apostles can be made. And much preaching founded upon this course of action of our Lord has tended, unintentionally, to give a similar impression in these and other times, as if the best preparations for conversion and a holy life were a gross and degraded life! No mistake could be greater. He nowhere teaches that reckless and open vice is the best way to meet Him, or the best prior education for His disciples.—*D. McColl.*

Publicans attracted to Jesus.—The tax-gatherers were the home heathen of Palestine, and none were more scorned than they. These and other outcasts were drawn to Jesus. They kept far from other religious teachers, but somehow they could not help being drawn to Him. He had a magnet-like power over them. Just as the swallow is drawn to the sunny south, as the flower turns to the sun, and the chicken to the mother bird, so great sinners, shunning others, turned to Jesus in the days of His flesh. But the most decent and religious people murmured scornfully. To defend Himself and shame them Jesus spoke the three parables of grace in this precious chapter.—*Wells.*

It is an Epitome of the Gospel.—Originally, it was the saying of foes, not of friends. In this cavil there spoke for once the commonly suppressed voice of a self-ignorant and self-flattering world. The world exactly inverts the judgment of God and heaven. God hates the sin, yet loves the sinner; the world casts out the sinner, but will eat and drink with the sin.

I. **The world's definition of "sinners."**—Those who have transgressed the world's morals. The world has its tariff of sins, and its register of sinners. The solemn saying of the Old Testa-

ment is forgotten by the religious world, "By Him actions are weighed." Weighed, not counted. Weighed, rather than measured.

III. **They meant, This man loves the company of the wicked.**—"A man is known by the company he keeps." A taunt which found no sanction from His judges. Pilate and Herod agreed as to His innocence. The taunt has had no acceptance with posterity.

III. **The words are true in their amplitude, and in their grandeur.**—Christ refuses none. With what mind on their part? With what view on His? Not resolving to continue in their sins. Not to bid them sin on. He takes them to forgive, to heal, to help, to go and sin no more. Christ receives no man except to rid him of his sin, and because that is his desire. —*Vaughan.*

Jesus Christ ignoring Social Distinctions.—In reference to the various classes of Palestinian society Jesus was not the slave of custom or class. He broke through them in obedience to the requirements of "judgment, mercy, and faith." Scribe and Pharisee stood aloof from Him. Publican and sinner drew near. But His "whosoever will" was equally for all. There was to be no respect of persons. Just as gladly would He have ministered in the fellowship and ministries of the faith to Pharisee as to publican. He often did, and does so still. Barriers are self-erected. Beneath all social accidents were *souls*. And these, in their priceless value, would survive earthly distinctions. He traversed social distinctions in the interest of that higher society which might, without clashing with them, be inclusive of all. In so acting He ran counter to the principles and narrow-minded, cold hearted practice of exclusionists. In His love for *man*, He aroused the hostile opposition and criticism of certain *men*. Custom, indeed, is not to be violated for the sake of singularity. But the example of Christ justifies the doing of it for the sake of the great things of "judgment, mercy, and faith." —*Campbell.*

Ver. 1. *Holiness United with Love.*—That which attracted publicans and sinners to Jesus was holiness, united with love; they were repelled by the haughtiness of the Pharisees. Goodness appeared to them in a guise they had never before known or even dreamed of.

"*To hear Him.*"—Not merely to see His miracles. The motive that drew them was of a spiritual character, and contrasted strikingly with that of many who came to the Saviour. Hence, He "received" them, welcomed them, and opened up to them the treasures of Divine love.

It was precisely these who felt they had no means to build the tower, no forces to meet the opposing king; and hence they sought resources from One who manifested power, and through Him desired "conditions of peace."

The humble *hear* and *learn*; they find the grace of God in the word issuing from the lips of Jesus. The proud *murmur* and *condemn*; their dark understandings would fain quench the love of God where it shines most brightly.

Ver. 2. "*Murmured.*"—A twofold ground of offence: 1. Jesus receives persons of evil name and repute. 2. He allows Himself to be received by them, and consents to sit at their tables.

"*This man receiveth.*"—They were scandalised at His procedure, and insinuated—on the principle that a man is known by the company he keeps—that He must have some secret sympathy with their *character*. But what a truth of unspeakable preciousness do their lips, as on other occasions, unconsciously utter!—*Brown.*

A Culpable Pride.—There is truth in the Pharisaic principle of abstaining from intercourse with sinful and defiled men, if it proceed from anxiety to avoid

being tempted by their sins. In them, however, it was the result of haughty feeling which made them keep at a distance from such unfortunate men, even when their minds showed an inclination towards something better.—*Olshausen.*

Christ Eating with Sinners.—The words were meant as a reproach. 1. How much Christianity has done to change the prevailing estimate of men and things! It is no reproach now for a teacher or minister of religion to seek out the sinful. Such conduct is understood now, thanks to the gospel. 2. Still, we are cruel in our treatment of sinners in private and common life. How severely do we judge when we ourselves are not at the bar. To "receive sinners and eat with them" is still a crime in Christendom. And, of course, in some senses it would be a crime. To prefer by choice the company of the immoral: this would be a just reproach—no virtue, but the very contrary. All depends upon the motive. If we would imitate Jesus in His treatment of sinners, let us imitate Him by His grace in His principle and in His motive. 3. He was not the friend of the sin, but the friend of the sinner. He would not leave the sinner in his sin. Not to embolden them in evil, but to win them for good. So the friend of the sinner must, to be Christ-like, be the foe of the sin.—*Vaughan.*

Vers. 4-10. *The Lost One Sought.*—The twin parables have much in common. They both exhibit the *seeking* love of God. Jesus shames the Pharisees for their pride and holding aloof. He gives them two short parables.

I. **The lost one.**—The two pictures of outdoor and indoor life were very familiar to His hearers. It is a figure of all, even of the Pharisees, if they had only known it.

II. **Who seeks it.**—The seeking Shepherd is a common figure in Church windows and in sacred pictures. Jesus is still seeking the lost,—by His Spirit, in His Church, through His people.

III. **How He seeks it.**—The Incarnation. The earthly life. The atoning death. The Church, too, holds up the candle of the Word. Joy fills His heart at the discovery and restoration of even one wandering sheep, one lost coin.—*Watson.*

Christ's Sympathy for Sinners.

I. A **yearning** sympathy.
II. An **active** sympathy.
III. A **tender** sympathy.
IV. A **joyful** sympathy.

Walker.

The Lost Sheep and the Lost Coin.

I. Love **sorrowing.**
II. Love **seeking.**
III. Love **rejoicing.**

Lessons.—1. The value of the soul. 2. God does not need to be made willing to save you. 3. Here is unsurpassed encouragement for every penitent.—*Wells.*

God's Love for the Lost.

I. The **loss.**
II. The **finding.**
III. The **rejoicing.**—*Taylor.*

The Persistence of Thwarted Love.—I. But first let me say a word or two about the more general thought brought out in both these clauses—of **the Shepherd's search.** Now, beautiful and heart-touching as that picture is, of the Shepherd away amongst the barren mountains searching minutely in every ravine and thicket, it wants a little explanation in order to be brought into correspondence with the fact which it expresses. For His search for His lost property is not in ignorance of where it is, and His finding of it is not His discovery of His sheep, but its discovery of its Shepherd. We have to remember wherein consists the loss before we can understand wherein consists the search. Now, if we ask ourselves that question first, we get a flood of light on the whole matter. The great hundredth Psalm, according to its true rendering, says, "It is He that hath made us, *and we are His*;

. . . we are . . . the sheep of His pasture." But God's true possession of man is not simply the possession inherent in the act of creation. For there is only one way in which spirit can own spirit, or heart can possess heart, and that is through the voluntary yielding and love of the one to the other. So Jesus Christ, who, in all His seeking after us men, is the voice and hand of Almighty Love, does not count that He has found a man until the man has learned to love Him. For He loses us when we are alienated from Him, when we cease to trust Him. Therefore the search which, as being Christ's is God's in Christ, is for love, for trust, for obedience. If, then, the Shepherd's seeking is but a tender metaphor for the whole aggregate of the ways by which the love that is Divine and human in Jesus Christ moves round about our closed hearts, seeking for an entrance, then, surely the first and chiefest of them, which has its appeal to each of us as directly as to any man that ever lived, is that great mystery that Jesus Christ, the eternal Word of God, left the ninety and nine that were safe on the high pastures of the mountains of God, and came down among us, out into the wilderness "to seek and to save that which was lost." And, that method of winning—I was going to say, of *earning*—our love comes straight in its appeal to every single soul on the face of the earth. Do not say that thou wert not in Christ's heart and mind when He willed to be born and willed to die. He seeks us by every record of that mighty love that died for us, even when it is being spoken poorly, and with many limitations and imperfections. And here, in our midst, that unseen Form is passing along and speaking to our hearts, and the Shepherd is seeking His sheep. He seeks each of us by the inner voices and emotions in our hearts and minds, by those strange whisperings which sometimes we hear, by the suddenly upstarting convictions of duty and truth which sometimes, without manifest occasion, flash across our hearts. He is seeking us by our unrest, by our yearnings after we know not what, by our dim dissatisfaction, which insists upon making itself felt in the midst of joys and delights, and which the world fails to satisfy as much as it fails to interpret. He seeks us by the discipline of life, for I believe that Christ is the active providence of God, and that the hands that were pierced on the Cross do move the wheels of the history of the world, and mould the destinies of individual spirits.

II. And now, in the second place, a word about **the search that is thwarted.** "If so be that He find." That is an awful *if*, when we think of what lies below it. The thing seems an absurdity when it is uttered, and yet it is a grim fact in every life—viz., that Christ's effort can fail, and be thwarted. Not that His search is perfunctory or careless, but that we shroud ourselves in darkness through which that love can find no way. God appeals to us, and says, "What more *could* have been done to My vineyard that I have not done unto it?" His hands are clean, and the infinite love of Christ is free from all blame, and it all lies at our own doors. I must not dwell upon the various reasons which lead so many men among us—as, alas! the utmost charity cannot but see that there are—to turn away from Christ's appeals, and to be unwilling to "have this Man" either "to reign over them" or to save them. One great reason is because you do not believe that you need Him. Some of us think we are in the flock when we are not. Some of us have no inclination for the sweet pastures that He provides, and would rather stay where we are. We do not need to do anything to put Him away. It is a very easy matter to turn away from the Shepherd's voice. "I called, and ye refused. I stretched out My hands, and *no man regarded*." That is all! That is what you do, and that is enough.

III. So, lastly, the thwarted search **prolonged.** "Till He find!" That is a wonderful and a merciful word. It indicates the infinitude of Christ's

patient forgiveness and perseverance. *We* tire of searching. "Can a mother forget" or abandon the seeking after a lost child? Yes! if it has gone on for so long as to show that further search is hopeless, she will go home and nurse her sorrow in her heart. For that is another thing that this word "till" preaches to us—viz., the possibility of bringing back those who have gone farthest away and have been longest away. The world has a great deal to say about incurable cases of moral obliquity and deformity. Christ knows nothing about "incurable cases."—*Maclaren.*

"*That which was lost.*"—None of these parables is meant to set forth with completeness either what wanderers have to do to go back to God, or what God has done to bring wanderers back to Himself. If this had been remembered, many misconceptions would have been avoided. They were meant to show us that a human instinct which prizes things lost, because they are lost, has something corresponding to it in the Divine nature, and so to vindicate the conduct of Christ.

I. **The varying causes of loss.**—The sheep, the coin, the son—each was lost. But in each case, the reason for the loss was different. The sheep was heedless. It was lost through heedlessness. Many men live just so, and, all unwitting, wander from the right road. How considerate of our Saviour to put this explanation of men's condition in the foreground. In the second parable, the *drachma* did not lose itself, but, by the law of gravitation, rolled into a dark corner. It had no power of resistance. So there are people who are things rather than persons, so entirely have they given up their wills and so absolutely do they let themselves be determined by circumstances. There are masses of men who have no power to resist temptation. This thought lightens the darkness of much of the world's sin. The third parable is a picture. The other two are parabolical representations; this is the thing itself. The exercise of self-will, impatience of control—these are causes of loss that underlie the others, and which make for every one of us the sinfulness of sin. It is rebellion, and it is rebellion against a Father's love. There is the individual choice in each case, desiring a separation, and kicking against control.

II. **The varying proportions of loss and possession.**—A hundred, ten, two. One per cent, ten per cent, fifty per cent; a trifle—more serious—heart-breaking. The ascending proportion suggests increasing pains and anxiety. There is something in human nature which makes anything that is lost precious by reason of its loss. Its absolute value may be little: its relative worth is great. Divine love goes after, not the greatest world, but the lost world.

III. **The varying glimpses we have here into God's claims upon us and His heart.**—Ownership describes His relation to us in the first two parables: love is the word that describes it in the third. It is a most blessed and heart-melting thought that God accounts Himself to have lost something when a man goes away from Him. God prizes us, is glad to have us, feels a sense of incompleteness in His possessions when men depart from Him. Think of the greatness of the love into which the ownership is merged, as measured by the infinite price which He has paid to bring us back. Let it lead us all to say, "I will arise and go to my Father.—*Ibid.*

The Twin Parables. — These two parables are an inseparable pair. They are a double star; you cannot tell how much light comes from the one, or how much from the other.

I. **Compare their structure.**—1. *They are alike.*—In each there is a loss, a seeking, a joyful finding. 2. They differ in the extent of the loss, the manner of the loss, and the toil of recovery.

II. **Compare their teaching.**—1. They are alike in teaching the lesson as to the lost condition of the sinner,

the willingness and power of God to save the sinner, and the importance with which God and angels regard each sinner's salvation. 2. They give different views of the sinner. He is wayward, weak, and foolish, like a sheep. He is dead and helpless, like the tarnished coin. The shepherd represents Christ's active and suffering work for man's salvation; the woman's work illustrates better the work of salvation in the soul itself—enlightening, cleansing, transforming work, necessary to fit it for close relationship with God.—*Taylor.*

Vers. 1-7. *The Lost Sheep.*

I. The shepherd misses one when it has strayed from the flock.

II. He cared for the lost sheep. Although he possessed ninety and nine, he was not content to let one go.

III. He left the ninety and nine for the sake of the one that had wandered.

IV. When he finds it he does not punish and upbraid it.

V. He lays the sheep upon his shoulder.

VI. Far from being oppressed by the burden, he rejoices when he feels its weight upon his shoulder.

VII. He invites his neighbours to rejoice with him over his success.—*Arnot.*

Ver. 4. *The Bewildered, the Unconscious, and the Voluntary Sinner.*—The parable of the Lost Sheep represents the stupid and bewildered sinner; that of the Lost Piece of Money, the sinner, unconscious of himself and of his own real worth; that of the Prodigal Son the conscious and voluntary sinner, the most aggravated case.—*Alford.*

"*What man?*"—Jesus appeals to those who had condemned His conduct, and asks whether they do not in the lower order of things usually manifest the pity which they blame in Him. "Does not a shepherd show compassion towards a sheep that has wandered from the fold? Shall not I much more show compassion to a poor, wandering sinner?" It is pity rather than self-interest that moves the shepherd, for the loss of one out of a hundred sheep would not be very serious. His kindly feelings are excited towards the sheep which has not the sense to find its way back to the fold, and which cannot defend itself against its enemies.

"*In the wilderness.*"—*I.e.*, in the place of pasturage, where they were safe. The section of the nation who were faithful to the law and to religious duties, enjoyed means of grace which those who had openly broken with the covenant between God and His people had deprived themselves. They were in the place of pasturage, and if they made diligent use of their advantages, would certainly attain to salvation.—*Godet.*

The Office of the Shepherd was to Seek the Lost. It was the office of the shepherd to seek the lost sheep (Ezek. xxiii. 6, 11, 23), yet with this the Pharisees and scribes found fault.

Vers. 5, 6. *Love Manifested.*—The loving heart of the shepherd is manifested (1) in the perseverance with which he seeks the wandering sheep; (2) in his carrying the exhausted animal upon his own shoulders; (3) in the joy with which he bears the burden; (4) in his summoning his friends and neighbours to partake in his happiness.

Ver. 5. "*Found it.*"—It is one by one, and not in masses, that souls are saved. Jesus saves the Samaritan woman by convincing of the depth of her need, and leading her to seek the Living Water; He saves Zacchæus by inviting him to receive Him into his house as his Guest and Redeemer. He saves Nicodemus by showing Him the necessity of being born again before he could enter into the kingdom of heaven; and He saves Mary Magdalene by delivering her from the power of seven evil spirits.

"*On His shoulders.*"—For He bare our sins in His own body on the tree (1 Pet. ii. 24; Isa. liii. 4-6; Heb. ix. 28).

Ver. 6. "*Rejoice with Me.*"—It is a beautiful principle of our nature that deep feeling, either of sorrow or of joy, is almost too much for one to bear alone, and that there is a feeling of positive relief in having others to share it. This principle our Lord here proclaims to be in operation, even in the Divine procedure.—*Brown.*

Christ's Joy in Finding the Lost.—Christ experienced a perfect rapture of delight when He found a lost sheep; witness His bearing at the well of Sychar, when His joy over the repentance of the woman of Samaria made Him forget hunger, insomuch that the disciples wondered if any man had given Him to eat. That joy, hoped for or experienced, made all His burdens light, made even the cross itself, abhorrent to His sentient nature, more than bearable. Therefore, in drawing the picture of a faithful Shepherd, He might with a good conscience put in this trait, "rejoicing."—*Bruce.*

Ver. 7. "*I say unto you.*"—Let us not, in this "*I say unto you*" miss a slight yet majestic intimation of the dignity of His person: "I who know, I who, when I tell you of heavenly things, tell you of Mine own (John i. 51, iii. 11), announce to you this."—*Trench.*

"*Joy shall be in heaven.*"—We can scarcely avoid the thought that here the prospect of that joy hovered before His soul, which He, the Good Shepherd, was especially to taste when He, after finishing His conflict, should return into the celestial mansion of His Father, and should taste the joy prepared for Him.—*Van Oosterzee.*

"*One sinner that repenteth.*"—He does not joy over the sinner as a sinner, but over him repenting. He joys over his repentance, over the sinner ceasing to be a sinner.

Unity of the Kingdom of the Good.—The kingdom ol the good thus appears as standing in mutual connection and loving unity, so that if one member rejoices, all members rejoice along with it. Heaven and earth are joined together by the bond of perfectness, love.—*Olshausen.*

"*Need no repentance.*"—The Pharisees, indeed, were not called to manifest a repentance like that of the publicans and sinners, for they had kept from gross vices; yet even in them a profound change of heart was needed. They murmured at that which caused great joy in heaven, and thereby showed how far they were from true communion with God.

Something Higher than Legal Righteousness.—The ninety and nine just persons are those who are righteous according to the legal standard, than which there is, however, something higher, even as there is something more inward. And unto this more blessed condition the truly penitent sinner is translated, so that his conversion is more a matter of rejoicing than the strict observance of the law by others.—*Speaker's Commentary.*

Vers. 8-10. *The Lost Coin.*—A totally distinct idea is conveyed by the parable of the Lost Piece of Silver from that in the parable of the Lost Sheep. Pity moves the Shepherd; self-interest moves the woman to patient search. And so Christ teaches that man has value in the sight of God. He is made in the image of God, he is destined for service, and therefore God has need of him.

I. **The Owner** of the silver piece as representing God. 1. Her *anxiety* to find. The coin, like the soul of man, is valuable in itself; it is one of a number, or set, and if it be lost the store is broken in upon, and if it be

not found, another may get it, whose it is not. 2. Her *diligence* in seeking —light brought into dark places, defilement swept away. 3. Her *success*. 4. Her *joyfulness*.

II. **The silver piece** as representing the soul of man. 1. Its innate value. 2. Its unconsciousness of loss. 3. Its helplessness. 4. Its proper place in God's keeping.

The parable teaches—

I. **That man is lost.**—1. By ignorance of the truth. 2. By falling into vice. 3. By his own heedlessness.

II. **That he may be found and restored to his true place and value.**

III. **That his recovery occasions joy.**—1. To himself. 2. To Christ. 3. To friends and neighbours. 4. To angels and to the spirits of the just made perfect.

Ver. 8. "*Ten pieces.*"—The ten pieces of silver indicate in passing that the woman is not so rich as to be indifferent to the loss of even *one* piece; that is, one soul is estimated by the Spirit in the Church, not in the proportion which one piece would bear to the hoard of a man with millions, but in its proportion to the scanty store of such a woman as this.—*Stier.*

"*Piece of silver.*"—A *drachma*. Man, made in the image of God, and bearing a Divine superscription.

"*Sweep the house.*"—The parable referring originally to the Jewish people, the "house" may be taken as representing the Church; the lighting of the candle and the sweeping, as representing the Spirit's giving light to the world, stirring up the dust of worldliness which conceals the sinner's true worth, and so applying the truth that he is found.

Ver. 10. "*Joy in the presence of the angels.*"

I. God rejoices over returning sinners, and that just because they were once lost.

II. God delights to have the inhabitants of heaven share in His gladness. "If the 'sons of God' shouted for joy and sang together at the first creation (Job xxxviii. 7), by how much better right when 'a new creation' had found place, in the birth of a soul into the light of everlasting life (Eph. iii. 10; 1 Pet. i. 12)" (*Trench*).

Joy Shared with the Angels.—Note carefully the language here employed: "in the presence of the angels of God." True to the idea of the parables, it is the Great Shepherd, the Great Owner Himself, whose properly the joy is over His own recovered property: but so vast and exuberant is it (Zeph. iii. 17), that, as if He could not keep it to Himself, He calleth His whole celestial family to rejoice with Him. In this sublime sense it is joy before or "in the presence of the angels": they only catch the flying joy, sharing it *with Him.*—*Brown.*

An Unexpected Good.—The angels delight in beholding a continued and uninterrupted course of righteousness. But yet in the deliverance of a sinner God's mercy shines out so brightly that Christ attributes to angels a greater joy in it, arising out of an unexpected good.

Divine Joy over Repenting Sinners.—Not joy among the angels, but joy in "the presence of the angels." The joy of God Himself.

I. **What is implied in sinners repenting?**—There are many incorrect and superficial views on repentance. Sorrow in consequence of sin has nothing to do with repentance. A man may even dislike sin and not experience true repentance. Repentance is a change of mind and heart, leading a man to turn from sin and turn to God. There must be both changes—in mind and heart. Beliefs and sentiments in regard to spiritual things must be renounced, and others embraced in their stead. The affections must cease to be under a selfish or worldly bias, and become directed to God and the things

of God. This experience is sweeter to God than even the songs of heaven.

II. **What is implied in God rejoicing?**—Absolutely there can be no accession to the happiness of the ever-blessed God, and yet there must be a real meaning in this language. This joy of God is the (1) *joy of manifested mercy.* He "delighteth in mercy" and in every opportunity for its exercise. (2) *Joy of gratified benevolence.* God is benevolent as well as merciful. He not only pardons, but crowns with blessing. (3) *Joy of recovered possession.* Man was made for God—has wandered from God. The bringing back of the wanderer, the repairing of injury, the renewal of what has been defaced, the healing of the wounded—such a change the all-loving Father cannot look upon but with complacency and delight.—*Alexander.*

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 11—32.

The Prodigal Son.—In the parable of the Prodigal Son we have the most luminous statement anywhere to be found of the original development of evil in the soul of man, and also of the awakening of those better elements in the nature which prove the kinship between man and his Creator. The Prodigal, whose story is given with such detail, serves two purposes: I. In the first part of his career he is a warning—he is a typical sinner. II. In the second he is an example—he is a model penitent. In the representation of the headstrong, disobedient son we may recognise some of the lineaments of our own characters, and learn to hate the sins that defile us; while in the account of his penitence and humility we may see in what attitude of heart, and with what words upon our lips, we should return to our heavenly Father.

I. **The typical sinner.**—The germ of evil—the bitter root from which so much that is hurtful springs—is plainly disclosed to us here. It is self-will. The ill-disposed son resented his father's authority, and wished to be free to do what he chose without being checked or remonstrated with—to feel, in short, that he was his own master. Of course, in the actual human story a good deal might be said in favour of his desire to live his life on his own responsibility. The condition of childhood and tutelage, in the natural course of things, lasts only for a time, and it is a mistake to prolong it unduly. A time comes when each individual must feel the responsibilities that belong to maturity of age, and when the continued exercise of an external control does more harm than good. And it is a test of the wisdom of a parent to know when to relax the yoke which it was a good thing for his children to bear in their youth. The desire of the younger son to leave his father's house and to begin life on his own responsibility might have been a perfectly natural and healthy feeling, and might have been gratified with the full consent of his father, and with the best feelings on both sides. It is only when we consider the spiritual meaning of the parable that the heinousness of this son's feelings and actions comes clearly into view. God is the father, man is the son. The rule of the Father is a spiritual one: His voice is the voice of conscience. The desire to escape from His control is wholly unjustifiable—it is the desire to put pleasure in the place of duty, to shake off the obedience which we as creatures owe to the law of God, and to defy all prohibitions that debar our taking those things that seem good and pleasant to the eye. Subjection to the will of God is the condition of our being and happiness: ruin and desolation follow upon a repudiation of that condition. And if we interpret the parable according to this principle, we may say that the fall of the younger son dates from the moment when he claimed his rights—when he separated his interests from the interests of his father—and not simply when, in the far country, he wasted his substance in riotous living. Morally he was as guilty the day he left his father's house as he was at any subsequent period: all the evil was in

germ in his heart which afterwards appeared in full maturity in his life. And our understanding this fact makes clear to us the many peremptory statements of the Word of God that all men, the respectable as well as the disreputable, are guilty before God. The fact of disobedience and depravity may be more apparent in some cases than in others, but that all are guilty is undeniable. For if the essence of sin lies in self-will, who can claim to be innocent? There are, of course, gross vices and disorderly habits into which we may never have fallen, but the root of them all is in that self-will which has often led us wrong, and self-righteous congratulations upon our comparative cleanliness are utterly out of place in view of that besmirched goodness which is all that the best of us have to boast of. The Prodigal being depicted by Christ as a typical sinner, we are to expect to find in him sin at its very worst, and it is very instructive to notice wherein the baseness of his conduct consists. In reading the parable, this is perhaps the last thing in it that we notice—if, indeed, it does not escape our notice altogether. We use the word "prodigal" glibly enough, and perhaps think of it as meaning one who "breaks out" into a very disorderly life, and goes on recklessly in the bad way. It has quite a different meaning. The Prodigal is *the waster*; and though the word is not found in the parable, it is derived from the phrase in ver. 13, "he *wasted* his substance in riotous living." His prodigality is his sin: he begins by asking for a share of his father's goods; he gets it, carries it off, and wastes it. It is true that he wastes it in riotous living, but no stress is laid on that circumstance. The elder brother, with a rancour which we can easily understand and excuse, insists upon the shamelessness of the vice into which the Prodigal had fallen; but even with him the essence of the fault he was unwilling to allow to be forgiven did not lie in it, but is expressed in the words, "he hath devoured thy living." Nay, it is not the sensual life which the penitent accuses himself of, or which the manner of his punishment accuses him of, but the wasteful life. It is not said that he had become corrupt in soul, or that his health was shattered by his riotous courses, but that his waste brought him to want—that at last he would fain have filled his belly with husks, and could not. It is not said that he was struck with remorse for the consequencess of his evil passions, but only that he remembered that there was bread enough, and to spare, for the servants at home. Is prodigality, then, such a hateful thing that it should be branded as the lowest form of sin? Are there not worse vices than it? Scarcely, if we look at it aright. It is selfishness, pure and simple—the sin of an ignoble or undeveloped creature. Nothing baser can be found than the resolution to indulge self, whatever it may cost—heedless of how others may suffer, heedless of the loss involved, heedless of the voice of conscience, and of the law of God, and of the terrible sentence of condemnation which such conduct is bound to draw down upon itself. It is not without reason that Christ lays stress upon the Prodigality of the Prodigal as the essence of his baseness; for, compared with this utter and brutish selfishness, other forms of sin have a certain air of dignity and superiority. Evil passions are often the errors and backfalls of noble souls: they are often the perversion of feelings which, if they had been rightly curbed and directed, would have brought no shame with them. But the resolute determination to indulge self in spite of all checks of conscience and religion is the final gulf in which the sinner lands; or, to change the figure, it is the root from which everything that is mean, and foul, and corrupt, springs, and by which it is fed. And therefore it is that all vital religion begins with the breaking down of the stubborn will, and its subjection to the wise and holy will of God. The Prodigal, then, is the typical sinner, on whose tragical history all should look with sympathy and terror—with sympathy because he is akin to us, and with terror because we perceive the likeness between ourselves and him.

The model penitent.—We may see in him the model penitent, and learn in what attitude of soul, and with what words upon our lips, we should return to our heavenly Father. In the manner in which the better mind was awakened in him, he is not necessarily an example to us. It was when the sting of hunger, of absolute beggary, penetrated his soul that he returned to himself and thought, with scorn, of the evil courses that had brought him to that pass. But that is only one of many ways in which the voice of God makes itself heard. There are many other kinds of experience that lead to the wholesome change and repentance manifested by this penitent. A severe illness, the sudden death of a friend, an unexpected calamity, a word of warning, the discovery that an evil habit has taken strong hold of us,—in some one of these ways the attention may be directed to our spiritual danger, to the vast distance by which sin has separated us from God, to the loss and risk to which we are exposed by remaining away from Him and in rebellion against Him. But however it may be that we "come to ourselves," we can find no better pattern of penitence in word and action than the Prodigal affords us in the later part of his history. We can be quite sure of this, for Christ of set purpose draws the picture to show both how true repentance expresses itself, and how it is received by the Almighty Father. Note—1. The penitent Prodigal complains of no one but himself, and speaks of no unworthiness but his own. He says nothing against his evil companions—nothing against those who lured him on to fresh courses of vice—nothing against the citizen who left him to feed on husks—nothing of the false friends of whom no man gave unto him; above all, he has nothing to say of the corruption of human nature, or the corruption of things in general. He says that *he himself* is unworthy, as distinguished from honourable persons, and that *he himself* has sinned, as distinguished from righteous persons. An outsider might notice that he was weak, and had been led into sin by companions more hardened and corrupt than himself. But that is nothing to him. All *he* knows is that he was led because he was willing and eager to go, and he does not cast a stone at his associates because he knows he was as morally guilty as any of them. This is a mark of true penitence. Whenever you hear any one excusing himself or herself on the ground of bad companions prevailing over a disposition that was naturally good, you may surely conclude that the penitence is insincere, even if your suspicions that such is the case have not been aroused by the whining tone of voice in which the words are always uttered. There are no excuses that avail to cover guilt. No stress of temptation, no inexperience, no inherent weakness of the nature, no solicitation of evil companions—are worth mentioning. The sinner has no right to mention them, though the judge may take them into account. The fact remains, when all is said, that the sinner is responsible for his guilt, and his only resource is to make the manly, the simply true confession, "I have sinned; I am unworthy." And that is the hard lesson to learn, and the beginning of faithful lessons. All right and fruitful humility, and purging of heart, is in that. Then too, (2) another mark of true penitence is discernible in the *shame* of the Prodigal. He abases himself before his earthly father, as well as before God. That is well worth noticing. "It is easy to call yourself the chief of sinners, expecting every sinner round you to decline, or return the compliment; but learn to measure the real degrees of your own relative baseness, and to be ashamed, not only in heaven's sight, but in man's sight, and redemption is indeed begun." Observe the phrase, "I have sinned *against* heaven"—against the great law of that, and "*before* thee"—visibly degraded before my human sire and guide, unworthy any more of being esteemed of his blood, and desirous only of taking the place I deserve among his servants. This element of shame is essential to true penitence, and often seems to be wanting in those who retail their religious experience, and describe the depth of depravity in which they were once sunk. If their state-

ments are true, shame should seal their lips. Another mark (3) of true penitence is the desire to be henceforward subject to authority; not simply to have the past wiped out, and to be at liberty to enter on another course of self-pleasing and freedom. The Prodigal had left a *father's* house; he desires to come back to a *master's*—"make me as one of thy hired servants." This is the spirit in which he returns, though the actual request is not proffered. Redemption must begin in subjection, and in the recovery of the sense of fatherhood and authority; just as all ruin and desolation began in the loss of that sense. "The lost son began by claiming his rights. He is found when he resigns them. He is lost by flying from his father, when his father's authority was only paternal: he is found by returning to his father, and desiring that his authority may be absolute, as over a hired stranger." By all these marks—by humbly confessing our guilt, by feeling shame on account of it, and by sincerely desiring to be ruled and controlled by the will of God—is that true penitence to be recognised which will avail to open to us our Father's house and our Father's heart.

Wandering.—After the younger son had secured his portion of the family inheritance, he went out of his father's house and "took his journey into a far country." At last he was free! The old restrictions that had fettered his childhood and youth were thrown off; the old duties that had waited upon him and dogged his comings and goings these many years were cast aside and forgotten; the monotonous orderliness and subordination of the peaceful home was a thing of the past. Henceforth he was his own master, and the world was at his feet. It is this delusive sense of freedom which lends a kind of enchantment to the early stages of wrong-doing; which persuades a man that he is evidencing his strength; that he has ceased to be a child under a wiser care and guidance, and become old enough to see the world and learn something of life. There are few things more tragic than to hear young men talking about "seeing life," when it is really death they are seeing. And when a man begins to talk much or loudly about being free, it means, as a rule, that he is enslaving himself. At the start, however, there is a delusive sense of freedom. It is no longer necessary to keep hours, obey rules, perform tasks; the world is before one, with its mysteries, its joys, and its vastness; the home, with its subordination and restriction, is behind. The young man has his portion in his wallet; his staff is in his hand; he has strength, freshness, youth; why should he not throw himself into the tumult of life, and test his power? And so the wanderings begin, and the father's house grows dim and shadowy in a past that seems pallid and vague beside the rich, full present. There is no rest, it is true; but there is the variety of constant change. There is nothing by the way that satisfies; but expectation points on to new sensations and experiences. From city to city, from country to country, the ardent traveller makes his way. He has no plans; that is part of his emancipation; he is doing as he pleases. If he wishes to stay, he stays; if he feels impelled to go, he goes. He sees men about him who are tied to times and places by duties, and whose necks are bowed by yokes of care; he has no duties and cares. He has broken out of that venerable old prison in which so many good but commonplace people have locked themselves all their lives; he breathes the open air, and lives on the broad earth. If he wishes to pluck a certain fruit, the fact that it is forbidden gives it a higher flavour; if he is drawn to do a certain deed, the fact that it is sinful makes it more attractive. He is no longer a child in leading-strings, to be frightened by the bugaboos of law, duty, morality, God; he is a grown man, and he has put away those childish things. He is free! And all the time the father's house, builded in purity, self-sacrifice, love, and service, grows dimmer against the horizon, until it dips below

that faint, far line. He has exchanged it for the world, and henceforth the world is his home.—"*The Outlook.*"

Vers. 17-19. *The Prodigal Son.*—This young man was like a good many young men of our own time and all times. He thought himself too wise to be longer guided by his father; he thought himself too strong to be longer governed at home. So he went away from home. When he loses his money, he loses his friends; for friends that are bought with money disappear when the money disappears. He had never learned a trade; he had never acquired the art of honest industry; he had never acquired the simple ability to give the community enough to make it worth while for the community to give him enough to live on. I think he must have acquired one virtue—patience—or he could not have taken care of swine. Perhaps he acquired honesty also, and would not even take the husks without permission. When he came to himself, he said, "What a fool I have been! Here I am, cold, houseless, friendless, starving, and in my father's house the servants have enough, and more than enough. I will go back, and apply for a position as servant in my father's household." What I want you to see is that this whole course of this young man separating himself from his father was a course of folly, and the return to his father was a return to wisdom. It was when he came to himself that he said, "I will arise and go to my father." Sin is madness. To say of a man that he is shrewd, but wicked, is a lie. No shrewd man is wicked; no wicked man is shrewd. Sin is short-sighted. To begin with, the man who disregards God's laws is a foolish man. In one realm we all recognise that. No man would call a man wise who disregarded the laws of nature. We all understand that natural laws do operate, and no man can say, "I will act as though natural laws do not operate." But when we get the natural laws that come closest to us, then we are more doubtful. Sanitary laws—those we think we can disregard. We cannot violate the law of gravitation, but we can violate the laws of health, and that will not hurt much! O fools and blind! The laws of God are immutable, eternal, unchanging; no man can disregard them. Has not science taught us even so much as that? And yet the world is full of men who disregard the moral laws. If the policeman tells us to halt, most of us are wise enough to halt; we do not attempt to brush him aside. But when God says, "Halt!" when God comes to a man who is going in the course that he knows is leading down to hell, and thinks he can turn around and go up-hill again, and God says in his conscience, "Stop! you are going in the wrong direction!" he brushes God aside and goes on. "The fool hath said in his heart, There is no God." But there are greater fools than he. There is the fool who says, "There is a God; but I am going to live as though there was not any; and there are thousands of them—tens of thousands of them." But God is more than a Law-giver; he is a Life-giver; and when a man tries to live without God, he is trying to live without the source and reservoir of life. No man knows what life is. Science traces back phenomena to their origin; but when it gets to this question—What is life? no man can answer. Once, when a boy, starting at a brook that flowed through my grandfather's place, I followed it up for miles and miles, until at last I came to its source, the little springs in the hills, and the little baby rivulets that, flowing together, formed the beginning of that brook. But the water in the hill that gave forth the springs was hidden from sight. I had gone as far as I could when I got to the original springs; but what lay behind the springs, the reservoir in the hill—that I could not see. So we have followed life back to its source, traced the life of man through the various forms of science back to the original germ, the very beginning; but there we are stopped. Where does this spring, this baby rivulet, come from, which, growing larger and larger, makes

this stream of wondrous life, with all the diversified phenomena, in one nation? It is God. God is life, and all phenomena are the manifestation and the revelation of the Divine life that lives and moves in every living thing. Man can make almost everything but life; that he cannot make. All vital phenomena are the forth-putting of life—that is, the forth-putting of God Himself; and when a man undertakes to live without God, do you know what he is doing? He is trying to live without life. There is just so much God in you as there is life in you. If you have some little intellect, that intellect is of God; if you have some little affection, that affection is of God; if you have some little honesty, that honesty is of God. And if you come up to this point, and stop and say, "I will have no more of God," you are saying, "I will have no more of life." That is what the wise Hebrew prophet meant, "Whoso findeth Me, findeth life; whoever sinneth against Me, wrongeth his own life. And they that hate Me love death." Oh, to live in this world that is all full of God, with God knocking at every door, God knocking at the heart, the brain, the eye, the ear, God knocking at every avenue of sense, every avenue of a man's being, and then to say, "I will live without Him"! But how many there are that are doing it! All the desires that are in men, all their eager quest for wealth, all their strenuous pushing for power, all their outreachings for knowledge, all their aspirations and dreams of love and hope, all their desires to be in any respect greater than they are to-day, are the hungerings of a child after its father. The Law-giver and Life-giver, He is also the Love-giver. We have not sounded the depths of the meaning of the simple text, "God is love." It is the very nature of the Divine to pour Himself out. He is not like Brahm—absorbed, silent, abstracted; He is for ever pouring Himself forth for the sake of others. He did not wake up one morning six thousand years ago, and say, "Go to, I will make a world." No, no; He has always been living; the whole universe is full of the Fatherhood of God; the universe is infinite as God is infinite, and love is infinite as God is infinite; and it is the nature of God to be for ever pouring Himself out that others may share His life, that others may be created to be life-bearers, living souls. God is love. Then you may turn it about—Love is God. And all the forms of love that life makes us familiar with are utterances of God. And God is perpetually trying to tell us who He is and what He is, not merely through the broken utterances of preachers, scribes, and prophets, but through the eloquent voices of life. The babe looks up into its mother's eyes, and says to the mother, "God is love." The little boy nestles up to the mother's breast, and falls asleep in her arms, and, filled by the love surging through her, is saying to her, "God is love." The young man goes away from home, and in his home-sickness writes back to mother with the thirstings and the hungerings of love; and the thirstings, and the hungerings, and the home-sickness, are saying to him, "God is love." To live as though there were no Law-giver, to live as though there were no Life-giver, to live as though there were no Love-giver, is also to live as though there were no Hope-giver. Do you know how full this nineteenth century is of despair? And do you know that all pessimism is atheistic, and all atheism is pessimistic? Man may have a certain measure of virtue without God; he may stand in the trenches, and fight bravely, and be willing to die, borne through the peril and the storm by his mere fatalism or his mere human courage, as a trained horse may stand in the battle till he is shot down. But no intelligent man can keep alive his hopes unless he keeps alive his faith in God. To be without God is to be without hope in the world. And the philosophy of Schopenhauer and Hartmann, and the gloom in Amiel and Allard, all bear the same witness: to be without God, without the sense of God, the knowledge of God, the faith in God, the assurance of God, is to be without hope. And, on the other hand, to be with Him is to be sure of hope, sure of the future. I am not certain

what I can do. Are you certain what you can do? I am not certain what all good men put together can do. Are you certain what they can do? But I do know what God can do. God has undertaken to make out of this human race a family of children like Himself, bearing His image, loving Him with His love, and returning His life back to Him, and receiving it from Him again. I know that He who has undertaken to do this will do it. The earth, which feels the brooding spring, does so because it is turning its face to the sun. It could not feel the brooding spring if there were no sun; and humanity, when it feels within itself the brooding of hope, the beginning of that nearer and larger and better life which it anticipates, turns its face toward God, and takes this life and light from Him. You are not living without God, and cannot. When you get rid entirely of God, you will get rid entirely of life. When a man comes to himself, he turns his face toward God. It is so simple: first, to see in God the Law-giver, and obey your conscience, whatever it tells you to do or be; for it is God's voice. Next, to see that life is ever larger and wider, and still larger and wider, and that it is from the God that is about you and would be within you. Then, to hear in all love-songs and love-voices the voice of God speaking to you, and to find God in every voice of love in all the world. And so, with your face toward God and your heart full of hope, to rejoice, as the strong man to run a race, because God is in you. For all that is noble, all that is worth having, all that is worth being, is God in you; and all you need to do is to open your eyes to see Him, and your ears to hear Him, and your hearts to take Him in, that your life may be His life.—*Abbott.*

Vers. 11-32. *The Prodigal and His Brother.*—Most readers must sometimes have wished that this parable had closed with ver. 24, and left us rejoicing in the joy of the father over his regained and penitent son. The second part of the parable seems to jar with the first. The "elder brother" is a mere discord in its music and robs it of its natural and happy close. The oldest interpretation (naturally suggested by vers. 1, 2) sees in the younger son a type of the publicans and sinners, and in his elder brother a type of the scribes and Pharisees. But this interpretation is not wide enough. We feel that our Lord is dealing, not with *men*, but with *man*; not with classes or nationalities, but with the entire race: and hence we demand an interpretation of His words that shall cover all classes and include the whole family of man. If the earliest interpreter saw in the younger son a type of the publicans, why may we not see in the publicans a type of all sinful but penitent men of every race? If they saw in the elder brother a type of the Pharisees, why may we not see in the Pharisees a type of all who trust in themselves that they are righteous, and despise others? Nay, more; if we can each find in ourselves that which identifies us with the prodigal but penitent son, may we not also each of us find in ourselves some traces of his narrow and self-righteous and unloving brother? This gives us an interpretation in which we can rest. Our Lord spoke to the publicans and the Pharisees, and in speaking to them He showed every man the publican and the Pharisee in his own breast. The great aim of His ministry was to convince men that they were the sons of God, and to impart to them a filial spirit. If we were set to define a good son, on what more essential points could we fix than these? 1. *That his father's service was his delight.* 2. *That on the mere prompting of love he at all times kept his father's commandments.* 3. *That under all changes and temptations to distrust, he confided in his father's wisdom and care.* In all these characteristics of sonship the Prodigal was for a time frankly and glaringly deficient. So far from affectionately depending on his father's bounty and love, he claimed what he called "*his own* portion of goods," that he might expend it as he would. So far from rendering his father a free and willing obedience, he felt

that he should never be free until he had escaped from his father's control. So far from taking a delight in service, and finding no place so dear as home, and no society so congenial as that of the inmates of his home, he was persuaded that he should never taste real pleasure till he could break away from the restraints of his father's service and follow the impulses of his own will. Here, then, we have the open and jovial sinner depicted to the very life. But is the elder son in any way a better son? Does he show a more filial spirit? Not a whit. Loving dependence, free obedience, glad and disinterested service, are the distinctive marks of sonship. He has not one of these. On his own showing, he is a servant rather than a son; his father is much more a master to him than a father. He dislikes the restraints to which he has submitted at least as much as the Prodigal who would not submit to them. His obedience is not free, but servile. He has been serving for wages, for reward, and he complains that his wages have been calculated on far too low a scale—that he has earned far more than he has received. Obviously, then, the elder son was as far away from his father's heart and spirit as the younger son had been from his father's home, and had sunk into a bondage from which it was still harder to redeem him. We must remember that in this parable we have the story of *two* prodigals, rather than of one; of two men, that is, who wandered away from God—who lost their standing as sons by losing the spirit of sons; and that the self-righteous censor of his brother, the cold and insolent critic of his father, although he had never left his house, had strayed even farther from God than the reckless Prodigal who, under all his sins and sinful impulses, had a son's heart in him, and was at last drawn back by it to his father's arms. The parable teaches that those who esteem themselves saints, because they busy themselves with religious dogmas and rules, may be made of harder and more impenetrable stuff than the transgressors whom they eye with sour suspicion and disdain. But it teaches us a lesson still more surprising than this. It teaches us that, let men be as bad as they may, and whether they show a wild, wilful, and wanton spirit, or a cautious, selfish, and mercenary spirit, or whether they are the slaves of impulse or of conventionalism, God is always a good Father to them all. The truth is that we may each of us only too easily find both these men in himself, and therefore God's grace to the one should be as welcome and pathetic as His grace to the other. As there is some hope that even the Pharisee may become a penitent, so there is much danger that even the penitent may become a Pharisee—that when he is "converted" he may become as narrow, and hard, and bigoted as ever his brother was, and sit in judgment and condemn those who were "in Christ" long before he was, and who have done far more to serve Him. We may well rejoice, therefore, that our Father in heaven is good to both—that when we return to Him, He has compassion on us; and that, even when we are angry with Him, and will not go in, He is not angry with us, but comes out and entreats us, re-kindling a filial and fraternal spirit in us by His fatherly generosity and love.—*Cox.*

Ver. 18. *Going to the Father.*—It is only necessary to remind you very briefly of the story of the Prodigal Son, from which this sentence is taken: how this younger son had grown weary of the restraints and the companionships at home; how he had demanded that the father should divide the estate while the father was still living; how the father had consented; how, a little while after that, the boy, still dissatisfied, had taken all and gone off into a far country. How long it took this prodigal son to come to himself, how long it took him to decide that he was foolish, and to make the resolve to arise and go back to his father, we do not know. But we know how the modern prodigal does; how long he cogitates; how many hindrances stand in his way. He has

lived his worldly life, and at length grows dissatisfied, and begins to think that he will seek for satisfaction somewhere else. And first there comes to him a citizen of the far country, who says, "You are mistaken; you do not need to go outside this far country. It is true you have been a failure; you have lived with harlots; but you do not need to do that. There are very reputable women living in this country, there are very excellent men in this country; be temperate, be honest, be industrious; the carob-pods are not bad eating if you know how to cook them. And if you are frugal and honest—but not too honest—you may come in time to own herds of swine—yes, and employ a swineherd—who knows? You do not need religion; all you need is to be a reformed and reputable citizen of this far country." Still he is not satisfied; still he thinks he will go and find this Father of his. Then Philosophy comes to him, clad in academic robes and with its book in hand. "My friend," it says, "you are mistaken; there is not any Father, and there is not any home; your notion that once you were with your Father and at home is a dream; I have been on the highest hill hereabout, and I have swept the whole horizon, from north to south, and from east to west, with my spy-glass, and I cannot see any Father's home nor any Father. It is true this far country is a poor one; nevertheless, there is nothing better; certainly you and I do not know of anything better. Do not waste your time in going after a Father who, for aught you know, has no existence." Still this young man is not satisfied. He looks about for some wiser and better counsellor. And then the dogmatist comes, holding a Creed in one hand and a Bible in the other; and the dogmatist says, "These men are all wrong; this far country cannot satisfy you; carob-pods are poor eating; you do need a Father, and there is a Father; but you are mistaken in thinking you can find Him now; He is afar off, and you are in a far country, and you must wait until you die before you can see your Father. But I have a splendid definition of Him; it describes all His attributes, and gives a full account of His government: take that. Or, if you are not satisfied with that, here is a book which tells about Him; for He was once in this far country, and lived here with certain of His children, and this book tells what His children knew about Him: either take what His children have said He says, or take our definition. That is the very best you can do." Still he is not satisfied, and he turns to find another counsellor at his side, clad in a long white robe, and with the cross upon his breast. This counsellor says, "They are all mistaken; the citizen of this country is mistaken—the world will never satisfy you; the agnostic is mistaken—there is a Father; the dogmatist is mistaken—you do not have to wait until you die. But still the Father is not here. You are in a far country, and you cannot get away from the confines of it; but the Father has sent the Church here to take His place; the Church is the vicegerent of the Father, the representative of the Father; the Church will tell you more or less infallibly what you ought to know, and more or less infallibly what you ought to do; the Church will hear the confession of your sins and will pronounce absolution, and so take from you the burden of your sins. Give up the idea that you can see your Father here, and take a Church." Those are the four counsellors that stand at the side of every man who is wondering whether he can arise and go to his Father. Over against them all—citizen of the world, agnostic philosopher, dogmatist, ecclesiastic—I want to put before you the simple truth that you can go to your Father here and now. In the first place, it is certain that the far country will not satisfy you. It has never satisfied. You are immortal, and this world is transient. Suppose you do succeed—suppose you get all you desire. You are fond of study, and you get books and opportunity to study; you are fond of influence, and you get that; you are fond of the power that money gives you, and you get money and the power that money gives. What then? In ten, twenty, thirty, forty, or fifty

years, the ship that never failed to touch at every door will touch at yours, and you will go on board and will leave your books, and your bonds, and your stocks, and your influence, all behind. You cannot take them with you. What then? You are spiritual, and this world is earthly and terrestrial; how can you expect it will feed you? If a man is hungry, and you show him a picture, will a picture satisfy his stomach? How can you expect *things* will satisfy the hunger for reverence, for hope, for love—in one word, for God? You are more than a machine, more than an animal. The man who says to you, "Be honest, be true, be pure, be good, leave the harlots alone, lead an honest and temperate life and you will succeed," gives you wise counsel; but if he tells you that that is enough, he is telling you a lie. Then there is that other counsellor, the agnostic. He tells you that there is no Father and there is no home—at all events, no Father and no home than we can know about. I affirm, on the contrary, that we can and do know the invisible and spiritual, directly and immediately. You have eyes to see the outward thing and you have ears to hear the outward voice, you have senses that deal with this world in which you live; use them, use them carefully, follow them whithersoever they lead, but do not think that you have no other sense and no other knowledge than that. You have also a power of vision that deals with the infinite and the eternal; you have in you an eye that can see the invisible, and an ear that can hear the inaudible. God is not a dream; the home is not a vision; and God and the home are not mere pictures which poets have painted out of their imagination; they are the reality which men of Divine vision have seen and presented to men of duller sight. The dogmatist comes to you with his Bible and his Creed, and he tells you that you cannot hope to see and know God here and now: meanwhile, take what the Creed and the Bible tell you. What do the Creed and Bible tell you? This: that God is a living God; that God is in the hearts of His children, inspiring them, talking with them. If to-day any man in the Church should say, "God does not hear prayer," orthodox theology would condemn him. But the Bible does not more distinctly reveal the truth that God hears prayer than it does the truth that God speaks to man. It is imagined that this Bible remains to show that God was once upon the earth, though He has gone now; He did inspire Isaiah, but He inspires no one to-day; He did speak to prophets, but He speaks to no one now. No: God *was* in His world: God *is* in His world. If any man holds up the Creed, therefore, to you and says, "Take a definition of God, instead of God," he is offering you what is not bread. The Creed is a definition of God; if it will help you to find Him, take it. The Bible is a guide-book to God; if it will guide you to Him, take it. But take it that it may guide you to Him; never take it in the place of Him. Enoch walks the world to-day, and God is with Him. I call you to God—not to a Creed, not to a book. And, finally, the ecclesiastic stands by your side; offers a Church—a Church as God's representative in the world. Of course, I do not object to the Church, or I should not be a member of it. What I do object to is the statement that the Church is the representative of God in the world, as though God were not here Himself. If the Church has not God in the heart of it, the Church is nothing; it is a mere ethical institution. The very message, the very ministry, the very function of the Church is to say to the world, not, "We are a representative of God, we personate God," but "We are the witness to a God who is in the heart of His children here and now." So I call you to arise and go to your Father. I call the little children to go to their Father. They cannot understand the Creed; they need not. They cannot comprehend the Bible; they need not. They cannot comprehend theology; they need not. But a little child, better than most older people, can understand that God is in conscience and in love—in father-love and mother-love.

I call you, young men, to arise and go to your Father. We should be glad to have you flocking into our church, but I do not call you to the Church; I wish I could meet you in the Sunday-school, studying the Bible, but I am not calling you to the Bible. I call on you to arise and go to your Father, and I declare to you that there is in you a power of vision, and that you can see Him face to face. Fathers and mothers, I call on you to go to your Father. How can you take this little child who is put into your hands and train Him for this life and beyond, unless you have a better, a wiser Friend than the minister or the school teacher? Old men that draw near to the confines of eternity, come, come to your Father. If the book will help you, take the book; if the Creed will help you, take the Creed; if the Church will help you, take the Church; but do not stop content with any one of them. Do not wait for death—God is here; do not think to look back across the centuries for Him; He who was there is here. "The far country," says Augustine, "is forgetfulness of God." You have come out of the far country when you have turned your thought, your inspiration, your love, to your Father, and forget Him no more.—*L. Abbott.*

Vers. 18, 19. *Not Worthy to be called God's Son.*—The estimate which we have of ourselves depends upon the standard with which we compare ourselves. This man had formed a different measure of himself in his previous experience, because his standard had been different. He had thought himself a good fellow, and all his companions assured him that he was a good fellow. Liberal, generous-handed, flinging money right and left—measured by the harlots and drunkards, he was a good fellow. The judgment was not strong, so measured. When he ceased spending his money riotously, and had come to settle down to something like industry, and measured himself with the swineherds that were about him, he thought himself perhaps better than the average. Very likely he was. He was of a good family, and they very possibly looked up to him. Measuring himself by the swineherds with whom he was living, he was superior. But when he turned his thoughts backward, and compared himself with the father whose home he had abandoned, then he said, "I am no more worthy to be called thy son." It was a new standard that he had adopted, and therefore a new judgment that he reached. This is the question I want to put before you: Are you worthy to be called God's son? Lawyer—you are worthy to be called good lawyer; merchant—worthy to be called good merchant; friend—worthy to be called good friend;—all of it true. But now take this other standard: God's son—are you worthy to be called God's son? What does this phrase, "God's son," mean? How shall we apply the measurement? We will look across the centuries, and gaze for a few moments at the portrait of One who was called God's Son; we will try to think how He lived, under what impulses, under what guidance, with what deeds; and then we will lay our lives alongside His life and ask ourselves, Are we worthy to be called God's son? Eighteen centuries ago, then, this Man was born in the province of Rome. Man, you say? do you call Him Man? Yes, I call Him Man. Like ordinary men? Ah, that is just the question I want you to answer. I want you to put yourself beside Him, and see whether ordinary men are like this Man. But He was Man and Son of God, and we are men and sons of God. Are we worthy to be called sons of God? This is the very question. This Man comes out into life at thirty years of age with His purpose fully set. How He had formed it we do not know. He appears as unexpectedly and as surprisingly as Elijah in the Old-Testament and John the Baptist in the New-Testament time; but when He appears His purpose is fully set, His life is consecrated to one great, resplendent idea—to bring about the kingdom of God

in the world—and from that purpose He never turned aside. With this consecrated, settled, resolute purpose went a great, inspiring, ardent, consuming love. I hardly know how we can apply the word "self-sacrifice" to Christ. There was no self to be sacrificed. He lived as a man that did not think of Himself. So ardent was He in His work that He went without His meals, and forgot to be hungry. How easily He puts aside the ordinary things for which we live, we all know, but other and subtler appeals also spoke to unheeding ears. The poet and the prophet long at times for solitude. Who has not sung to himself the psalmist's song, "Oh that I had wings like a dove! for then would I fly away, and be at rest!" And we may be sure that all the triumph of apparent popularity, and the jostling crowds, were more odious to Him than to any poet or prophet that ever walked the earth. The subtle temptations to the life of a recluse, the life of simple prayer and meditation, He put behind Him, as the grosser temptations that appeal to grosser men. The lark flies from the earth, and carries its song heavenward; but this Singer flew down to earth and went into the cage that He might sing to men who were encaged. Where pain, and gloom, and suffering, and sin were, there this Singer carried His song and His prayer. Sometimes, on the other hand, the poet and the prophet long for companionship. He grows utterly lonely; he wants some one to walk beside, some one at least that will understand him and commune with him. And so did this Man. And He gathered twelve about Him; the best He could find, nearest to Him in spirit and in purpose—and yet how far away! They could not understand Him. They could not understand Him, because they were not free from selfishness. When they sat about the Last Supper, they quarrelled for precedence. These were the men he had to depend on; these the very best; and yet how He lived for them, and loved them—through their misunderstandings, their narrownesses, their quarrels, their desertions, their denials! And yet this love of His was not a Puritan's love. It was love, not conscience. He did not do the things of which He might have said, "I ought to do"; He did all the things that all the impulses of His nature moved Him to do; for all those impulses were to love and service. And so His heart was full of sympathy for men. Though they could not touch Him, yet He could touch them. He is walking the highway; the crowds are about Him; in the distance is heard the cry, "Room for the leper! room for the leper!" It was not enough to say, "Be well?"—He touched Him.

This love was shown in nothing so much, I think, as in His wrath. He could be angry—and He was at times. And when He was angry, how the men were afraid of Him! When He stood in the Temple courts, surrounded by the Pharisees, and launched out indignant denunciation against those that made long prayers for a pretence and devoured widows' houses, He faced a crowd of angry men, but they dared not touch Him; there was a flashing in His eye, and a thunder in His voice, that held them back. With all this love, with all this sympathy, with all this loneliness at times, there was a wonderful purity. Perhaps you will think me irreverent, or, at least, unorthodox, if I say it—sometimes it seems to me that Paul understood human nature better than Jesus Christ did. Paul understood how the spirit and the flesh battle against each other. Paul understood how the animal is pulling the spirit down, and the spirit, shackled and bound, cannot emancipate itself. It was Paul who wrote, "For what I would, that I do not; but what I hate, that I do"; and Paul who wrote, "Wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from this body of death?" But Christ says, "The prince of the world cometh, and hath nothing in Me." With all this love, with all this purity, with all this service. went a wonderful hopefulness. Jesus of Nazareth was the Optimist

of the centuries. Coming forth at the time when the world was at it lowest moral ebb, when there had been no prophet in Palestine for centuries, when there was nothing but corruption, when there was no virtue and no true civilisation even in Rome, when literature there was well-nigh dead and moral life had died, this Man rang out His clarion note from pulpit to pulpit, and from valley to valley, and from hillside to hillside, "The kingdom of God is at hand!" And, inspiring all, the source of all this, He walked with God. "The words that I speak to you, I speak not of Myself; the Father doeth the works." And He so walked with God that in His hours of loneliness He found in God His companionship, in God His Rest and His Refuge. Take this life and put it alongside your life, and then answer the question, "Am I worthy to be called my Father's son?" In the coming days let this Presence go with you. If sometimes your will grows weak, let His strong Manhood nerve you to a better consecration; if sometimes the world, with its subtle temptations, comes in upon you, let His unselfish service drive out the motives that belong only to the far country; if sometimes you are discouraged and in despair, let His smile rest upon you and His strong words say to you, "Be of good cheer; I have overcome the world"; if sometimes you look on another's wrong with unblushing cheek, catch the tones of His voice, and let there be thunder in your heart against others' iniquity; if sometimes the wrong upon yourself brings the blush of anger to your cheek, look on Him who looked on Peter with forgiving eyes, and be ashamed that your selfishness is angry, and not your love. Am I worthy to be called God's son? What are you doing? You are trying to make bread out of stone—good bread, doubtless, for yourself, for your children perhaps, and for others; but this is not Christ's work. And *you*—you are tempted to fly from the top of some great pinnacle and let all the world look on and clap and say, "Wonderful man he is!" This is not God's work. And *you*—you are trying to do God's work in the world, but the devil has stayed at your side and said, "Promise to follow me, and I will show you a better way to purify politics, cleanse the Church, set society right." This also is not the work of God's son. To be God's son, it is at least this: To have a life wholly consecrated to God's service; to have a heart wholly full of His unselfishness and self-forgetting love. Are you worthy to be called God's son?—*Ibid.*

SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS ON VERSES 11—32.

Vers. 11-32. *The Two Brothers.*—The point of this parable, as of the two preceding, is God's joyful welcome to a returning sinner, in contrast with the angry jealousy of the Pharisees. That is *the* lesson of the story, and hence it is essentially a repetition of the parables of the Lost Sheep and the Lost Coin.

I. **But the conduct of the Pharisees, implied before, is now plainly held up to view.**—For the elder son represents the Pharisee, and no one else. All other applications are beside the mark. The two verses which open the chapter vindicate this as the only correct interpretation. And so the elder son's conduct is no episode, but an essential part of the parable, the statement, in fact, of what is half the lesson of all three parables. If it is objected that Christ could not speak of the unloving and unlovely Pharisees in the words "Son, thou art ever with me," the answer is ready. Here, as often, Christ simply takes him at his own estimate for the moment, shows him thereby how unlovely he really is, and so makes manifest in the only possible way his need of repentance and restoration.

II. **The younger son** is the "publi-

can and sinner," the openly irreligious everywhere. His sin is not denied or palliated. It is drawn in imperishable colours. But Christ had a gospel for such. The Pharisees had none. They did not think God could forgive such. Not so, says Jesus, God goes after the lost, seeks diligently, welcomes back with great and generous joy.—*Hastings.*

Two Types of Sinners, and God's Love for Them.

I. **The outcast but penitent sinner.**—1. His home privileges. 2. His selfish and wicked life. 3. His misery and unrest. 4. His penitence.

II. **How the father dealt with him.**—1. Readiness to receive. 2. Free and complete forgiveness. 3. Restoration to sonship and privileges.

III. **The self-righteous and proud sinner.**—1. Equally unworthy with his brother, for he was boastful, unbrotherly, unfilial—a picture of the Pharisees, and of the self-righteous generally.

IV. **How the father dealt with him.**—1. Loving and gentle entreaty. No rebuke. 2. Still recognises him as a son. 3. Still offers him all the undeserved privileges of sonship.

V. **Which of the two do we most resemble?**—*Taylor.*

The Revelation of the Father.—The *locus classicus* for Christ's teaching as to the revelation of the Father, the belief of which tends to make men become citizens of the kingdom, is the fifteenth chapter of Luke, and especially the parable of the Prodigal Son. There God appears as One who takes pleasure in the repentance of sinners, such as the reprobates of Jewish society, because in these penitents He sees prodigal children returning to their Father's house. By these parabolic utterances Jesus said to all, however far from righteousness, God loves you as His children, no more worthy to be called sons, yet regarded as such; He deplores your departure from Him, and desires your return; and He will receive you graciously, when, taught wisdom by misery, you direct your footsteps homewards. It is not allegorising exegesis to take this meaning out of the parable. Jesus was on His defence for loving classes of men despised or despaired of, and His defence in part consisted in this, that His bearing toward the outcasts was that of the Divine Being. He loved them as a Brother; God loved them as a Father.—*Bruce.*

The Lost One's Return.—Some have called this parable a gospel within a gospel. It is full of tender and loving teaching.

I. **The son at home.**

II. **The son far from home.**

III. **The son at home again.**—*Watson.*

The Lost Son.—I. **The son glad to leave home.**—1. The choice. 2. The parting. 3. The absence.

II. **The son glad to return home.**—1. Thoughts of home. 2. The homeward journey. 3. The happy meeting.

III. **The lessons of the story.**—How like the ingratitude of many is the younger son's conduct! How bitter the fruits of selfishness! How tender the Divine forgiveness!—*Taylor.*

A Parable of Two Sons.—I. **There are two ways in which people fall from their right attitude to God.**—1. Some men ignore God, or choose to forget Him. 2. Others dread God too much to revolt from Him, and do what they can to earn the Divine favour. The two varieties run down to the same identical root. In the one case you are an alien, in the other a slave; in neither a child. Both are proud and selfish. Neither is loving.

II. **The methods by which our Father is for ever seeking to bring us into a childlike relation to Himself.**—1. Of God's way with the prodigal. 2. With the legalist.—*Dykes.*

The Condition of Humanity.—Man, viewed as the object of the Saviour's

solicitude, is lost (1) as a straying sheep is lost, *through thoughtlessness*; (2) as a piece of money is lost to *use*, when its owner cannot find it; (3) as a prodigal is lost, who in *waywardness and self-will* departs from his father's house to a distant land, and there lives a life utterly diverse from that of the home he has left, and so living has no correspondence with his family, but is content to be as dead to them, and that they, in return, should be as dead to him. Such were the thoughts of Jesus concerning man when He described him as "lost."—*Bruce.*

I. **The Prodigal Son**: his (1) self-will; (2) folly; (3) misery; (4) repentance.

II. **The loving father**: 1. His long waiting for his son. 2. The fervency and rapture of his joy on receiving him.

III. **The relentless elder brother**: 1. His moral correctness. 2. His severity and pride.

The Parable tells us—

I. Of man's original estate, as a child in his father's house, happy, and wanting nothing.

II. Of the misery that waits on sin, especially heavy in the cases of those who go to great excess in evil.

III. Of the true way in which to return to God.

IV. Of the Divine compassion that hastens to welcome the penitent.

V. Of the envy which some, even of God's children, manifest at such great kindness being spent on such as have been grossly sinful.

VI. Of God's forbearance towards our infirmities and unbecoming feelings.

I. **The Prodigal's departure.**
II. **His return.**
III. **The reception he meets with.**
IV. **The character and conduct of the elder brother.**

Vers. 11-24. *The Prodigal.*

I. **His departure.**—Multitudes tread this path. The way to death is thronged. The "seven devils" that hold the reins, and direct the course, urge myriads of "younger sons" to their ruin. Yet there is hope. There are two pieces of good news for every prodigal: 1. God is angry with you, not pleased. His anger is against your departing. Were He pleased when you go away, you could not expect Him to be pleased when you come back. 2. Christ Himself, by His word in this parable, makes a path for the prodigal's return. Why did He paint this picture? To leave open a way from the "far country" to the Father's home and bosom.

II. **His return.**—"He came to himself." This suggestive word marks the turning-point. His conduct had been madness as well as sin. He makes self-discovery, and resolves to return. Worthless though he is, the father gladly receives the penitent prodigal. It is the history of one actual case. A story made by Christ, and so made as to serve a purpose. The purpose is to show how He receives even the chief of sinners. No conceivable degree of provocation closes His heart against him that cometh.—*Arnot.*

The Lost Son.—There is, perhaps, no page in the Bible which comes home so perfectly to the understanding of every human being as this. But, human as the story is, the parable is truly Divine. There are two distinct pictures, or compartments rather, in the one composition.

I. **The prodigal's progress.**—Apostasy, profligacy, penalty. The picture is not overdrawn.

II. **The penitent's return and reception.**—Reflection, resolution, return and reception, confession, restoration, rejoicing. Man's redemption is a momentous event in the annals of God. He alone perfectly understands it, and most of all rejoices over it, for to Him our nature belongs, and He alone knows what it is worth. Other beings, however, including men themselves, are called to rejoice along with God in this.

The mark of their nearness to God in spirit will be the degree in which they are taken up about human salvation—are concerned for it, and delight in its accomplishment.—*Laidlaw.*

Five Phases of Religious Experience.—Five scenes which correspond to the phases of religious experience through which the Prodigal Son passes: 1. Departure from home (vers. 1-13)—his sin. 2. His miserable plight (vers. 14-16)—his punishment. 3. His regrets (vers. 17-19)—his repentance. 4. His return (vers. 20, 21)—his conversion. 5. His restoration to his place as a son and to his father's favour (vers. 22-24)—his justification.

Ver. 11. *Grace and Faith.*—In spite of the admirable manner in which Jesus had employed the two former figures, since they are borrowed from the world of nature, they do not fully serve His purpose. They do, indeed, to some extent, describe the feelings towards the sinner which fill the heart of God, but they do not set forth the part which the sinner himself plays in the drama of conversion. He needs to find a figure, borrowed from the moral sphere, and consequently from human life. *Grace* is represented in the first and second parables, *grace and faith* in the third (cf. Eph. ii. 8).—*Godet.*

A Definite Revelation of God's Thoughts towards Us. — Jesus here drops the interrogative form which introduces the two preceding parables. He no longer appeals to his hearers to say what a shepherd, and what a woman, in the circumstances supposed, would probably do. He now reveals in definite terms the thoughts of God towards our sinful race.

Vers. 11, 12. *Dissatisfaction.*

I. **Dissatisfaction implied in the demand of the son:** 1. The cause of dissatisfaction, impatience of restraint. 2. The expression of dissatisfaction. 3. The guilt of dissatisfaction.

II. **The effect shown, in the act of the father.** 1. This act gives no sanction to the son's demand as right. 2. This act allows freedom to a sinner to follow his own choice. 3. This act confers powers which might be used for spiritual profit.—*Ritchie.*

Vers. 11-13. *The Soul and its Sin.*

I. Whence the soul's sin springs—out of a desire for bad freedom.

II. Where sin places the soul.

III. That to which sin dooms—waste, shipwreck.

Ver. 12. *The Arrogant Claim.*

I. The younger son comes to his father **to demand his portion.**

II. He lays claim to his portion as a **debt,** which he thinks his father owes him.

"*The younger.*"—It is scarcely by accident that the younger son is chosen to play the part of the prodigal. For it is for the young—to those who are innocent and unsuspicious, to those whose hearts are light, and who have had but little experience of the world's ways—that the world's temptations have the greatest charm, who are most likely to long for freedom, and least capable of avoiding the dangers it brings.

"*Give me.*"—Over against the Prodigal's demand, "Give me my portion of goods," is the children's cry, "Give us day by day our daily bread"; they therein declaring that they wait upon God, and would fain be nourished from day to day by His hand.—*Trench.*

Weary of Home, Anxious to See the World.—Two things urge the younger son to make this request: 1. He is wearied of his father's house. 2. The world abroad attracts him. So is it with the sinner. He desires to escape from the restraints of holiness and to be at liberty to please himself.

Experience Alone Can Cure.—The father sees that the moment has come

in which the son can only be cured by experience, and he gives him up to his own will. This is the point to which the heathen had arrived at the epoch of judgment described by St. Paul (Rom. i. 24-28)—that of "being given up to their own lusts." A time comes when God ceases to strive against the inclinations of a perverse heart and lets it have its own way.—*Godet.*

Ver. 13. I. **Preparation for leaving his early home.**—1. The time of preparation. 2. The act of preparation.

II. **Departure into a far country.**—1. The leaving his father's house. 2. The journey into a far country.

III. **Wasting his substance with riotous living.**—1. The substance wasted. 2. The substance wasted with riotous living.—*Ritchie.*

The Wanderer.

I. **To sin is to depart from God.**—The explanation of this action is: 1. Alienation of heart. 2. The allurements of evil. 3. The weakness of the nature. 4. The illusions of Satan.

II. **All sinners that are carried away with the love of sin do actually leave God and depart.**—1. They do not know what is to be found in God. 2. They are at enmity with Him. 3. They are averse to His laws and government.

III. **They go into a far country.**—1. This Prodigal set off *immediately*, as soon as he received his portion. 2. His father's bountifulness did not render him dutiful. 3. The distance to which he wandered was not so much of place as of state. 4. All who are now the children of grace, and on the way to heaven, were once wanderers like him.—*Jones.*

"*Not many days.*"—For a little, therefore, he lingers in his father's house after he has formed the resolution to depart and has liberty to do so. And so in the case of the sinner, apostasy of heart often precedes apostasy of life. It is by degrees, perhaps almost imperceptible at first, that he enters on the downward course. It begins in feeling before it manifests itself in action.

"*A far country.*"—An image of the sinner's deep apostasy from God.

"*Wasted.*"—Lit. "scattered." As lightly, swiftly, as "all had been gathered together" is all dissipated again.

The Riotous Spendthrift.

I. All sinners, when they have departed from God, are *spendthrifts and great wasters.* 1. All receive their portion of goods. 2. Unregenerate sinners consume these on their own lusts, the faculties of body and soul, and their earthly treasures.

II. They waste what they have received in *riotous living.* 1. They have cast off the government of God 2. They trample on His holy laws. 3. They put themselves under the government of the great adversary of God and man.—*Jones.*

Vers. 14-16. I. **His want, through famine in the land.**—1. The mighty famine in the land. 2. His want in the famine.

II. **His work with a citizen of that country.**—1. His joining himself to a citizen. 2. His work with the citizen.

III. **His wish for the husks,** to relieve his hunger. 1. The desire for husks. 2. The desire unfulfilled.—*Ritchie.*

Vers. 14, 15. *Sources of Misery.*—1. Abundance exchanged for destitution. 2. Freedom for servitude. Two sources of misery: *inward griefs, outward sorrows.*

I. The heart itself consumed by loathing, remorse, loneliness, and despair.

II. Outward calamities, such as the famine here specified, against which the heart, deprived of the consolations of religion, strives in vain.

Ver. 14. "*A mighty famine.*"—External circumstances hasten the con-

sequences of sin, and are used by God to lead to repentance. Thus the father seeks his son by so ordering events that he shall *feel* his real condition. In like manner, in the history of the prophet Jonah, the great storm and danger upon the sea are used to lead him to repent of his disobedience.

The Grievous Famine.

I. All things under the sun quickly decay and disappear.

II. Alienation from God leads to poverty, misery, and suffering, and these are intended to drive sinners from the far country back to their Father.

III. This Prodigal's destitution. 1. He was stripped of the means of self-gratification. 2. He is convinced of the emptiness and vanity of all things under the sun. 3. He wants something which he has not, but does not know what he wants.—*Jones.*

A Wasted Life.

The affecting lines of Byron well illustrate this experience of the prodigal:—

"My days are in the yellow leaf;
The flowers, the fruits of love are gone;
The worm, the canker, and the grief,
Are mine alone.
The fire that on my bosom preys
Is lone as some volcanic isle;
No torch is kindled at its blaze—
A funeral pile!"

Vers. 15, 16. *The Willing Slave.*

I. It is with the strongest reluctance that sinners leave this far country. 1. They believe nothing of what they hear of the country where they live. 2. They believe nothing of what they hear of the Redeemer's kingdom. 3. The far country is suitable to their sinful inclinations. 4. They have a deep-rooted enmity against God and holiness.

II. Deep conviction of sin leads to fear, but many are still very unwilling to return to their Father's house. 1. They enter the service of a hard master. 2. They are set to poor and mean employments. 3. Their only liberty is to choose in what fields they will work. 4. They try various means to satisfy their cravings, yet all in vain. —*Jones.*

Ver. 15. "*Citizen.*"—Notwithstanding all the Prodigal's folly and sin, he did not become a citizen of that far country. He felt himself, while there, an exile from home; and when his misery becomes intolerable he does not sink into apathy and despair, but his thoughts return to his father and his father's house.

"*Sent him into his fields.*"—The world and every one of its citizens is a hard master, in whose services the most pitiable wages are given; yea, not even food to eat. Well for every prodigal who is constrained to realise this and does realise it.—*Stier.*

Ver. 16. *Degradation.* — He who would not, as a son, be treated liberally by his father is compelled to be the servant and bondslave of a foreign master; he who would not be ruled by God is compelled to serve the devil; he who would not abide in his father's royal palace is sent to the field among hinds; he who would not dwell among brethren and princes is obliged to be the servant and companion of brutes; he who would not feed on the bread of angels petitions in his hunger for the husks of the swine.—*Corn. à Lapide.*

"*Would fain.*"—Between carnal and spiritual pleasures there is usually this difference: the first, when we are without them, excite in us strong desires; but after their possession they cloy and dissatisfy. It is quite the contrary with spiritual pleasures. We have a distaste for them as long as we are without them; but possession produces the desire of them, and the more largely we partake of them the greater is our appetite and hunger.—*S. Gregory.*

The Swine Cared For, the Swineherd Neglected.—The swine were valuable; they would fetch a good price in the time of famine. They were cared for, but the wretched swineherd was left to

look after himself. This was his return for squandering his living upon pretended friends!

Vers. 17-20. *The Soul and its Repentance.*

I. Repentance is kind and right-minded thought about one's self.

II. Repentance is dissatisfaction and regret.

III. Repentance is confession of sin.

IV. Repentance is also humility.

V. Repentance is also resolution toward the Father.

VI. Repentance is the actual movement of the soul toward the Father. 1. Recognition of sin. 2. Sorrow for sin. 3. Forsaking of sin.

Ver. 17. I. **His restoration to himself.**—1. He came to an understanding of what is true. 2. He came to a conscience of what is right. 3. He came to an affection for what is good. 4. He came to a will for what is holy.

II. **His review of his condition.**—1. He expresses a bitter sense of present misery. 2. He expresses a deep conviction of his past folly. 3. He expresses a grateful remembrance of his father's bounty. 4. He confesses a fervent desire for the joys of his early home.

The Solemn Pause.

I. Till now he was in a state of moral madness.

II. But the Prodigal is now come to himself—*i.e.*, to his right senses. 1. He never before gave himself the trouble of thinking. 2. Now he begins to think seriously.

III. Two subjects fill his whole soul. 1. The happiness of those who enjoy such abundance in his father's house. 2. His own starving condition in a distant land.—*Jones.*

"*Came to himself.*"—Words of deepest significance, saying, as they do, that to come to one's self and to come to God are one and the same thing; that when we truly find ourselves we find Him, or, rather, having found Him, find also ourselves; for it is not man in union with God, who is raised above the true condition of humanity, but man separated from God, who has fallen out of and below that condition.—*Trench.*

One Not in His Right Mind.—For one who could so act — forsake such a father and desert such a home, to incur nothing but misery, insult, and the pangs of hunger—can only be spoken of as one not in his right mind.—*Burgon.*

A Change of Feeling.—He began by despising his father's house and by longing to escape from it. Now he looks with disgust upon the country for which he had exchanged it, and desires to return home. He chooses what he had left; he leaves what he had chosen.

"*How many!*" — Behold the sad catastrophe of rash and thoughtless voluptuousness. It turns the man out into a strange country who might have lived happy in his father's house; it makes a beggar of one that was rich; it changes the condition of a son into that of a slave; it compels him to feed filthy swine who disdained the dutiful service of a gracious father. —*P. Chrysologus.*

Vers. 18, 19. I. **An earnest resolution to arise.**—1. He resolves to exert a will for deliverance. 2. He resolves to put forth activity in the right direction. 3. He resolves to set out in a new course. 4. He resolves to go to an expected end.

II. **A true repentance of sin.**—1. The confession of sin. 2. The aggravations of sin confessed. 3. The unworthiness to be called the son of such a father. 4. The request to be made as a hired servant.

The Preparatory Address.

I. The sinner must come and confess his sins unto God, or never find mercy.

II. How this confession must be

made. 1. It must be a true confession. 2. It must be such as the occasion requires. 3. In it there must be both faith and repentance.

III. What encouragement has the sinner to confess his sins unto God? 1. God is a Father. 2. His delight is salvation. 3. He has made ample provision for the redemption of the sinful. 4. He invites all to take advantage of it.—*Jones.*

Ver. 18. "*I will arise.*" — He will "arise," for he has till now been grovelling in the dust. He will "go," for he is a very long way off. To his "father," for at present he dwells among swine.

The Pious Resolution.

I. "I will arise." 1. This is a most dangerous country to abide in. 2. It contains nothing to supply my numerous wants.

II. "I will go to my father." 1. All things naturally draw towards home. 2. The Holy Spirit begins His work by creating hunger and thirst after righteousness and resolution to return to God. 3. Where there is life there is progress. 4. The sinner has nowhere to go at last for help and comfort but to his God.—*Jones.*

"*Against heaven.*"—He alone really confesses his sins who has regarded them mainly as sins against God—against a higher, heavenly order of things; and this is the best sign that a sinner has come to himself. Cf. Ps. li. 4: "Against Thee, Thee only, have I sinned and done this evil in Thy sight."

"*Before thee.*"—"In respect of thee"—*i.e.*, by wasting his substance and by occasioning him great unhappiness and some disgrace.

Ver. 19. "*Make me as one of thy hired servants.*" — An ancient writer says, in commenting on this verse, "O, Lord Jesu! Preserve us from such husks as the swine did eat, and instead thereof, give unto us the true Bread; for Thou art steward in Thy Father's house. As labourers, vouchsafe to hire us also, although arriving late; for Thou dost hire men, even at the eleventh hour,—and givest to all alike the same reward of life eternal."

"*Make me as one.*"—He wishes that there may be no distinction between him and the least of the day-labourers, and promises thereby that he will diligently serve and be obedient as a day-labourer. He wishes to be released, at any price, from his wretched condition, and with deeds to prove the sincerity of his confession of sin.—*Van Oosterzee.*

Vers. 20-24. *The Soul and its Reception.*

I. The reception of a longing and watching love.

II. A quick reception.

III. A reception of utmost welcome.

IV. A reception of larger answer to prayer than one dare hope for.

V. A reception of perfect reinstatement.

Ver. 20. *The Turning-Point.*

I. "And he arose." 1. He rises up and comes forth from the regions of the dead. 2. He cannot stay in the far country.

II. "And he came to his father." 1. The sinner left God: now he returns to God. 2. He had nowhere else to go. 3. He came quite home. 4. He came without delay.

III. There are great difficulties in the sinner's way to return to his Father. 1. His sins. 2. His vileness. 3. His hardness of heart. Yet there is a new and living way by which he may go.—*Jones.*

I. **The return of the son.**—1. The setting out on the homeward way. 2. The progress in the new course. 3. The return to his father.

II. **The welcome of the father.**—1. The father's observation of his son

afar off. 2. The father's compassion on his son coming to his home. 3. The father's welcome to his son returning to him.—*Ritchie.*

"*Ran.*"—The coming of the father to meet his son here figuratively exhibits the sending of the Son of God. —*Von Gerlach.*

"*Ran.*"—The return of the sinner is expressed by the word *going* (ver. 18), but God's coming to the sinner by *running.* God makes greater haste to the sinner than the sinner does to God; God makes much of our first inclination, and would not have it fall to the ground.

"*Kissed him.*" — No cold, formal greeting—*deosculatus est.* He kissed him repeatedly and fervently — devoured him with kisses.

"One parable cannot exhaust the whole truth; but in this parable we may say that the Saviour and Mediator is concealed in the kiss which the father gives the son" (*Riggenbach*).

The Prodigal was utterly destitute of merit, even in his repentance. For it was not until he had exhausted every resource, and death stared him in the face that he resolved to return home. Yet he was received with ardent welcome, and without upbraiding. Thus is it with the sinner. Although we return to God only, as it were, when we cannot help coming, He receives us with open arms; He takes the sin away and does not cast it up to us.

Associates Left Behind.—The Prodigal leaves behind him the companions and instruments of his lusts. This is a distinctive feature of true repentance. In the act of fleeing to his father he leaves his associates, and his habits, and his tastes, behind; and conversely, as long as he clings to these he will not—he cannot—return to his father. —*Arnot.*

The Compassionate Father.

I. His father saw him: 1. God takes notice of the very beginning of the new creation in the soul. 2. He sets the greatest value on the least grace, for He sees how great it will be at the last.

II. The father had compassion on him and ran to meet him. 1. Compassion on his most miserable condition, and his deep distress of mind. 2. Runs to meet him, because of the great delight in seeing him returning home, and because he wished to succour and comfort him.

III. He fell on his neck and kissed him; in like manner God pities His enemies, but delights in those who come home to Him, who are members of Christ, and are led by His Spirit.

IV. In regeneration God and man meet; they meet in peace and love; and they meet to part no more for ever.—*Jones.*

Imperfect Contrition, and God's Response to it.—The father's kiss conveys and implies the assurance of forgiveness. In the rehabilitation of this outcast youth there are two stages—(1) the human, and (2) the Divine. The Divine must have necessary preference over the human. The son would not seem to have reached any very high plane of moral life and feeling when the father met him. He was hunger-hunted, that was all. That penitence? It looks more like scheming self-interest. The action has scarcely any strain of moral sentiment and aspiration in it whatsoever. He was moving on a comparatively ignoble level, but the level led by unmistakeable gradients that their father's eye could follow into the far-off future up to something nobler and better at last. The first movements of the man's mind before it has been transformed by the magic effusion of the father's love cannot escape some strain of the old sordidness. If it is the wrath to come rather than the wretchedness he is leaving behind that excites his first movements toward home, his repent-

ance is still open to *the impeachment of self-interest.* The father, however, saw the dip, and trend, and direction, in this pathway of imperfect motive. The soul is not noble in its first steps of penitential movement towards home. It is made so by the touch of God's reconciling love.—*Selby.*

Ver. 21. *The Penitential Confession.*

I. The Prodigal Son returns to his father's house in a very different state of mind from that in which he left it.

II. We see here a penitent, approaching mercy's door, confessing his sins and praying for pardon. 1. He comes as a true penitent. 2. He seeks for no excuse, and does not even use his penitence as a plea.

III. His deep distress, which is both unavoidable and beneficial.

IV. He dwells upon the magnitude and aggravations of his sins.

V. He manifests deep humility.—*Jones.*

The Prepared Speech only Half Said.—Why did he not say all he had intended? Because he was prevented from saying more by the kisses of his father, and the other tokens of his father's love.

I. **The confession of sin made.**—1. The confession is filial in its spirit. 2. The confession is personal in its character.

II. **The aggravations of sin acknowledged.**—1. It is sin committed against sovereign authority. 2. It is sin committed in the face of fatherly love.

III. **The conviction of unworthiness expressed.**—1. The sense of unworthiness altered. 2. The appeal to paternal compassion implied.—*Ritchie.*

Repentance of Fear and Repentance of Love.—There is a profound difference between the confession uttered by the Prodigal Son (ver. 21), and that which the depth of his misery had extorted from him (vers. 18, 19). The latter was a cry of despair. Now distress has passed away, and the confession has become the cry of repentant love. The words are the same—"I have sinned"—but the tone in which they are uttered is different. Luther recognised the difference very clearly; and the repentance of love as distinguished from the repentance of fear was the true principle of the Reformation.—*Godet.*

Vers. 22-24. *Free and Complete Forgiveness.*—The forgiveness granted is both freely given and complete in its character. It is not preceded by any humiliating penance, or period of probation, or any successive stages of restoration to favour. In an instant he is reinstated in the place, and invested with the dignity, of a son.

The Prodigal is not put through a preparatory discipline, lodged in some sad and dreary moral quarantine, till some of the loathsomeness and defilement of sin be worn off him. His rags are exchanged for princely clothing; a feast is prepared to relieve his hunger and thirst.

Christ here Teaches Two Great Lessons:—

I. That God receives and forgives a sinner who comes back repentant.

II. That He delights in the act of thus forgiving repentant sinners.

Ver. 22. I. **The robe of filial acceptance.**—1. The best robe—best for covering, endurance, and beauty. 2. The bringing forth of the best robe, the open exhibition and free offer of Jesus' righteousness. 3. The putting on of the best robe.

II. **The ring of filial distinction.**—1. This is a token of filial relation. (2) This is a badge of filial privilege. 3. This is a pledge of filial inheritance.

III. **The shoes for filial life.**—1. The shoes prepare for walking in the comfort of a son. 2. The shoes prepare for walking in the freedom of a son. 3. The shoes prepare for walking in the service of a son.—*Ritchie.*

"*The best robe.*" — Cf. Zech. iii. 4, 5: "And He answered and spake unto those that stood by, saying, Take away the filthy garments from him. And unto him He said, Behold, I have caused thine iniquity to pass from thee, and I will clothe thee with change of raiment. . . . And they clothed him with garments." See also Isa. lxi. 10; Rev. iii. 18.

"*The best robe.*"

I. When a sinner truly repents and turns to God, no mention is made of his past offences.

II. The father ordered his servants to clothe, adorn, and feed his starving son. 1. The children of men are the objects of God's care and kindness. 2. He employs some servants to convey His gifts and blessings to His children.

III. The father ordered the best robe to be brought for him: 1. A mark of His love. 2. A meet dress for the company he was now to move in.

IV. A ring for his hand: (1) as symbol of the covenant of everlasting union; and (2) as an ornament.

V. And shoes for his feet; he must now walk in a new way, which he never knew before.—*Jones.*

Vers. 23, 24. I. **The provision for joy in the penitent's return.**—1. The bringing forth of Christ's atoning sacrifice as the provision of joy. 2. The partaking of Christ's atoning sacrifice as the substance of joy.

II. **The grounds of joy over the penitent's return.**—1. He was dead, and is alive again. 2. He was lost, and is found.—*Ritchie.*

Ver. 23. *The Richest Feast.*

I. This feast is the great salvation by Christ crucified.

II. The children of grace feed and live on the provisions which their heavenly Father has treasured up for them in the fulness of Christ.

III. The benefits of actual feeding on the gospel feast are truly great and lasting: (1) Believers thus come into closer union with Christ; (2) into communion with Him; (3) are transformed into His image; (4) and grow in grace, and in meetness for heaven.—*Jones.*

Ver. 24. I. **Angels rejoice** over the coming back of a sinner to God.

II. **Believers rejoice** over the return of a brother to their Father's house, because he is a brother; because they themselves know the happiness of the saving change; because this change brings honour to their Saviour.

III. **God rejoices** over the restoration of a son to filial life and love.

IV. **The penitent rejoices** in the welcome to his Father's heart and home—the joy of rescue, of acceptance, of a new nature, of communion, of possession and hope.—*Ritchie.*

"*Dead . . . lost.*"—The word "dead" describes the misery into which the Prodigal had sunk; "lost" describes the father's experience of deprivation during his son's absence. These two aspects of sin correspond to the representations in the two preceding parables: the son had strayed away (like the lost sheep), the father had lost something (as the woman had lost the piece of silver).

The Great Rejoicing.

I. **The cause of the joy:** 1. The penitent son as one alive from the dead. 2. As one lost who had been found.

II. **The nature of the joy:** universal, high, and eternal.—*Jones.*

Vers. 25-32. *Vindication of the Family Joy.*

I. **The elder brother's anger at the Prodigal's reception.**—1. The occasion of his anger. 2. The expression of his anger.

II. **The father's vindication of the family joy.**—1. The father's forbearance with an unfilial spirit. 2. The reasons he alleges for the joy.

III. **The lessons of truth here conveyed.**—1. God's love to fallen men,

2. Christ's condemnation of the self-righteous, of their pride and contempt for others. 3. The Divine welcome to great sinners.—*Ritchie.*

A Picture of the Legalistic, Grudging Pharisee.

I. **Jealous discontent.**
II. **Unfair complaints.**
III. **A gentle answer.**

Taylor.

Ver. 25. "*Was in the field.*"—The vividness and beauty of the story is heightened by the fact that the elder son, at the return of his brother, is not in the house, but has spent the day in hard, slavish service, and now first returns home at eventime, when the feast was already in progress.

More Perilous Faults. — The elder son is still a son, nor are his faults intrinsically more heinous — though more perilous, because more likely to lead to self-deception—than those of the younger. Self-righteousness is sin as well as unrighteousness, and may be even a worse sin (Matt. xxi. 31, 32); but God has provided for both sins a full sacrifice and a free forgiveness.—*Farrar.*

The Mirror Held Up to The Pharisees. —The Pharisees had said at ver. 7, at least in their hearts, "These ninety and nine just persons are *ourselves,* however!" And again, while hearing of the lost son, "This does *not* assuredly point to us!" Another mirror is now held up before them—"But here see yourselves!"—*Stier.*

Ver. 27. "*Safe and sound.*"—How nice is the observance of all the lesser proprieties of the narrative! The father, in the midst of all his natural affection, is yet full of the moral significance of his son's return—that he has come back another person from what he was when he went, or while he tarried in that far land; he sees into the deep of his joy that he is receiving him now indeed a *son*—once *dead,* but now *alive*; once *lost* to him, but now *found* alike by both. But the servant confines himself to the more external features of the case, to the fact that, after all he has gone through of excess and hardship, his father has yet received him *safe and sound.*—*Trench.*

Vers. 28-32. *The Father's Condescension and Kindness.* — Note (1) the father's condescension, and (2) his kindness in dealing with the elder son. He does not send a servant, but goes himself. He entreats him to lay aside his displeasure and to come in to welcome home his brother and to partake of the feast. And notwithstanding his son's boasting and rude attack, he continues composed and loving, and answers with meekness.—*Foote.*

Vers. 28-30. *An Unlovely Character.* —Note (1) the elder brother's displeasure at the kind reception of his prodigal brother; (2) his self-righteous pride; (3) his ungracious complaint; (4) his malicious exaggeration of his brother's misdeeds, and his ignoring the change that had taken place in him; and (5) his refusal to acknowledge him as his brother.

Vers. 29, 30. *Two Complaints.*—The elder son has two complaints to make: 1. He himself has been harshly treated. 2. His unworthy brother has been too kindly treated. The father replies to each of these charges in vers. 31, 32.

Ver. 29. "*Do I serve thee.*"—He thus shows that he was a slave. His father was regarded by him as a master—nay, as an unjust master—and he looks back upon his many years of ill-requited labours. Though in his father's house, he has utterly lost the filial spirit, while his brother even when far away had retained some measure of it. He is, therefore, so to speak, the real and more entirely *lost* son.

No Confession of Shortcoming.—Observe that while the younger son

confesses with no excuse, the elder son boasts with no confession. This at once proves his hollowness, for the confessions of the holiest are ever the most bitter.—*Farrar.*

"*Never gavest me.*"—He falls into the very sin which his brother committed when he said, "Give me the portion of goods that falleth to me." He, too, is feeling that he does not truly possess what he possesses *with* his father, but that he must separate something off from his father's stock before he can count it properly his own. —*Trench.*

Ver. 30. "*Thy son.*"—Some such word as "precious"—"this thy *precious* son" would bring out the elder brother's implied contempt still more clearly; while "this thy *dear* brother," in ver. 32, would suggest the father's affectionate reproof more adequately. Both words are implied in the tone of the two speeches.

Vers. 31, 32. *The Privilege of Service.*

I. Fidelity in service is a privilege, and not servitude.

II. A sinful life is a disaster, and not happiness to be envied. For the elder son contrasts his own hard and unremitting service with the careless and self-indulgent career of his younger brother. "He has enjoyed all the pleasures of sin, and now he enjoys all the happiness of salvation! I have never known anything but painful obedience to Thy commandments!"

Ver. 31. "*Son, thou art ever with me.*"—Though the son does not say, "Father," the father address him as "Son." This sets forth God's forbearing kindness toward the self-righteous and uncharitable.

CHAPTER XVI.

CRITICAL NOTES.

VER. 1. **And He said also.**—This implies that there is a certain, though perhaps not very close, connection between the discourse in this chapter and that which precedes it. The chapter mainly consists of two parables bearing upon the right use of riches in this world with regard to the prospect of another world. This subject was specially appropriate to the two classes of publicans and Pharisees—the one of which amassed ill-gotten gains, and the other of which was covetous (ver. 14). **To His disciples.**—The parable of the Unjust Steward, though of special bearing, perhaps, upon the publicans, was not addressed exclusively to them. **A certain rich man.**—In the interpretation of the parable the Rich Man can only represent God, who is possessor of all things. **A steward.**—A man of business, or agent. Such persons were often slaves, but it is evident from vers. 3, 4 that this man was free. By the steward we are to understand disciples, or every man in Christ's Church. **Accused.**—Probably a malicious, but certainly a true, accusation. **Had wasted.**—Rather, "was wasting" (R.V.).

Ver. 2. **How is it that I hear this of thee?**—Or, "What is this that I hear of thee?" (R.V.). Probably the A.V. is to be preferred—*i.e.*, not "What is the nature of this report?" but "What ground is there for the report?—produce books and vouchers." **Thou mayest be.**—Rather, "Thou canst be no longer steward" (R.V.). The steward not denying the report, it was impossible to retain him in his office. The dismissal is to be understood of the day of death. **I cannot dig.**—Rather, "*I have not strength to dig*" (R.V.). His strength had been enervated by his soft life.

Ver. 4. **I am resolved.**—The word in the original implies a sudden plan—an idea that has just dawned upon him. **They.**—*I.e.*, the debtors. **Receive me.**—*I.e.*, give me shelter. This is one of the points of comparison on which stress is laid in ver. 9.

Ver. 5. **Every one.**—Rather, "each one." **Debtors.**—It is doubtful in what relation these "debtors" stood to the "lord." They were either tenants who paid rent in kind, and whose rent was now lowered, or persons who had received advances of food from the Rich Man's stores, which they had not paid for, and the amounts of which were now fraudulently altered. Probably the latter explanation is the better of the two. **The first.**—Two specimen cases are given; the varying reduction in the two implies that consideration was paid to the different circumstances of the respective debtors.

Ver. 6. **Bill.**—R.V. "bond"; the literal term is "writings." **Quickly.**—Evidently a secret and hurried arrangement; the debtors, too, seem to have been dealt with separately and privately.

Ver. 8. **The lord.**—Rather, "his lord" (R.V.), and not Christ. **Wisely.**—*I.e.*, prudently and skilfully. Both the Rich Man and the steward were "children of this world," and were therefore characteristically inclined to overlook the fraudulent part of the transaction, in view of its cleverness and success. **Wiser.**—More shrewd. **In their generation.**—Rather, "for their own generation"—*i.e.*, in their lower sphere; in looking after their own interests. **Children of light.**—Cf. John xii. 36; Eph. v. 8; 1 Thess. v. 5.

Ver. 9. **I say unto you.**—"*I*," in opposition to "the lord"; "*you*," in opposition to "the steward." **Of the mammon.**—*I.e.*, "by means of" (R.V.). "Mammon" is an Aramaic word for "wealth"—not for "god of wealth," as commonly explained. "Mammon of unrighteousness"—*i.e.*, wealth which is so generally regarded as personal property, and squandered accordingly, instead of being considered as a trust committed by God to our charge; unrighteously claimed as one's own, and unrighteously employed. **Make friends.**—The imagery is taken from the parable. As the steward procured grateful friends, who received him when dismissed from office, so may we, by charitable deeds, provide friends to welcome us into heaven (to welcome on arrival, not to open heaven to us). **When ye fail.**—Rather, "when it shall fail"—*i.e.*, mammon. **Everlasting habitations.**—Rather "the eternal tabernacles" (R.V.)—*i.e.*, as contrasted with the temporary refuge secured by the steward for himself.

Ver. 10. **He that is faithful**, etc.—In the spiritual sphere the interests of steward and lord are identical; while in the parable the steward secured his own future welfare by defrauding his master. He was guilty of unfaithfulness; but we may, by showing a foresight like his, and by using what is entrusted to us in deeds of charity, show true faithfulness to our Lord. Our characters are tested in this way, by our taking means for securing our eternal welfare or by our neglecting to do so. The contrast between the "least" (or "a very little," R.V.) and "much" corresponds to that between "unrighteous mammon" and "true riches" (in ver. 11), and between "that which is another man's" and "that which is your own" (in ver. 12).

Ver. 13. **No servant**, etc.—"Mammon" and "serving" in this verse show that it is still connected with the preceding section. We are entrusted with the "unrighteous mammon," but are not to be servants to it. God requires the undivided service of our hearts (cf. James iv. 4; Col. iii. 5).

Vers. 14-18. In this section, the connection of which with the preceding and following parables is not at first sight apparent, we have evidently the heads of a discourse addressed to the Pharisees. The thread of connection seems to be the following. The Pharisees derided the teaching of Jesus concerning riches, and plumed themselves upon their righteousness. Jesus contrasts merely outward and legal righteousness with that inward righteousness which approves itself to God (ver. 15). He declares that the period of outward legal righteousness came to an end with the preaching of John the Baptist; that the kingdom of God is now preached and every one (*i.e.*, publicans and sinners) presseth into it. Yet no reproach was thus cast upon the Law; there was no relaxation of the standard of holiness—nay, in the kingdom of God a strict observance of the rules of conduct was insisted upon. The scaffolding of the legal system was taken away, but the inward principle of the Law is eternal (ver. 17). The example given of the indissolubility of the moral law and of the revelation, through Christ, of a stricter morality than that of the Mosaic enactments, is taken from the law of adultery. The paragraph vers. 14-18 forms an introduction to the parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus. The words (ver. 15) "that which is highly esteemed among men" are illustrated by the picture of the brilliant and sumptuous life of the Rich Man; the words, "is abomination in the sight of God" correspond to the statement of the terrible chastisement in hell which falls upon him; while the permanent value of the Law (ver. 17) is asserted over again by Abraham—"They have Moses and the prophets; let them hear them" (ver. 30). In contrast, too, with those who press violently into the kingdom of God (ver. 16), is the life of the self-indulgent sinner, who is indifferent to everything but his own ease and comfort.

Ver. 14. **Covetous.**—Rather, "lovers of money" (R.V.). **Derided.**—The literal meaning of the word is "to turn up the nose at." Derided the idea; that is, that riches hindered religion.

Ver. 15. **Justify yourselves.**—*I.e.*, declare yourselves to be just, or righteous. **Highly esteemed.**—Rather, "exalted" (R.V.); lit. "lofty."

Ver. 16. **The law**, etc.—Christ here clearly distinguishes between the Old and the New Dispensation. **Presseth into it.**—Rather, "entereth violently into it" (R.V.) (cf. Matt. xi. 12, 13). The allusion is to the eagerness with which some classes of the community received the message of the kingdom (cf. Luke vii. 29; John xii. 19).

Ver. 17. **One tittle.**—The word used described the little turns of the strokes by which one letter of the alphabet differs from another somewhat like it.

Ver. 18. **Whosoever putteth away his wife.**—The allusion here to the law of divorce is probably a reference to the fact that the Pharisees were lax in their opinions on this point. They allowed divorce for any cause: Christ forbade it, except for the one cause of "fornication." The expression in this verse might seem to forbid divorce altogether, but in other passages where the matter is dealt with, the one exception is specified (see Matt. v. 32; xix. 9).

Ver. 19. **A certain rich man.**—No name given him, while the beggar has a name (ver. 20). He is often called Dives (Latin for "rich"). **Clothed in purple.**—His outer dress of costly Tyrian purple, his inner of fine linen from Egypt. **Fared sumptuously.**—Or "living in mirth and splendour" (R.V. margin). No charge of gluttony or other sensual vice can be founded on these words. He enjoyed the pleasures of this life which his wealth could purchase, instead of providing friends against the day of death (ver. 9). His luxuriousness was of the type described in 1 John ii. 16.

Ver. 20. **Lazarus.**—A form of Eleazar, which means "God my help." This name is evidently chosen to indicate the beggar's piety, upon which, however, the parable lays no stress, as the Rich Man's sin was neglect of a brother man, and not neglect of a pious brother man. The word translated "beggar" means simply a poor man. **Full of sores.**—As persons of his class often are—cutaneous disorders, from meagre diet, and neglect.

Ver. 21. **Desiring.**—And evidently obtaining his desire: accepting willingly the crumbs, though they were insufficient to satisfy his hunger. **The dogs.**—The wild, ownerless dogs that roam in the streets of an Eastern city, and act as scavengers. **Licked.**—In contrast with the inhumanity of men towards the beggar is set the pity of the dogs: they licked his sores as they lick their own.

Ver. 22. **The beggar died.**—No mention made of burial, as in the case of the Rich Man: the funeral rites of a pauper attract little attention. **Was carried.**—*I.e.*, his soul was carried. **Abraham's bosom.**—*I.e.*, the happy side of Hades, where the saints were regarded as resting in bliss. The figure is that of a banquet: the beggar is placed in a seat of honour next Abraham. The reclining at table by which the head of one person almost rested on the lap of another, explains "Abraham's *bosom*" (cf. John xiii. 23). **And was buried.**—Splendid obsequies, in accordance with the rank and wealth he had enjoyed. Taken in connection with what follows, there seems a strain of irony in the mention of the Rich Man's burial.

Ver. 23. **In hell.**—Rather, "in Hades" (R.V.), the baleful side of the world of spirits. There can be no doubt that in the representation of the state of matters in the future world, as given in this parable, Christ uses figurative language, in accommodation to the prevailing Jewish ideas of His time, rather than reveals that world as it is. **In torments.**—Perhaps we are to understand by this the anticipation of condemnation—the final condemnation being still in the distance.

Ver. 24. **Send Lazarus.**—As, having been his inferior on earth, he may be employed still as a servant. The Rich Man is now the suppliant, but is not yet accustomed to the reversal of his lot. **Tongue.**—Which had been an organ of luxury. **Am tormented.**—Rather, "am in anguish" (R.V.); the word differing from that in ver. 23.

Ver. 25. **Son.**—Solemn and calm reply: no mockery of his state, no grief concerning him either. **Receivedst.**—Or "receivedst to the full." **All thy good things.**—"All thou didst account good, came to an end with life." "*Thy* good things." Notice that the corresponding word is not used of Lazarus' "evil things." He did not, probably, regard them as evil, but as part of God's discipline towards him.

Ver. 26. **And beside all this.**—*I.e.*, "Even if it were not so, God's decree has placed thee where thou art, and a great gulf between us, so that it is *impossible* to grant thy request." **So that they.**—Rather, "in order that" none may pass it. **Is fixed.**—For ever impassable.

Vers. 27, 28. **I pray thee, therefore.**—His brethren were living carelessly as he had lived. In his solicitude on their account we have a certain change in his disposition—his selfishness gives way: and in this change we would gladly believe there is the germ of a better life. The general tone, however, of the parable forbids much stress being laid on this.

Ver. 30. **Nay, father Abraham.**—Not "They will not hear them," for he could not tell that; but "Leave them not to that uncertain chance; make their repentance sure by sending a messenger from the dead."

Ver. 31. **If they hear not**, etc.—The words of Abraham are stronger than those of the Rich Man—even the lesser work of *persuasion*, not to speak of the greater of bringing to repentance, could not be wrought by this means. The possibility of sending such a messenger is not denied. There is no impassable gulf between Hades and the world. Lazarus of Bethany

(whose name so strangely corresponds to that of the beggar here) crossed it, and so did Christ Himself. The Pharisees did not believe, though confronted with the fact of the resurrection of some from the dead. Christ, after His rising again, did not go to them—the fact is here asserted that they would not have believed, even if He had done so. The reason for such unbelief has its explanation: mere marvels have not necessarily any moral value, and soon pall upon those who witness them.

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 1—13.

The Prudent Steward.—There is at first sight a difficulty in the interpretation of this parable; apparently there is a commendation of evil by Christ. We see a bad man held up for Christian imitation. The difficulty passes away when we have learned to distinguish the essential aim of the parable from its ornament or drapery. It is not Christ, but the *master*, who commended the Unjust Steward. And he did so, not because he had acted honourably, faithfully, gratefully, but because he had acted *wisely*. He takes the single point of prudence, foresight, forecast. We constantly do this in daily life. We are, perhaps, charmed by a tale of successful robbery; we wonder at its ingenuity, feel even a kind of respect for the man who could so contrive it; but no man who thus relates it is understood to recommend felony. This steward had planned, he had seen difficulties, overcome them, marked out his path, held to it steadily, crowned himself with success. So far he is an example. The way in which he used his power of forecasting may have been bad; but forecast itself is good.

I. **Wisdom of this world.**—There are three classes of men: those who believe that one thing is needful, and choose the better part, who believe in and live for eternity—these are not mentioned here; those who believe in the world and live for it; and those who believe in eternity, and half live for the world. "What shall I do?" Here is the thoughtful, contriving, sagacious man of the world. In the affairs of this world the man who does not provide for self, soon finds himself thrust aside. It becomes necessary to jostle and struggle in the great crowd if he would thrive. Note the kind of superiority in this character that is commended. There are certain qualities which really do elevate a man in the scale of being. He who pursues a plan steadily is higher than he who lives by the hour. There may be nothing very exalted in his aim, but there is something very marvellous in the enduring, steady, patient pursuit of his object. You see energies of the highest order brought into play. It is not a being of mean powers that the world has beguiled, but a mind far-reaching, vast, throwing immortal powers on things of time. Such is the wisdom of this world, wise in its contriving selfishness, wise in its masterly superiority, wise in its adaptation of means to ends, wise in its entire success. But the success is only in their generation, and their wisdom is only for their generation. If this world be all, it is wise to contrive for it and live for it. But if not, then consider the words, "Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee; then whose shall those things be that thou hast gotten?"

II. **The inconsistencies of the children of light.**—"The children of this world are wiser," etc. This is evidently not true of all. There have been men who have given their bodies to be burned for the truth's sake; men who have freely sacrificed this present world for the next. To say that the wisest of the sons of this world are half as wise as they, were an insult to the sanctifying Spirit. But "children of light" is a wide term. There is a difference between life and light. To have light is to perceive truth and know duty. To have life is to be able to live out truth and to perform duty. Many a man has clear light who has not taken hold of life. So far as a man believes the body nothing in comparison with the soul, the present in comparison with the future; so far as he has felt the power of sin and the sanctifying power of the death of Christ; so

far as he comprehends the character of God as exhibited in Jesus Christ;—he is a child of light. The accusation is that in his generation he does not walk so wisely as the child of the world does in his. The children of the world believe that this world is of vast importance. They are consistent with their belief, and live for it. Out of it they manage to extract happiness. In it they contrive to find a home. To be a child of light implies duty as well as privilege. It is not enough to have the light, if we do not "walk in the light." To hold high principles and live on low ones is Christian inconsistency. If a man say that "it is more blessed to give than to receive," and is for ever receiving, scarcely ever giving, he is inconsistent. If he profess that to please God is the only thing worth living for, and his plans and aims and contrivances are all to please men, he is wise for the generation of the children of the world; for the generation of the "children of light" he is not wise. The wisdom of the steward consisted in forecasting. He felt that his time was short, and he lost not a moment. The want of Christian wisdom consists in this, that our stewardship is drawing to a close, and no provision is made for an eternal future. "Make to yourself friends." Goodness done in Christ secures blessedness. A cup of cold water given in the name of Christ shall not lose its reward. Wise acts, holy and unselfish deeds, secure rewards. "Everlasting habitations." Nothing is eternal but that which is done for God and others. That which is done for self dies. Perhaps it is not wrong, but it perishes. You say it is pleasure; well, enjoy it. But joyous recollection is no longer joy. That which ends in self is mortal; that alone which goes out of self, into God, lasts for ever.—*Robertson.*

SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS ON VERSES 1—13.

Vers. 1-9. *The Unjust Steward.*

I. **The steward dismissed.**

II. **The steward providing for the future.**

III. **The steward commended.**

IV. **The lessons for disciples.**—1. Every one is a steward. 2. Be like this steward in prudence, and use of opportunity. 3. Be unlike him in dishonesty. In this he is a warning.—*Taylor.*

Christian Prudence.

I. **The stewardship of the unjust steward.**—1. Careless. 2. Dishonest. 3. Commended.

II. **Our stewardship.**—1. We are all stewards. 2. We shall have to give account. We must keep our eye on the future.—*Watson.*

I. **Wisdom's eye.**—1. Looks far forward. 2. Looks also around.

II. **Wisdom's hand.**—Is quick to do whatever needs to be done. The wisdom of the steward's plan would have been folly, if it had not been carried out at once.—*Wells.*

Special Reference to the Publicans.—Apparently, though not certainly, these parables were spoken that the publicans might distinctly understand how their ill-gotten gains were to be used. They were to be taught that, though their past is forgiven, they have a duty to do with the gains they have made. And they are addressed as men thoroughly versed in all the ways of monied men, wide awake to appreciate hard work, vigilance, enterprise, and promptitude. And the aim of this first parable is to impress on them the necessity of carrying over with them into the kingdom of God the qualities which had made them successful in the kingdom of mammon.—*Dods.*

The Two Parables in this Chapter.—Note the connection between the two parables in this chapter: the one supplements the other. The idea common to them both is the connection between employment of earthly goods and life beyond the grave. The Unjust Steward represents the man who secures his future lot by a wise use of fleeting

wealth; the Rich Man is a representative of those who ruin their future by a neglect of present opportunities of preparing happiness in the world to come.

General Teaching of this Parable.—The sum of this parable is that we should deal humanely and benignantly with our neighbours, that when we come to the tribunal of God the fruit of our liberality may return to us.—*Calvin.*

The Parable Teaches Two Lessons:

I. The general one a lesson of prudence in the use of temporal possessions with a view to eternal interests.

II. The special one a lesson as to the way of using these possessions which most directly and surely tends to promote our eternal interests—viz., by the practice of kindness towards those who are destitute of this world's goods.—*Bruce.*

To Use the World for God.—The parable teaches Christian prudence, Christ exhorting us to use the world and the world's goods, so to speak, *against* the world and *for* God.—*Trench.*

I. **The fault and its punishment** (vers. 1, 2).
II. **The sudden resolution** (vers. 3, 4).
III. **The execution of the plan** (vers. 5-7).
IV. **The Master's praise** (ver. 8).
V. **The counsel to disciples as an application of the parable** (ver. 9).

Vers 1, 2. I. **Every human being is simply a trustee.**
II. **We shall have to answer for our trust.**

Ver. 1. "*Accused.*"—The accusation may have been prompted by malicious motives, but the sting of it lay in its truth. In like manner it is not so much the malevolence of our great spiritual adversary that we have to fear as the just grounds for accusation which our conduct may afford.

Ver. 2 "*Hear this of thee.*"—The steward had abused the trust his master had placed in him, and is called to account. In like manner God has entrusted much to man, and will be strict in requiring from him an account of his stewardship. He is not treated as one who, from the utter corruption of his nature, must inevitably go wrong, but as one who is fully responsible for all his actions.

Ver. 3. "*What shall I do?*"—He tacitly admits his guilt, and instantly faces the situation and endeavours to make the best of it. His self-indulgent life has incapacitated him for hard work of an honest kind; his pride forbids him to beg for alms from those who had known his former circumstances of affluence and power.

Ver. 4. "*Receive me.*"—Here we come across the great lesson of the parable. The steward, when put out of one home, is anxious to secure another. In like manner the fact that we have to leave our home on earth, when death comes, should make us anxious to provide for ourselves an abiding home in the world to come.

Vers. 5-7. *Beneficence a Passport to Heaven.*—The steward acts so as to secure benefits for the debtors, without any pecuniary benefit to himself; and this points the moral of the parable—beneficence is a passport into the eternal habitations.

Ver. 5. *Obligations.*
I. **The grounds of our obligations.**—The gifts of God, the gift of His Son, peace of mind, the society of the good.
II. **The discharge of our obligations.**—Cherish our blessings, live up to our privileges, scatter our blessings among others.

What we Owe to God.—Man is a debtor to God. He is continually forgetting this. Our indebtedness to God need not paralyse us into a sudden despair. Christ is our ransom for the

awful obligation of "ten thousand talents." But His love should constrain us into His service. There are two things to consider: 1. The cause. 2. The nature of our indebtedness to God.

I. **The cause.**—Each of us owes an infinite debt to God for creation, redemption, election, and grace. To us, especially, life should be a noble and beautiful thing. But more blessed than the first creation is the second. Another mystery of the Divine love is election—a fact which confronts us everywhere. The sovereign, righteous, loving will of God alone accounts for our privileges. Thank Him, too, for grace—the continual, overshadowing, indwelling, inexhaustible gift of the Holy Spirit.

II. **The nature of this debt.**—We owe God worship, righteousness, trustfulness, and love. In worship we must render substance, testimony, service. The law of God is to be fulfilled by us in our sanctification. Nothing honours God like trusting Him, or wounds Him like failing to trust Him. This is a service always open to all. Best, and last, and sum of all, we owe God love. Paying this we pay everything, and yet feel that nothing is paid. It is His nature to care for our love. God is not content with loving; He desires to be loved. But it must be a complete love—love of mind, will, and spirit. —*Thorold.*

Vers. 6, 7. "*Write fifty . . . write fourscore.*"—There is nothing of spiritual significance in these amounts. They represent merely the shrewdness with which the steward dealt with each debtor, with sole reference, probably, to the greater or less ability of each to render a grateful return to himself when cast upon the world.—*Brown.*

Vers. 8-12. *Christian Prudence.*

I. **Prudence.**—Is a shorter form of providence. It has great value in human life. It is needed in our conduct, in relation to our money, in our undertakings, and in our companionships. Christian prudence will show itself in making provision for the future world.

II. **Worldly prudence and its teaching.**—The prudence of the worldly man is in advance of the spiritual prudence of the religious man, as the aims of the former are all directed to *one single end*—viz., worldly prosperity. The religious man's aims are too often divided. Because worldly things are near and visible, they are apt to share the affections which should be wholly centred on "the things which are unseen."

III. **Christian prudence.** — Christ not only drew lessons from the dishonest steward, but He proceeded to give us a rule for the wise use of money. Use riches, not as our own, but as the stewards of God. Use them as He directs. We are not to make getting rich our aim. We are not to love riches. We are to use them freely for deeds of charity and mercy. Christ also gives encouragements to prudence. Faithfulness in dealing as God would have us with the "unrighteous mammon" is to be the means of training us for, and proving our fitness for, the true riches. Worldly riches are not "true"; we cannot hold them permanently; they do not satisfy the soul. The knowledge and love of God alone satisfy the soul. These, and all that follows with them, are a sure and lasting possession.—*Taylor.*

Ver. 8. *The Follies of the Wise.*—The world can teach the Church many lessons, and it would be well if the Church lived in the fashion in which men of the world do. There is eulogium here; recognition of splendid qualities, prostituted to low purposes; recognition of wisdom in the adaptation of means to end; and a limitation of the recognition, because it is only "in their generation" that the "children of this world are wiser than the children of light."

I. **Two opposed classes.**—Our Lord so orders His words as to suggest a double antithesis, one member of which

has to be supplied in each case. He would teach us that the "children of this world" are "children of darkness"; and that the "children of light" are so, just because they are the children of another world than this. Thus He limits His praise, because it is the sons of darkness that, in a certain sense, are wiser than the enlightened ones. And that is what makes the wonder and the inconsistency to which our Lord is pointing. Men whose folly is so dashed and streaked with wisdom, and others whose wisdom is so blurred and spotted with folly, are the extraordinary paradoxes which experience of life presents to us.

II. **The limited and relative wisdom of the fools.**—The steward would have been a much wiser man if he had been an honester one. But, apart from the moral quality of his action, there was in it what was wise, prudent, and worthy of praise. There was courage, fertility of resource, adaptation of means to end, promptitude in carrying out his plans. Bad the design indeed was, but clever. He was a clever cheat. The lord and the steward belong to the same level of character, and vulpine sagacity, astuteness, and qualities which ensure success in material things, seem to both of them to be of the highest value. The secret of success religiously is precisely the same as the secret of success in ordinary things. Nothing is to be got without working for it, and there is nothing to be got in the Christian life without working for it any more than in any other. The reasons for the contrast are easy to understand. "This world" appeals to sense, "that world" to faith. And so trifles crush out realities.

III. **The conclusive folly of the partially wise.**—Christ said "in their generation," and that is all that can be said. Let in the thought of the end, and the position is changed. Two questions—What are you doing it for? And suppose you get it, what then? —reduce all the world's wisdom to stark, staring insanity. Nothing that cannot pass the barrier of these two questions satisfactorily is other than madness, if it is taken to be the aim of a man's life. You have to look at the end before you serve out the epithets "wise" and "foolish." The man who makes anything but God his end and aim is relatively wise and absolutely foolish. Let God be your end. And let there be a correspondence between ends and means.—*Maclaren.*

Mismanagement of Eternal Interests. —In this verse, Christ, after telling the story of the dishonest steward, speaks on His own behalf. Our Lord adds this comment of His own to the commendation pronounced by the steward's master.

I. **This maxim is literally true.**—Worldly people are more quick-sighted than Christians as to worldly interests. The very goodness of the Christian is against him in the business of life. He is unwilling to think evil, and unready to counterwork it. So the world often has its laugh at the Christian.

II. **The text is true as a serious reflection on the ordinary management of a Christian life.**—Those who profess to be living for eternity do not act so wisely, with a view to that high and glorious end, as those who scarcely aim at anything beyond time, act with a view to that comparatively low and poor ambition. There are only these two classes of men—the "children of this age" and the "children of light." The former are characterised by the absence of a definite pursuit and well-grounded hope of an immortal life in heaven. But the latter do not always associate this high aim of life with true wisdom in the choice of means. Worldly men, in accuracy of eye, steadiness of hand, and strength of effort, outstrip Christian men. These latter should copy, as regards spiritual realities, the good method of worldly men whose life-aims are purely secular. It is not enough to have a higher aim than worldly men. *How* does the Christian live, in view of, and in pursuit of, this higher aim? Is he wise? Is he prudent? Or is he languid,

indifferent, slothful? How searching such an utterance of rebuke as Christ speaks here is to all who profess to be "children of light"? The Christian should be inventive, resolute. Too often he is living below his privileges and opportunities. Great exertions should accompany great expectations. It is so in things earthly. Give a man hope, and you give him zeal; make success doubtful, and you destroy endeavour. Let not the hope, the zeal, the diligent endeavour of the worldling, rebuke the sloth, the aimlessness, the languor, of a "child of the light"!—*Vaughan.*

Spiritual Far-Sightedness Commended.—The Unjust Steward showed, even in his dishonesty, a far-sightedness of prudence which it were well if Christian people, while eschewing the dishonesty, could always exercise in reference to their own higher aims and nobler interests. The conduct of this unscrupulous agent is made to furnish a lesson, not of imitation certainly, but yet not wholly of avoidance, to the disciples of Jesus Christ.—*Ibid.*

The Qualities Exhibited by The Steward.—The steward exhibits various valuable qualities of character well worthy of imitation—decision, self-collectedness, energy, promptitude, and tact.—*Bruce.*

"*Commended.*"—"Men will praise thee when thou doest well to thyself" (Ps. xlix. 18).

"*Wisely.*"—This quality of wisdom Christ had already commended to His disciples, in the words, "be ye therefore wise as serpents" (Matt. x. 16).

We May Learn from His History—

I. **That dismissal, death, will certainly come to us.**

II. **That some provision should be made for what is beyond.**

The Word Reminds Us—

I. **How intricately mixed up with each other are virtues and vices,** good and evil, in this human world.—In the character of this steward the virtue of prudence lay intimately associated with gross and deliberate fraud.

II. **Of the high religious value of prudence.** The need and function of prudence in relation to the life and future of the soul.

Points in which Worldly Men often Surpass Christians.—Worldly men prosecute their schemes (1) with more ingenuity of contrivance; (2) with more singleness of aim; (3) with greater earnestness; (4) with greater perseverance;—than "the children of light" often display.

Vers. 9, 10. *Stewardship for the Lord.*—These sentences require careful pondering, in themselves and in their connection.

I. **We hold all we have as the redeemed subjects and servants of Christ.**—The steward has nothing of his own. We are not our own. Christ, as Mediator, makes us His own property. This is the secret of Christian stewardship. You, and all you have, are restored to yourself; but you hold all for Christ henceforth. Your absolute all is His. Your possessions come under the same law. You must give all for all. He will have no divided stewardship.

II. **What are the tokens of good stewardship?**—1. That the entrusted property be improved to the utmost. 2. That it be administered strictly according to the owner's will. 3. That where His will is not certainly known, wisdom or prudence does the very best. Our Lord says, Be wise for Me as the steward in the parable was for himself. This is of the very essence of our trust, that the Master leaves much to our own tact. He gives us the main outlines of His will, and leaves us to fill up details. In nothing is Christian wisdom more needed than in the right employment of our wealth, be it greater or less. Let the steward feeling be well educated and keen, and there will be

no error—at least, no error against Christ.

III. **He who habitually remembers his stewardship will be saved from the deadly evil which besets the possession of property, the making it into a god.**—Christ makes mammon the possible rival of the Supreme. Undue love of this world's goods is inconsistent with the single-minded fidelity of the steward sentiment. Of the love of wealth, pre-eminently, it may be said that it cannot co-exist with the worship of God. The only safeguard is the habitual remembrance that what we have is not our own. Faithful steward service will alone protect us from becoming idolaters of this world's good. He who serves not God with His money makes money itself His only god. This warning is not addressed to the rich alone, though specially needful for them. But the warning is to all. Every one has some property, and therefore some stewardship.

IV. **To all stewards there is approaching the day of reckoning.**—The day of judgment throws its shadow over every life. We are all hasting to the one last audit. Our salvation, indeed, will depend on the presence or absence of our faith in Christ, but the kind of salvation, the measure of it, and the degree of future reward assigned hereafter, will be regulated by the faithfulness of the life in all its boundless variety of works. If we have proved unjust to our Master in this life, He will not trust us in the next.—*Pope.*

Ver. 9. *Christ's Teaching on Wealth.*

I. **Riches are not necessarily to be repudiated.**—Our Lord teaches that, rightly used, they may add intensity to the joy of our future condition. Out of the mammon, whose characteristic is injustice and untruth, we may form friendships which will not terminate with life. "I say unto you"—not repudiate your riches; but "make to yourselves friends out of them."

II. **These friends do not purchase or gain for us an entrance.**—They simply receive us when we enter. Our names must be graven, not on the hearts of the poor saints, but on the hands of the Redeemer with the very nails of the crucifixion. "*Friends.*" With money alone you can buy slaves, tools, flatterers. But with money alone we cannot buy a friend. Only he who *has* a heart can win a heart. Only a heart-winner can be a friend-winner. Riches rightly used may therefore be profitable for our higher interests.—*Alexander.*

"*Make to yourselves friends.*"—No thought can be better fitted than that of this parable, on the one hand to overthrow the idea of any kind of merit attached to almsgiving (for what merit can there be in giving of that which is another's?), and on the other to encourage us to the practice of that excellence which assures us of friends and protectors for so grave a crisis as that of our entrance into the world to come.

"*Receive you.*"—In the journey of life, as in other journeys, it is a pleasing reflection that we have friends who are thinking of us and who will receive us with joy when our journey is at an end.

Vers. 10-12. *How the Little may be Used to Get the Great.*

I. **The strange new standard of value which is set up here.**—Outward good and inward riches are compared (1) as to their intrinsic magnitude; (2) as to their quality; (3) as to their ownership.

II. **The broad principle here laid down as to the highest use of the lower good.**

III. **The faithfulness which utilises the lowest as a means of possessing more fully the highest.**—Earthly possessions administered according to the principle (1) of stewardship; (2) of self-sacrifice; (3) of brotherhood.—*Maclaren*

Ver. 10. "*He that is faithful.*"—Which is as much as if He had said:

The use which men make of the goods of this present world, which are comparatively of small value, shows the use they would make of such as are far greater, were the same committed to them, and which belong to the children of God in heaven. If they have used these aright, so would they use those; and if they have abused these, they would abuse those likewise. *Faithfulness* and *injustice* are properly applied to the use and abuse of things not our own, but committed to us for the honour and purposes of the owner. For to apply them to our *own* uses and purposes, and not *His*, would be a breach of trust, and therefore unfaithful and unjust in a very high degree.' —*Palmer.*

"*Least . . . much.*"

I. This verse suggests that we are in this world merely on, trial, and serving our apprenticeship.

II. That it is our fidelity to the interests entrusted to us that is tried, and not so much whether we have done little or great things.

Faithful in Little, Faithful in Much.

I. **True faithfulness knows no distinction between great and small duties.**

II. **Faithfulness in small duties is even greater than faithfulness in great.**

III. **Faithfulness in that which is least is the preparation for, and secures our having, a wider sphere in which to obey God.**—*Maclaren.*

Faithfulness.—Put to the mind alone, as if that were all there is of us, the mind might ask doubtfully how it can be true. It looks as if one might be upright in large transactions, and yet careless in trifles; tell the truth commonly, but not always; keep the law of the school under the teacher's eye, but break it out of sight; meet emergencies handsomely, but in the commonplaces of every-day affairs come short. We have seen such lives. What, then, does Christ mean? He says that faithful men and faithful women are faithful everywhere, under all conditions, in all places alike. "Faithful," full of faith. This chosen word is the key to the sentence. Faithfulness is not a single virtue, or a separate trait. It runs through the whole character, as blood through the body. The root of it is faith in God, and itself is the root of all excellencies and all moralities. Faithfulness is not a thing of more or less, of seasons or opportunities, of ornament or convenience. Principles never are, and faithfulness is a principle. Duty is universal because God is universal. Duty is unchangeable because God is unchangeable. The "least things" in which each of us is faithful or faithless, are not only the beginnings of what seems great in the eyes of men, they are great already by what they come out of; they are discharges of a life within us; they signify a principle in the working and springs of character; they uncover and they prove the inward frame and habit of soul on which eternal life depends.—*Huntington.*

Vers. 11, 12. *Stewardship for Self.*—In this whole section there is a quiet undertone of reference to the true wisdom of life in extracting as much good as possible from all the elements of this world's evil, especially from what we call its possessions.

I. **Extracting it for self, and not only for our Master.**—There is, indeed, a sense in which self may be entirely suppressed, self as a final end, self as the director of life. But, on the other hand, it is the will of God that the benefit of self shall, as subordinate, never be lost sight of. There is a Christian care for self which is at once the supremest wisdom and the supremest unselfishness. We must think and act in the midst of the dangers of time, and the snares of earthly wealth, for the interests of our immortal souls when time and the wealth of time are ended and gone.

II. **For this is the true secret, that we have no self apart from our**

Master.—We never reach the height of our Lord's teaching, nor rise to the grandeur of our relation to Him, until we so identify ourselves with Him and His universal cause on earth that we know no difference between His and ours. This is the true evangelical glorification of the steward principle. The more we have of earthly goods the more are our graces tested, and, if we are wise enough to sustain the test, the more confirmed becomes our renunciation of this world, and our preference of heaven. The wisdom of a man who has the dangerous trust of possessions is not only to keep himself from the special peril that besets him, but to turn the danger to good account. That is the lesson of the chapter, and of our whole life.

III. **After all, we must go beyond this world for the Saviour's most impressive illustration of His meaning.**—We cannot disconnect the stewardship of time from the issues of eternity. All that we possess is ours for a season, that through our prudent use of it we may advance our own interests for ever. In two ways the Divine Teacher impresses this upon us: 1. We may make to ourselves friends by the mammon of unrighteousness, who shall welcome us to everlasting habitations. 2. By fidelity below in that which is least we may prepare ourselves for larger trusts, and for a jurisdiction hereafter for which the stewardship of time furnishes but a slight analogy. Christ's emphatic preface, "I say unto you," introduces the lesson that we must in our better and holier cunning create for ourselves friends by the charitable use of our substance. What the poor worldling in the parable did for the poor self of this generation, you must do for the higher and nobler self of the world to come. But that is not all. Our Lord teaches that our stewardship here may be so administered as to prepare us for larger trust hereafter. The Unjust Steward does not teach us this, save by contrast. He so failed that he could never be trusted again. We are to be trusted hereafter according to the measure of our capacity for trust acquired here. There will be stewardships in the other world, without probation, and without fear of failure, proportioned and accommodated to the character we have acquired here. The general principle of fidelity is to be trained in this life, and this prepares for independence in the coming life.—*Pope.*

Ver. 11. "*The unrighteous mammon.*"—Unrighteous because (1) it is so often used and enjoyed without any thought of God; (2) because it is so often acquired in unlawful ways; (3) because it is the source of manifold temptations (1 Tim. vi. 9, 10), which make it difficult for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God (chap. xviii. 24, 25).

Ver. 12. "*Another man's.*"—Wealth is here described as belonging to another, because it is not absolutely our own, but may at any moment be recalled, and must at the hour of death be resigned. In opposition to it are those spiritual benefits which are truly "our own," because, once obtained through faith, they constitute an inalienable property.

God's Faithful Steward.—The last inference from the most difficult of all Christ's parables. It is a retrospect from the other side of death, when the earthly life lies all behind, shrunk to a single point and act. "If in that which was another's ye were not faithful, who shall give you—I appeal to yourselves, to your common-sense, to your first principles of reason and equity—who shall give you that which shall be your own?"

I. **"That which is another's" is the whole of this life's possession.**—Even while we have it, it is another's. Not only a trust, a stewardship. No idea of personal ownership can for a moment enter into it. It is so precarious in its tenure that we cannot reckon on it for a day; we brought it not into the world, and we cannot take it with us when we leave the

world. It is not part of us—it is an adjunct, an accessory, an accident; it may go any day—it must go one day. It is another's, even while we have it.

II. "**That which is your own.**"—The sound is pleasant to the ear. The lust of possessing is an instinct of nature. It waits not for the developed covetings of manhood. Even our own souls are not yet our own. They are "our own" only at last, as the prize of the lifelong conflict, the stake of the game in which the man and the man's enemy are at play. This makes life so serious, so momentous. The risk of not "gaining" as "our own," our own souls! The soul itself is not *yet* our own; it depends on the life, the life earthward and heavenward, the life towards man, and the life towards God. To the good steward, when all fails him, and the stewardship of the long past must be accounted for, he shall find himself for the first time as an owner, the soul, the self, the redeemed and sanctified nature, being at last given him for his own. This is the gospel for which we can never be too thankful, of the new ideal of life as Jesus Christ taught, exemplified, and inspires it in His people. Life a trust; all that life has for us, another's; we ourselves stewards, not owners, required, aroused, and enabled to be faithful! Our Lord appeals to this very lust of possessing. We must wish to possess. Only the fool and the mammon-worshipper can be indifferent to the question, "Who will give you that which is your own?"—*Vaughan.*

"*That which is another man's . . . that which is your own.*"—The parable of the Unjust Steward is admittedly hard to be understood. No other of our Lord's parables has called forth so many and such a variety of comments as this. The words of ver. 12 supply the key to the mystery of this parable; they are the solution of its difficulties. What are the difficulties of interpretation which the parable presents? How very harsh and unusual appear such words as "And the lord commended the unjust steward." What sort of a lord could he have been, to do thus? It relieves us to find that it was not *our* Lord, but the lord of the steward, who commended him for acting wisely, though dishonestly. The fact that he did so simply proves that the master was as bad as the man. They are "children of this world," governed by the same principles, actuated by the same motives. The lord had suffered by the roguery of his servant, but could not withhold a tribute of admiration at the display of the same qualities which he himself possessed. This explanation removes some of the difficulties, but not all. Our Lord holds up something here as an example for us. What is there shown us in this picture which we may imitate? Not the principles governing the conduct of the Unjust Steward. They were wholly detestable. But the transaction itself is to be imitated, having respect to the relationship between our Master and His stewards. Here we have a man entrusted with the goods of another so using them as to obtain an advantage for himself. Are there any conceivable circumstances in which we might use goods entrusted to us by another for personal profit? Only under one condition, and that condition exists here. If that other person entrusted us with his property, with the express purpose, intent, command, so to use it as to get increase for ourselves, then, and only then, would this be right. While there are similarities between the relations of the lord and the steward in the parable and our Lord and His stewards, there are also differences; for the parable teaches by dissimilarities as well as by similarities. The lord entrusted his goods to the steward that he might trade with them for the master's benefit, and the steward's fidelity would consist in so doing. The relation between our Lord and His stewards is the reverse of this. He entrusts us with His goods to be used, not in enriching Him; that is impossible,—no conceivable trafficking

of ours can increase His wealth,—but the use is to be for our own profit. "*I* say unto you"—I who am the Lord of all you possess—"make to yourselves friends of the mammon of unrighteousness, that when ye fail they may receive you into everlasting habitations." Faithfulness in that which is least will secure for us that which is much.

I. The further exposition, therefore, of this saying of our Lord's depends on the interpretation put upon two of its phrases: "That which is another man's," and "That which is your own." What are we to understand by these? No sooner do we begin to think about them than we find a great confusion of ideas. There is a very general reversal of the order of truth in the interpretation of these two phrases. What is "your own"? Most people, when they contemplate their *own*, fasten at once upon worldly possessions — houses, lands, businesses, accumulations, investments, worldly position, honours in society, dignities achieved. "These are my own," say they, and in this territory they walk, imagining that here they are supreme. But these are the very things which are *not* your own. "Where," say you, "is the man who can successfully question the validity of my title-deeds? Who is he that will challenge my right to these things? They were bequeathed by my ancestors, or they have been gotten by my own industry, or accumulated by my thrift. Surely these are my own!" And yet it is of precisely such things as these that Christ speaks when He uses the phrase "that which is another man's." But whose are they? Where is the other who can claim proprietorship in them? There is One whose presence fills eternity, in whose hands our breath is, and whose are all our ways. The Lord of Life and Being has endowed us with being and with all we possess. We ourselves are His. "The silver and the gold are His, and the cattle upon a thousand hills." If I tell the truth as to all the things I "own," I shall say, "The Lord Jehovah, all are His." But you will say, "Oh yes, we admit all that. That is Theology." Yet there are very few who are influenced by the considerations arising out of this admitted truth. But there are other men in question. It is not possible to acquire any earthly things of which we can say that we have the absolute proprietorship. Other men have claims and rights in them. We are but trustees for the common good. Worldly possessions are not "our own." Surely to-day men are learning that property has its responsibilities as well as its rights, its obligations as well as its privileges. No man has the right to say, "This is for myself, and myself only." He holds for his brethren in general. The solution of the social problems which perplex society lies in the recognition of this great Christian doctrine of trusteeship. Because these things are not our own is no reason for seeking, by an equal division of property, to adjust the rival claims of different classes in society. Nothing could be more absurd or unfaithful. Not in absolute proprietorship, nor by arbitrary divisions, nor by attempted communism, but by the doctrine that all we have we hold as trustees for the good of those by whom we are surrounded, shall we fulfil the Divine purpose in committing to our keeping "that which is another man's." I almost hear you say again, "Yes, we admit all this." But how much unfaithful trusteeship there is, nevertheless! To bring the truth home to us we must reflect upon the fact that, in the most literal and absolute sense, these worldly things are not our own—they are "another man's." How soon the day will come to all of us when, willingly or reluctantly, we shall be compelled to part with earthly goods! In prospect of that hour we may already ask ourselves, in the words of the prophet, "Where will ye leave your glory?" It must be left. Where can it be left that we shall ever find it again? Then, when we are confronted with the death-summons,

whose shall these things be which we have fondly imagined were "our own"? What wonderful ingenuity men display in their testamentary arrangements, in order to declare whose those things shall be. Alas! how futile their endeavours. Not for long in any case—often not even for a short period—can they say whose those things shall be, but into the hands of another, or of others, all must be surrendered. That inevitable "other man"; how he dogs our footsteps in life, ever following on our track!—a few short days or years and he will overtake us. Most certainly these things are *not* "our own." They are "another man's." Ere long that other man will be examining our papers, operating upon our balance at the bank, and dividing our property—perhaps in the manner we should least desire. What, then, *is* our own? Is there in this changeful world anything we can so appropriate that it shall become in very deed our own? God, in His infinite goodness and mercy through Jesus Christ our Saviour, has made it possible for us to become possessed of true riches which shall be our heavenly portion, our eternal inheritance. Nothing external is really our own. But the moral qualities we possess, as the result of dealing with earthly things—these are our own: love of justice, mercifulness, truthfulness, humility, benevolence—these are the patrimony of man, made after the image of God, and in His likeness. Inwoven daily into the very texture of our spiritual being are qualities which become a part of ourselves. God sees, not only what we are, but what we may become. He sees the loftiest ideal for every human being, what we might be if the utmost possibilities were reached. This He has willed shall be our own, and has bidden us reach out to and obtain as much of these highest possibilities as we choose. In the formation of character we are acquiring that which shall be ours for ever. Unhappily, many make their own what God never intended should be theirs. The contrary qualities to those I have mentioned—the carnal, the sensual, even the devilish—may become ours. It is possible for men to become untruthful, unjust, unmerciful.

II. If we thus clearly understand what is "another man's" and what is "our own," then the teaching of the text becomes at once apparent. Only by faithfulness in the use of another's can we become possessed of that which God intended should be ours. By our use of the things of earth we are obtaining the higher things that appertain to our character and destiny. Possessions in themselves base and carnal may be so employed that out of them we shall secure the spiritual and the heavenly. From the "unrighteous mammon" we may extract the "true riches"—from that which is least, that which is much; from the fleeting treasures of this life, the enduring wealth of eternity; from that which is "another man's," that which is "our own." All the relations of our life here become thus invested with a vast importance. We cannot afford to despise the earthly: we cannot neglect its proper use, or fail in righteous dealing with it, but we beggar our real selves. Many scarcely reflect that their daily trafficking with worldly matters—their business, their gains, their losses, their ambitions, and their plans—are leaving indelible traces on their spiritual being. The material things they handle will perish in the using, but the noble qualities—the generosity, the unselfishness, the truthfulness, the mercifulness, the God-likeness—they have acquired in the sphere of worldly duty will abide with them for ever. The great truth thus inculcated has many applications. It is true of every temporal possession, of every earthly relationship, and of all talents, of whatsoever kind, with which we are entrusted. Its immediate and obvious application is to the use of money—and this was the application primarily intended by our Lord. It may be supposed that such a use of this great

lesson will at once lead us to a discussion of the duty of Christian giving. We may come to this ultimately, but there are several other aspects of our dealing with that which is "another man's" to be first considered. The mischief to some men's characters is done before they come to the claims of charity; it is done in the process of getting and accumulating. They have already acquired a nature so sordid that they are "past feeling." They cannot give because they have so much, or because they have got it by means dishonourable or destructive of their nobler nature. Years ago, when they were poorer and purer, if they had been told of some of the things they now do and say, they would have been ready to cry, "Is thy servant a dog, that he should do this thing?" Nothing more surely corrodes and destroys the lofty nature that God intends should be our own than ill-gotten gain and the love of hoarding for its own sake. It cannot be too urgently impressed upon us that in our modes of getting money, and plans and purposes in accumulating it, we are moulding our characters. Men who would secure "their own" must sometimes be content to stand by with hands off when other people are eagerly gathering—they must allow some things to go past them, for the price of taking them is the sacrifice of their highest, truest manhood. The truth holds good, not merely in relation to great wealth and large transactions in business; it finds its illustration in all spheres—even the lowliest. The merchant or trader who leaves his counting-house or his shop when the day's work is done leaves behind that which is "another man's." He leaves the interests, the claims, the rights of others which have been within his power, but inevitably he carries away something vastly more important to himself: insensibly, but continuously, he has been acquiring "his own," and he goes from the manufactory or the warehouse morally a better or baser man. During every hour of the day he has been silently appropriating "his own" whilst handling that which is "another man's." And even so the workman, in his common tasks, is fashioning his own character and moulding his inner life. He builds into the unseen parts of an edifice with honesty, with truth and fidelity, and these qualities are at the same time strengthened and built up in his own being. Let there be base and false work at the forge and the loom, and he who has done it may suppose the transaction is ended when the fraud has passed undetected. Not so; the falseness he has perpetrated has become part of himself—he has made that "his own" which he supposed he had inflicted on "another man." Nor is it merely in the modes of getting money, but in the purposes for which it is retained and used, that men mould their characters and destiny. For there are circumstances in which it is right, and indeed our duty, to retain wealth, that it may be wisely used as a fund for the good of others. God has given some men, not only large capital, but ability and opportunity so to lay it out that they may provide work and wages for others. In such cases the first duty of a capitalist is to take care of his capital. It is not "his own"; it belongs to others, and is entrusted to him that he may employ it for the common weal. We are all of us familiar with the spectacle of the miserable millionaire who has treated the great fund entrusted to him as if it were "his own." He has employed it in great gambling speculations, that he might have the unhallowed excitements that have ended in a moral and, perhaps, mental and bodily paralysis. Instead of light and love and truth, he has for his own a great curse, extracted from his great capital. There is the opposite picture sometimes to be looked upon—the man who has so wisely and generously used his means that he has blessed thousands, and has himself grown more and more unselfish. He has cultivated the best

things in his own spirit and character, whilst he has worked in the use of wealth for the good of others. But it is not given to all of us to find "our own" or lose "our own" in these larger spheres of duty. It is, however, certain that all of us are determining "our own" by the use we make of "another man's" in the matter of Christian giving. Whether we have less or more of this world's goods, in our response to the calls of charity we affect for good or evil our dispositions and our characters. And as to financial arrangements, let us look at our support of missionary and kindred institutions in the light of our Lord's teaching in this parable. The call for money to carry on Christ's work in distant fields is one of the tests—and one of the best tests—of our wisdom and fidelity in the use of "that which is another man's." In no other way can we more surely exchange the carnal things of earth into the currency of the heavenly world. Pounds, shillings, and pence will have no currency there—they will have lost their purchasing and commanding power; but ere we pass hence the treasures of earth may be exchanged for the true riches, the fleeting things of this world for the enduring wealth of eternity. The mammon of unrighteousness may be so used that at length they shall receive us to the everlasting habitations. Let us learn habitually to deal with the things of earth in the light of eternity.—*Pope.*

Ver. 13. "*No servant.*"—In this verse Christ states what the fidelity is, which in this stewardship is required; it is a choosing of God instead of mammon for our lord. For in this world we are in the condition of servants from whom two masters are claiming allegiance. One is God, man's rightful lord; the other is the unrighteous mammon, which was given to be our servant, to be wielded by us in God's interests, and itself to be considered by us as something slight, transient, and another's—but which has, in a sinful world, erected itself into a lord, and now demands allegiance from us, which if we yield, we can be no longer faithful servants and stewards of God. Therefore, these two lords have characters so opposite, it will be impossible to reconcile their service (James iv. 4): one must be despised if the other is held to; the only faithfulness to the one is to break with the other, "*Ye cannot serve God and mammon.*"—*Trench.*

MAIN HOMILETICS ON THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 14—31.

Abused Wealth the Rich Man's Ruin.—The parable of the Unjust Steward teaches the right use of worldly wealth; and the central point of the miscellaneous sayings in vers. 14-18 is the permanence of the Law and the Prophets. Both points reappear in this parable.

I. **The earthly contrast of the two lives.**—There is a double contrast—the sharp and shocking diversity between the prodigal abundance of the Rich Man's dress and fare and the squalid misery of the diseased beggar, and the contrast between the end of their lives. With regard to the first it is to be clearly understood that Jesus Christ is not running a-tilt against rich men, as if wealth was wickedness, or a beggar necessarily a saint. But it should be as clearly noted that He is declaring the essential wickedness and inhumanity which dog the possession of wealth, as a constant danger; namely, the use of it for selfish purposes, so as to preserve in all its sharpness the contrast between its possessor and the poor. The Rich Man's duty to Lazarus was not discharged by letting him have the leavings of his feasts, as he seems to have done. Rich men may do small charities and yet be guilty of such use of their wealth as will sink them to ruin. The name Lazarus (Eleazar, "God is help") suggests the thought of

the poor man's devoutness, though in the parable the fact of his piety is not dwelt upon. Not because Lazarus was pious, but because he was poor and leprous, was it the Rich Man's business to help him. Christ's teaching about wealth is not communistic or socialistic. He recognises fully the right of individual possession, but He emphatically asserts that possession is stewardship, and that we hold money, as we do everything, in trust for those who lack and need it. Lazarus dies first, worn out by privation and disease. Perhaps, if he had been carried indoors from the gate, he would have lasted longer. What a change for him! The one moment lying in the fierce sunshine, so motionless and helpless that the dogs came about him as if he were dead, and he had no strength to drive them away; and then he is carried by angels into Abraham's bosom. He has no funeral, as the other has. The Rich Man dies, and, of course, has a splendid interment, with all the proper pomp and circumstance. His wealth can get him a fine funeral, of which he knows nothing; and that is all that it can do.

II. **The contrast of the two lives in Hades.**—Our Lord paints that unseen state in colours taken from the ordinary Jewish conceptions. "Abraham's bosom," the bearing of the soul by angels, the dialogues between the dead, were all familiar rabbinical ideas; so that it is difficult to say how far we have here representations of fact. The main idea seems to be that of the reversal, in Hades, of the earthly condition. Lazarus is now in the place of joy and abundance; the Rich Man is now the beggar lying at the gate. He who would give nothing of his abund ance, but was deaf to the groans and blind to the misery at his gate, has now to feel the pangs of need and to crave a drop of water to cool his tongue. The solemn answer put into the lips of Abraham expresses the impossibility, from the very nature of that state, of granting the desired alleviation. It is a state of retribution, the outgrowth and necessary issue of the earthly life, and so cannot be otherwise than it is. "Remember." The past will stand clear befor e the selfish man and be a torment—he is tortured by the very desires he has nourished and by the stings of conscience and memory. "Thy good things." He who makes the world his good is necessarily wretched when he is swept out of it by the whirlwind of death, and sees, when too late, what a blunder his estimate of its good was. On the other hand, the pious beggar received things that were "evil" in reality, but yet were not the things which he regarded as truly evil; and because he, on his part, placed his good higher than the world, therefore evil wrought for good to him. The lesson of this parable is the converse of that of the Unjust Steward; namely, that the selfish use of wealth is fatal, and brings bitter retribution in another life. The second ground for the refusal of the request is the existence of the "great gulf" which forbids passage from either side. Doctrinal statements can scarcely be founded on the parable, yet we see that there is no hint of repentance in the Rich's Man's cry, and that the implication of the whole is that his character was set. True, the state of Hades is not a final state; but it is also true that the narrative gives no reason for holding that the character of its inhabitants is anything but permanent.

III. **The sufficient warnings by Law and Prophets.**—The rich man's second petition has often been treated as a sign that his selfishness was melting, and that so he was on the road to a better mind. But the natural instinct of family is not in itself more than selfishness in another form; and his request implies that he thinks the fault of his being where he is, lies not at his door, but is due to imperfect warnings. That does not sound like repentance. "If I had had a message from the grave, I would have repented." So many of us think that it is God's fault, not ours, that we yield to temptation. But the real ground of our sinful, godless lives is not a deficiency of light and warning, but inward aversion. Every man has far more knowledge of good than he uses. It is not for lack

either of warning or conviction that men are lost. They do not need enlightenment, but, as Christ significantly puts it here, "persuasion." The Pharisees, whom Christ is pointing at here, were giving signal proof of the power of neglecting miraculous evidence, even while, like the Rich Man, they were calling out for it from Jesus. This latter portion of the parable is directed against them, and completes the reference of the whole to the preceding part of the chapter. The first part echoes the lesson of the Unjust Steward: this repeats the assertion of the permanent validity of Law and Prophets. But though directed presumably against the Pharisees, both have their lesson for us. We have knowledge and motive enough to walk in the paths of godliness. If we do not give heed to what we have, it would be vain to send even messengers from the dead to us. What is lacking in us, if we do not yield to the light, is not more light, but eyes to see, and a heart to love it.—*Maclaren:*

SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS ON VERSES 14—31.

Ver. 14. "*Derided Him.*"—The Pharisees listened to these counsels concerning wealth with a scorn and contempt which expressed themselves openly. The Saviour and most of His followers were poor, and rich men are very apt to despise what they consider the cheap Quixotism of the views of pious men concerning the best use of riches, when those men are themselves poor.

No doubt the Pharisees found confirmation of their belief that the love of riches was compatible with the love of God in the fact that the Law spoke of riches as a mark of the Divine blessing.

Ver. 15. *The Judgment of Men and the Judgment of God.*

I. **Men see but the outside, and are easily deceived: God sees the heart, and cannot be deceived.**

II. **Man judges by one standard, God by another.**—Rank, wealth, ability, learning, attract the admiration of men, while only moral and spiritual elevation of character wins the approval of God.

Ver. 16. *Until John and Since.*

I. **The ministry of the Baptist,** short as it was in its duration, slight apparently in its consequences, is made the turning point of the dispensations. The spiritual history of the world was cleft in twain by that brief mission.

II. **Our Lord regards that mission as already part of the past**—almost of the far past. Time moves quietly when God is making history; one day is sometimes as a thousand years, no less truly than the converse.

III. **There is a strength in the expression "presseth" which makes it less the statement of a fact than the utterance of a triumphant anticipation.**—This is that tone of prophetic jubilation which breaks in so often upon sadder themes of discourse as the Saviour marches toward Jerusalem and Calvary.—*Vaughan.*

The Virtue of Violence.—"Presseth violently." Violence is here for once made a virtue. In the life of the kingdom there are some characteristics fitly expressed by these strong words.

I. **The life of the kingdom is, in part, a life of renunciations.**—It has to make sacrifices, to make war on sins, vehemently to determine not to miss the heaven where only righteousness dwells with God.

II. **The life of the kingdom is not an easy one, in what it demands of the reason.** Not that Christ would commend haste or rashness in belief, or expect any man to believe first and then inquire. But even in believing there is a timidity which is not prudence, and a vehemence which is not presumption. The gospel is a life, the entrance upon a new idea and plan

of existence; and, this being so, it is folly to make the question of faith or no faith a matter of caprice or accident. Therefore the man is to be commended who will brook no delay and no diversion in the settlement of the question of questions: how, in what allegiance, he is to live.

III. **The life of the kingdom is a life of two chief activities.**—Godward and manward. Devotion and work. Vehemence in prayer is not an incongruous term to apply to devotion. Force, zeal, earnestness too, are necessary to the perfection of the Christian character. Positive activity manward. For lack of this most men swim with the stream, and their spiritual life tends to decay. How much nobler the life of the man who "presses" into the kingdom!—*Ibid.*

Vers. 16-18. *The New Era.*—1. There is a change in the Divine method: the Law and the Prophets prepared men for the kingdom of God, but now the kingdom has come; the mercy of God to the sinful is revealed, and all are summoned to take advantage of it. 2. There is a general movement in human society; multitudes of the outcast and despised are pressing into the kingdom. 3. Yet the holiness of God which the Law proclaims remains for ever the same; the glad tidings of forgiveness do not imply a diminution of the Divine requirements. 4. On the contrary, under the gospel a severer and more spiritual standard of morality is set up: the sanctity of the marriage-tie, for example, is greater under Christianity than it had been in Jewish society.

Ver. 19-31. *Contrasted Destinies.*

I. **A series of solemn dramatic contrasts to startle the Pharisees out of their complacent selfishness.**—1. The contrast between Dives and Lazarus in life. 2. The contrast is resumed beyond the grave. 3. A contrast of character underlies the picture.

II. **Passage from the dramatic to the didactic stage of the parable.**—1. The destinies of a lost soul are appealed in vain to the court of natural affection. 2. The contrasts of the hereafter are maintained by the inexorable necessities of the Divine government. 3. The permanence of the contrasted destinies beyond the grave is certified by the permanence of human character. 4. These final contrasts hereafter rest upon a common probation in this life.—*Selby.*

Dives and Lazarus.

I. **Dives was lacking in the necessary grace of holy charity.**—His ignorance of Lazarus was culpable. A man ought to know the sorrows of those who are in his path.

II. **The other world-picture reverses their positions.**—Two great principles prevent Dives' misery from being mitigated. 1. God's compensating justice. 2. God's sovereign arrangement that in another world there should be the exact contrast of this.

III. **Good desires may spring up too late in the heart.**

IV. **Every living man has provided for him, within his present grasp, all that is necessary for his own salvation.**

V. **The manner in which the Bible is to be savingly used.**—*Vaughan.*

An Unfaithful Steward's Doom.—The Pharisees scoffed at our Lord's "visionary" account of property: this parable is His reply. The intense and natural curiosity of men about the future life has led them to pass over the tremendous moral and practical lessons of the parable, in their endeavour to discover what it reveals concerning the fate of the impenitent. But what is it that our Lord meant the parable to teach? The Rich Man thought that his wealth was his own, to do with as he liked. It never occurred to him that it all belonged to God. How did he incur such a terrible doom in the spirit-world? An awful and hopeless doom! By his flagrant breach of trust in not using his wealth

for the relief of those whose sufferings touched the Divine heart, and to whom he should have been the minister of Divine pity. To God this was intolerable. The "flame" is the fiery displeasure which God feels at his selfishness.—*Dale.*

A Warning to the Selfish.

I. **The covetous rich.**—Condemned by Christ. 1. By direct reproof. 2. By illustrative parable.

II. **The covetous rich and the godly poor.**—1. Contrasted in worldly condition. 2. Contrasted in the hour of death. 3. Contrasted in the unseen world.

III. **Lessons of the story.**—1. Certain destruction awaits the worldly. 2. Peace and joy await those whose treasure is in heaven. 3. Repentance must be in this life: there is none beyond.—*Taylor.*

Here and Hereafter.—The story of two men.

I. **In this world.**—1. The Rich Man. 2. The poor man.

II. **In the next world.**—1. In Abraham's bosom. 2. In hell.—*Watson.*

Outline of the Parable.

I. The earthly condition of the two men (vers. 19-22). 1. The Rich Man's mode of life (ver. 19). 2. The poor man's mode of life (vers. 20, 21). 3. The death of the former (ver. 22*a*). 4. That of the latter.

II. The condition of both in the world beyond the grave (vers. 23-31). 1. The torment of the Rich Man, and his request (vers. 23, 24). 2. The reply of Abraham (ver. 25, 26). 3. The Rich Man's second request (vers. 27, 28). 4. Abraham's second reply (ver. 29-31).

The parable teaches—1. The uncertainty and transitoriness of earthly blessings. 2. The responsibility of rich men, not only for what they do, but for what they do not do with their wealth. 3. The supremacy of the law of God as a guide to eternal life.—*Speaker's Commentary.*

Selfishness and Its Doom.—1. The Rich Man's selfishness. 2. His indifference to the misery of his fellows. 3. His dreadful doom.

Two Scenes.

I. **The earthly scene.**—The condition and manner of life of the two men; their characters and dispositions, as yet unrevealed.

II. The Rich Man's selfishness implied by his neglect of his poor neighbour.

III. **The scene beyond the grave.**—The altered circumstances of the two: the permanent character of the new conditions; relief of present misery, and a warning to those still on earth refused.

This World and The Next.

I. For mankind, after this life is done, another world remains, consisting of two opposite spheres or conditions—one of holiness and happiness, the other of sin and misery.

II. There is a way from this present life to the place of future misery, and also a way to the place of future blessedness.

III. There is no way over from one of these future states to the other.

IV. Our Lord would constrain us to make the needful transition now.—*Arnot.*

The parable emphasises the facts—(1) that one may enjoy a high standing in the sight of men and be reprobate before God; (2) that an unloving temper is essentially base; and (3) that a terrible penalty is inflicted on those who misuse the world's goods.

A Trilogy.—The parable of Lazarus and the Rich Man is the sublimest delineation of this side and of that side of the grave in its astounding antitheses. What is the trilogy of a Dante, in

which He sings of hell, purgatory, and heaven, compared with the trilogy of this parable, which places with few but significant strokes the great whole of Earth, Gehenna, and Paradise, at once before our eyes.—*Van Oosterzee.*

Ver. 19. "*A certain rich man.*"—Jesus said not, a calumniator; He said not, an oppressor of the poor; He said not, a robber of other men's goods, nor a receiver of such, nor a false accuser; He said not, a spoiler of orphans, a persecutor of widows;—none of these. But what did he say? "*There was a certain rich man.*" And what was his crime? A lazar lying at his gate, and lying unrelieved.—*Augustine.*

Abuse of Riches.—Riches may be abused (1) not only by positive misuse, but also (2) by the careless and thoughtless use of them. These two lessons are taught respectively by the preceding and by the present parable.

Ver. 20. "*Named Lazarus.*"—Seems he not to you to have been reading from that book where He found the name of the poor man written, but found not the name of the rich; for that book is the book of life.—*Augustine.*

Ver. 21. "*The dogs came.*"—The kindness of the brute brings out in deep relief the inhumanity of man.

The nakedness and hunger of Lazarus are contrasted with the rich clothing and sumptuous banquets of the Rich Man.

Ver. 22. "*The beggar died.*"—The beggar died first, being taken from his sufferings; the other was given longer space for repentance.

"*Carried by angels.*"—Here is one who in his life had not a single friend; and now suddenly not one, but many angels wait upon him.—*Luther.*

The Beggar's Escort.—I. **Angelic ministry.**—*Surplusage of angelic* service. Not one angel, but two or more, an indication of the glad and bright willingness with which the humble task of duty was done. A gracious and honouring superfluity of helpfulness.

II. **The differentiation of Divine and human estimates.**—The angels were doing God's bidding. The plurality of this deputed bodyguard means, not only service, but honour. A message to us not to stand on our dignity and self-respect, but to honour Christ's lowly ones. The scornful rabbis would have declined to accompany a beggar's funeral. The angels gladly escort his liberated spirit to the abodes of the blessed, for he was a true "son of Abraham." Would *you* feel honoured if asked to attend a pauper's funeral, or to help to lay the deal-encased body in the grave? Or would you judge only by the outward appearance, and show yourself at the rich man's burial? The angels "see not as man seeth," and count it an honour to be the bodyguard of a beggar, and the ministrants of his spirit.—*Grosart.*

"*Abraham's bosom.*"—To correct the notion that wealth, as such, excludes from happiness hereafter; or that poverty, as such, ensures fruition of that happiness, it is sufficient to observe that the beggar Lazarus is carried by angels into the bosom of the rich man Abraham, who made a right use of the riches of this world.

A Sudden Change for The Better.—In an instant Lazarus finds in the heavenly world the sympathy and help which had been denied him on earth.

"*And was buried.*"—There is a sublime irony, a stain upon all earthly glory, in this mention of his burial, connected as it is with what is immediately to follow. The world, loving its own, follows him, no doubt, with its pomp and pride, till it could not follow any farther. There was not wanting

the long procession of the funeral solemnities through the streets of Jerusalem, the crowd of hired mourners, the spices and ointment, very precious, wrapping the body; nor yet the costly sepulchre, on which the genial virtues of the departed were recorded. This splendid carrying of the forsaken tenement of clay to the grave is for him what the carrying into Abraham's bosom was for Lazarus; it is his equivalent, which, however, profits him little where he now is. For death has been for him an awakening from his flattering dream of ease and self-enjoyment upon the stern and terrible realities of eternity. He has sought to save his life, and has lost it. The play in which he acted the rich man is ended, and, as he went off the stage, he was stripped of all the trappings with which he had been furnished that he might sustain his part. There remains only the fact that he has played it badly, and will therefore have no praise, but uttermost rebuke, from Him who allotted to him this character to sustain. —*Trench.*

Ver. 23. "*In hell.*"—The Rich Man is thus represented as awakening from the momentary unconsciousness of death to full consciousness; and the first object he discerns is Lazarus, whom he had seen lying in wretchedness at his gate, reposing in the seat of honour beside Abraham.

Ver. 24. "*Father Abraham.*"—This is the only example in Scripture of the invocation of saints, and does not afford much encouragement for the practice.

Vers. 25, 26. *The Request Denied.*—The request is denied for two weighty reasons: 1. It is unreasonable. 2. It is impossible to grant it.

Ver. 25. *Memory in Another World.* —I. **Memory will be so widened as to take in the whole life.**

II. **Memory in a future state will probably be so rapid as to embrace all the past life at once.**

III. **It will be a constant remembrance.**

IV. **Memory will be associated with a perfectly accurate knowledge, and a perfectly sensitive conscience as to the criminality of the past.**—*Maclaren.*

Different Modes of Divine Procedure. —God deals with men in different ways: on some He seeks to awaken gratitude by bestowing upon them many gifts; others He leads through suffering to humility and pious resignation in spirit. And in accordance with the results produced is the retribution in the future world: the ungrateful find themselves in poverty and misery; the meek are healed of their wounds, and exalted to felicity.

Ver. 26. "*Beside all this.*"—Not only would there be a moral impropriety in granting the request, but the decree of God had made it impossible to grant it. An unfathomable gulf which could not be spanned separated between the Rich Man and the company of the blessed.

Vers. 27, 28. "*Send him to my father's house.*"—The request of the Rich Man is incompatible with the interpretation of the parable, which regards it as condemning riches, and not merely the abuse of riches. The five brethren are in danger of coming to the place of torment because of their unbelief and impenitence, and not because of their being wealthy.

Ver. 28. "*Lest they also.*"—We cannot escape the conclusion that in the Rich Man's words there is a certain reproach against God and the Old-Testament economy, for his not having received sufficient warning. The reproach is rolled back by Abraham's reply: "They *are* sufficiently warned: the fault is theirs if they, too, go to the place of torment."

The Five Brethren.—The effect which might possibly have been produced

upon the five brethren of Dives, by Lazarus "going to them from the dead" has been described as follows: "He stands and knocks at the door of their mansion, and at length enters in his grave-shroud. His glazed eyeballs and hollow cheeks declare him a tenant of the narrow house. In deep, sepulchral tones he says, "I have come from the night of the grave, and I know of death, and of hell, and of heaven, and it's all true." But the eldest brother is a Pharisee. He is a self-righteous man. He fasts and he prays. He pays tithes of all he possesses. He is not as other men are—the message cannot be for him. The second brother is a Sadducee. He believes neither in angel nor in spirit. He is the type of the sceptic of the present day—when death comes, it is utter annihilation. He explains away the appearance of Lazarus as an optical illusion. The third is a merchant—buying, and selling, and getting gain. He is an avaricious man; but his brother left him no legacy in his will, and he cannot now believe that he cares for his soul in eternity, when he cared so little for his body on earth. The fourth is a fashionable man, a man of æsthetic taste and culture; he loses himself in the beauties of nature, of art, of literature. The sight of Lazarus in his mansion was an offence to him. What had this beggar got to do here. The message could not be for him. The fifth was a delicate, pale-faced youth; the least thing put his poor heart in a flutter. He could bear no excitement, and, as he beheld the form of Lazarus in his grave-clothes, he swooned away; and when he recovered, the apparition was gone.—*Robertson.*

Ver. 29. "*Hear them.*"—There are two kinds of hearing.

I. That which is confined to outward acquaintance with the Law and the Prophets, and acceptance of their teaching Divine truth.

II. That which is manifested in obedience to the will of God revealed in His Word. The Scriptures were read in the synagogues, and were carefully studied by the Rabbis, so that no Jew could fail to "hear" in the one sense of the word. There needed to be added to intellectual knowledge a love of holiness, and practice of it in daily life.

Ver. 30. "*Nay, . . . but if one went.*"—As the works of the blessed dead follow them, so follow this man his ignorance of the way of salvation, his neglect and practical contempt of the extant Word, his self-will and self-vindication, his pertinacious demand of signs and wonders from the mighty hand of God.—*Stier.*

Ver. 31. "*If they hear not,*" *etc.*—I. **The ordinary means of salvation** which we enjoy are amply sufficient.

II. **If the ordinary means of grace fail to convert us, no extraordinary—that is, miraculous—means are to be expected.**

III. **When the ordinary means fail to convert men, miracles, though they were wrought, would fail also.**—*Foote*

CHAPTER XVII.

CRITICAL NOTES.

VER. 1. **Then said he.**—Rather, "And he said" (R.V.). The previous discourse had been addressed to the Pharisees; we have now detached sayings addressed, probably on various occasions, to the disciples. This section is more fully given in Matt. xviii. 6-35. **It is impossible,** etc.—"So long as the world lasts, sins and occasions of sin will exist; but this fact does not destroy the personal responsibility of each individual for his own sin (*Speaker's Commentary*). **Offences.**—Rather, "occasions of stumbling" (R.V.). The recent behaviour of the Pharisees (xvi. 14), to whom so many looked up with respect, was an instance of stumbling-blocks being cast in the way of those weak in the faith ("little ones," ver. 2).

Ver 2. **It were better.**—Or "It were well" (R.V.). Lit. "It were gain for him." **Offend.**—As before, "cause to stumble" (R.V.). **Little ones.**—Not necessarily children, though it applies to them; perhaps here the reference is specially to the publicans and sinners.

Ver. 3. **Take heed.**—"This is to warn them not to be too readily dismayed at 'offences,' nor to meet them in a brother with an unforgiving spirit" (*Alford*). **Against thee.**—Omit these words (omitted in R.V.); probably taken from Matt. xviii. 15, or from the following verse. **Rebuke.**—Perhaps one of the reasons why "offences" abound is the neglect of this duty—that of rebuking them in a proper spirit.

Ver. 4. **Seven times.**—A general expression, not to be taken literally. Some of the Rabbis fixed three times as the limit of forgiveness.

Ver. 5. **Increase our faith.**—Rather, "Give us more faith." This request was doubtless prompted by a sense of weakness in overcoming "offences" and in exercising so large a measure of forgiveness.

Ver. 6. **If ye had.**—Rather, "If ye have" (R.V.). **A grain of mustard seed.**—A proverbial expression for a very small amount. The phrase implies that the apostles had some, but not sufficient, faith. **Sycamine tree.**—The words were evidently spoken in the open air. The sycamine is the mulberry tree; it is different from the sycamore or Egyptian fig-tree of xix. 4. **Planted in the sea.**—There to grow; a stronger expression than in the parallel passage in St. Matthew. "The whole passage may be thus paraphrased: You think the duties I enjoin too hard for your faith, but this shows you have as yet no faith of the high order you ought to have, for the smallest measure of such faith would enable you to do what seems altogether impossible in the natural world; and *so much the more* in spiritual things, since real faith is pre-eminently spiritual power" (*Popular Commentary*).

Ver. 7. **A servant.**—*I.e.*, a slave. **Feeding cattle.**—Rather, "keeping sheep" (R.V.). **By and by.**—*I.e.*, straightway, immediately. The phrase is to be connected with the words spoken by the master, "Come straightway and sit down to meat." There is no harshness in the orders given.

Ver. 8. **Till I have eaten,** etc.—In xii. 37 a different assurance seems to be given. But Christ is here speaking of what we have *a right* to expect; there He describes the *favour* He will bestow on faithful servants.

Ver. 9. **Doth he thank.**—*I.e.*, does he feel special gratitude because his orders are obeyed? Certainly not,—even if he is in the custom of thanking his servant for acts of obedience, the fact remains, upon which the parable is based, that he feels under no special obligation to him for assiduous labours. **I trow not.**—These words are omitted in R.V., and are not really needed to complete the passage, since they are implied in the question "Doth he thank?" etc. There is, however, an air of genuineness about them.

Ver. 10. **Unprofitable.**—*I.e.*, not useless, but as doing nothing beyond bare duty. It is implied that we are often much more "unprofitable" by reason of our so often failing in duty. "Wretched is he whom the Lord calls an unprofitable servant (Matt. xxv. 30); blessed is he who calls himself so" (*Bengel*).

Ver. 11. **Samaria and Galilee.**—This mention of Samaria before Galilee is perplexing, being the opposite direction to a journey to Jerusalem. Probably "through the midst" is to be understood as meaning "along the frontiers of." Probably the incident here recorded occurred about the time and place referred to in ix. 56.

Ver. 12. **Ten men.**—If this miracle took place near a border village, we can understand how a Samaritan and Jews should be in the same company—all outcasts from society because of their leprosy. **Afar off.**—See Lev. xiii. 46; Numb. v. 2.

Ver. 13. **And they.**—The word is emphatic; their faith in Jesus led them to take the initiative.

Ver. 14. **Go, show yourselves.**—According to the Law (Lev. xiv. 2-32), Jesus did not, as on a former occasion, touch the lepers (ver. 13); His purpose seems to have been to test their love for Him as Healer. Faith they had; love leading to gratitude was only found in one of them. **As they went.**—Evidently they had not gone far.

Ver. 16. **A Samaritan.**—Probably he was on his way to the priests in his own temple at Mount Gerizim.

Ver. 17. **Were there not ten cleansed?**—Rather, "Were not the ten cleansed?" (R.V.) *I.e.*, did not the cure operate on all alike? A sadness of tone is perceptible in this question. The ingratitude of his own countrymen was revealed in this want of love for benefit received by the nine lepers.

Ver. 18. **Give glory to God.**—Not mere personal ingratitude to Jesus, but insensibility to the compassion of God manifested through Him. **This stranger.**—Rather, "alien." The Samaritans were Gentiles, and not a mixed race. Their religion was a mixture of Judaism and idolatry. See 2 Kings xvii. 24-41.

Ver. 19. **Made thee whole.**—Rather, "Hath saved thee" (R.V. margin). "In a higher sense than the mere cleansing of his leprosy. *Theirs* was merely the beholding of the brazen serpent with the outward eyes, but his, with the eye of inward faith; and this faith saved him—not only healed his body, but his soul" (*Alford*).

Ver. 20. **Demanded of the Pharisees.**—We can scarcely think that they had any good end in view in asking this question; it is probable they expected to get some answer which might be used against Jesus. Their idea of "the kingdom of God" was that it would be an outward manifestation of God's sovereignty in the world, in which a splendid position of supremacy would be assigned to the Jewish nation. **With observation.**—*I.e.*, in such a manner as to be observed with the outward eye.

Ver. 21. **Within you.**—Or "In the midst of you" (R.V. margin). The latter rendering is certainly to be preferred. The kingdom of God was certainly not in the hearts of the Pharisees, though it, as a visible society, was among them in the community of believers in Christ. All through the remainder of the chapter it is a visible coming of Jesus that is referred to. The rendering "within you" would yield a perfectly valid sense, but one not at all in harmony with the eschatological character of this discourse.

Ver. 22. **One of the days.**—*I.e.*, even a single day. Perhaps one of the days which He had passed with them on earth; but more probably, as regret for the past was superseded by hope for the future, one of the days which would follow His return.

Ver. 23. **See here.**—False reports of His return. His return would be sudden, and not of a local character. Cf. Matt. xxiv. 23-27.

Ver. 24. **For as the lightning.**—"The lightning, lighting both ends of heaven at once, seen of all beneath it, can only find its full similitude in His personal coming, whom *every eye shall see* (Rev. i. 7)" (*Alford*).

Ver. 25. **But first.**—The Son of man must be taken away before He can return (vers. 26-30). The security and carelessness of the world before the Flood, and of the inhabitants of Sodom before its destruction by fire, are referred to as illustrating the condition in which the world will be before the second coming of Christ.

Ver. 31. **Upon the house-top.**—A place of cool and quiet resort. **Not come down.**—*I.e.*, not re-enter his house, but escape away by the flight of steps outside. **Not return back.**—As in the case of Lot's wife, who turned back in heart to Sodom.

Ver. 33. **Shall seek.**—Perhaps rather, "Shall have sought"—*i.e.*, in his preceding life, shall lose his life *then*. **Preserve it.**—Rather, "Make it alive," or bring it forth to life. The figure is that of parturition—an emblem of the birth of soul and body to life and glory everlasting.

Ver. 34. **In that night.**—Time of peace and security: the Son of man cometh "as a thief in the night." **The one shall be taken.**—*I.e.*, by the angels (cf. Matt. xxiv. 31): he who is left is rejected, for his unworthiness.

Ver. 35. **Two women.**—Grinding at a mill, as is still common in the East.

Ver. 36. **Two men.**—This verse is omitted in all the best MSS. and versions; omitted in R.V.; it is evidently derived from the parallel passage in St. Matthew.

Ver. 37. **Where, Lord?**—This is a question put by the disciples. Where, *i.e.*, should this manifestation take place? They have not taken in what Christ has said about His manifestation instantaneously to the whole world, and about the folly of listening to the cry "See here! see there!" (ver. 23). The answer is a re-affirmation of the universality of the Lord's appearance and of God's judgment. **Eagles.**—Rather, "vultures," as eagles do not prey on carrion. "As the vultures are found wherever there is a carcase to prey upon, so the judgment of Christ will come wherever there are sinners to be judged—*i.e.*, over the whole world" (*Speaker's Commentary*).

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 1—6.

Counsels to Disciples.—Various attempts have been made, but without success, to connect together the utterances of Christ on this occasion, and to trace the line of thought which links the one to the other. It seems probable that St. Luke here groups together fragments of teaching, without any attempt at arranging them in order, and without giving any note of the circumstances that gave rise to them. Perhaps he found them just as he here gives them, in some record of the life of Christ such as he alludes to in the opening verses of his gospel. Three distinct topics are treated of in these verses.

I. **Concerning offences** (vers. 1, 2).—He speaks to His disciples, and especially to those who were strong in the faith, and warns them against setting stumbling-blocks in the way of the weak. Many were drawing near to Him and attaching themselves to Him whom the disciples were in danger of despising and affronting, unless they took especial care to avoid doing so; such were publicans and outcast classes of the population, Samaritans and strangers from the heathen world, and also persons who had faith in Christ and did good work in His name without formally connecting themselves with the company of believers. It was only too easy for prejudices of race, class, and office, to prompt a harsh treatment of such "little ones." Then, too, it was no doubt the case that among the first generation of disciples, as in later times, there were some who were loud in their professions of faith, but lax in their moral conduct, and who could not fail to bring discredit upon the Master's cause, and to hinder some from embracing it. Scandals of this kind are far graver and more pernicious than those which arise from mere prejudice and want of consideration for the feelings of others. Hence probably it was this class of scandals which our Saviour had here in view, and which excited His indignation so strongly. His words reveal both His tender sympathy for the "little ones" whose hearts are troubled and whose salvation is imperilled by the misconduct of others, and His righteous anger that those who do such deadly mischief should bear His name and be ranked among His followers. Scarcely stronger terms could be chosen to express the terrible punishment which such conduct deserves, and will receive. The infinite value of the human soul, the especial pity which He has for the weak and timid, and His indignation against wilful offenders, are most clearly brought to light in this saying of His.

II. **Concerning forgiveness** (vers. 3, 4).—Our Saviour has in view here the sins of which a man may be guilty in ordinary intercourse with his brethren. They may excite feelings of anger or irritation, but are not serious or heinous enough to be brought before a judicial tribunal. And for dealing with them Christ advises a mild, brotherly admonition, in order to bring the offender to a sense of the wrong he has done, and prescribes forgiveness to be extended to him on his repenting and confessing his error. However often offence may be given, forgiveness is to be exercised whenever asked for by the offending party. Both indignation against sin and compassion towards a sinner find a place in the course of procedure here laid down. In ordinary society, men are accustomed to pass over many such offences good-naturedly, and to omit the friendly admonition; so that neither is the offender brought to a sense of his wrong-doing, nor is the love that prompts to forgiveness brought into play. The forgiveness which Christ prescribes for His disciples is to be inexhaustible, like that which He Himself exercises towards penitent sinners. He chooses a symbolical number to describe the extent to which it is to be carried, and therefore the rule He here lays down is practically equivalent to that which He gave on another occasion, when, instead of seven times He spoke of seventy times seven.

III. **Of faith** (vers. 5, 6).—The request which the apostles offered to Christ was probably suggested by seeing some extraordinary manifestation of the Saviour's power, which they desired to imitate—such, for example, as the withering of the barren fig-tree (Matt. xxi. 20); or by experiencing some failure in work which they had attempted to do—as when, for example, they attempted to heal the epileptic boy (chap. ix. 40). The reply of Christ taught them that it was not a matter of little and more. Let them have real faith in any degree and they would be able to accomplish the greatest marvels. Faith establishes a connection between the human and the Divine, and all the power and resources of omnipotence are brought to supplement and aid our weakness. Yet, just as Christ Himself did not use His supernatural power for purposes of display or for His own personal benefit, so the fulfilment of this promise is only to be seen in the history of what His disciples have done for the extension of His kingdom. The triumphs of the gospel, in overthrowing deeply rooted systems of idolatry and in defeating the malice of its enemies, are as wonderful as tho miracles in the physical sphere which Christ here and elsewhere gives as examples of the power of faith.

SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS ON VERSES 1—6.

Vers. 1-10. *The Spirit of Extra Service.*—Even in the highest place, and doing the highest and heartiest service—

I. **There is need of a lowly spirit.**—Our Lord gives very express teaching on this point. Our highest service may sometimes be in the spirit with which we regard a brother who has offended us, in pushing past us, perhaps, or trying to take our place. Roots of bitterness, however strong, may easily be uprooted, even by a weak faith, and acts of love planted, as it seems, in the very sea.

II. **Such service may be very suddenly required of us.**—It may not seem part of our proper work, far less direct service to our Lord. Our ploughing or pasturing may seem so to fill up our time and to wear out our strength that we may feel excused from such calls to extra service or sacrifice as the ambition or tho rudeness of a brother may render needful. So our Lord gives the parable of a servant thus ordinarily occupied during the day. But is he to hold himself discharged from personal service in the house if his Master should require it? Would he not willingly postpone any gratification, as of rest and refreshment for himself, if called to wait while his Master was refreshed, and to minister to His pleasure? And this is the way in which our Lord represents some of those extra services, hard and trying in one sense, but full of joy when rightly viewed.—*McColl.*

Vers. 1-4. I. **Obstacles cast maliciously in the way of the weak.**—Which demand severe punishment.

II. **The sins of brethren.**—Which call for gentle reproof and continued forgiveness.

Vers. 1, 2. I. **We should beware of occasioning offences.**

II. **We should beware of being overthrown by such offences.**

Ver. 1. "*Impossible.*"—*I.e.*, morally impossible in a world so largely under the influence of sin. Yet the responsibility of those who cause "offences" is not thereby removed or diminished.

"*Offences.*"—*I.e.*, things which the sincere disciple may with reason stumble at, because they are dishonouring to his Lord and hurtful to the Church.

These may be (1) acts of persecution; (2) sophistry or false reasoning; (3) heretical and extravagant opinions; or (4) immoral and inconsistent conduct on the part of those who make a religious profession.

We must distinguish between offences *taken* and offences *given*: it is against

the latter that this woe is directed. Offence may be *taken* on very frivolous grounds.

Ver. 2. "*It were better for him.*"—There is a profound difference between the sentiment expressed in this verse and that current in worldly society, concerning there being worse things than death. "Death rather than dishonour," "rather than disgrace brought upon one's family," are supposed to be heroic expressions. But here it is "death rather than wrong-doing, rather than casting a stumbling-block in the way of the weak." Pride animates the worldly sentiment, whereas the Christian is interpenetrated by a deep sense of the heinousness of sin.

Vers. 3-5. *Faith Getting in and Giving Out.* Love's labour consists of two parts, *doing* and *bearing*. These two are different but inseparable. They may be compared to the right and left hands of a living man. The Christian life is sometimes mainly a laborious activity, sometimes mainly a patient enduring, and sometimes both at the same time and in equal measure. I could not venture to decide which is the greater Christian, the man who bears injuries patiently, in a forgiving spirit, or the man who labours heroically in some department of active duty The "doers" are better known in the Church and the world than the "bearers." The results of active love bulk more largely in history than those of passive love. But perhaps in the inherent merits of the case, and in the judgment of the Omniscient, faith has borne as much and as precious fruit in enduring evil as in doing good. The meek, Christ-like bearer of evil is as much needed, and as much used in the work of the kingdom, as the actual Christ-like doer of good. In the present case it was on the side of bearing injury that the heavy demand was made. Assuredly those early disciples of the Lord found the duty as difficult as any positive work in which they had ever engaged. In trying to fulfil it, they speedily reached the end of their own resources; and, finding that they possessed not the sufficient supply for meeting and satisfying this new demand, they said to the Lord, "Increase our faith."—*Arnot.*

Ver. 3. "*Take heed.*"—These words are to be connected with vers. 1, 2. "Take heed": 1. Because it is so easy to cause others to stumble. 2. Because of the terrible penalty attaching to the sin of overthrowing another's faith; the lost soul is like a weight fastened to him who has ruined it, and drags him, in his turn, down into the abyss.

Ver. 3. "*If thy brother,*" *etc.*—The disciple is to be animated by (1) holiness in reproving sin, and (2) by love in forgiving it. Holiness becomes censoriousness when it is divorced from love; love degenerates and loses its Divine character when it is divorced from holiness.

"*Forgive him.*"—Forgiveness, to be adequate, should be (1) instant, (2) frank, (3) complete.

Motives for Forgiveness.—I. **From a regard to our own peace of mind.**

II. **From a regard to the happiness of the world at large.**

III. **From a regard to the express injunctions of Scripture.**

IV. **From a regard to our own need of Divine forgiveness.**

Ver. 4. *Forgiveness.* — Repentance seems to be required here before forgiveness is granted by us; and consequently it would seem to be implied that we may refuse to pardon obstinate offenders. We need, however, to keep in mind that there are two kinds of forgiveness. 1. We may lay aside every idea of revenging an injury, and suppress feelings of hatred, and show kindness to the offender, without modifying the unfavourable opinion we have formed of his conduct; and (2) we may be able to receive the offender

again into favour, and to be fully persuaded that all hindrances to intimate fellowship with him are fully withdrawn.

Ver. 5. "*And the Apostles said.*"—They who were so often divided among themselves, and animated by a spirit of petty rivalry, now unite in humble supplication for the supply of their spiritual necessity..

"*Increase our faith.*"—I. Some measure of true faith is needed for safety and holiness.

II. True faith is of a progressive nature.

"Certainly they did never have any grace who did not complain to have too little" (*Hall*).

"I have no grace till I would have more" (*Donne*).

Prayer and Faith.—"For faith they ask; and, by asking, show their faith. Thus prayer ever increases faith, and faith ever inclines to prayer."—*Williams.*

The Disciples' Prayer.—In this short prayer the disciples assumed—

I. **That they already believed, asking for an addition to the faith they already possessed.**

II. **That it is more faith that will produce more obedience.**

III. **That the faith which worketh by love is not of themselves, but is the gift of God through His Son.**—In these assumptions, having been secretly taught of the Spirit, the apostles were deeply intelligent and completely correct. And our Lord, in His reply, acknowledges that their inferences are correct.—*Arnot.*

Ver. 6. "*If ye had faith.*"—Some faith they had, yet not such great faith as to give the command specified and be obeyed. The illustration of the power of faith here given is intelligible only on the principle that spiritual miracles are greater than those wrought in the material world.

"*As a grain of mustard seed.*"—Small, yet living and capable of rapid increase.

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 7—10.

The Dutiful Servant.—This parable is comparatively unfamiliar to most readers of the New Testament, and that probably for two reasons. It has no setting, no significant and illustrative framework of circumstance, and it has a sterner, a severer, tone than we commonly hear in the parables of our Lord. The view of human life and duty which it presents is not a welcome one. We are compared to a slave—to a slave who has been hard at work all day in his master's fields, first driving the plough and then tending the cattle. When he returns to the house at sundown, new duties, new toils, await him. Instead of being permitted to rest, or invited to recruit himself after the fatigues of the day, he has to prepare his master's supper, to gird himself and wait on him. Even when he has discharged these new duties, he gets no thanks for his pains. He has but done his duty. He is only an unprofitable servant. At first the parable seems hard and ungracious, but the more carefully we consider it, the more true to the actual facts of human life do we find it, and the more sorry, therefore, we should be to miss this saying of Christ's. Has not nature itself its sterner, as well as its more gentle and benignant, aspects—its severity as well as its beneficence, its storms as well as its calms? And human life—is that always smooth and easy? Is it invariably and unbrokenly gracious? Is it a sacred and welcome possession always, and to all men? Are there not myriads to whom it appears a mere succession of ill-rewarded toils, a mere dull round of labour, cheered by no thanks, by no approval, by no applause? And if the Great Teacher were to depict human life fairly, if He was to be a fair and full representative of the

God whom we find in nature and in human nature, was it not inevitable that He should portray *all* the facts and aspects of our life—inevitable, therefore, that He should utter some such words as these? Nay, more; is it not well for us that at times we should dwell on these severer, as well as on the more tender and benignant, aspects of human life and duty? If we are men, and not babes in Christ, the word *duty* will hardly be less dear to us than the word *love*. If we are brave we shall hold the title "dutiful servant" to be hardly less honourable than that of "loving and obedient child"—we shall rejoice that the path to heaven is steep and hard to climb, since only by a severe and bracing discipline can we rise to our full stature, and come to our full strength. We need to be roused and stirred by the clarion call of duty, as well as soothed and comforted by the tender breathings of love. And *here* the call comes to us loud and clear, waxing ever louder as we listen and reflect. "Do your duty, and when you have done it, however laborious and painful it may be, remember that you have *only* done your duty. If you are tempted to a dainty and effeminate self-pity for the hardships you have borne, or to a dangerous and degrading self-admiration for the achievements you have wrought, let this be your safeguard, that you have done *no more* than your duty." The very moment we grow complacent over our work, our work spoils in our hands. Our energies relax. We begin to think of ourselves instead of our work, of the wonders we have achieved instead of the toils which yet lie before us, and of how we may best discharge them. So soon as we begin to complain of our lot and task, to murmur as though our burden were too heavy, or as though we were called to bear it in our own strength, we unfit ourselves for it; our nerves and courage give way; our task looks even more formidable than it is, and we become incapable even of the little which, but for our repugnance and fears, we should be quite competent to do. And then, how bracing is the sense of duty discharged, if only we may indulge in it. And we may indulge in it. Does not Christ Himself teach us to say, "We have done that which it was our duty to do"? He does not account of our duty as we sometimes account of it. All that He demands of us is, that, with such capacities and opportunities as we have, we shall do our best, or at lowest *try* to do it. Honesty of intention, purity and sincerity of motive, the diligence and cheerfulness with which we address ourselves to His service, count for more with Him than the mere amount of work we get through. He would have us account, as He Himself accounts, that we *have* done our duty when we have sincerely and earnestly endeavoured to do it. The thin and hard theology which denies all merit to man, is alien to the spirit of Christ. True, He bids us to add to the statement "we have done our duty," the confession "we are unprofitable servants." And no doubt the humility of that sentence is as wholesome for us as the grateful and sustaining pride of the other. For what man of a really manly and generous spirit does not feel, even when he has done his best, that he might have done more? And even when he has done his most, as well as his best, what man of a really Christian spirit does not both lament that he could not do more, and gratefully acknowledge that he could not have done so much—that he could have done nothing good—but for the grace and help of God? What does he feel but that nothing is done till *all* be done? Finally, let us remember that the whole truth cannot be packed into a single sentence, or even into a single parable. Our Lord sometimes enforces one aspect of it, and sometimes another. It does not follow because we very justly call ourselves "unprofitable servants"—*i.e.*, *unworthy* or *unnecessary* servants, of whom God stands in no need, and who can do but little for Him—that *He* will call us unprofitable. On the contrary, if we do that which it was our duty to do, if we but sincerely try to do it, we know that He will call us "good and faithful servants." And in this very parable it is to be observed that Christ is simply saying how men *do* act, not how they

ought to act; what they do demand of their servants, not what they ought to demand. Even if we suppose the man in the parable, who taxes his servant to the utmost, and takes all he does without thanks, to be a good master, it by no means follows that God will not prove better and kinder than the best of men. *He* may do, He certainly will do, far more than they do, far more even than they ought to do. The true supplement to this parable of the Dutiful Servant is to be found in the parable of the Kind Master (chap. xii. 35-37).—*Cox.*

SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS ON VERSES 7—10.

Vers. 7-10. *The Parable of Extra Service.*—The watchword of Christian ethics is not *devoteeism*, but *devotion*; the kingdom first, everything else second, and, when the interest of the holy state demands it, military promptitude in leaving all and repairing to the standard. This idea is essentially the key to the meaning of this difficult parable, which we may call "the parable of extra service."

I. **The service of the kingdom is very exacting.**—Involving not only hard toil in the field during the day, but extra duties in the evening, when the tired labourer would gladly rest, having no fixed hours of labour, eight, ten, or twelve, but claiming the right to summon to work at any hour of all the twenty-four, as in the case of soldiers in time of war, or of farm labourers in time of harvest. And the extra service, or overtime duty, is not monkish asceticism, but extraordinary demands in unusual emergencies—calling men, weary from age or from over-exertion, to still further efforts and sacrifices.

II. **So the right-minded servant will perform these added tasks without a murmur.**—And without a thought that anything great or specially meritorious has been done by him. The temper equal to this is manifestly not that either of the slave, who works as a drudge under compulsion, or of the Pharisee, who sets a high value on his performance. It is the temper of devotion mellowed by the grace of humility.—*Bruce.*

Humility and Endurance.—The connexion is, "Ye are *servants* of your Master, and therefore endurance is required of you—faith and trust to endure out your day's work before you enter into your rest. Your Master will enter into His, but your time has not yet come; and all the service which you can meanwhile do Him is but that which it is your bounden duty to do, seeing that your body, soul, and spirit, are His. The lessons are here taught: (1) of humility, and (2) of patient endurance in the service of Christ. There is no denial of the fact that privileges will be bestowed on dutiful servants, but it is distinctly taught that nothing can be expected on the ground of merit.

"*Plowing, or feeding cattle.*"—The labour of the day is followed by work within the house when the servant returns home. He is his master's property, and there are no limits to the service he may be called to return but those which his master may choose to set. In like manner the Christian has no power or right to set any limit to the service which is due from him to God,—to mark off any department of his life, or any portion of his time, as belonging solely to himself, within which he may act simply in accordance with his own tastes and wishes.

Ver. 8. "*Afterward.*"—Rest and refreshment are not denied, but they follow labour, and are all the sweeter from the sense of having faithfully performed every duty.

Ver. 9. "*Doth he thank?*"—He may use the words of courteous acknowledg-

ment of service, but he is not conscious of any extraordinary recompense being merited. And so no human being can accumulate merit in the sight of God and impose upon Him the obligation of rewarding it. But we must remember that higher than the sphere of *right* is the sphere of *love*, and that service rendered in a joyous and filial spirit has value before God.

The parable rebukes those who choose the position of servants instead of accepting that of sons—in other words, those who obey God for the sake of reward instead of from a spirit of filial love.

Ver. 10. "*Unprofitable servants.*"

I. **God has given all, owns all, has a right to all.**

II. **He ordinarily makes our work easy.**

III. **There is no such thing as a surplus of merit in man.**—Even though a man should perform all his duty, he is destitute of merit before God.—*Arnot.*

Our Failings render us Much More Unprofitable.—The argument is an *à fortiori* one: "How much more when ye have failed in so many respects."—*Bengel.*

"*Unprofitable.*"—The word does not here mean "useless." Had the servant done *more* than his duty, some merit on that account might have been claimed by him; but when he has merely done his duty, he can make no such claim. He is free of blame, but has nothing to boast of.

Eternal Life a Gift.—In Rom. vi. 23, we have the true ground on which we look for eternal life set before us—viz., as the *gift* of God *whose servants we are*—not the *wages*, as in the case of sin, *whose we are not.*—*Alford.*

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 11—19.

The Lord's treatment of this case is entirely different from that with which He met the leper of an earlier narrative. When that first subject of His cleansing power came kneeling to Him, Jesus put His hand on him, effected his cure on the spot, and then sent him to the priest for confirmation. Here the procedure is almost reversed. Without cleansing them, without so much as telling them that they were to be cleansed, He bids them take the cure on trust, and proceed to show themselves to the constituted authorities, as persons who were lepers no more.

I. **Thus was their faith tested.**—It was a strong test, but their perfect confidence in Jesus was equal to it. They instantly set out. They had seen no charm used, had heard no words of cleansing; they felt, as yet, no change wrought upon their diseased bodies; but they went, in the firm faith that the thing would be done. They acted out their faith. Every step they took away from the presence of Jesus was a proof that they trusted Him. And their confidence was soon rewarded. The cure came: every man saw before his eyes in his fellows the wonderful transformation which he felt in himself. "It came to pass, that, as they went, they were cleansed." Could there be a better illustration of faith, from one point of view, than the conduct of these ten men? They took Jesus at His word, and they soon realised the blessedness of so doing. This is faith. Constantly we stumble at the plainness and simplicity of this act of faith—trusting the bare word of God. We so often say, "If I could only feel something, see some improvement, experience some joy, have evidence in myself, then I would believe." Such language, transferred to these patients of Jesus, would run, "Let us first see some signs of the leprosy removing, feel some pulse of recovered health, then we shall believe, and go to the priests for a certificate." Put thus, it would be recognised at once as the language of downright unbelief.

Yet how often we mock the message of salvation with just such treatment in our hearts, if not in speech!

II. **This treatment was further intended to test their love.**—*I.e.*, it was intended to bring out whether their faith was fruitful trust in Him as God's representative to them, or whether it was a mere formal faith in His office as a healer, so well-known that He could not be disbelieved. For these reasons He did the cure only after they had left Him. He sent them away out of His presence, and on the road to the priests, and then healed them. Thus an entirely new situation arose. When diseased folks were healed instantly by Jesus, and were still before Him, they could not withhold their acknowledgment. In a case like this it might be very different; and so it proved, for only one of the ten stood the test. No doubt the nine had a confidence in Jesus' power which carried them through the test set them. They had that outside faith which sufficed to trust His word for healing. But they had no regard either to the Divine glory or the redeeming might of Jesus. They took His cleansing of them as a mere common thing. At first the miracles of Christ had been fresh and startling. But now, as His love repeated them, men did with Christ's miracles as they do with His Father's bounties—see nothing Divine in them because they are so common. This their unbelief, their seeing no glory of God in what Jesus did to them, is proved by their unthankfulness. Jesus Himself, who knew what was in man, was astonished at this instance of ingratitude and irreligion. Unbelief, with its baneful blight, counterworks the works of God at every point. Times and places there were when Jesus could do no miracle because of men's unbelief. Then, again, when He wrought them abundantly, there were men who saw His miracles and did not believe. Now it has come even to this: there are men experiencing the miracle in themselves, and yielding no homage to their Healer. Thus unbelief brings forth its bitter fruit of ingratitude. Even in Christians it makes melancholy havoc, blinding them to the Divine hand in their deliverances, leading them to cheapen God's marvellous grace, and coldly trace to second causes the change that once they rejoiced over as life from the dead. Of men at large unbelief and ingratitude make heathens. For it is pronounced to be the very sin of the heathen that "when they knew God, they glorified Him not as God, neither were thankful; but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened" (Rom. i. 21).—*Laidlaw.*

SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS ON VERSES 11—19.

Vers. 11-19. *Gratitude and Ingratitude.*

I. **The forlorn company and their cry.**
II. **The command which is a promise.**
III. **The unthankful nine and the grateful one.**
IV. **The wonder, pain, and patience of Jesus.**
V. **The larger blessings given to the thankful heart.**—*Maclaren.*

A Remarkable Scene.

I. **A gracious mission.**
II. **A loathsome sight.**
III. **Merciful interposition.**
IV. **Religious observance.**
V. **Sinful ingratitude.**
VI. **Joyful praise.**

One in Ten.

I. **What these men were before seeing Jesus.**
II. **What the interview did for them.**
III. **What it failed to do with nine of the ten.**—*Dingley.*

Ver. 11. *Samaria and Galilee.*—The notice of the scene of this miracle explains the presence of a Samaritan in the company of lepers. The same rule for the exclusion of lepers from society obtained in Samaria as in Israel and

the common affliction drew these poor outcasts together.

Ver. 12. "*Ten lepers.*"—Differences among them of race and religion had been overcome by their common misery. A similar company is spoken of in 2 Kings vii. 3.

Ver. 13. "*Lifted up their voices.*"—They were less bold than the leper in chap. v., who came to kneel at Jesus' feet; but as they saw Him entering the village from which they were excluded, they called upon Him for mercy and healing.

"*Have mercy.*"—The incident illustrates the human side of the work of salvation. There is (1) a sense of mercy and helplessness; (2) faith in Jesus; (3) an appeal to His compassion.

Ver. 14. "*Go, shew yourselves.*"—In many different ways did the Great Physician deal with the needs of those He healed: sometimes He seemed to resist a strong faith, that He might make it stronger yet (Matt. xv. 23-26); sometimes He met a weak faith, lest it might prove too weak in the trial (Mark v. 36); in one case He forgave first and healed after (Matt. ix. 2, 6), in another case He healed first and only then forgave (John v. 8, 14). Some adequate reason moved Him, doubtless, to adopt His present course of procedure.

Ver. 15. "*Turned back.*"—This man is sent with the rest to the priests. He well knew this duty was a branch of the law of ceremonies, which he meant not to neglect; but his heart told him there was a moral duty of professing thankfulness to his Benefactor, which called for his first attendance. First, therefore, he turns back, ere he will stir forward. Reason taught this Samaritan, and us in him, that ceremony must yield to substance, and that main points of obedience must take place of all ritual complements.—*Hall.*

"*With a loud voice.*"—He had been loud in *prayer* (ver. 13), so now he is loud in *praise.* His impurity had kept him at a distance from Christ, but now that he is cleansed he falls at the Saviour's feet.

Ver. 16. "*Fell down.*"—A token—1. of love for the Saviour, and 2. of willingness to submit entirely to Him.

"*Giving Him thanks.*" — Every miracle has its lesson, and in that lesson lies the reason why it has been recorded. There were many lepers cleansed of whose healing no record is given: but the story of these ten is told because one of them came back. "Giving Him thanks"—in these words the lesson lies.

I. **It is the beautiful story of the gratitude of a "stranger."**—The story is made more beautiful by the contrast with the ingratitude of "His own." It recalls the parable of the Good Samaritan: the two narratives are parallel in more respects than one.

II. **And both illustrate in a remarkable way the great lesson of the previous series of discourses.**—It was the despised Samaritan who returned: the privileged Jews held on their legal and selfish way. *Legal* way; for observe that the nine had ample excuse. Christ had ordered it, and the Law demanded it. But the letter killeth. Love overrules Acts of Parliament. The nine held by the Law, but the one got the grace.

III. **By grace he was saved through faith.**—"Thy faith hath *saved* thee." Physically, he was made whole already; so were His companions. But now he gets the nobler and only noble blessing. This the others lost, through their ingratitude.—*Hastings.*

Christ's Bearing in Relation to Ingratitude.—To ungrateful treatment the Saviour was no stranger. Neither can we hope to be. The sting of ingratitude may be felt by all. But how do we comport ourselves under it?

I. **This will test character.**—In

Christ's example there is both reproof and inspiration. He was not insensible to ingratitude. Nay, He was more sensitive than we. His feelings were keener. He never became less sensitive to sin in any form by contact with it. We do. To Him it never became more endurable. To us it may. Sin within responds to sin without. We carry with us the body of sin. By this relation we are less sensitive to it than Jesus. But Christ remained ever keenly sensitive. How, then, would He feel ingratitude! One of those polar currents is sweeping over Him now.

II. **His conduct in the face of ingratitude challenges admiration and imitation.**—He is not made sour, misanthropical, self-contained. There is no recoil to the opposite extreme of indifference and hate. What a halo of unsullied glory is about the Christ of God! Delicate sensibility on the one hand; base ingratitude on the other. Yet the streams of good-will and blessing kept flowing perennially with undiminished volumes. The "milk of human kindness" never soured in Him. He never contracted a tinge of moroseness. He never grew weary in well-doing. Only with His life did such ministry cease. From the cross we hear "Father, forgive them."—*Campbell.*

"*Where are the nine?*"—The question is the turning-point of the story. The nine received the gift of healing and forgot the Giver. There was only one grateful patient.

I. **In the Saviour's question we may perceive much of the mind that is in Christ Jesus toward sinful men.**—He went about doing good. His whole life was beneficent. No human being did he ever hurt. Even fruitless human lives He spared. But while men cared only for the curing of bodily ailments, the Great Physician looked to both the disease of the body and the sin of the soul; and mainly to the latter.

II. **He tries the lepers by sending them out of His sight to be healed.**—He desired that they should return to Himself with thanks. He loves a cheerful comer as well as a cheerful giver. All were glad; only one was grateful.

III. **How wistfully Jesus looks after the nine as they go away!**—They took greedily the temporal benefit; they despised the more precious gift which the Lord was waiting to bestow. They snatched the lesser, and missed the greater. What would He have said to them if they had returned?

IV. **We know what He said to the one who did return.**—He had another faith and obtained another cure. He believed to the saving of his soul. In him the Redeemer sees of the travail of His soul, and is satisfied. In the others He sees no fruit, and therefore complains. He expects healed and delivered men to come back to Him with praise. Is He to be disappointed? —*Arnot.*

One of Ten.—I. **Lesson from the ten.**—All *need* cleansing.

II. **Lesson from the nine.**—The sin of unthankfulness.

III. **Lesson from the one.**—The duty and beauty of gratitude.—*W. Taylor.*

I. **Why men are unthankful.**
II. **Why we ought to be thankful.**
III. **How we ought to show our thankfulness.**—*Watson.*

Unthankfulness.

I. **In many cases the reason is that we do not see our Benefactor.**—Just as these lepers were at a distance from Christ when healing took place.

II. **A second cause is an imperfect appreciation of God's gifts.**—Health is coveted by the sick, but lightly valued when they gain it.

III. **A third reason is the utilitarian one.**—Men do not see the good of it.

Three results of gratitude: 1. It stimulates powerfully to active well-doing. 2. It makes worship—especially public worship—real and sincere. 3. Thankfulness here on earth is the best possible preparation for the spirit and life of heaven.—*Liddon.*

Why the Nine Acted as They Did.—1. They may have thought that they had done nothing to deserve their horrible fate, and that, therefore, it was only *just* that they should be restored to health. 2. They may have thought that they would at least make sure of their restoration to health, before they gave thanks to Him who had healed them. 3. They may have put obedience before love. 4. It may be that the nine Jews would not go back just because the Samaritan did: misery had broken down enmity, but when the pressure of misery is removed, the Jews take one road, the Samaritan another. 5. They may have said within themselves that they could be just as thankful to the kind Master in their hearts without saying so to Him.—*Cox.*

Ver. 18. "*There are not found.*"—The nine others were already healed and hastening to the priest, that they might be restored to the society of men and their life in the world; but the first thoughts of the Samaritan are turned to his Deliverer. He had forgotten all in the sense of God's mercy and of His own unworthiness.—*Williams.*

"*This stranger.*"—The gratitude of the Samaritan overcame the prejudices which his race cherished against that to which the Saviour belonged; while his companions were wanting in gratitude to their countryman who had healed them.

Ver. 19. "*Thy faith.*"—The true nature of faith is here very clearly displayed as consisting principally in moral qualities of obedience and love. Confidence in the Saviour's power had led to the healing of the ten; but "this stranger" manifested a faith which secured for him higher blessings than that of bodily healing.

"*Saved thee.*"—The Samaritan was saved by his faith, not because he was cured of his leprosy (for this was likewise obtained by the rest), but because he was admitted into the number of the children of God, and received from His hand a pledge of fatherly kindness.

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 20—37.

The Coming of the Kingdom.—The whole of Jewish society were at this time in anxious expectation of the establishment on earth of the Messianic kingdom; and, as we learn from Acts i. 6, the apostles themselves, even after the resurrection of Jesus, partook to a very large extent of the conceptions concerning that kingdom which were current at that time. On one occasion (John vi. 15) the multitude were about to attempt to force Jesus to establish a kingdom of a kind they wished to see—an attempt which He defeated by withdrawing from their midst. Here He is asked to state definitely His opinion concerning the manifestation of Messianic power. In His reply we note that He first addresses Himself to the Pharisees who put the question, and then to His disciples; and that to the one class He speaks of the spirituality of the kingdom of God, and to the other of its outward manifestation.

I. **The spirituality of the kingdom** (vers. 20, 21).—The question put to Christ revealed the carnal and erroneous conception of the Divine kingdom which filled the minds of the Pharisees. They thought of the coming of that kingdom as a sudden and outward change in human society, in which the nation to which they belonged would attain to the highest degree of earthly prosperity, and enjoy supremacy over all the other peoples of the earth. They knew that at the time when they put the question to Jesus the condition of matters after which they longed was still in the future, but they anticipated the coming of a time when they would be able to say, "Here it is! The kingdom of God is among us." The reply of Jesus was that the kingdom had come, though they failed to recognise

it. It was present in the person of Him as its Founder, and of those who had accepted Him as the Christ, and was a spiritual condition rather than an altered state of outward circumstances. They wished to *see* the kingdom, but they needed to have the spiritual sense by which to recognise it; as He said to Nicodemus, "Except a man be born again He cannot see the kingdom of God."

II. **The outward manifestation of the kingdom** (vers. 22-37).—To the Pharisees, who were blinded by religious prejudice, Jesus spoke of the spirituality of the kingdom, but to His own disciples, who were qualified by their faith in Him to receive further instruction in the truth, He spoke of the outward manifestation of His kingdom as associated with His return to earth. First of all—1. *He told of the time and manner of His return* (vers. 22-25). He did not, indeed, give any indication of the precise time of His return, but He implied that it would not be soon. The patience of His disciples would be tried; they would long for His re-appearing, and think regretfully of the days when He dwelt on earth, and their eager expectation would predispose them to listen to false announcements of His return. Yet they would be left in no doubt of the fact when He actually did return. All dwelling on the earth would behold His glory and the brightness of His coming. Yet before He entered upon that glory, which all then would see, He must suffer shameful rejection. 2. *The state of the world at the time of His return* (vers. 26-30). It would be like the time before the great catastrophes of the Flood and the destruction of the Cities of the Plain. Men would be plunged in a carnal security. All the ordinary occupations of secular life would be in regular process; but religious faith and religious feeling would have disappeared from the hearts of the great majority of men. The return of the Saviour would overwhelm the secure, and involve them in ruin. 3. *How safety is to be secured at the moment of His return* (vers. 31-33). Those who have their hearts set upon Him, and not upon earthly things, will be prepared to join Him when He appears. Those who are suddenly surprised, as they either rest or labour, at the time of His appearing will need to leave everything behind them and to separate themselves in thought and desire from all their earthly possessions. The great lesson, therefore, is suggested to all of us that if we are to find safety at that supreme crisis, we must live in a spirit of detachment from things of earth—"be in the world and yet not of it." 4. *Human society sifted when Christ returns* (vers. 34-37). In the present condition of the world no outward marks distinguish the true from the spurious disciples of Christ—those who will be ready to ascend to meet Him in the air when He returns (1 Thess. iv. 17) from those who will then be found unprepared. But His appearing will bring to light the true characters and dispositions of men. A separation will be made between the good and evil, and all ties will be dissolved but that between the Saviour and His true-hearted followers. Yet the Divine judgment upon the worldly and ungodly will not be altogether postponed until the return of Christ. Wheresoever society becomes thoroughly careless and corrupt, judgment overtakes it, as swiftly and as surely as the vultures fall upon a carcase.

SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS ON VERSES 20—37.

Vers. 20, 21. "*When the kingdom of God shall come.*"—The worldly feelings and selfish ignorance of the Pharisees were displayed in the question they put to Jesus; they were fully confident of their place in the kingdom of God, and were merely anxious to be informed *when* that kingdom would appear. Jesus, in His reply (1), annihilates their expectations of its glorious manifestation; (2) withdraws the kingdom from the visible world as it exists in space; and (3) transfers it to the inner spiritual world.

We may Learn from This Statement—
I. **A lesson of charity.**
II. We may find in it **ground of encouragement.**
III. It administers **a necessary caution.**

Ver. 20. "*Not with observation.*"—In another place, indeed, we are told that both comings of the kingdom, the first and the last, are with observation, and may be known by the signs of the times; but it is here meant that it was not with such signs as the Pharisees intended, of which the bodily eye and ear could be witness, but with such indications as faith alone could perceive. —*Williams.*

Ver. 21. "*The kingdom of God is within you.*"—The words do not simply mean that the kingdom of God is an internal spiritual matter, for Christ goes on to speak of it as an external phenomenon. Humanity must be prepared for the new external and Divine state of things by a spiritual work wrought in the depths of the heart; and it is this internal advent which Jesus thinks good to put first in relief before such interlocutors.—*Godet.*

Vers. 22-25. I. **The dark hour that precedes the manifestation of the kingdom in its external form.**
II. **The dangers of deception and of self-delusion to which His disciples would be exposed.**
III. **The revelation of Divine things in their glory by the Son of Man.**—Now He is despised and rejected of men, but the day is coming in which all will see and recognise His heavenly majesty.

Ver. 22. "*One of the days of the Son of Man.*"—Either one of the past days of communion with Christ upon earth or one of the days of His future triumphant reign. Regret is only another form of desire. When the apostles or their successors shall have passed a long time upon the earth in the absence of their Lord, and have reached the end of their preaching and apologetic demonstrations, and around them scepticism, materialism, pantheism, and deism, gain ground more and more, there will spring up in their souls an ardent longing after that Lord who remains silent and concealed; they will desire some Divine manifestation, "a day" like the days of old, as a prelude of final deliverance, to sustain their hearts and to strengthen the faltering Church. Yet it shall not be given them; to the end it will be necessary to walk by faith and not by sight.—*Godet.*

Days Desired and Not Seen.—There was no fault in the disciples' regretful desire for the "days of the Son of Man." It would be bitter for them to feel that they could not return. But they could see Him no more in this life. He was gone from the earth. Can we apply the text, without blame, to any limited experience in our own lives.

I. **To our Lord's days.**—How full of opportunities of spiritual improvement! In continental travel, who has not felt the want of a Sunday? But this was only a voluntary and brief suspension of privilege. Professional life in distant lands means to many the loss of public worship and of all outward aids to keeping the day holy. How often will one long, in these experiences, for the bygone experiences of English Sundays. Use them, then, diligently *now*. Do not spend them in trifling and idleness. The days will come when you will be sorry for all this. Lose not, then, for want of a little early diligence, advantages which, in their highest form, you can never afterwards get back.

II. **In their worst sense the words of the text were never fulfilled to any of their first hearers but one.**—Judas found them true; the rest found them fulfilled in a higher form. If they are ever to be fulfilled in us, it will be in their worst sense. We are all living in the "days of the Son of Man." All of us have an offered Saviour. Live

as if there were none. Trifle away these days of grace. Will we not live bitterly to regret such folly? Still, indeed, may such see "one of the days of the Son of Man," and pass through an agony of penitence into peace. But let the neglect be continued into or beyond middle age, and the desire for one of these days not be awakened. How soon will the text be fulfilled in such a case? Sooner or later there will come a time—many times, if one be not sufficient—when everything in this world will be felt to be a blank, and nothing satisfying but that which is heavenly and eternal. "Too late!" will be the bitter, disappointing thought. "I must reap as I have sowed." In the old age, the death-bed of the sinner, neglectful, unrepentant, in the judgment and eternity of the impenitent in the world beyond, see awfully fulfilled the solemn prediction of the text. Oh! anticipate and prevent such a dread experience. "Now" is "one of the days of the Son of Man." Escape betimes from the misery of all miseries, the desire to see one of these days, and *not* to see it. Truth seen too late, opportunities lost, but well remembered! Who can fitly speak of the soul-agonies of a final rejection?—*Vaughan.*

Ver. 23. "*Go not after them.*"—It is taken for granted that there will be a visible manifestation of the kingdom of Christ, and the disciples are warned against false announcements of its appearance. At first this idea seems contrary to the statement in ver. 21. Yet in that verse it is the *spiritual* kingdom, the advent of which cannot be observed or proclaimed; here it is a question of the visible kingdom.

Ver. 24. "*As the lightning.*"—The coming of the Lord will be universal and instantaneous. He will be His own witness, and His appearing will be manifest to all.

Ver. 25. "*First must He suffer.*"—The rupture already begun between Israel and its Messiah will be consummated, and the rejection of the Messiah by His people will have as its consequence the removal of His person, and the invisibility of His rule for a whole epoch of history—an epoch which, according to xiii. 35, will only conclude with the conversion of Israel. And Jesus announces that this epoch, during which the world will see Him no longer, will end in an utterly materialistic state of matters, which will be terminated only by His coming (vers. 26-30).—*Godet.*

Vers. 26-30. *Historical Parallels.*—The final manifestation of things Divine will bring salvation and blessing to the pious, and will overwhelm in destruction those who are in a state of carnal security. As it was with the unbelievers in the antediluvian world and with the guilty inhabitants of Sodom, so will it be with the ungodly "in the day when the Son of Man is revealed." 1. The dawning of that day will be sudden and unexpected. 2. It will be hailed by some with joy, while to others it will be a day of destruction and terror.

Vers. 26-29. "*The days of Noah . . . of Lot.*"—One thing is remarkable throughout the whole of this representation—that the contemporaries of Noah and Lot are not, by any means, described as wicked and vicious, but merely as absorbed in things of this world. That the vicious will go into perdition is easily understood; but the man who, without any glaring evil deeds, wastes his life upon external things, fancies himself secure, in this very negativeness, from the judgment of God—he little thinks that his whole being is sinful because it is worldly and alienated from God (James iv. 4). The discourse of the Lord is directed against this carnal security, and not against vice, which is condemned by the Law. —*Olshausen.*

Ver. 26. "*As it was in the days of Noah.*"—*I.e.*, during the hundred and

twenty years while the work was being prepared. While believers long with increasing fervour for the return of the Lord, the carnal security of the world about them becomes deeper and deeper.

Ver. 27. "*They did eat,*" *etc.*—Rather, "they were eating; they were drinking." This was their life.

Ver. 28. "*They bought, they sold,*" etc.—The enumeration of the various occupations of the inhabitants of Sodom implies a more complex and advanced state of civilisation than was known by the antediluvians.

Ver. 29. "*It rained fire.*"—The destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah is not attributed in Scripture to the agency of water (*i.e.*, to the waters of the sea of Sodom) drowning them, but of fire (Gen. xix. 23-28). But the soil itself was also convulsed, and the waters of the Jordan, which before flowed through that region, were pent up in the Lacus Asphaltites or Dead Sea,—a striking emblem of the Lake of Fire. —*Wordsworth.*

Ver. 30. "*Even thus shall it be.*"—What is here said of the end of the world is fulfilled and multiplied in little images in the life of each; in every case these are, by Divine appointment, preceding judgments which warn of the suddenness and surprise with which eternity overtakes each man. And for the same reason that from each the day of his death is hidden, in order that he may be always living in expectation of it, so it is also with the end of the world, that by every generation it may be expected. "Behold" (says Chrysostom), "we know *the signs* of old age, but we not *the day* of death; so we know not the end of the world, though we know the signs of its approaching."—*Williams.*

Vers. 31-36. I. **The preparation needed for the day of the Son of Man**—1. Freedom from all dependence on earthly things (vers. 31, 32). 2. Self-denial (ver. 33).

II. **Human society sifted** (vers. 34-36). By those who are prepared for the coming of Christ being caught up to meet Him (cf. 1 Thess. iv. 17).

Vers. 31-36. *Entanglement in Earthly Affairs.*—Jesus describes the disposition of soul which, in that supreme crisis, will be the condition of safety. The Lord passes with His heavenly train. The change in human society is effected in the twinkling of an eye. He takes to Himself all those inhabitants of the earth who, by their detachment from earthly possessions, are prepared in spirit to follow Him, and who mount up towards Him with free and joyous flight. The others, who are entangled in earthly affairs and possessions, remain behind. Their fate is like that of Lot's wife, who perished with the goods from which she could not tear herself away. —*Godet.*

Ver. 31. "*On the house-top . . . in the field.*"—The contemplative and the active life—that of those occupied in meditation and prayer, and that of those busy in the ordinary work of the world; let neither hesitate to follow the Lord when He appears, and to abandon all possessions, if they would avoid the fate of the wife of Lot.

Ver. 32. "*Remember Lot's wife.*"—1. Her hopeful beginning in abandoning Sodom. 2. Her failure in the decisive hour of trial. 3. Her punishment.

The case of Lot's wife warns us "to forget the things that are behind" (Phil. iii. 13); her looking back implied regret at leaving the place where she had dwelt so long in comfort, and doubt as to whether there were good reasons for leaving the city.

Ver. 33. "*Whosoever shall seek,*" etc. —St. Luke adds this that the desire of an earthly life may not prevent believers from passing rapidly through the midst of death to the salvation laid up for them in heaven. And

Christ employs a strong expression to denote the frailty of the present life, when He says that souls are "*preserved*" (literally, "begotten into life"), when they are "*lost.*" His meaning is the same as if He had declared that men do not *live* in the world, because the beginning of that life which is real, and which is worthy of the name, is, to leave the world.—*Calvin.*

Ver. 34. "*Two men in one bed.*"—Not our *circumstances*, but our *hearts*, will determine our future condition. Those prepared will be taken, whether they are asleep or at work, when the Lord comes. The reference may possibly be to husband and wife, as the word "men" is not in the original, and the translation "persons" would do equally well.

Ver. 35. "*Two women,*" etc.—Those most closely related by earthly ties will, in the twinkling of an eye, be separated for ever.

Ver. 37. "*Wheresoever the body is.*"—All history is a comment on these words. Wherever there is a Church or a people abandoned by the Spirit of Life, and so a *carcase*, tainting the atmosphere of God's moral world, around it assemble the ministers and messengers of Divine justice—*the eagles* (or vultures, more strictly; because the true eagle does not feed on aught but what itself has slain)—the scavengers of God's moral world, scenting out, by a mysterious instinct, the prey from afar, and charged to remove presently the offence out of the way.—*Trench.*

The Carrion and the Vultures:—"Where?" Tepid and idle curiosity is expressed. The Lord's solemn warnings did not stir the disciples deeply. Our Lord refers to a universal future judgment. But the words are not exhausted in reference to that event. The same principles have often been embodied in lesser "comings of the Lord," as will be displayed in world wide splendour and awfulness at the last.

I. **These words are to us a revelation of a law which operates with unerring certainty through all the course of the world's history.**—*E.g.*, the destruction of the Canaanites, the fall of Jerusalem, the French Revolution, the American War concerning slavery.

II. **This law will have a far more tremendous accomplishment in the future.**—Christ is Judge as well as Saviour. By Him the whole world is to be judged in righteousness.

III. **This law need never touch us, nor need we know anything about it but by the hearing of the ear.**—It is told us that we may escape it. "Repent" and you shall not become food for the vultures of Divine judgment. Take Christ as your Saviour, and in that dread hour you will be safe.—*Maclaren.*

CHAPTER XVIII.

CRITICAL NOTES.

VER 1 **And He spake a parable.**—This parable is closely connected with the preceding discourse about the second coming of Christ. The widow is the Church; the judge is God, who long forbears to avenge her wrongs. The parable is of a somewhat paradoxical nature, like that of the Unjust Steward, and like that of the Selfish Neighbour (chap. xi. 5). "The argument is: If such be the power of earnest entreaty that it can win right even from a man sunk in selfishness and fearing neither God nor man, how much more will the right be done by the just and holy God, in answer to the continued prayers of His elect!" (*Alford*). **Always to pray.**—It is rather *urgent* prayer that is here commended than a prevailing state of mind, as in 1 Thess. v. 17. **To faint.**—A military metaphor: to abandon anything from cowardice, sloth, or despondency.

Ver. 2. **Which feared not God,** etc.—A common form of expression to describe an unprincipled and reckless character. Probably the second clause of the description—"neither regarded man"—brings into stronger light his recklessness, and consequently the apparent hopelessness of the widow's case; regard for the good opinion of others being, with many, a stronger motive than fear of God.

Ver. 3. **A widow.**—One of a class more exposed to injustice and wrong in Eastern society than among us. **Avenge me.**—Probably too strong an expression; rather "do me justice" (so in vers. 5, 7, 8); "consider my case, and free me from the evil practices of my oppressor."

Ver. 4. **Though I fear not,** etc.—This intensifies the situation, as it brings into clearer light the shamelessness of the judge. He deliberately admits to himself the villainy of his own character, so that no conscientious scruples are seen to affect him from beginning to end.

Ver. 5. **Her continual coming.**—Lit., "her coming to the end"—"her coming for ever." **Weary me.**—"Wear me out" (R.V.). This rendering seems rather weak, as there does not seem much difference of degree between "trouble" and "weary," or "wear me out." The word is a pugilistic term, and means literally "to give any one a black eye." May there not be a half-humorous fear expressed, lest the widow should lose patience and strike him? There is no example of the word being used figuratively to mean "weary," though the corresponding Latin word (*obtundere*) is often so used.

Ver. 7. **Shall not God?** etc.—Over against "the Unjust Judge" is set God, the righteous judge, and over against "the widow" His elect. **Though He bear long with them.**—If "bear long" is here an allusion to God's long-suffering or compassion, the rendering in the A.V. yields no sense. In the R.V. the passage runs: "And He is long-suffering over them." The word, however, which means "slow-minded," may denote "to be slow in avenging or assisting them." So that, literally rendered, the passage would be: "Though He be long-suffering [towards their enemies] in their behalf." On the whole, the latter interpretation seems preferable.

Ver. 8. **Speedily.**—*I.e.*, soon, though the time seems long. Cf. 2 Pet. iii. 8, 9. **Faith.**—*I.e.*, this kind of faith which continues in prayer without fainting. It implies that, in consequence of the delay, importunate prayer for His coming will be the exception rather than the rule. There is no prophecy in the words that the number of believers will then be few.

Ver. 9. **Unto certain.**—This parable is not addressed to Pharisees, but to some of His own followers who were Pharisaical at heart. **Despised.**—Or "set at nought" (R.V.). **Others.**—Rather, "all others" (R.V.); lit. "the rest."

Ver. 10. **Went up.**—The Temple standing on an elevation. Probably some of Christ's hearers were now on their way to worship there.

Ver. 11. **The Pharisee stood.**—Took up a position apart from others, as the word seems to indicate. **With himself.**—Secret prayer, or the personal devotions offered apart from those statedly conducted by the priests for the people at large. **God.**—Rather, "O God." There seems no reason why the phrase should be abbreviated in our English versions. **As other men.**—Rather, "as the rest of men" (R.V.); all but himself. **Extortioners.**—Those who injure others by *force*. **Unjust.**—Those who overreach others by *fraud*.

Ver. 12. **I fast,** etc.—His works of supererogation. The Law prescribed only one day of fasting—the great day of Atonement (Lev. xvi. 29). The Oral Law prescribed fasts on Monday and Thursday of each week, in commemoration of Moses' ascending and descending Mount Sinai. **That I possess.**—Rather, "that I get"—*i.e.*, one-tenth of his income, not of his property.

Ver. 13. **Afar off.**—Perhaps this means from the altar or from the Holy Place. It may

however, mean from the Pharisee, as though he felt his unworthiness to be near those whom he regarded, and who regarded themselves, as holy. **Smote upon his breast.**—A gesture of sorrow (cf. chap. xxiii. 48). **Me a sinner.**—Perhaps it may be rendered "to me *the* sinner"—*i.e.*, beyond all others (R.V. margin). It seems, however, to detract from the simplicity of the prayer to think of the publican as comparing himself, even unfavourably, with others.

Ver. 14. **Exalteth himself.**—As did the Pharisee. **Shall be abased.**—Rather "humbled" (R.V.)—*i.e.*, in his failure to obtain justification from God. "The sense is, one returned home in the sight of God with his prayer answered, and that prayer had grasped the true object of prayer—the forgiveness of sins; the other prayed not for it, and obtained it not. Therefore he who would seek justification before God must seek it by humility, and not by self-righteousness" (*Alford*).

Ver. 15. **Also infants.**—Rather, "their babes" (R.V.). In Matthew and Mark we read "little children." **Touch them.**—Matthew has "that He should put His hands on them and pray."

Ver 16. **Jesus called them.**—*I.e.*, the babes. The call could only, of course, be obeyed by their parents. The incident supplies a strong argument in favour of the practice of infant baptism. These children were not old enough to be taught or to express faith in Jesus; they are presented by their parents, and are welcomed by the Lord.

Ver. 17. **Verily I say unto you.**—"Not only may the little infants be brought to Him, but, in order for us who are mature to come to Him, we must cast away all that wherein our maturity has caused us to differ from them, and we must become *like them.* Not only is infant baptism justified, but it is *the normal pattern of all baptism*: none can enter God's kingdom except as an infant. In adult baptism we strive to secure that state of simplicity and childlikeness which in the infant we have ready and undoubted to our hands" (*Alford*).

Ver. 18. **A certain ruler.**—*I.e.*, ruler of a synagogue. St. Matthew describes him as a young man; and the sequel of the story shows that he was wealthy. He seems to have been ingenuous and lovable, and therefore to have been remarkably different from the majority of others of his class. **Master.**—*I.e.*, teacher. He evidently regarded Jesus as one of exceptional virtue and wisdom; but our Lord did not accept this as adequate recognition of His nature and claims. **What shall I do?**—It is *doing* rather than *being* that is in his thoughts (cf. Rom. ix. 32).

Ver. 19. **None is good save one.**—*I.e.*, from the ruler's point of view the epithet of "good" was not applicable to Jesus. The dilemma in which Socinians are placed with regard to Jesus, *Stier* puts as follows: "*Either* 'There is none good but God; Christ is good; therefore Christ is God'; *or* 'There is none good but God; Christ is not God; therefore Christ is not good.'"

Ver. 20. **Thou knowest the commandments.**—Those quoted by Christ are from the second table of the Law, which concern our duties towards our fellow-men.

Ver. 21. **All these have I kept.**—In this reply his self-righteous spirit is brought to view, though in him this self-righteousness is not allied with hypocrisy.

Ver. 22. **Yet lackest thou.**—Christ does not attempt to show him that he had fallen far short of the requirements of these plain rules of duty; He takes him at his own estimate. "Supposing this statement to be true, one thing is needed to complete the character—obedience to the requirements of the first table of the Law, fulfilment of duties towards God." **Sell all.**—This was a special commandment, suited to the case of the ruler. He wished to be a disciple of Christ, but was unprepared for the self-sacrifice involved in becoming a disciple. He had to choose between riches and obedience to Christ—*i.e.*, to the voice of God speaking to him through Christ. His acceptance of Christ as an authoritative Teacher in matters of religion pledged him to receive the statement as to his special duty without demur. In refusing to do that duty he could, therefore, not conceal from himself that he was transgressing against God.

Ver. 24.—The R.V. is much briefer: "And Jesus, seeing him, said." **How hardly!**—*I.e.*, with what difficulty; not impossible (ver. 27), but only to be accomplished by great effort. Riches always bring temptation (see 1 Tim. vi. 9, 10).

Ver. 25. **Camel.**—Some have sought to modify the apparent harshness of this saying by supposing that a word meaning "a rope," and not the animal, was used. No such word, however, as *kamilon*, for "a rope," is to be found, except in a conjectural interpretation of this very passage. Others have supposed "the needle's eye" to be a small city gate through which a camel could not pass without being unladed. In either case conjecture would only succeed in producing an impossibility quite as great as that of the text. It is something impossible with men that *is* spoken of. In Matt. xxiii. 24 a camel is similarly spoken of proverbially as equivalent to something very large.

Ver. 26. **Who, then, can be saved?**—Not only do all try to become rich, but a temporal kingdom in which all would be well off and prosperous was expected by these disciples.

Ver 27. **Possible with God.**—Divine grace, and nothing but it, can touch the hearts of men who trust in riches.

Ver. 28. **We have left all.**—*I.e.*, Have done what this ruler had refused to do. "Treasure in heaven" was promised to him in exchange for earthly possessions. What, then, should be the pre-eminent reward or those who obeyed Christ's command? The question is implied here; it is expressed plainly in the parallel passage in St. Matthew's Gospel.

Ver. 30. **Receive manifold more.**—*I.e.*, even in this present life enjoy a happiness far exceeding any temporal discomfort undergone in consequence of giving anything up for the sake of Christ, and receive the highest spiritual reward in a life to come.

Ver. 31. **Then took He unto Him.**—*I.e.*, took the twelve apart. The parallel passage in St. Matthew's Gospel says that this disclosure was made on the last journey up to Jerusalem. Between ver. 30 and ver. 31 should probably come the journey from Bethany in Peræa to Bethany in Judæa, the raising of Lazarus, and Christ's retirement to Ephraim (John xi. 54). From this retreat He now comes to keep His last Passover in Jerusalem. On more than one former occasion Christ had foretold His rejection and sufferings (see Matt. xvi. 21, xvii. 22, 23). Each prediction is more full of details than the last. **All things**, etc.—The passage is a peculiar one, and is thus given in the R.V: "All the things that are written by the prophets shall be accomplished unto the Son of Man."

Ver. 32. **Unto the Gentiles.**—This circumstance had not yet been foretold. It implies His crucifixion, that being a Roman and not a Jewish form of capital punishment. All the details of His passion here foretold found fulfilment.

Ver. 34. **And they understood none**, etc.—Peculiar to St. Luke, though the other two Synoptists record the request proffered by James and John and their mother, which indicated a state of mind like that described here. The prophecy ran so completely counter to the fixed ideas of the disciples concerning the nature of Christ's kingdom that they could not understand it in the least.

Ver. 35. **As he drew nigh to Jericho.**—St. Matthew speaks of *two* blind men cured as Jesus *departed* from Jericho (xx. 29 *ff.*); St. Mark of *one* blind man named Bartimæus (evidently the man here mentioned) healed as Jesus *went out* of Jericho. So far as the numbers are concerned, no special difficulty need be felt. The second and third evangelists simply record one case of healing in which there were details of exceptional interest. But, so far as the place of healing is concerned, there *is* a discrepancy which no harmonist can solve. If, however, we knew all the circumstances of the case, the discrepancy *might* disappear. It might turn out that there was an old and a new town at Jericho, and that departing from the one corresponded to entering the other. This conjecture is highly improbable, but is possible. Meantime the discrepancy exists, and is a testimony to the fact that the narratives of the evangelists are independent of each other.

Ver. 39. **Rebuked him.**—Not because he addressed Jesus as "Son of David," but because they thought his cries would be wearisome and annoying to our Lord.

Ver. 41. **What wilt thou?**—The question seems a strange one. What else could the blind man wish for in preference to the gift of sight? We need to remember that with sight would come the call to work for his livelihood—a prospect which did not, however, deter Bartimæus from asking the boon.

Ver. 43. **Gave praise to God.**—St. Luke frequently concludes narratives of miracles in this way (cf. chaps. xiii. 17, ix. 43, v. 26). "He, of the three evangelists, takes most notice of the glory given to God on account of the miraculous acts of the Lord Jesus" (*Alford*).

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 1—8.

Persevering Prayer.—The difference between this parable and that of the Selfish Neighbour (ch. xi.) should be kept in view. That taught the general lesson of perseverance in prayer: this deals with perseverance in prayer for a particular thing—namely, the coming of the Son of Man for judgment, which has been the theme of the preceding chapter (vers. 20-37), and is recurred to in Christ's question at the end of ver. 8.

I. **The story.**—The judge is one of those, too common always in the East, who poison the fountain of justice at its source, and are "companions of thieves." His character is painted in dark colours, and the darker they are, the more do they serve to bring out the contrast between him and the Judge to whom Christians have to pray. That contrast is the very point of the parable. So

far gone in selfish wresting of his office is this man that he is fully conscious of his own baseness, and does not even attempt the farce of varnishing it, but, with cynical frankness, acknowledges his motives to himself. His delay in granting the widow's petition, and his final yielding, come from the same motive —his own convenience. It was troublesome to do as she wished, but when it became more troublesome not to do it, he did it. The judge is meant to be as much unlike our Judge as can be conceived. The widow is meant to be like the true disciple. She is the figure of God's "own elect, which cry day and night unto Him"; and that not only in her persistence, but in her desolation. Whether we bring into connection the frequent Scriptural emblem of the bride, and think of the state of the Church during her Lord's absence as widowhood, as we should probably do, or content ourselves with the vaguer interpretation, which regards her simply as afflicted, and the prey of oppressors, she represents the state of the Church in the absence of her Lord. The Eastern widow has no protectors, and, therefore, many oppressors; and if she can find no redress from the law, she is desolate indeed. Her prayer does not breathe so fierce a spirit as "avenge" suggests. What she asks is deliverance for herself, rather than vengeance on her foe. The deliverance cannot, indeed, be accomplished without retribution on the oppressor, but that is not the primary burden of her prayer.

II. **Our Lord's comment.**—The argument is a "much more." Every point in the description of the Unjust Judge is to be reversed, and then we shall have the picture of our Judge. He does not delay for His own ease; He is not careless to our sorrows, nor deaf to our prayer. If His judgment seems to slumber, the delay is the tarrying of love, and is for the good of the Church. When the intervention comes, it will not be wrung from an indifferent hand by fear of being troubled, but be the loving gift of Him who knows when, as well as how, to grant deliverance. The whole teaches—1. That the Church will have to pass through a period of desolation and oppression, which will only end with Christ's coming. 2. That its true attitude during that time should be earnest desire and prayer for that coming. 3. That there will be long delay. 4. That this delay is not the result of carelessness towards the Church's need and cry, and so that no delay should deaden faith or silence entreaty. Jesus adds further an assurance and a sad question. The assurance is that whensoever deliverance comes, the thing will be done suddenly. The law of God's judgments is that they travel slowly, but come suddenly at last, and are "a short work." The final question is really a sad prediction. "But"—notwithstanding the certainty, and My assurance of it—"the faith" in His coming (not merely "faith" in the wider sense of the word) will have waxed dim. This closing word at once shows the correctness of the interpretation, which gives a special direction to the persevering prayer enjoined, and enforces the exhortation by the consideration of the danger to which the waiting servants are exposed."—*Maclaren.*

SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS ON VERSES 1—14.

Vers. 1-14. *Lessons on Prayer.*

I. **A lesson on prayer.**

II. **A lesson from a widow's urgency** (vers. 2-5).—1. An unjust judge will listen to an urgent suitor. How much more will a holy, righteous, and merciful God! 2. A friendless widow, by perseverance, gained her cause. How much more will God's "own elect," His own children, get a speedy answer when they cry to Him!

III. **Lessons from a Pharisee and a Publican.**—Contrast the attitude, the prayer, the failure, of the one, with the attitude, the prayer, the success, of the other.—*W. Taylor.*

A Parable on Prayer.—Luke's second parable on prayer (see xi. 5-14), peculiar to his gospel. Summing up the whole widowed life of the Church in her life of prayer. *How to pray* (1-9). *How not* to pray (12-14). An impressive instance of Luke's method of balance by contrast.—*Alexander.*

Vers. 1-8. *Perseverance in Prayer.*—From the lessons Jesus taught His disciples on perseverance in prayer, it appears how well aware He was that God shows Himself so little like a Father that those who trust in Him are tempted to think Him rather like a man of selfish spirit, or like an unjust judge, who is indifferent to right. The relevancy of this parable requires that this character should be regarded as representing God, not as He is indeed, but as He seems to tried faith. The didactic drift of the parable is: You will have to wait on God, possibly till hope deferred make the heart sick; but it is worth your while to wait.—*Bruce.*

"*Always to pray.*"—The story and the lesson in this parable are not as parallel rods, but the one is laid across the other, and they touch only at *one* point. That one point is "always to pray, and not to faint." Thus, "the key of this parable is hung up on the door." This parable teaches how to pray for ourselves. Put all your soul and strength into your prayers; keep on praying under God's delays.

I. **The helpless.**—In the East widows are the most helpless of beings. Your soul is even as this widow. It is in great need. There is no help for you in yourself.

II. **The helper.**—God has boundless store, and is not troubled by your coming to Him. Turn to the Mighty for help.

III. **The appeal.**—Let it be definite, earnest, for things good and right. God's delays are not denials. So we must persevere in prayer.

IV. **Encouragements.**—God loves to be pressed. The lesson is taught by contrast and unlikeness. Would you make God worse than a godless judge?—*Wells.*

"*Continue in prayer.*"

Many get discouraged in praying because the answer does not come at once.—It should be settled in the mind—

I. **That God always hears the true prayer,** and that He will always send an answer, though it may not always be the answer we desire. God's plans reach out widely, and work slowly.

II. **The reason of God's delay may be to increase our earnestness.**—The story of the Syro-Phenician woman illustrates this.

III. **Many prayers are never answered because men faint at God's delay.**—A little longer patient perseverance would have brought you a great reward. Many lose heart just when the answer is about to be granted.—*Miller.*

A Strong Argument.—The argument, as in the case of the Unjust Steward, is *à fortiori*: "If such be the power of earnest entreaty that it can win right, even from a man sunk in selfishness, and fearing neither God nor man, how much more will the right be done by the just and holy God, in answer to the continual prayer of His elect!"—even though, when this very right is asserted in the world by the coming of the Son of Man, He may hardly find among His people the power to believe it; though few of them will have shown this unweariedness of entreaty which the poor widow showed.—*Alford.*

Ver. 1. "*Men ought.*"—1. Prayer a duty. 2. Binding on all. 3. Always to be maintained. 4. To be offered fervently.

"*To faint.*"—Said properly of a coward in battle. Prayer is here spoken of as a *militia* or warfare. The arms of the Church are prayers. The Church militant is the Church supplicant. Her congregations for public prayer are her armies of soldiers storm-

ing the gates of heaven with a siege of prayers.—*Wordsworth.*

Discouragement.—The danger of discouragement arises from the delay in receiving an answer, while the adversary continues to harass.

Ver. 3. "*A widow.*"—In its struggles with the world, and with sin within or around it, while feeling abandoned by God (of which condition we have a picture in the case of Job), and left without earthly support or help, the soul resembles a widow, who in vain entreats the assistance of a wicked judge. But perseverance in prayer overcomes at last even the severity of heaven.—*Olshausen.*

Loneliness and Helplessness.—Every soul conscious of its loneliness, conscious that it has no help, save in God only, is a widow.—*Augustine.*

Ver. 3. "*Avenge me of mine adversary.*"—Here we see the Church, which in her nature and her destiny is the bride of Christ, and waits for His festal appearance, in the form of a widow. Matters have the look as if her betrothed spouse were dead at a distance. Meanwhile, she lives in a city where she is continually oppressed by a grievous adversary, the prince of this world. But since she continually calls on God for help, it may, in a weak hour, appear to her as if He had become the Unjust Judge over her—as if He were dealing entirely without Divine righteousness and without love to man. But she perseveres in prayer for His coming to redeem her, and although this is long delayed, because God has a celestially broad mind and view, and accordingly trains His children for Himself to the great spiritual life of eternity, yet it comes at last with surprising quickness.—*Lange.*

Ver. 4. "*Would not.*"—The only way in which to move such a man was either (1) to bribe him, or (2) to intimidate him, or (3) to weary him into attending to the petition. The widow's poverty and weakness left her with only the third resource.

Ver. 5. "*Weary me.*"—The word ὑπωπιάζω is well known to have been a pugilistic term, corresponding to the word "punish" in the slang of the "ring," but having special reference to the eyes of an antagonist. St. Paul uses the word in a sense less removed from the primary in 1 Cor. ix. 27, "I punish my body." In our Lord's parable the word has departed still further from its primary sense, and in the mouth of the Unjust Judge is clearly "slang." It is the poor widow who is to "bruise" the lazy judge, not by blows nor by unsparing treatment, but simply by importunity. I know of no English equivalent which at all preserves the metaphor, except the slang word "bore," and that is founded, apparently, on a different though not very dissimilar analogy. I suppose that a man is "bored" when the sharp pertinacity of another threatens, as it were, to drill a hole into him, as the ceaseless turning of a metal point will bore the hardest rock. The Greek equivalent is the more expressive of the two. It is well known that the constant repetition of a very light stroke upon the body will produce a painful bruise at last. I do not know, however, how the sentence can be better rendered in English than, "lest by her continual coming she bore me."—*R. Winterbotham.*

Ver. 6. "*Hear what the unjust judge saith.*"—Cf. xvi. 8, where another lesson is drawn from the conduct of an unrighteous man. "Though the language of the Unjust Judge be revolting, yet take notice of it and observe the lesson that may be drawn from it."

Ver. 7. "*Shall not God?*"—Since (1) He is not an unjust, but a righteous judge, and (2) the supplicant is not a stranger, but His own elect.

"*Cry day and night.*"—The best illustration of this text is to be derived from the prayer of the souls of the elect of God, under the altar (Rev. vi. 9, 10), which cry with a loud voice, saying, "How long, O Lord, holy and true, dost Thou not judge and avenge our blood on them that dwell on the earth"?—*i.e.*, on the powers of this world.

Conditions of Importunate Prayer.

I. **Sense of need.**
II. **Desire to get.**
III. **Belief that God has in store what we desire.**
IV. **Belief that, though He withholds awhile, He loves to be asked.**
V. **Belief that asking will obtain.**—*Arnot.*

"*Speedily.*"—The relief, which to man's impatience tarries long, indeed arrives speedily; it could not, according to the far-seeing and loving counsels of God, have arrived a moment earlier. Not while Lazarus is merely sick—not till he has been four days dead—does Jesus obey the summons of the sisters whom He loved so well (John xi. 6). The disciples, labouring in vain against a stormy sea, must have looked often to that mountain where they had left their Lord; but not till the last watch—not till they have toiled through a weary night—does He bring the aid so long desired (Matt. xiv. 24, 25).—*Trench.*

Ver. 8. "*Nevertheless.*"—The fear is not that the judge will delay granting the succour needed, but that the supplicants will cease asking for it.

"*Shall He find faith?*"—Our Lord spoke these words to show that when faith fails, prayer dies. In order to pray, then, we must have faith; and that our faith fail not, we must pray. Faith pours forth prayer; and the pouring forth of the heart in prayer gives steadfastness to faith.—*Augustine.*

"*Find faith.*"—Cf. Matt. xxiv. 12: "Because iniquity shall abound, the love of many shall wax cold."

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 9—14.

Self-righteousness and Humility.—This is a parable which sets forth one of the great laws of the kingdom of God, viewed as a kingdom of *grace*—that enunciated in the closing verse: "Every one that exalteth himself shall be abased; and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted." We shall best study the parable by making our starting-point the judgment of Jesus on the two men whose characters are so graphically depicted in it, and considering, in order, these points: First, the import of the judgment; second, its grounds; third, its uses.

I. **It is declared that the publican went down to his house justified rather than the Pharisee.**—We must assume that it is not intended to call in question the statements of fact made by the two parties. Neither is supposed to have borne false witness for or against himself, whether in ignorance or with intent to deceive. Even the self-laudatory statements of the Pharisee are allowed to pass unquestioned. What is blamed is not his statement of facts, but the spirit in which he makes that statement—the spirit of *self-complacency.* There is the less reason to doubt this that the Pharisee is not represented as uttering his prayer aloud. He took up his posture and prayed thus *with himself.* Had his prayer been intended for the public ear, there would probably have been in it less depreciation of others and also less praise of himself. But just on that account there would have been less sincerity, less fidelity to the actual thoughts and feelings of the man. And just because it is a heart-prayer it is a true prayer, reflecting his real belief. It is his self-complacency alone, therefore, not its fact-basis which is liable to question. The publican's account of himself is also as-

sumed to be correct. Our Lord does not mean to say this publican was mistaken in imagining himself to be so great a sinner. He is a sinner, as he says in words; a great sinner, as he declares by significant gesture. The validity of the judgment pronounced concerning him does not at all rest on the comparative smallness of his guilt. These things being so, it is clear how the judgment must be understood. It means, not that the publican is a just man, and the Pharisee an unjust, but the publican is nearer the approval of God than the other who approves himself. The approval or good-will of God is what both are seeking. Both address God. The one says, "God, I thank Thee"; the other, "God, be gracious unto me." The one expects God to endorse the good opinion he entertains of himself; the other begs God to be merciful to him, notwithstanding his sin.

II. **The grounds of the judgment.**—Only one reason is expressly referred to by Christ; but there is another reason implied. It is this: The publican's *self-dissatisfaction* had more truth or religious sincerity in it than the Pharisee's *self-complacency*, and God, as the Psalmist tells us, desires and is pleased with truth in the inward parts. The statements he made did not, even if true, warrant self-complacency. Each act of thanksgiving might have been followed by an act of confession. "I have not been an extortioner, but I have often coveted what was not my own. I have not been unjust, but I have been far from generous. I have not been an adulterer, but my heart has harboured many wicked thoughts." For all the truly good are conscious that they have confessions to make which exclude all boasting. Another index of the self-complacent Pharisees' want of truth in the deeper sense is that, while apparently unconscious of any sins of his own, he is very much alive to the sins of others. With a coarse, sweeping indiscriminateness he pronounces all men but himself guilty, and guilty of the grossest sins. He makes himself very good by the cheap method of making all others very bad. Our Lord expressly states a reason in support of His judgment concerning the two men. "Every one that exalteth himself shall be abased, and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted." This statement is valuable, as teaching that self-praise and self-condemnation produce the same effects on the Divine mind as on our own minds. When a man praises himself in our hearing, the act provokes in us the spirit of criticism; when, on the other hand, we hear a man condemn himself, there arises in our bosom a feeling of sympathy towards him. Just the same effects do the same acts, Christ gives us to understand, produce on the mind of God. And with His teaching all Scripture agrees. God forgives sins to such as acknowledge them, and imputes sins to such as deny them, for this among other reasons, because it gives Him pleasure to exalt those who humble themselves, and to humble those who exalt themselves.

III. **The uses of the judgment.**—We learn from the verdict pronounced on the two worshippers that it is necessary, in order to please God, to be sincere and to be humble; but we may not hence infer that we are saved by our sincerity or by our humility. We are not saved by these virtues, any more than by boasting of our goodness, but by the free grace of God. From the introductory words we learn that the chief purpose of the parable was to rebuke and subdue the spirit of self-righteousness; another purpose, doubtless, was to revive the spirit of the contrite and to embolden them to hope in God's mercy. This is a service which contrite souls greatly need to have rendered them, for they are slow to believe that they can possibly be the objects of Divine complacency. Such, in all probability, was the publican's state of mind, not only before but even after he prayed. He went down to his house justified in God's sight, but not, we think, in his own. Think not, He would say to such as he, that God casts the poor, nervous, desponding penitent out of His sympathies. Nay! the Lord is nigh unto them that are of a broken heart. Who can tell how many repentant ones went down to

their houses cheered by the words which had fallen from the lips of the sinner's Friend! Let us use the parable for kindred purposes still; learning from it ourselves to cherish hopeful views concerning such as are more persuaded of their own sinfulness than of Divine mercy, and doing what we can to help such to believe that verily there is forgiveness with God.—*Bruce.*

SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS ON VERSES 9—14.

Vers. 9-14. *Two Prayers.*

I. **The place of prayer.**

II. **The Pharisee's prayer.**—He forgets the evil he had and the good he had not. He did not see himself as God saw him. He does not ask for anything. He does not pray for the publican. He only thanks God he is not like him.

III. **The publican's prayer.**—How short it is! How earnest he is! He feels his great need. He receives the blessing. What a load is lifted off his soul!—*Watson.*

Two Prayers.—Here we have two kinds of prayer set side by side for our instruction.

I. **The first is really no prayer at all,** but only a bit of self-felicitation in the presence of God. It has no adoration, no confession, no supplication. This Pharisee has many followers. Many there are whose whole stock of piety consists in not being so bad as some others are. But it is a poor kind of virtue which has nothing better to build on than such imperfect relative goodness.

II. **The other man's prayer was altogether different.**—There was no measuring of himself with other people. There was no going over sins he had *not* committed. There was no mention of his neighbour's sins, but freedom in speaking of his own. He was burdened with the consciousness of personal guilt, and cried to God for undeserved mercy, to be granted wholly through grace. This is true prayer. The prayer of the penitent reaches heaven. God wants this honesty and humility in our supplications. The particular sinner with whose sins each man ought to be most concerned is himself.—*Miller.*

Two Men at Prayer.

I. **The proud man's prayer.**—1. It was full of boasting words. 2. It did not speak about his sins. 3. It did not ask God for anything. It was therefore not a real prayer at all.

II. **The humble man's prayer.**—1. He calls himself a sinner. 2. He begs for mercy. 3. His words are few, but they come from the heart. His prayer was answered. It was a true prayer.—*W. Taylor.*

The Pharisee and the Publican.

I. **The wrong religion.**—His prayer reveals the man. It is made up of self-trust and scorn of others. Self-praise is not comely. A proud prayer is a prayerless prayer. This man confesses only the sins of other men. This Pharisaic spirit lurks in every heart, and must be starved and killed. Even in true Christians traces of the Pharisee may often be found.

II. **The right religion.**—His prayer shows a full belief. 1. *In man's great misery.* Like the pilgrim, he has one burden, and pardon is his one need. 2. *God's greater mercy.* The word he uses means the mercy of propitiation and reconciliation. This man learned God's mercy in learning his own misery. Sin and salvation are the two foundation-stones of the right religion.—*Wells.*

Points of Resemblance and of Difference.

I. **Points of resemblance.**—1. Both sinful, though their sinfulness took different forms. 2. Both worshippers of God. 3. Both examine their own lives and characters.

II. **Points of difference.**—1. The Pharisee plumes himself upon his superiority to others; the Publican is consumed by the thought of his own

unworthiness. 2. The Pharisee finds in his life a righteousness beyond even the requirements of God's law; the Publican has no ground of hope but in the compassion of God. 3. The Pharisee has much to say; the Publican can only ejaculate one sentence. 4. The Publican is accepted with God; the Pharisee is not.

Ver. 9. "*Trusted in themselves.*"—Probably these were not Pharisees, for in that case the figure of a Pharisee would not have been held up to them as a similitude. Some of Christ's own followers evidently had given indications of trust in their own righteousness, or of contempt towards others.

Ver. 10. *The Pharisee and the Publican.*—Two extreme types of worshippers. What a contrast!

I. **The Pharisee.**—1. His advantages. 2. His drawbacks.

II. **The Publican.**—1. His drawbacks. 2. His advantages.—*Davies.*

Ver. 11. *The Pharisee.*—In the Pharisee and the Publican were represented the very poles of religious and social respectability. We are now concerned with the Pharisee.

I. **The Pharisees, as the name implies, were, before all things, men who insisted on their separateness from others.**—Their duty was to avoid all intercourse with or assimilation to the Gentile world. They multiplied all outward signs which could distinguish them from the heathen, or from those of their countrymen who seemed to have a fancy for heathen ways. In many respects they contrasted favourably with the latitudinarian Sadducees.

II. **The Pharisee, as representing the religious world of Judæa, seems to have everything in his favour, as he goes up to the Temple to pray.**—What is it in his prayer that our Lord condemns? It was that his religion centred, not in God, but in himself, and was, therefore, no religion at all. He asks God for nothing—no pardon, no mercy, no grace. He feels the need of nothing.

III. **The Pharisees have long disappeared from history; but the spirit of Pharisaism survives,** and our Lord's sentence on it holds good for all time. No one is safe from the infection of the Pharisaic spirit; no precautions, surely, will be thought unnecessary which may help to keep it at bay.—*Liddon.*

Vers. 11, 12. *The Pharisee's Errors.*—1. He thought of God as satisfied with external conduct and not as requiring purity and humility of heart. 2. He failed to see his shortcomings, and exaggerated his virtues. 3. He despised others.

The Pharisee's Ground of Confidence.—1. That he was not so bad as other men. 2. That he was not guilty of gross sins. 3. That he paid attention to external precepts of religion.

The Pharisee's Prayer.—1. He shows what he *is*. 2. What he *does*. 3. What he *gives*.

Ver. 11. "*Prayed thus.*"—It was less a prayer of thanksgiving to God than a congratulatory address to himself. True thanksgiving is always accompanied by and inspired by humility.

"*I thank thee.*"—Though in the form of a prayer, the Pharisee boasts of his superiority to others. It is possible to thank God for what we do and become more than others (1 Cor. xv. 9, 10), but such a thanksgiving springs out of the most profound humility.

"*As other men.*"—Or rather, "as the rest of men" (R.V.) He divides mankind into two classes—the evil and the good, and he finds himself standing almost alone in the latter.

Ver. 12. "*This publican.*"—His eye alighting on the publican, of whom he may have known nothing but that he *was* a publican, he drags him into his prayer, making him to furnish the dark background on which the bright colours of his own virtues shall more

gloriously be displayed; finding, it may be, in the deep heart-earnestness with which the contrite man beat his breast, in the fixedness of his downcast eyes, proofs in confirmation of the judgment which he passes upon him. *He*, thank God, has no need to beat his breast in that fashion, nor to cast his eyes in that shame upon the ground.—*Trench.*

Ver. 13. "*Standing afar off.*"—*I.e.*, from the altar of burnt-offering, in contrast with the Pharisee who took up his place near it.

The Publican an Example. — The Publican affords us an example worthy of imitation. 1. In his profound sense of the Divine holiness. 2. In his contrition for sin. 3. In his open and free confession of unworthiness. 4. In his cry for mercy.

The Publican Shows Humility—1. In his posture. 2. By his action. 3. By the matter and form of his prayer.

"*His eyes.*"—Fear and shame cause him to keep his eyes upon the ground.

"*His breast.*"—The seat of conscience.

"*A sinner.*"—To the Pharisee all are sinners, and he only is righteous; to the Publican all are righteous, and he only the sinner.—*Westermeier.*

"*Me a sinner.*"—Or "the sinner" (R.V.). As the Pharisee saw in himself nothing but righteousness, so the Publican saw in himself nothing but sin.

Ver. 14. *The Fate of the Two Prayers.* —The Publican's prayer, like incense, ascended into heaven, a sacrifice of sweet savour, while the prayer of the Pharisee was blown back like smoke into his own eyes; for "God resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble."—*Trench.*

Something in Both to Be Avoided, Something to Be Copied.—We should avoid the Pharisee's pride, but not neglect his performances; we should forsake the Publican's sins and retain his humility.—*Chrysostom.*

"*Justified.*"—Accepted by God as righteous. The Pharisee had in form attributed the excellencies he found in his own character and life to the grace of God, but the relish with which he recounts his virtues shows plainly that under the guise of humility pride was lurking. His prayer contained no request, and drew down no blessing. But the Publican's request, proffered in humility, was granted.

Justification.—In all the passages in St. Luke where the word is used (chaps. vii. 29, 35, x. 29, xvi. 15), its plain meaning is to *declare* righteous and not to *make* righteous. The Publican prays for mercy; the Pharisee trusts in his own righteousness. God accepts the Publican as righteous, but does not endorse the Pharisee's judgment on himself. This use of the word "justify" is not peculiar to the Pauline epistles; we find it in the Old Testament (Isa. l. 8, liii. 11; Ps. cxliii. 2).

The Two Men.

Two went to pray; or rather say,
One went to brag, the other to pray;
One stands up close, and treads on high,
Where th' other dare not send his eye.
One nearer to the altar trod,
The other to the altar's God.

Crashaw.

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 15—30.

How to Enter the Kingdom.—All three evangelists bring together these two incidents of the children in Christ's arms and the young ruler. Probably they were connected in time as well as in subject. Both set forth the conditions of entering the kingdom, which the one declares to be lowliness and trust, and the other to be self-renunciation.

I. **The child-likeness of the subjects of the kingdom.**—No doubt there was a dash of superstition in the impulse that moved the parents to bring their children to Jesus, but it was an eminently natural desire to win a good man's blessing, and one to which every parent's heart will respond. It was not the superstition, but the intrusive familiarity, that provoked the disciples' rebuke. The tender age of the children is to be noted. They were "babes," and had to be brought, being too young to walk, and so having scarcely arrived at conscious voluntary life. It is "of such" that the subjects of the kingdom are composed. What, then, are the qualities which, by this comparison, Jesus requires? Certainly not innocence, which would be to contradict all His teaching and to shut out the prodigals and publicans. Besides, these scarcely conscious infants were not "innocent," for they had not come to the age of which either innocence or guilt can be predicated. Perhaps Ps. cxxxi. puts us best on the track of the answer. It may have been in our Lord's mind; it certainly corresponds to His thought. The infant's lowliness is not yet humility, for it is instinct rather than virtue. It makes no claims, thinks no lofty thoughts of self—in fact, has scarcely begun to know that there is a self at all. On the other hand, clinging trust is the infant's life. It, too, is rudimentary and instinctive, but the impulse which makes the babe nestle in its mother's bosom may well stand for a picture of the conscious trust which the children of the kingdom must have. The child's instinct is the man's virtue. There is no place in the kingdom for those who trust in themselves. We must rely wholly on God manifest in His Son.

II. **Self-renunciation as the condition of entering the kingdom.**—1. *Its necessity.* This is set forth in the conversation with the ruler. The ruler's question has much blended good and evil. It expresses a true earnestness, a dissatisfaction with self, a consciousness of unattained bliss and a longing for it, a felt readiness to take any pains to secure it, a confidence in Christ's guidance—in short, much of the child spirit. But it has also a too light estimate of what goodness is, a mistaken notion that eternal life can be won by external deeds, which implies fatal error as to its nature and his own power to do these deeds. This superficial estimate of goodness, and this over-confidence in his ability to do good acts, are the twin mistakes against which Christ's treatment of him is directed. Jesus does not deny that He has a right to the title "good," but questions this man's right to give it Him. He thought of Jesus only as a man, and, so thinking, was too ready with his adjective. He who is so liberal with his ascriptions of goodness needs to have his notions of what it is elevated. Jesus lays down the great truth which this man, in his confidence that he, by his own power, could do any good needed for eternal life, was perilously forgetting. God is the only good, and therefore all human goodness must come from Him; and if the ruler is to do "good," he must first be good by receiving goodness from God. Christ, having tried to deepen his conceptions and awaken his consciousness of imperfection, meets him on his own ground by referring him to the Law, which abundantly answered his inquiry. The second half of the commandments are alone quoted by Him, for they have especially to do with conduct, and the infractions of them are more easily recognised than those of the first. The ruler protested that he had done all these ever since he was a lad. No doubt he had, and his coming to Jesus confessed that, though he had, the doing had not brought him eternal life. What was lacking? The soul of goodness, without which these other things were "dead works." And what is that soul? Absolute self-renunciation and following Christ. For this man the former took the shape of parting with his wealth, but that external renunciation in itself was as "dead" and impotent to bring eternal life as all his other good acts had been. It was precious as a means to an end—the entrance into the number of Christ's disciples—and as an expression of that inward self-surrender which is essential for discipleship. The requirement

pierced to the quick. The man loved the world more than eternal life, after all. But though he went away, he went sorrowful, and that was, perhaps, the presage that he would come back. 2. *The difficulty of self-renunciation* (vers. 24-27). The exclamation of Jesus is full of the charity which makes allowance for temptation. It speaks a universal truth, never more needed than in our days. How few of us believe that it gets harder for us to be disciples as we grow richer! What a depth of vulgar admiration of the power of money is in the disciple's exclamation, "If rich men cannot get into the kingdom, who can get in?" Or it may mean, Who can fulfil such a difficult condition? The answer points us all to the only power by which we can do good and overcome self—viz., by God's help. God is "good," and we can be good too if we look to Him. God will fill our souls with such sweetness that earth will not be hard to part with. 3. *The reward of self-renunciation.* It would have been better if Peter had not boasted of their surrender, but yet it was true that they had given up all. Jesus does not rebuke the almost innocent self-congratulation, but recognises in it an appeal to His faithfulness. It was really a prayer, though it sounded like a vaunt, and it is answered by renewed assurances. To part with outward things for Christ's sake, or for the kingdom's sake—which is the same thing—is to win them again with all their sweetness a hundredfold sweeter. Gifts given to Him come back to the giver, enhanced by His touch and hallowed by lying on His altar. The present world yields its full riches only to the man who surrenders all to Jesus. —*Maclaren.*

SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS ON VERSES 15—30.

Vers. 15-17. *The Children and Christ.*

I. **By whom were they brought to Christ?**—We infer that they were brought by their own parents. Who else were likely to be so interested in them? Who were so likely to solicit for them the Saviour's benediction? Ought it not to be so still?

II. **Of what age were they?**—Of various ages, but all of tender years, some being mere infants. Some step by their parents' sides, some are led by the father's hand, some are gently borne in the maternal arms.

III. **The purpose for which they were brought to Jesus.**—That He might *pray* for them. In response to this request He took them up in His arms and *blessed* them. Good higher than merely temporal welfare was sought, health better than that of the body. All through after-life their faith would be helped and their hearts cheered by remembrance of the fact.

IV. **What reception was given to them by the disciples?**—They interposed to prevent the parents' nearer approach with their children. The prohibition was harsh and blind. How little they knew Christ's heart! Was there a father among them?

V. **What reception was given to them by Jesus Himself?**—He was displeased at the disciples' rebuke. He called the little ones near. He directly addressed and blessed them. For His gracious words countless parents all the world over and in every age have blessed His gracious name.—*Edmond.*

Christ's Welcome to Children.

I. **The bringing.**
II. **The hindrance.**
III. **The rebuke.**
IV. **The lessons.**—*W. Taylor.*

Christ's words imply—

I. **That children, even mere babes, may be regenerated and truly holy.**

II. **That infants may become members of the visible Church.**

III. **That children are very early capable of receiving benefit from religious instruction.**

IV. **That the true Church on earth actually consists, in a great measure, of those who have been called in early**

life, or at least have been very early instructed in the way of salvation.

V. **That the kingdom of God above consists, in a large degree, of those who have died in infancy and childhood.**

Ver. 15. "*Also infants.*"—The phrase used by St. Luke, which might be translated "even infants," is meant to indicate the reverential feelings of those now about Jesus. Even their children they desired to be touched and blessed by Him.

Ver. 16. *Children Examples to Us.*—Children are examples to us (1) in their humility, and (2) in their trustfulness. What they are naturally we should strive to become.

Ver. 17. *Humility of Children a Pattern.*—It is the humility of children to which our Lord represents it as necessary that men should be converted, and this humility as exemplified in the mode of receiving the kingdom. There are three senses in which this humility may be understood.

I. **As opposed to the pride of intellectual self-sufficiency.**—In receiving the *doctrine* of the kingdom in a spirit of docility, without doubting or disputation; as when the child shall receive his father's word with implicit faith.

II. **As opposed to the pride of self-righteousness.**—In receiving the *blessings* of the kingdom without any consciousness of desert; as when the child shall expect and take favours at his father's hand, without the faintest sentiment of any merits of his own.

III. **As opposed to ambitious pride.**—In receiving the kingdom in a spirit of love for the brethren, without contention for pre-eminence; as when the nobleman's child shall, if permitted, make a companion of the beggar's, on a footing of the most perfect equality. —*Anderson.*

Resemblance to Children.—Disciples should resemble children (1) in teachableness, and (2) in freedom from worldly desires.

The disciples thought it was necessary for the children to become like them before the interest of the Saviour in them would be excited, and are taught that they themselves must become like children before they could enter into the kingdom of heaven.

Vers. 18-30. *Entering the Kingdom.*—Dante calls this incident "the great refusal." It is one to arrest the attention of the most careless. But it should be linked on with the previous incident of the blessing of the children. This ruler could not enter the kingdom, because he would not receive it as a little child. His spirit was far removed from the obedient, trustful disposition of the little child. Jesus deals very gently, not harshly, with him. He took him on his own ground, and led him by a very simple test to realise that he hardly knew what keeping the commandments meant. Was not the sum of the commandments, "Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself"? Tried by the lesser table of the Law he failed utterly. He would not part with his wealth for the poor. Christ did not need to test him by the greater table of the Law. Thus he was led to see how it was impossible for him to inherit eternal life by keeping the commandments. Even if he had stood the test, there was still the summons, "Come, follow Me." Not even by selling all we have, but by following Jesus, is the way to inherit eternal life.—*Hastings.*

Christ's Word to the Wealthy Ruler.
I. **The earnest question.**
II. **The willing answer.**
III. **The simple but sufficient test.**
IV. **The sad failure.**—*W. Taylor.*

A Young Man Seeking Jesus.
I. **His worthy aim.**
II. **His consistent life.**
III. **His lack of self-knowledge.**
IV. **His darling sin.**
V. **His great refusal.**—*Ibid.*

I. **The conversation with the young ruler** (vers. 18-23).

II. **The conversation on the subject of riches suggested by his conduct** (vers. 24-27).

III. **The conversation with the disciples concerning their having obeyed the summons which the young ruler refused to obey.**

Vers. 18-27. *A Warning.*—We have here—1. Another warning against self-righteousness and boasting, or thinking highly of our own deeds. 2. Against the sin and danger of an undue attachment to the things of this world.

Ver. 18. *Favourable Circumstances.*—This man appears here in a very favourable light.

I. **Though young and wealthy, he was of irreproachable moral character.**

II. **He had spiritual cravings which he was anxious to satisfy.**

III. **Unlike many of his class, he believed that Jesus could give him authoritative direction as to the way to attain eternal life.**

IV. **He came openly to proffer his request.**

Ver. 19. "*None is good, save One.*"—The declaration is the expression of the same humble subordination to God, penetrated by which Jesus also, although knowing Himself one with the Father, yet designates the Father as the One sending Him, teaching Him, sanctifying Him, glorifying Him—in one word, as the greater. Ever, indeed, is the Father the original source, as of all being, so of all goodness—the absolutely Good, in His holiness ever the same, while in contrast with Him, even the Son, as man, is one developing in goodness and holiness, perfecting Himself through prayers, conflicts, sorrows, and suffering, unto Divine glory.—*Ullman.*

Ver. 20. *The Law and The Gospel.*—Jesus refers the self-righteous to the *Law*, to convict them of sin; to the humble He preaches the *gospel.*

Ver. 21. "*All these have I kept.*"—This reply testifies, no doubt, to great *moral ignorance* on the part of the speaker, but it is also proof of a *noble sincerity.* He has never known the spiritual significance of the commandments, and therefore believes that he has fully kept them."—*Godet.*

Ver. 22. "*One thing thou lackest.*"—1. A gracious acknowledgment of an attractive character—*one* thing only lacking. 2. An earnest warning, since this one thing was the one thing needful.

Ver. 23. "*Very sorrowful.*"—The Gospel of the Hebrews amplifies this incident as follows: "Then the rich man began to scratch his head, for he was displeased by that saying; and the Lord said to him, How, then, canst thou say, I have accomplished the Law; since it is written in the Law, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself; and here are many of thy brethren, children of Abraham, who live in misery, and are perishing with hunger, while thy table is loaded with good things, and nothing goes from it to them!"

Ver. 24. "*How hardly!*" *etc.*—It is not the mere fact of possessing wealth which hinders the soul from rising to spiritual things, but the sense of security which wealth is liable to bring with it. Hence, according to St. Mark, Jesus explains this statement by describing the persons alluded to as those "*who trust in riches.*"

Ver. 25. *The Temptation of The Rich.*—In other words, a rich man *is*, so far as his riches are concerned, in a more difficult position for the attainment of heavenly-mindedness, and, therefore, for that humility of spirit and disengagement from the cares and snares of life, which are essential to all who would enter God's kingdom, than a poor man is. Poverty also has its own temptations, and God either equalises the lots of men, or, at any

rate, sends no severer temptation without also sending "*more grace*" whereby to resist it (James iv. 6). Along with the temptation He provides also the way of escape (1 Cor. x. 13). And, since men have always loved and always will love, riches, the Lord desired to force upon us the conviction that if we would increase our wealth we run a terrible risk of also increasing our worldliness. From this inordinate love of riches, simply, we *cannot* be saved by our own power. Left to ourselves we should fail utterly in the attempt to combine the love of God with the deceitfulness of earthly mammon. But we are not left to ourselves. The salvation of the soul, in the midst of earthly riches, requires *a spiritual miracle*, a miracle of the grace of God. But, so far from miracles being rare, we live in the midst of them. Without them no man could be saved at all, least of all any man who has so much about him as the rich have to make this world sweet and easy. Souls are saved, men enter into the heavenly kingdom, in spite of difficulties humanly insuperable, and only because nothing is impossible with God.—*Farrar.*

Ver. 26. "*Who, then, can be saved?*"—*I.e.*, because all are striving to be rich. We must remember, too, that the disciples yet looked for a temporal kingdom, and therefore would naturally be dismayed at hearing that it was so difficult for any rich man to enter it.

Ver. 27. "*Possible with God.*"—Thus, in the twinkling of an eye, Jesus raises the mind of His hearers from human endeavours, of which alone the young ruler was thinking, to that Divine work of radical reformation which proceeds from Him who only is Good, and of which Jesus is the instrument. Cf. John iii. 2-5 for a similar rapid change of idea.—*Godet.*

Ver. 28. "*We have left all.*"—They had stood the test which had proved too hard for the young ruler; to them, as to him, the alternative had been given of cleaving to the world or of cleaving to Christ. What, then, should be their reward?

Vers. 29, 30. *Two Aspects of Piety.*

I. **The gospel a present blessing.**—1. To the person. 2. To our associations. 3. To our circumstances. 4. To mankind at large.

II. **The Gospel a future expectation.**—1. Every present blessing is an earnest of the future. 2. Every present effort is a preparation for the future. 3. Every present experience creates a desire for endless life.

Ver. 29. "*Left house or parents,*" etc.—The gain is a hundredfold the sacrifice, and is received at once; it comes "in the form of a re-construction of all human relationships and affections, on a Christian basis and amongst Christians, after they have been sacrificed in their natural form on the altar of love to Christ."

Ver. 30. "*Manifold more.*"—The reward, disproportionate to the sacrifices made, (1) illustrates the generosity of the Master; (2) is humbling to the disciple, for he still remains a debtor to Divine grace.

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 31—34.

The Third Announcement of The Passion.—Jesus and the twelve were now on their way up to Jerusalem to be present at the celebration of the feast of the Passover. But though He was surrounded by disciples, and accompanied by crowds of pilgrims, He was isolated in thought from all who journeyed with Him. The multitude anticipated the coming of the kingdom of God in connection with His arrival in the holy city (chap. xix. 11); the disciples were intent upon ambitious schemes for securing places of honour in that kingdom (Matt. xx. 20-28); while He mused upon the sufferings and death which were now so near Him.

I. **The prediction.**—Special solemnity marked the manner in which Jesus communicated His thoughts to the disciples. He took them apart, probably in order to isolate them from the multitude, whose ignorant enthusiasm might have been set on fire by the announcement of the dangers which threatened Him, and to impress upon His disciples the deep significance of the communication He was now making to them. The minuteness and accuracy of the prediction are very remarkable. Vague forebodings of disaster are all that any mere man, placed in similar circumstances to those in which Jesus now was, would experience. But Jesus has special knowledge of all that awaits Him. His enemies are the chief priests and scribes and elders; but with them will be allied the Gentiles, as the actual inflictors of death. He foresees the mocking, and scourging, and all the brutal ill-treatment of which He will be the victim. And as plainly as the details of His suffering are foreseen by Him is the certainty of His resurrection from the dead after three days present to His thoughts. No less remarkable is the calmness with which He makes this announcement. He utters no lamentation or complaint, He manifests no reluctance, but, with unfaltering resolution, journeys up to the city where sufferings and death awaited Him. He names some of His enemies, but He is silent about His betrayer, who now, with the other apostles, stood by His side and listened to His words.

II. **The purpose for which the prediction was given.**—The primary object Jesus had in view was, doubtless, to prepare His disciples for the events which would so sorely try their faith in Him. Their belief in His Messiahship and Divine commission would be subjected to a severe strain by seeing Him apparently a helpless victim in the hands of His enemies. And when the time of trial came, it should have strengthened the disciples to remember that he had foreseen the sufferings which were inflicted upon Him, and had voluntarily accepted them. But we can easily believe that He desired also to find some relief for His own feelings by unburdening His mind to those who were His dearest and most trusted friends. Sorrow is lightened by the sympathy of those we love. And as Jesus afterwards, in the garden of Gethsemane, sought to have the advantage of the presence and sympathy of the three apostles who were in most intimate communion with Him, so now, doubtless, a similar feeling moved Him to take the twelve into His confidence.

III. **The effect of this communication.**—So far as we know the only impression the words of Christ made upon those that heard them was that of mere bewilderment. No words of sorrow or sympathy seem to have been spoken by them in reply. Their minds were still possessed by expectations of earthly sovereignty to be exercised by the Messiah, and the announcement of an ignominious death perplexed and stupified them. The allusion to the resurrection from the dead fell upon deaf ears—it was unintelligible; and any suggestion of superhuman dignity and power which might be latent in it was overborne by the disastrous character of the rest of His communication. No words could convey more vividly the utter loneliness of Christ than those which describe the effect upon the disciples of His sorrowful prediction; those who were most firmly attached to Him, and knew Him best, could not understand Him, and stood silent and perplexed as they listened to His disclosure of the sufferings He was so shortly to undergo.

SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS ON VERSES 31—34.

Vers. 31-33.—*Christ Strengthens the Faith of His Disciples* (1) by preparing them for His humiliation, and sufferings, and death; and (2) by assuring them of His victory over death.

Two Grounds of Comfort:—

I. The sufferings of Christ belonged to the Divine purpose in sending Him, as indicated by the prophets.

II. His ignominious death would be followed by a glorious resurrection.

Sufferings Willingly Met.

I. Our Lord clearly foresaw and foretold all the sufferings which lay before Him.

II. He willingly and eagerly went forward to meet them.

III. Our hope for acceptance with God should rest upon that obedience unto death to which Christ was now going forward.

Ver. 31. "*Written by the prophets.*"—*I.e.*, their predictions of the sufferings of the Christ (cf. Ps. xxii.; Isa. liii.; Zech. xi., xii. 10.

Ver. 32. "*Delivered unto the Gentiles.*"—The prophecy grows clearer as the event approaches. At first it had been, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up" (John ii. 19); "The days will come when the Bridegroom shall be taken" (Matt. ix. 15). These words of Christ have rather the air of historic record than of prophetic anticipation.

Ver. 33. "*The third day.*"—His death and His rising show His two natures, human and Divine—His human nature and weakness in dying; His Divine nature and power, in rising again. These show His two offices—His priesthood and His kingdom: His priesthood in the sacrifice of His death; His kingdom in the glory of His resurrection. They set before us His two main benefits—His death, the death of death; His rising, the reviving of life again: the one, what He had ransomed us from; the other, what He had purchased for us.—*Andrewes.*

Ver. 34. "*Understood none.*"—One must know human things in order to love them, but one must love Divine things if he would rightly know them."—*Pascal.*

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 35—43.

Bartimæus.—The blind man, Bartimæus (Mark), is seated by the wayside. That is his usual place—begging his usual occupation. But another idea fills his mind to-day. He has heard much of Jesus of Nazareth. The country is filled with the rumour that He is on His way to Jerusalem to be crowned King of the Jews. To the blind man it has, somehow, become clear that this is the Christ promised to the Fathers. He is prepared to confess his faith in Him, for he has a great boon to ask of Him. He has taken up his usual place since early morn, and is watching anxiously for the first sign of Christ's coming, when he hears the sound of a multitude approaching. He asks the bystanders, or the first comers, "what it meant." They answer and tell him, "Jesus of Nazareth passeth by." Now, then, his great opportunity has come. He lifts up his voice, in the words of that most eloquent and simple prayer he has prepared, and he repeats the prayer till the time of answer came: "Jesus, Thou Son of David, have mercy on me." Note what obstacles this man's faith overcame.

I. **His circumstances.**—He was but a poor blind man, a customary object of charity. He who was passing by was a great Teacher, a Prophet of the people, reputed to be the Messiah, and probably the future King of Israel. Moreover, He was in the heart of a procession, engaged in teaching, and much engrossed in this momentous crisis of His public life. But Bartimæus was not to be hindered by any of these things. As to the difference in rank between himself and Jesus, he made nothing of it, or rather he made an encouragement of it. When He heard the name, Jesus of Nazareth! his heart leaped up within him. "This is the very person I want to meet. I am poor; He is the friend of the

poor. I am blind; He is the healer of the blind. I am a despised and forgotten waif by the roadside; He is the King of Israel, the gatherer of outcasts—the Healer of the broken-hearted, the One who remembers the forgotten." If, then, any one is hindered from coming to Christ by considerations of environment, be this the answer of faith. The worse your circumstances, the more need you have of Christ, the more evident is it that you are of those to whom He is offered, and for whom He is intended. When He is nigh, let no argument find place in your heart that the time is unsuitable, or that there may be a more convenient season.

II. **The desire of worldly advantage.**—Here was a great procession coming. In an ordinary case Bartimæus would, doubtless, have laid himself out to make a harvest of the passing caravan. On this occasion he made up his mind to forego that altogether. He weighed the two things, and he said to himself, "No, no alms to-day; I will direct my whole efforts to getting a cure from Jesus of Nazareth." He did not attempt both things, but deliberately sacrificed the alms-getting for the eyesight. Doubtless he would have been a fool to do otherwise. Yet that is the folly men are committing every day, and not the thoughtless alone among men. Those who have some glimpse of the priceless value of spiritual light and peace, yet let year after year leave them as it found them, because they are too busy in the world to seek salvation, or too much afraid of losing present advantage to set aside its claims, even for a season, and "count their cost" of their immortal nature. Jesus and his multitudes are passing by while some of us are busy gathering pennies by the wayside. A soul in earnest, a soul prepared for the Master's grace, will hold it of such urgent moment that everything must stand aside till this great question is settled.

III. **The opposition of others.**—We are not told what were the motives of the crowd in trying to silence Bartimæus. Perhaps the vulgar notion that it was improper for a common beggar like him to take up the time and attention of Jesus; perhaps that, with all their popular enthusiasm for Jesus, they were not pleased at the blind man for the boldness of his expression that Jesus was the Christ. It is not easy to conceive any obstacle in the way of the spiritually anxious more stumbling than this, when the professed, and sometimes even the real followers of Christ, object to the ardour of their expressions, or the evident feeling they show. "This is going too far. It is extravagance. It disturbs the Church." The real meaning is, it puts us about, it suggests an uncomfortable suspicion that we are not in earnest, when we see some spirit-stirred ones counting all things loss to win Christ, and overturning the cold, formal decency of the Church with their new-born fervour. As soon as the cry, with its unusual title and its imploring tones, meets the Saviour's ears, He comes to a standstill, and commands the blind man to be brought to Him. This is how Christ finds those that inquire after Him. We know that He is found of those who seek Him not, surprises those that look not for Him, singles out for search those that had forgotten Him. How certainly then, as this story shows, is He the Rewarder of them that diligently seek Him. It was a moment of rare triumph for Jesus. He is attended by a joyful crowd. But He turns—how characteristically!—from the happy throng to the one miserable man who needs His help. The pertinacious vitality of faith had proved itself in this instance, and it met, according to Christ's method, with an instant and abundant reward. It was proved, not only by the blind man's firm conviction of Jesus' Messiahship, but by his irrepressible expression of it, by his conquest of the obstacles put in his way, by his joyous alacrity when Jesus called him, by his prompt application of Christ's offered grace to his most particular need. And now, as all the Evangelists add, the proof was crowned by the first use he made of the new gift of sight. "He followed Jesus in the way." From this conduct the Lord

received honour, both direct and indirect, for all the people, when they saw it, swelled His praises. These two forms of service to Christ re-act upon each other. If all who know about Him were to profess Him, there would be much increase of spiritual life in the Church. If all who profess Christ were to experience what they profess, there would be much increase of spiritual heat. If all who have experienced Christ were to live up to their experience of His mercy, the Church would be like a mass of molten metal in the midst of a cold world—the world, indeed, would be set on fire, and the whole earth would be filled with His glory. —*Laidlaw.*

SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS ON VERSES 35—43.

Ver. 35-43. *Bartimæus.*—The story of Bartimæus shows us a man in difficulties, and exhibits his conduct when face to face with the three powers of life: 1. Self. 2. The world. 3. God. We shall see what the world did for him, what he did for himself, and what Divine love did for him.

I. **The world.**—The world gave him pity and alms, but it could not give him sight. He wanted power; it could only give compassion. He wanted eyes; it could only give a dole. Its gifts made him feel his dependence most keenly.

II. **What Bartimæus did for himself.**—He was self-reliant. He would not be silenced. He is heedless of the crowd. The more opposition, the more endeavour. But he is also single-minded. He must run no risk of failure in reaching Christ. He throws aside his long robe. It might impede his progress. What was raiment, compared with the dowry of eyesight?

III. **What Christ did for him.**—The best human efforts cannot achieve everything. Man and the world are not the only factors of life. Before Christ the demeanour of Bartimæus is changed. He stands as one who waits. What he needs must be waited for. The man of independence is to learn dependence. And Christ acts towards him with love—love that shows sensibility, decision, judgment, and capability. He is quick to discern need, decisive in His command, deliberate in His dealing, and powerful in His gift.—*Carpenter.*

I. **The situation** (ver. 35-39).
II. **The cure** (vers. 40—42).
III. **The effect produced** (ver. 43).

A Wayside Miracle.
I. **The beggar's need.**
II. **The beggar's cry.**
III. **The beggar's urgency.**
IV. **Jesus' response.**—1. The same cry can reach Him still. 2. He will listen, and help us.—*Watson.*

A Confession of Faith.
Ver. 38. I. **A confession of faith in Jesus as able to give sight.**
II. **A confession of faith in Him as Messiah,** at whose coming the eyes of the blind should be opened.

Ver. 39. "*Rebuked him.*"—The blind man saw Jesus with the eye of faith, and prayed to Him as his Saviour; while the world, who could see His person, saw Him not. And yet the blind world, which did not see Jesus, rebuked the blind man, who saw and worshipped Him; but he was nothing daunted by the rebuke, but cried to Him the more earnestly. Thus the blind recovered sight, and they who saw were blind.

Ver. 41. *Vague Prayers.*—Poor Bartimæus had no difficulty in answering Christ's question. He could not for an instant mistake or forget the nature of his want. He cried to Jesus for mercy, when he heard that He was passing by, because he felt a particular want, and believed that Jesus only could supply it. He felt that this was his only chance, and a fastly fleeting one. And so, on Christ's approach and direct inquiry, he was

ready with a direct and unhesitating answer. Faith was supplemented here by an accurate knowledge of the heart's plague and sorrow; and He who waited for this avowal said at once in reply, "Receive thy sight; thy faith hath saved thee." We often kneel in the Divine Presence, as this man did, and call to the Saviour for mercy. Were He to cross-examine us as to the meaning of our words, would our answer be ready? Does each heart know its own bitterness so well as to be able at once to ask for the boon we specially need? Or is there unreality, is there vagueness in our language, when we pray?

I. **In our confession of sin,** do we use vague and unreal words, not meaning them? Let us practice ourselves in meaning something by our confessions of sin. This exercise, and its accompaniment of seeking forgiveness, are an indispensable part of all worship. It has respect to time past, the ineffaceable, irretrievable past.

II. **But the other part of prayer has respect rather to the future.**—"To obtain mercy" that is one thing: "to find grace to help in time of need"—that is the other. Even more in the latter case is there the risk of vagueness and unreality in our prayers. The petitions which we seem to bring to the throne of grace may be neutralised by our inability to answer the searching inquiry of our Lord, "What wilt thou that I shall do for thee?" The very endeavour to bring something definite, something real, something learned by experience and examination, whenever we profess to approach God's mercy-seat with words of prayer on our lips, will help to give point and meaning to our worship. Then will the question of the text sound in our ears with less of reproof than of encouragement. — *Vaughan.*

Ver. 42. "*Thy faith.*"—In replying to the request of the blind man, Jesus says, "Thy faith," and not "My power," in order to impress upon him the value of that moral act, and that certainly in view of the still more important spiritual miracle yet to be wrought in him.

Ver. 43. "*Followed Him.*"—All that he cared for was seeing; all that he cared to see was Christ.

CHAPTER XIX.

CRITICAL NOTES.

VER. 1. **Jericho.**—"The city of palm-trees (Deut. xxxiv. 3; Judges i. 16) is about six miles from the Jordan and fifteen from Jerusalem. When taken by Joshua the site had been cursed (Joshua vi. 26), but in the reign of Ahab, Hiel of Bethel defied and underwent the curse (1 Kings xvi. 34). In later times Jericho became a great and wealthy town, being fertilised by its abundant springs (2 Kings ii. 21) and enriched by its palms and balsams" (*Farrar*). The trade in balsam was extensive, and Zacchæus was evidently superintendent of the tax-collectors who had the oversight of the revenue derived from that article.

Ver. 2. **Zacchæus.**—*I.e.*, Hebrew "Zaccai" ("pure") (Ezra ii. 9; Neh. vii. 14). **Chief among the publicans.**—Or "a chief publican" (R.V.). The word so translated occurs here only.

Ver. 3. **The press.**—"The crowd" (R.V.).

Ver. 4. **Sycomore.**—See xvii. 6: a tree with short trunk and wide lateral branches.

Ver. 5. A previous knowledge of the man is not precluded. His name, occupation, and reputation, may have been known to Jesus, but the Saviour showed supernatural knowledge of his mind and heart. **I must.**—A Divine plan, fixing every event in our Lord's ministry. Cf. iv. 43, xiii. 33. **Abide.**—Probably remain over the night.

Ver. 7. **They all murmured**—An indication of the strong national prejudice against the occupation of such men as Zacchæus. **To be guest.**—Or, "to lodge" (R.V.).

Ver. 8. **Stood.**—Took up his stand. The word expresses a formal and resolute undertaking to be guided by the promptings of conscience, which had now been awakened by Christ's visit to him. **I give.**—*I.e.*, not "I am in the habit of giving," but "I now propose to give.' **If I have taken.**—*I.e.*, "whatever I have taken." He does not deny the guilt of his past life. **Restore fourfold.**—The restitution commanded by the Law in cases of theft (Exod. xxii. 1).

Ver. 9. **This day.**—Evidently the day Christ entered his house, and not the following morning. **Is salvation come,**—"Meaning by 'salvation' both Himself, and the conversion of Zacchæus, which His words had wrought" (*Speaker's Commentary*). **Is a son of Abraham.**—*I.e.*, is a Jew—one of "the lost sheep of the house of Israel," not "has *become* a son of Abraham by repentance."

Ver. 10. **For the Son of Man,** etc.—The greater his guilt, the more need he has of a Saviour.

Ver. 11. **He added.**—This parable is thus distinctly connected with the words spoken in the house of Zacchæus. It is, therefore, not to be confused with the parable of the Talents, from which it differs in structure and incidents, and which was spoken in Jerusalem. "The main differences between the two parables may be stated thus: 1. That of the Talents tells us the simple story of the committal of certain sums of money to individuals, and of the use made by each of the sum entrusted to him; that of the Pounds is complicated with a distinct incident—viz., the opposition of the citizens, and the vengeance taken upon them. 2. In that of the Talents the principal person is a householder; in that of the Pounds he is a nobleman seeking a kingdom. 3. The Talents are given in various proportions; the Pounds are distributed equally. 4. There is an enormous difference between the sums entrusted in each case (the 'pound' being equal to about £3 of our money, the 'talent' being sixty times as much). 5. In the parable of the Pounds the slothful servant only suffers loss; in that of the Talents a positive punishment is inflicted besides" (*Speaker's Commentary*). **Nigh to Jerusalem.**—Jericho is about fifteen miles distant from it. **They thought,** etc.—*I.e.*, the followers of Jesus anticipated that this formal progress to Jerusalem, during which so many miracles were wrought, would issue in the open manifestation of God's kingdom.

Ver. 12. **A certain nobleman.**—In this Christ refers to His own dignity as "born king of the Jews" (Matt. ii. 2). It is interesting to notice the close correspondence between incidents in the life of Archelaus and those which form the framework to this parable; these are, the journey to Rome to receive institution to a kingdom, the embassy of Jews sent to protest against it, his instructions to servants to look after his pecuniary interests in his absence, and his assignment of cities as a reward to faithful adherents. The fact that Archelaus had a splendid palace at Jericho has, not unreasonably, been taken by some as probably suggesting the allusions to him in the parable. As Archelaus was an unjust and cruel prince, we have in this picture of spiritual things something of the same paradoxical nature as in the parable of the Unjust Steward and the Unjust Judge.

Ver. 13. **His ten servants.**—Rather, "ten servants of his" (R.V.). **Occupy.**—Rather, "trade ye herewith" (R.V.). The word is one specially used of business investments.

Ver. 14. **His citizens.**—In the interpretation of the parable this is to be understood of the Jews, as "the servants" are the disciples. **This man.**—The phrase implies contempt.

Ver. 16. **Thy pound hath gained.**—"He modestly attributes this to his lord's money, and not to his own work" (*Grotius*). Cf. 1 Cor. xv. 10.

Ver. 17. **Faithful in a very little.**—This is the essence of the parable. It is the faithfulness of the service rendered to which the lord looks, and not to the amount gained. The reward is proportioned to the faithfulness manifested.

Ver. 19. **Be thou also.**—Notice that no special words of commendation are bestowed on this servant. He had not been as faithful as the other.

Ver. 20. **Laid up in a napkin.**—A common mode among the Jews of hoarding coin.

Ver. 21. **Thou takest up,** etc.—Proverbial expressions to describe a hard, grasping disposition.

Ver. 23. **Into the bank.**—Or, "into a bank." **That at my coming,** etc.—Or, "I should have gone and required," etc. (R.V. margin). **Usury.**—*I.e.*, interest.

Ver. 25. **And they said.**—*I.e.*, the bystanders in the parable. The lord proceeds without taking any notice of the interruption.

Ver. 26. **Even that he hath.**—Cf. chap. viii. 18, "seemeth to have."

Ver. 27. **Slay them.**—Our Lord here combines into one picture His figurative coming to take vengeance upon the Jews who rejected Him, and His literal coming at the end of the world.

Ver. 28. **Went before.**—*I.e.*, at the head of the disciples. Cf. Mark x. 32. **Ascending.**—The road from Jericho to Jerusalem is one long ascent.

Ver. 29. **Bethphage.**—A village apparently on the east of Bethany. The name means "house of figs." The place itself has not been identified. It is mentioned in the Talmud. **Bethany.**—The home of Lazarus and his sisters. It lies on the eastern slope of the Mount of Olives, fully a mile beyond the summit, and not very far from the point at which the road to Jericho begins its more sudden descent towards the Jordan valley" (*Smith*, "Dictionary of the Bible").

Ver. 30. **A colt.**—The more circumstantial account in St, Matthew speaks of a mother and her colt. The Saviour rode upon the colt while the mother was led beside it, after the manner of a sumpter. **Never man sat.**—And therefore sent for a sacred purpose. Cf. Numb. xix. 2; Deut. xxi. 3; 1 Sam. vi. 7.

Ver. 35. **Cast their garments.**—As in honour of a king (cf. 2 Kings ix. 13).

Ver. 36. **In the way.**—As also leaves of trees and palm-branches.

Ver. 37. **And when He was.**—St. Luke alone indicates the point at which the popular enthusiasm began to manifest itself. "Bethany is hardly left in the rear before the long procession must have swept up and over the ridge, where first begins 'the descent of the Mount of Olives' towards Jerusalem. At this point the first view is caught of the south-eastern corner of the city. The Temple and the more northern portions are hid by the slope of Olivet on the right. It was at this precise point, 'as He drew near, at the descent of the Mount of Olives'—may it not have been from the sight thus opening upon them?—that the hymn of triumph burst forth from the multitude" (*Stanley*, "Sinai and Palestine"). St. John speaks of a company going out from the city to meet the procession (xii. 18), and explains that the enthusiasm was principally excited by the raising of Lazarus from the dead.

Ver. 38. **Peace in heaven.**—*I.e.*, between God and man; and on this account "glory [to God] in the highest."

Ver. 40. **If these,** etc.—Rather, "if these shall hold their peace, the stones will cry out" (R.V.). The words are of a proverbial character; they recall, too, Hab. ii. 11.

Ver. 41. **And when.**—"The road descends a slight declivity, and the glimpse of the city is again withdrawn behind the intervening ridge of Olivet. A few moments, and the path mounts again; it climbs a rugged ascent, it reaches a ledge of smooth rock, and in an instant the whole city bursts into view. Immediately below was the valley of the Kedron, here seen in its greatest depth as it joins the Valley of Hinnom, and thus giving full effect to the great peculiarity of Jerusalem seen only on its eastern side—its situation as of a city rising out of a deep abyss. It is hardly possible to doubt that this rise and turn of the road, this rocky ledge, was the exact point where the multitude paused again, and 'He, when He beheld the city, wept over it'" (*Stanley*, "Sinai and Palestine"). **Wept.**—The word implies "wept aloud."

Ver. 42. **Even thou.**—*I.e.*, as well as the disciples. **In this thy day.**—Rather, "in this day" (R.V.).

Ver. 43. **Cast a trench.**—Rather, "cast up a bank" (R.V.); strictly speaking, "a palisade." It and a wall of masonry were afterwards used by Titus in investing the city.

Ver. 44. **Thy children.**—Not merely infants, but the inhabitants generally. The city is personified as a mother. **Visitation.**—*I.e.*, season of grace. Cf. Gen. l. 24; Exod. iv. 31, etc.

Ver. 45. **Into the temple.**—This is a second purification of the Temple, the first being recorded in John ii. 13-17. **Sold therein.**—*I.e.*, doves, sheep, cattle, for use in sacrifice.

Ver. 46. **It is written.**—Isa. lvi. 7. **Den of thieves.**—Rather, "den of robbers" (R.V.).

Ver. 48. **Were very attentive.**—Rather, "the people all hung upon Him, listening" (R.V.).

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 1—10.

Melted by Kindness.—This visit to Jericho was the last. It was but a few days before Calvary, and the near approach of the end, as well as the tension of concentrated purpose which marked our Lord in these last days, make the delay and effort to win Zacchæus the more striking. He was the last convert, so far as we know, before the cross. The penitent thief was the next.

I. **The character and motives of Zacchæus.**—A Jew who had taken service with Rome could have little patriotism and less religion. His office showed that he cared more for gain than for honour or duty. A Jew publican was classed with thieves, and regarded as an agent of the enemy and hated accordingly—and knew that he was so hated. The harsh judgment was no doubt generally deserved, and as a rule would produce the very vices which it attributed. Brand a class with an evil fame and its members will become what the world says they are. Bitterness breeds bitterness, and Zacchæus would repay contempt with interest. All this is unpromising enough; but buried below greed, and unscrupulousness, and bitter animosity, was a little seed, the nature of which the man himself did not apparently recognise. He said to himself that it was curiosity that drew him. Probably he was doing himself injustice. There was something better vaguely stirring in him, which he was afraid to acknowledge to himself. The fame of Jesus as the friend of publicans had probably reached Zacchæus and touched him. His determination may set us an example. He makes up his mind that see Jesus he will. In all walks of life difficulties are sown thick, and perhaps thickest on the road to Christ. But they can be overcome, and nothing need keep the sight of Jesus from a heart that is in earnest in wishing it. Zacchæus had been long accustomed to ridicule, and did not mind a jeer or two as he climbed the sycomore. We have often to drop dignity if we want to get high enough above the mob to see the Lord; and a man afraid of being laughed at will stand a poor chance.

II. **Christ's over-answer to Zacchæus' desire.**—Our Lord is not accustomed to name people without having some deep significance in doing so. There is always an emphasis of love, or warning, or authority, in His use of men's names. Here He would probably let Zacchæus feel that he was completely known, and certainly asserts mastership and demands a disciple's allegiance. There is no other instance of Christ's volunteering His company; and His thus inviting Himself to Zacchæus' house shows that He knew that He would be welcome, and that the wish to ask Him was only held back by the sense of unworthiness. Christ never goes where He is not wanted, any more than He stays away where He is wanted; but He often comes in more abundant self-communication and larger gifts than we dare ask, however we may long for them. Sometimes, too, it is His answer which first interprets to us our wishes. Observe, too, that "must." Jesus often speaks of a great "must" ruling His life, and here it determines a comparatively small thing; for the small thing is a means of accomplishing the great end of seeking and saving (ver. 10), and only he who is faithful to the law of the Father's will in small things will keep it in great. The offer of visiting Zacchæus expresses Christ's kindly feelings and declares that He has no share in the common aversion. That voluntary association with the outcast is a symbol of Christ's whole work. The same desire to save, and willingness to be identified

with the impure, which led His feet into the shunned house of Zacchæus, led Him from glory to earth and caused Him to "dwell among us." Zacchæus comes down as fast as he can, and is glad; for he has found a Saviour. Christ is glad, for He has found a sinner whom He will make a saint. Both have found what they sought.

III. **The transforming effect of Christ's love.**—The experience of Christ's love convinces of sin far more thoroughly than threats. The frowns of society only make the wrong-doer more hard and merciless; but the touch of love melts him as a warm hand laid on snow. The sight of Jesus reveals our unlikeness and makes us long after some faint resemblance to Him. So Zacchæus did not need Christ to bid him to make restitution, nor show him the blackness of his life; but he sees all the past in a new light, and is aware that there is something sweeter than ill-gotten gains. If we love Jesus Christ as He deserves, we shall not need to be told to give Him our all. The true spring of self-sacrifice is the reception of Christ's love. Note the calm dignity and self-assertion of Jesus, identifying His coming into the house with the coming of salvation. Who else would have dared to say that without being laughed or hissed down as unsufferably arrogant? Observe the reason for His coming—namely, that Zacchæus also is a "son of Abraham," publican as he is. That cannot mean merely a born Jew, but must refer to true spiritual descent and affinity.—*Maclaren.*

SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS ON VERSES 1—10.

Vers. 1-10. "*On the borders of the kingdom.*"

I. **We cannot tell all Zacchæus' motives.**—Curiosity would seem to have had a leading share. But this curiosity may have had something substantial at its root. He may have heard Jesus spoken of as the friend of publicans and sinners. His conscience may have testified loudly that he stood greatly in need of such a friend.

II. **Christ was worthy of His title.**—"Friend of Sinners." The very summons must have thrilled Zacchæus' soul. He to be selected among all the men of Jericho as the host of Jesus! For him to come into such close contact with the Lord of the kingdom of heaven? What grace there was in selecting Zacchæus!

III. **A great reformation in heart and life.**—How much need of it! The curiosity is changed into a far higher feeling; his climbing becomes the symbol of a far greater elevation. The change shows itself in the new life he purposes to lead. The very sight of the poor, simple, beneficent and self-denying Christ makes his own old life look black and hideous, and makes him most sincere and cordial in the new ways and habits he resolves to follow.—*Blaikie.*

I. **The meeting of Jesus and Zacchæus** (vers. 1-5).

II. **Jesus entertained in the house of Zacchæus** (vers. 6-8).

III. **The declaration of Jesus concerning Zacchæus** (vers. 9, 10).

I. **The rich publican.**
II. **The inquirer.**
III. **The called.**
IV. **The saved.**—*Palmer.*

Conversion of Zacchæus.

I. **Difficulties attending it.**—1. The stigma attaching to the office he held. 2. The temptation to retain a lucrative employment. 3. His wealth.

II. **His triumph over the difficulties.**

III. **Proofs of the genuineness of his conversion.**—1. Active gratitude. 2. Charity. 3. Restitution.

Note here—

I. **The simple, natural way in which a soul is brought within the range of Christ's supernatural, Divine power.**—The commonplace motive of *curiosity* fully explains the action of Zacchæus.

II. **The instantaneous nature of conversion.**

III. **The evidence of conversion in the correction of evil habits and besetting sins.**

IV. **Religion sanctifies the life of those who come under its influence.**—It cleanses the heart and passes from it to *the house*. Those most in contact with the true servant of Christ are most convinced of the beneficial change that has been wrought in the character.

Ver. 2. "*And he was rich.*"—Yet, as the sequel shows, rich as he was, he had not incurred the woe of those rich who are full, and who have so received their consolation here that all longings for a higher consolation are extinct in them (vi. 24).

Ver. 3. "*Sought to see Jesus.*"—His desire to see Jesus is not to be classed with the curiosity of Herod, but is rather akin to that longing after salvation which animated those Greeks who sought to see Jesus at the feast (John xii. 21).

Spiritual Dwarfs.—Zacchæus is a typical character, the type of many who are wanting to see Christ, but who are spiritually too short to see Him; who are looking out for sycomores to help them to see. What produces spiritual smallness?

I. **Cold.**—In the vegetable world, cold is one of the secrets of dwarfed stature. Sunshine means height. Read Stuart Mill's autobiography. His home was an ice-house.

II. **Pride.**—A man ever looking at himself, or his work, or his intellect —never looking higher than self. He thus fails to see One who is higher.

III. **Speciality of training.**—This may be a hindrance to spiritual growth. Ours is an age of specialists. Men give themselves up to one pursuit, and to see one order of facts. So, looking for nothing else, they see nothing else. A giant in materialism is often a spiritual dwarf.—*Lovell.*

Ver. 4. "*Ran.*" — God always rewards us if He sees us eager for good. —*Theophylact.*

"*Climbed up.*"—He overcomes that false pride, through which so many precious opportunities, and oftentimes in the highest things of all, are lost.

Ver. 5. "*Saw him and said.*"—He knows how to discover His own in places the most unlikely. He finds a Matthew at the receipt of custom, a Nathanael under the fig-tree; and so, with sure and unerring glance, He detects Zacchæus in the sycomore, and at once lays bare his hiding-place.

"*Zacchæus.*"—"He calleth His own sheep by name and leadeth them out" (John x. 3). Christ (1) singles him out by a glance; then (2) addresses him by name; and (3) calls him to minister to Him.

"*Must abide at thy house.*"—Words of an extraordinary grace, for while the Lord *accepted* many invitations into the houses of men, yet we do not read that He honoured any but the publican by thus offering Himself to his hospitality. Adopting the royal style, which was familiar to Him, and which commends the loyalty of a vassal in the most delicate manner, by freely exacting his services, He informed Zacchæus of His intention to visit him, and signified His pleasure that a banquet should be instantly prepared. —*Ecce Homo.*

Christ's "*Musts.*"—We have Christ applying the greatest principle to the smallest duty. Why *must* He abide in Zacchæus' house? Because Zacchæus was to be saved, and was worth saving. What was the "must"? To stop for an hour or two on His road to the cross. So He teaches us that in a life penetrated by the Divine will, which we gladly obey, there are no things too great, and none too trivial to be brought under the dominion of that law, and to be regulated by that Divine

necessity. Obedience is obedience, whether in large things or in small. There is no scale of magnitude applicable to the distinction between God's will and that which is not God's will. Gravitation rules the motes that dance in the sunshine as well as the mass of Jupiter. God's truth is not too great to rule the smallest duties. Bring your doing, then, under that all-embracing law of duty.—*Maclaren.*

Vers. 6-8. *Evidences of Conversion.*—1. Readiness in obeying the call of Christ. 2. Joyfulness in receiving Him. 3. Deeds of charity. 4. Endeavours to remedy past faults.

Ver. 6. "*He made haste.*"—Zacchæus in the sycomore tree was as ripe fruit, which dropped into the Saviour's lap at His first and lightest touch.—*Trench.*

Ver. 7. "*That is a sinner.*"—Here the fault-finders were in the wrong; he *had been* a sinner, but now he is a new creature.

Ver. 8. I. **A public confession.**
II. **A public vow of restitution and dedication to God.**

"*The half of my goods.*"—A man might bestow "all his goods to feed the poor" (1 Cor. xiii. 3), and yet his generosity might be of no value in the sight of God; yet St. Luke here implies that the action was an indication of inward repentance.

Ver. 9. "*This day is salvation.*"—Jesus says that salvation has come to the house of the publican, not because that house had received one of His visits, but because its inhabitant really showed himself another man from what he appeared to be in the eyes of the multitude. While they had even just before named him as "a man that is a sinner," the Saviour now names him "a son of Abraham"—one who not only was descended from Abraham, but also was animated by the faith for which Abraham was famous.

"*This day is salvation.*"—Memorable saying! Salvation has already come, but it is not a day nor an hour old. The word "to this *house*" was probably designed to meet the taunt, "He is gone to lodge at a sinner's house." The house, says Jesus, is no longer a sinner's house, polluted and polluting: "'Tis now a saved house, all meet for the reception of Him who came to save." What a precious idea is *salvation to a house*, expressing the new air that would henceforth breathe in it, and the new impulses from its head which would reach its members.—*Brown.*

Ver. 10. "*For the Son of Man,*" etc.
I. **What we have lost takes a special dearness and value in our thoughts; so is it with God.**—He is with us now and is now seeking that He may save us.
II. **A man may be lost in more senses than one.**—Lost in sin, lost in the crowd of men, lost in doubt and fear, lost to his proper use and joy in the world: and, in whatever sense we may be lost, His purpose is to find and save us.

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 11—27.

"*Till He come.*"—The object of the parable is not to state the Christian doctrine of reward for faithfulness, which is only part of its contents, but to damp down the expectation of the immediate bursting in of the kingdom by displaying the double series of events which must go before its appearance—namely, the protracted, faithful trading of His servants, and the antagonism of its foes, with the issues of both these when the King does appear.

I. **What precedes the appearance of the kingdom.**—Three different lines of activity are shadowed—the prince's in the far-off land, the servants', and the

enemies' in the territory which is to be his kingdom. Jesus does not say that He is the man of noble birth, but His hearers could not mistake his meaning. He teaches here, as always, that His departure is the pre-requisite to His investiture with the visible sovereignty of the world; that many long days must pass before He comes again; but that, while absent, He is not idle, but carrying on that "asking" which from of old was declared to be the condition of His recovering "the uttermost parts of the earth" for a possession. Till then His servants trade with the small capital which He has left them, and His enemies struggle against His rule. His gifts to His servants are absolutely the same in amount in every case, and they are of very small value. What, then, is the uniformly identical gift which all Christ's servants receive? If we are to seek for any one answer, we must either say the blessing of salvation or the word of the gospel. "The common salvation" belongs to all alike. The same gospel is entrusted to all. Why is it represented as a small sum? Perhaps because the Christian's gift from his absent Lord is of little worth in the world's eyes, or more probably in order to contrast it with the greatness of the result of faithfulness. The small capital makes the faithfulness of service the more noticeable, and suggests that the great purpose of life is to test and to train—that its trivial business is only great when regarded as the means of obtaining what is infinitely greater. Life is redeemed from insignificance by being looked at in connection with the stupendous magnitudes beyond, which also makes it seem small. The more closely we link it with eternity, the smaller it will seem in itself, the greater in its issues.

II. **The circumstances of the appearance of the kingdom.**—It is to be very unlike the sanguine, vulgar expectations of both disciples and crowd. The servants are to be summoned to give in their accounts; the enemies to be swiftly slain in His presence. Thus a solemn diet of judgment is to inaugurate it. The great principle of degrees in reward according to degrees in faithfulness is laid down. The joy of the Lord is one for all servants, but the dominion in the future is proportioned to faithfulness here. Note that the difference in results must be supposed to depend, not on circumstances beyond the servants' control, but on their diligence. Observe, also, the omission of commendation to the second servant, which implies a less degree of faithful effort in him. The first represents Christians who excel; the second Christians who are content with small attainments and achievements. There is salvation in fulness, and also salvation "so as by fire." Observe, too, the humility with which the servants present their gains. They say nothing about their own diligence. It is the Lord's pound, not their pains, which has made the profit. The pounds and the pains are both due to Him who gives the treasure into our hands, and gives also the grace to use it. The servants are not all rewarded, but we do not know how many of the unnamed seven were faithful, and how many slothful. One idler is put before us, and stands for the class. His excuse seems to himself to be sufficient, and its very rudeness guarantees its sincerity. No man would speak so to his judge. But Christ translates thoughts into words, in order to show their falsity, and perhaps to suggest the solemn lesson that the inmost unavowed motives shall one day be plain to us, and that we shall be compelled to speak them out, however ugly and foolish they sound. Men will be their own accusers and condemnation. The excuse lays bare a very frequent motive of indolence—namely fear, built on a misconception of the character of the Lord and Giver of all gifts. Men darken their own spirits by thinking of God as demanding rather than as giving—and that while everything they have and see should teach them He is the God who gives. Such thoughts of Him paralyse activity and destroy the one all-powerful motive for service. Only when we know His infinite love, and are moved by His mercies, shall we task every power in grateful and joyful

service. The prince's answer is difficult, as no explanation of the "bank" is wholly satisfactory. Perhaps the best is that which takes it to mean the Church in its associated efforts, in some part of which the most timid may share, and, bringing his small contribution to the common stock, may be able to do something for Christ. The slothful servant is deprived of the gift which he had not used. That looks hard, and often draws forth remonstrances or, at least, our wonder. But we see it here, and we shall see it yonder. Christ states a law of human experience which works everywhere. Used faculties grow, unused ones decay. The parable is not complete with the rewards and retribution of the servants. Its purpose was to portray the course of events which must precede the appearance of the kingdom, and the stern judgment which should inaugurate it. In fact, it is the programme of the world's history till the end, and the enemies are as important, though not as conspicuous, a part of the whole as the servants. They represent primarily the Jews, but it is surely an incongruous thrusting of history into parable to take the terrible vengeance on them, which is the very last act of the king after he has returned, as meaning nothing more than the destruction of Jerusalem. Surely the "slaying" here is more terrible than physical death. It points to that same awful retribution of hatred and opposition to the King of which the New Testament is full. That expression "before me" leads us tremblingly to think of "everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord."—*Maclaren.*

SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS ON VERSES 11—27.

Vers. 11-27. *The Pounds.*

I. **True followers.**—These must be tried. Outward respect for a present master is no test of character, no evidence that his servants are fit for the positions to which they aspire. But faithfulness to a long-absent Lord, faithfulness to past memories, faithfulness to present duties and responsibilities, faithfulness to an undying hope that He shall come, will come, even though He seem to tarry long—that will test the character, and that will be rewarded with undreamt-of honour.

II. **Seeming followers.**—These are not true. They love not; they follow only through fear. Therefore they cannot abide faithful in absence, though they are not *sure* enough openly to throw off their allegiance. Theirs will be bitter loss and disappointment.

III. **Open enemies.**—There are these as well. Their pride of heart and badness of life make them prefer the rule of a Barabbas to that of the holy Lord. They do not even pretend to be disciples. There is, therefore, no degradation for them when He appears; there is simply swift destruction. They are not surprised at the sentence passed upon them. They have openly cast in their lot with His enemies; if He comes in power, they know what their end will be.—*Hastings.*

The Parable of the Pounds.

I. **The occasion** of the parable.

II. **The historical incident** in the parable.

III. **The parable**—a prophecy. 1. Of His own departure. 2. Of continued opposition to His rule. 3. Of a time of probation for His servants. 4. Of His triumphant return.

IV. The parable—**a lesson in individual responsibility.**—Each traded, was reckoned with, rewarded, or punished individually.—*W. Taylor.*

The True Preparation for the Coming of the Kingdom is that of Character.

I. **The faithful and their reward.**—Increasing spiritual capital. Divine approval. A larger sphere.

II. **The unfaithful, and their loss.**—To neglect the gospel is to be in peril, and to risk loss. Negative excellence is not positive obedience. The idler's penalty is a soul dwarfed and unspiritual. The soul loses the capacity

for love and service. The pound is taken away. The soul progressively deteriorates, by refusing to come into right relations with God.—*Palmer.*

The Parable is a Parallel.—Pursue the subject along the lines furnished by the laws of trade.

I. **Some capital is needed.** — 1. Natural. 2. Spiritual endowments.

II. **Only the authorised money can be used in commerce.**

III. **Time and opportunity must be given.**

IV. **There must be wholesale and retail in trade.**—The few are called to the first, the many to the second.

V. **Both buyer and seller must gain a profit.**

VI. **"Till I come" limits the trading season.**—When Christ comes, probation ends.—*Wylie.*

Structure of The Parable.—The introduction (ver. 11); the parable (vers. 12-28). The parable:—

I. **The fidelity of the servants** during their Lord's absence put to the test (vers. 12-14).

II. **The servants judged.**—1. The faithful servants rewarded (vers. 15-19). 2. The faithless servant convicted and punished (vers. 20-26).

III. **The rebellious citizens slain** (ver. 27).

Servants and Subjects.—The parable sets forth the twofold relation in which the ruler stands. 1. To his servants. 2. To his subjects. The servants represent the apostles and disciples; their faithfulness or unfaithfulness to the trust committed to them is praised or blamed; the citizens represent the Jewish people, and their disobedience to their rightful Lord is punished.

A picture—

I. **Of the King** of the kingdom of God. 1. His origin. 2. His destiny. 3. His departure and return.

II. **Of His servants.**—1. Their calling. 2. Their giving account. 3. Their reward.

III. **Of His enemies.**—1. Their hatred. 2. Their impotency. 3. Their punishment.

The parable teaches—

I. **The need of a patient waiting for Christ.**

II. **Of an active working for Him till the time of His return.**

"*Should immediately appear.*"—The parable is spoken to correct several erroneous opinions concerning the kingdom of God.

I. **That the kingdom would very soon appear.**—In contradiction to this idea the long journey and the consequent delay are spoken of.

II. **That all would joyfully submit to it.**—The parable speaks of bitter but unsuccessful enmity on the part of some.

III. **That the subjects of the kingdom would enter on a life of inactive enjoyment.**—In opposition to this, long and patient labours are spoken of.

Ver. 12. "*A certain nobleman.*"

I. **An intimation of the kingly descent and dignity of our Lord.**

II. **A prophecy of His departure from earth.**

III. **A comforting representation of His departure to the Father.**—As the means ordained for obtaining the kingly power and glory.

Ver. 13. "*Occupy.*"—*I.e.*, "employ in trading." 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! Why did he not distribute *weapons* to his servants? Because the duty of the servants was, with the diligent but silent occupation of their pound, to lay the rudiments of the 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.—*Trench.*

Christ's Traders. — The imagery of the text suggests the work of the servants while the Master is gone.

I. **The stock-in-trade.**—What is it that all Christian men have in common? The gospel, the message of salvation. This is the "pound" which each Christian has equally. Let us not be ashamed of it.

II. **The trading.**—In the trading is to be included the whole of the outward life which is to be shaped by the principles and motives contained in the message of the gospel. Specially the idea is involved of spreading the Word which has been received. The Christianity of any man must be very shallow who feels nothing of the obligation which it lays upon him to communicate it to others. Make a business of it. Such is the meaning of the metaphor. Do it as you do your business.

III. **The audit.**—The day arrives for scrutiny and judgment. There are varieties in the profits. Christ rewards, not success, but diligence. It is not all the same whether we have traded with our pound or hidden it in a napkin. A higher sphere of service is granted to the diligent traders.—*Maclaren.*

Ver. 14. *An Embassy.*—The enmity of the citizens.

I. **It is capricious**, for they assign no reason for their dislike.

II. **It is deeply-rooted**, as implied in the contemptuous "this man."

III. **It is unsuccessful.**

Ver. 15. "*Having received the kingdom.*"—The elevation of their master to sovereignty places the servants in a totally new position. Not only does he manifest towards them a satisfaction proportionate to the success of their labours, but, their master, acting now as their king, assigns to them posts in the government of the state, corresponding in importance to the respective results of their activity. So will it be at the second coming of Christ. The humble work accomplished during the absence of the Lord will be the measure of the power entrusted by Him to each on His appearing.—*Godet.*

Ver. 16. "*Thy pound.*"—In deep humility the faithful servants acknowledge that they claim no merit for the success that had attended their labours. Cf. "I laboured more abundantly than they all, yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me" (1 Cor. xv. 10). "Not unto us, O Lord, not unto us, but unto Thy name give the praise" (Ps. cxv. 1).

Ver. 17. "*In a very little.*"—Cf. xii. 48: xvi. 10.

"*Over ten cities.*"—"We shall also reign with Him" (2 Tim. ii. 12). It is perhaps not unduly spiritualising a mere detail of the parable to think of the reward being the privilege of communicating spiritual benefits to others; the ten or five cities to be thought of as communities of moral beings whom the glorified believer raises to his own level of spiritual life.

Ver. 18. "*Gained five.*"—A lesser degree of success in consequence of less strenuous energy in work. This is implied by the facts that the servants had equal sums entrusted to them, and that the servant, though receiving a reward, receives no special commendation from his lord.

Ver. 19. "*Over five cities.*"—The glory of each differs; their common joy is the same.

Ver. 20. *The Servant's Defence.*—It is fearful to sin; it is more fearful to delight in sin; yet more to defend it.

"*And another came.*"—Rather, and the other. The word used implies that this servant belonged to a different class from those who had preceded him in the interview with the master.

Ver. 21. "*I feared thee.*"—*I.e.*, knowing that his master was a man of austere character, who would be pitiless in punishing him for the loss of the pound, he had kept it safely, and now restored it as he had received it. So

that he regarded himself as free from blame, even if he could lay no claim to commendation. The words "thou takest up," etc., seem rather a proverbial description of a hard, grasping character than as specially appropriate to the circumstances of the case.

Ver. 22. "*Thou knewest,*" *etc.*—*I.e.*, "All the more, therefore, shouldest thou have sought to satisfy my demands; and thou mightest have satisfied them, though perhaps not to the full, with very little expenditure of labour. If the trouble and risk of trading were too great, I might at least have received the interest which a bank gives for money lodged in it."

A Legal Christian.—This man, it seems to me, represents a believer who has not found salvation in Jesus Christ to be as attractive as he had expected—a legal Christian, who knows nothing of the grace of the gospel, and is acquainted only with its moral requirements. It seems to him that the Lord asks a great deal, and gives very little. This feeling leads him to do as little as possible. He thinks that God ought to be content with abstinence from evil-doing, and with an outward respect to His gospel.—*Godet.*

Ver. 23. "*The bank.*"—Probably it is vain to try to find a spiritual counterpart to this detail of the parable. The reply of the Lord is, virtually, "If thou wouldest not do and dare for me in great ventures of faith, yet at all events in humbler paths, in safer and less perilous, thou mightest have shown fidelity, and have preserved me from loss."

Ver. 24. "*Take from him the pound.*"—The punishment for unfaithfulness is the loss of the faculty for service. And it is especially worthy of notice that this sentence of condemnation is strictly in accordance with the Divine law that prevails in the natural world. Let any member of the body or faculty of the mind lie disused for a time, and, by the very fact of disuse, its power is diminished or destroyed.

Ver. 25. "*And they said unto Him.*"—This interruption is remarkably like that of Peter in chap. xii. 41; and the reply (ver. 26), virtually corresponds to that of Jesus in chap. xii. 42. The king apparently takes no account of the surprise his words have excited, but in ver. 26 he expounds the principle on which his judgment is based.

Ver. 26. "*Unto every one.*"—It is not merely that the one receives more than before he had, and the other loses what he had. This is not all; but that very gift which the one forfeits, the other obtains; one is enriched with a pound withdrawn from the other; one takes a crown which another has let go (Rev. iii. 11);—even as we see continually one, by the ordinance of God, stepping into the place and the opportunities which another has neglected, despised, and misused, and so has lost (Gen. xxv. 34, xxvii. 36, xlix. 4, 8; 1 Sam. xvi. 1, 13; 1 Kings ii. 35; Isa. xxii. 15-25; Acts i. 25, 26; Rom. xi. 11).—*Trench.*

Ver. 27. "*Bring hither and slay.*"—They who will not submit to Christ the crucified will be crushed by Christ the King. Every eye shall see Him; they also who pierced Him. Meekly now He stands at the door and knocks; then He comes as the lightning comes.—*Arnot.*

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 28—48.

A New Kind of King.—St. Luke takes no notice of the stay at Bethany, and the sweet seclusion which soothed Jesus there. He dwells only on the assertion of royalty, which stamped an altogether unique character on the remaining hours of Christ's life.

I. **Christ's part in originating the triumphal entry.**—He sent for the colt,

with the obvious intention of stimulating the people to just such a demonstration as followed. Note the remarkable blending of dignity and poverty in "The Lord hath need of him." It asserts sovereign authority and absolute rights, and it confesses need and penury. He is a king, but He has to borrow even a colt on which to ride in triumph. Though He was rich, for our sakes He became poor. Jesus then deliberately brought about His public entry. He thereby acts in a way perfectly unlike His whole previous course. And He stirs up popular feelings at a time when they were specially sensitive, by reason of the approaching Passover and its crowds. Formerly He had avoided the danger which He now seems to court, and had gone up to the feast, as it were, in secret. But it was fitting that once, for the last time, He should assert before the gathered Israel that He was their King, and should make a last appeal. He deliberately makes Himself conspicuous, though—or we might say because—He knew that thereby He precipitated His death. The nature of His dominion is as plainly taught by the humble pomp as is its reality. Gentleness and peace, a sway that rests not on force nor wealth, are shadowed in that rustic procession and the pathetic poverty of its leader, throned on a borrowed colt, and attended, not by warriors or dignitaries, but by poor men, unarmed, and saluted, not with the blare of trumpets, but with the shouts of joyful, though, alas! fickle hearts.

II. **The humble procession, with the shouting and the background of hostile spies.**—The disciples eagerly caught at the meaning of bringing the colt, and threw themselves with alacrity into what seemed to them preparation for the public assertion of royalty, for which they had long been impatient. How different the vision of the future in their minds and His! They dreamed of a throne; He knew it was a cross that was in store for Him. They broke into loud acclamations, summoning, as it were, Jerusalem to welcome its King. Christ's royalty and Divine commission are proclaimed from a thousand throats, and then up swells the shout of praise, which echoes the angels' song at Bethlehem, and ascribes to His coming power to make peace in heaven with an else alienated world, and thus to make the Divine glory blaze with new splendour, even in the highest heavens; their song was wiser than they knew, and touched the deepest, mysteries of the unity of the Son with the Father, of reconciliation by the blood of the cross, and of new lustre accruing to God's name thereby, even in the sight of principalities and powers in heavenly places. Their shouts died away, and their faith was almost as short-lived. High-wrought emotion is a poor substitute for steady conviction. But cool, unemotional recognition of Christ as King is almost as unnatural. There were cool observers there, and they make the foil to the glad enthusiasm. Note that these Pharisees, mingling in the crowd, have no title for Jesus but "Teacher." He is no King to them. To those who regard Jesus but as a human teacher, the acclamations of those to whom He is King and Lord always sound exaggerated. People with no depth of religious life hate religious emotion, and are always seeking to repress it. A very tepid worship is warm enough for them. Formalists detest genuine feeling. Propriety is their ideal. Christ's answer is probably a quoted proverb. It implies His entire acceptance of the character which the crowd ascribed to Him, His pleasure in their praises, and, in a wider aspect, His vindication of outbursts of devout feeling, which shock ecclesiastical martinets and formalists.

III. **The King plunged in bitter grief in the very hour of His triumph.**—The fair city brings before His vision the awful contrast of its lying compassed by armies and in ruins. He hears not the acclamation of the crowd. "He wept," or, rather, "wailed"—for the word does not imply tears so much as cries. That sorrow is a sign of His real manhood, but it is also a part of His revelation of the very heart of God. The form is human, the substance Divine. The man weeps because God pities. Christ's sorrow does not hinder His judgments. The woes

which wring His heart will, nevertheless, be inflicted by Him. Judgment is His "strange work," alien from His desires; but it *is* His work. Note the yearning in the unfinished sentence. "If thou hadst known." Note the decisive closing of the time of repentance. Note the minute prophetic details of the siege, which, if ever they were spoken, are a distinct proof of His all-seeing eye. And from all let us fix in our hearts the conviction of the pity of the judge, and of the judgment by the pitying Christ.

IV. **Christ's exercise of sovereign authority in His Father's house.**—Two things are brought out in the compressed narrative. 1. *The fact.* It was fitting that, at the end of His career, as at the beginning, He should cleanse the Temple. The two events are significant as His first and last acts. The second one, as we gather from the other evangelists, had a greater severity about it than the first. The need for a second purifying indicated how sadly transient had been the effect of the first, and was thus evidence of the depth of corruption and formalism to which the religion of priests and people had sunk. 2. *His vindication of His action.* It is in right royal style. The first cleansing was defended by Him by pointing to the sanctity of "My Father's house"; the second by claiming it as "My house." The rebuke of the hucksters is sterner the second time. The profanation, once driven out, and returning, is deeper; for whereas, in the first instance, it had made the Temple a "house of merchandise," in the second it turned it into a "den of robbers." Thus evil assumes a darker tint by lapse of time, and swiftly becomes worse if rebuked and chastised in vain. We see here (1) Christ's calm courage in continuous teaching in the Temple; (2) the growing hatred of the authorities; and (3) the eager hanging of the people on His words, which baffled the murderous designs of the rulers. Meekly and boldly He goes on the appointed way. The day's task of winning some from impending ruin shall still be done. So should His servants live, in patient discharge of daily duty, in the face of death, if need be. The enemies, who heard His words and found in them only food for deeper hatred, may warn us of the possibilities of antagonism to Him that lie in the heart, and of the terrible judgment which they drag down on their own heads, who hear, unmoved, His daily teaching, and see, unrepentant, His dying love.—*Maclaren.*

SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS ON VERSES 28—48.

Vers. 28-44. *The Triumphal Entry of Jesus into Jerusalem.*

I. **The preparations for it** (vers. 28-36).

II. **The entry itself** (vers. 37-38).

III. **The murmurs of the Pharisees** (vers. 39, 40).

IV. **The lamentation over the city** (ver. 41-44).

Ver. 28. "*Had thus spoken.*"—And when *He had thus spoken*, had thus judicially, in His own revealed royal person, decreed the destruction of His foes, He went onward to Jerusalem, there to deliver Himself up as the Paschal Lamb into their hands.—*Stier.*

Ver. 29. "*Sent two of His disciples.*"—The sending of the two disciples is an indication of the deliberate purpose of Jesus to give special solemnity to this scene. Hitherto He had withdrawn Himself from popular homage; but He wished to be proclaimed once at least as Messiah and King in the midst of His people (ver. 40). This was the moment of manifestation so impatiently desired by His brethren (John vii. 3, 4), and was also a last appeal to the population of Jerusalem (ver. 42). There was nothing in this course of action to compromise His work, for He well knew that His life was drawing near to an end (xiii. 32, 33). He therefore allowed free

course to the enthusiasm of the multitude; He even provokes the manifestation which follows, while He gave to it a more peaceful and humble character than it might have assumed.—*Godet.*

Ver. 30. "*Never man sat.*"—Humble as were the arrangements for this triumphal entry into Jerusalem, a royal dignity is manifested in the spirit in which they were made. The animal chosen to carry the Saviour was to be one which had never before been used on any common occasion.

Ver. 31. "*The Lord hath need.*"—These words seem to imply that Jesus knew the persons to whom the disciples were sent—that they were friends or disciples. Perhaps in this incidental allusion we have another indication of previous visits paid by Jesus to Jerusalem.

Ver. 32. "*Found even as He had said.*"—Prophetical fore-knowledge rather than omniscience seems to be indicated by the action of Jesus on this occasion.

Ver. 35, 36. *Jesus Claims and Receives Homage.*—Jesus virtually claimed homage, and His disciples responded to Him by paying it. They might, no doubt, easily have procured ordinary trappings for the animal on which He rode, but they chose to prove their desire to consecrate themselves and their possessions to His service by making use of their own garments. Jesus, by accepting their homage, asserted His royal dignity, and by the humble circumstance of His triumph, as arranged by Him, proclaimed that His kingdom was not one of this world.

Vers. 37-44. I. **The joy of the disciples and of the multitude on coming in sight of the city.**

II. **The grief of Jesus at the same moment.**

Vers. 37-48. I. **The purpose Christ developed.**—He came to teach, to heal, to exemplify a sublime character, to offer an expiatory sacrifice, to manifest His Kingship.

II. **The homage Christ received.**

III. **The sorrow Christ felt.**

IV. **The kingly duty Christ fulfilled.**—*Palmer.*

Ver. 37. "*Began to rejoice.*"—Once mounted on the ass, Jesus became the centre of the procession, visible to all, and the scene began more and more to assume an exceptional character. It is as if a breath from on high, a precursor of that of Pentecost, had moved the populace. The sight of the city, and of the Temple, which at this very point appeared in all their beauty, contributed to the outburst of joy and hope which came so suddenly. All hearts recalled at this moment the miracles which had marked the career of this extraordinary Man—miracles which been so numerous as almost to have exhausted the sense of wonder.—*Godet.*

Ver. 38. I. **The character in which Jesus is to be received.**—"The King that cometh in the name of the Lord."

II. **The happy results anticipated from His reign.**—1. "Peace in heaven—*i.e.*, peace re-established between heaven and earth. 2. "Glory in the highest"—fresh and more wonderful manifestations than had been given before of God's gracious character and of His majesty and power.

Ver. 39. "*Some of the Pharisees.*"—They cannot in any sense have been disciples of Jesus. Their spirit was exactly like that of modern Socianism; they objected to prophetical expressions being used and lofty epithets being applied to one whom they regarded as merely a teacher.

"*Rebuke Thy disciples.*"—The Pharisees had, for the time, lost the power of silencing the acclamations of the people, and so they have recurrence to Jesus

himself. They were offended that He accepted recognition as the Messiah, and perhaps were even afraid of the enthusiasm of the populace leading to a seditious outbreak against the Roman authorities."

Ver. 40. "*The stones will immediately cry out.*"—Hitherto the Lord had discouraged all demonstrations in His favour; latterly He had begun an opposite course. On this one occasion He seems to yield His whole soul to the wide and deep acclaim with a mysterious satisfaction, regarding it as *so necessary* a part of the regal dignity in which, as Messiah, He, for the last time, entered the city, that, if not offered by the vast multitude, it would have been wrung out of the stones rather than be withheld.—*Brown.*

Vers. 41, 42. *The Tears of Christ over the Indifference of Men.*

I. **Spiritual indifference was the sign of concealed ruin.**—1. Indifference conceals from men the downward progress of the soul's life. 2. It, at the same time, hides the Christ who alone can save.

II. **In spiritual indifference Christ saw a self-wrought ruin.**

III. **In spiritual indifference He saw ruin rapidly becoming hopeless.** —*Hull.*

I. The tears and words of Christ are the tears and words of a true patriot.

II. **He lamented the destruction of Jerusalem as a theocratic kingdom—as a Church.**

III. **Jerusalem was a home of souls—a hive of living men and women—whose rejection of Him involved overthrow and ruin.**—*Liddon.*

Ver. 41. "*Wept over it.*"—The words just spoken by the Pharisees displayed that obstinate resistance to Him which involved the ultimate ruin and overthrow of the city and nation. The contrast between what was and what might have been, was so great that He could not refrain from lamentation.

Ver. 42. "*Even thou.*"—Or, "thou also," *i.e.*, "thou, as well as the humble crowd of disciples now forming the procession."

"*Thy peace.*"—Probably an allusion to the meaning of the name Jerusalem—the "city of peace."

"*Belong unto thy peace.*"—Acceptance of the sovereignty of Jesus would have meant laying aside that worldly and rebellious spirit which brought about the ruin of the nation.

Ver. 43. "*Cast a trench.*"—Cf. Isa. xxix. 3: "And I will encamp against thee round about, and will lay siege against thee with a mount, and I will raise forts against thee."

Ver. 44. I. The visitation of Jerusalem by Christ our Lord was **unobtrusive.**

II. The visitation of Jerusalem was **final.** Our Lord's words account (1) for the decay and ruin of nations; (2) for the decay and fall of churches; (3) for the decay of seats of learning; (4) for loss in the individual life, when manifest warnings and visitations are neglected.—*Liddon.*

Visitation.—God's visitations are connected in Holy Scripture with various motives.

I. The common use of the word associates it with **judgment**; with the judicial infliction of punishment of some sort (Ps. lxxxix. 32; Numb. xvi. 29).

II. But Divine visitations are often connected with a purpose of **blessing** (Gen. xxi. 1; 1 Sam. ii. 21).

III. Visitation sometimes, too, means **warning**—a meaning intermediate between that of blessing and judgment (Ps. xvii. 3; Job x. 12). It is in this sense that our Lord describes His own ministry as the visitation of Jerusalem. It was partly a visitation of judgment, as our Lord judged the scribes and priests and Pharisees, though His

judgment was not final. Yet more was it a visitation of blessing; it brought with it instruction, grace, and pardon. Failure to know the time of a visitation is followed by grave consequences, because (1) it implies a culpable deadness of spiritual interest, and (2) an equally blame-worthy preoccupation with some other more engrossing interest.—*Liddon.*

Ver. 45. "*Began to cast out.*"—From the parallel passage in St. Mark we learn that the cleansing of the Temple did not take place on the day of the triumphal entry. On that day Jesus entered the Temple and looked round about upon all that was passing in it (Mark xi. 11). On the following day He purified it from the abuses which had sprung up in it, and which had not been effectually checked by His first act of cleansing (John ii. 15).

Ver. 46. "*My house,*" *etc.*—In the reply of Jesus there are quotations from two passages in the prophets—Isa. lvi. 7 and Jer. vii. 11.

Ver. 47. "*The chief priests,*" *etc.*—Three classes of persons were roused to opposition:

I. The chief priests, whose neglect of the Temple was reproved by the action of Jesus, and whose gains were diminished by the suppression of the traffic.

II. The scribes, who were envious of the fame and influence He acquired by His teaching.

III. The "chief of the people," or the wealthy classes, who were for the most part attached to the Sadducean party, and afraid of the effects of any patriotic movement. From this point the Pharisees, who must have approved of the cleansing of the Temple, cease to be the most prominent persecutors of Jesus.

Ver. 48. "*Very attentive.*"—Rather, "hung upon Him." Hung upon Him, as the bee doth on the flower, the babe on the breast, the little bird on the bill of her dam. Christ drew the people after Him by the golden chain of His heavenly eloquence.—*J. Trapp.*

CHAPTER XX.

CRITICAL NOTES.

VER. 1. **One of those days.**—Rather, "one of the days" (R.V.). **Preached the gospel.**—Lit. "evangelised." This beautiful word is almost confined to St. Luke, who uses it twenty-four times, and St. Paul, who uses it twenty times. **Chief priests,** etc.—Thus all classes of the Sanhedrim were represented. This was a formal and official message sent to make Jesus declare Himself as a Divinely commissioned prophet, in which case the Sanhedrim had power to take cognisance of His proceedings as a professed teacher. **Came upon Him.**—The phrase perhaps has reference to the suddenness and hostility of the action taken. The motives of Christ's enemies are disclosed in chap. xix. 47.

Ver. 2. **By what authority?**—*I.e.*, by what kind of authority; it was not that of a rabbi, or priest, or magistrate, for Christ held none of these offices. **These things.**—Probably special reference is made to the cleansing of the Temple, as well as to the acceptance of the popular homage, and the triumphal entrance into Jerusalem.

Ver. 4. **The baptism of John.**—*I.e.*, the whole mission and teaching of John, of which the baptism was the central point. If they acknowledged that John's mission was from heaven, they had an answer to their own question, for John had borne witness to Jesus as the Messiah, and as having received the Holy Spirit.

Ver. 5. **They reasoned,** etc.—We would understand that they went apart and discussed the matter among themselves. **Believed.**—Gave credit to his testimony concerning Me.

Ver. 6. **Stone.**—The word is an emphatic one, and is used only here; it means "to stone to death."

Ver. 7. **They could not tell.**—Rather, "they knew not" (R.V.). Their reply was, virtually, not "We do not know," but "We do not wish to say"; and to this inward thought Christ replies, "Neither tell I you." Their incompetence to decide in the case of John disqualified them for judging in the case of Jesus.

Ver. 9. **Then began He.**—The opening of a fresh series of parables and discourses. **This parable.**—The substance of which is partly a history of the ingratitude and rebelliousness of the Jewish people, and partly a prophecy of their final act of apostasy in rejecting and slaying their Messiah, and of the punishment that would follow. **A certain man.**—The man represents God, the vineyard the Jewish nation, the husbandmen the rulers of the Jews. This parable is intimately connected with Isa. v. 1 *ff.* **For a long time.**—The idea implied is that abundant opportunity was given for a return for all God's mercy to Israel.

Ver. 10. **A servant.**—By the servants are to be understood the prophets. For the treatment they received see 1 Kings xviii. 4, xxii. 24-27; 2 Chron. xxiv. 21; Jer. xxvi. 20-23, xxxvii. 15: cf. also Neh. ix. 26; Heb. xi. 36, 37. **Of the fruit.**—*I.e.*, payment in *kind*.

Ver. 12. **Cast him forth.**—A certain gradation in acts of insolence and violence is implied.

Ver. 13. **My beloved son.**—The distinction between the son and the other servants is plainly indicated (cf. Heb. iii. 5, 6). Yet the Son takes upon Him "the form of a servant" (Phil. ii. 7). Christ here speaks of Himself, not as Redeemer, but as preacher of righteousness. **When they see him.**—Omitted in the best MSS.; omitted in R.V.

Ver. 14. **This is the heir.**—An implication that the leaders of the Jews were secretly conscious that Christ's claims were well founded. Nicodemus, speaking for his class, said, early in Christ's ministry, "We know that thou art a teacher come from God" (John iii. 2). The words, too, of Caiaphas seem to imply a latent consciousness that Jesus was the Messiah (John xi. 49-52).

Ver. 15. **So they cast him out.**—Here the prophetical part of the parable begins. The allusion is either to excommunication, to delivering Him over to the heathen, or to His suffering death outside the walls of the city. If this last be the fulfilment of the prophecy, we may compare with these words, John xix. 17; Heb. xiii. 11, 12.

Ver. 16. **He shall come.**—In St. Matthew this reply is given by the people in answer to Christ's question. This coming of the Lord is here plainly identified with the destruction of Jerusalem. **God forbid,**—Lit., "Be it not so"; a phrase found here only in the Gospels. There seems no special reason why, in the passages in the New Testament where it occurs, the Divine name should be used in translating it; it is scarcely reverent so to use it.

Ver. 17. **And He beheld them.**—Rather, "But He looked upon them" (R.V.); a fixed glance to add force to the quotation from Scripture which He was about to make. **That is written.**—Ps. cxviii. 22; a psalm from which the multitude had quoted in acclamations the day before. (Hosanna, Matt. xxi. 9, is from the twenty-fifth verse of that psalm, where it is rendered "save now.") **Head of the corner.**—"The stone is regarded both as a foundation-stone and a stone at the angle of the building, binding the two walls together" (*Farrar*).

Ver. 18. **Broken.**—Rather, "broken to pieces" (R.V.). **Grind him to powder.**—Rather, "it will scatter him as dust" (R.V.). In the latter there is probably an allusion to Daniel ii. 35. They fall on the stone who are offended at Christ in His low estate (Isa. viii. 14; Luke ii. 34). "Of this sin His hearers were already guilty. There was yet 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 themselves in distinct and self-conscious opposition against the Lord; who, knowing who He is, do yet to the end oppose themselves to Him and to His kingdom" (*Trench*).

Ver. 19. **And they feared the people.**—The state of mind in which the attempt to ensnare Jesus was made: "and they did so in fear of the people" (*Alford*).

Ver. 20. **They watched Him.**—Rather, "and having watched for an opportunity." **Spies.**—Men "suborned." **Just men.**—*I.e.*, honest, ingenuous men, perplexed with a doubt which He might solve. **Power and authority of the governor.**—*I.e.*, "to the Roman power, and to the authority of the governor."

Ver. 22. **Tribute.**—The word means a poll-tax which had been levied since Judæa became a Roman province. The insurrection of Judas of Galilee had been occasioned by the belief that it was unlawful to pay this tax, since God was the only true ruler of the Jewish people. This belief was held by a large section of the people; if Christ decided against it, He would alienate them; if He agreed with them He would embroil Himself with the Roman authority. The idea that the Herodians who, as St. Matthew says, joined with the Pharisees in putting this question, approved of the tax, is utterly unfounded. It is a mere conjecture of Origen's. There would be very little craftiness in the plot if two classes, one of them notoriously opposed to the payment of the tax, and the other as notoriously in favour of it, were represented in the same deputation. The Herodians, as clinging to the last fragment of

Jewish national independence in the rule of the Herods, would naturally be opposed to complete subjection to Rome.

Ver. 24. **A penny.**—The Roman *denarius.*

Ver. 25. **Render, therefore.**—It was a decision of the rabbis that "wherever any king's money is current, there that king is lord." By accepting the coinage of Cæsar they had acknowledged his supremacy in temporal things, and consequently his claim to tribute. But the answer goes further. The followers of Judas of Galilee regarded the authority of Cæsar as incompatible with that of God. Our Lord distinguishes between temporal and spiritual sovereignty, and shows that the two are not opposed to each other. God was no longer, as of old, the civil ruler of His people. They had rejected His authority, and He had given them over to a foreign power, who reigned and claimed tribute by His ordinance (cf. Rom. xiii. 1, 7). But God was still, and must ever be, the spiritual Ruler of the world, and to Him now, as ever, worship and obedience were due.

Ver. 27. **Sadducees.**—Members of the aristocratic and wealthy class, which included the higher ranks of the priesthood. It is a popular error, based on a statement of Jerome's, that they rejected all the Jewish Scriptures but the Pentateuch. They accepted the later Scriptures but rejected the Oral Law and traditions. Like all Jews, no doubt, they attributed a higher degree of inspiration to the Pentateuch than to any other part of the Old Testament. **Deny the resurrection.**—*I.e.*, of the body, and apparently even the immortality of the soul. The Pharisees, on the contrary, believed in the resurrection of the body and a future life, much in a Christian sense, though they had somewhat carnal ideas of the nature of the future state.

Ver. 28. **Moses wrote.**—Deut. xxv. 5.

Ver. 29. **Seven brethren.**—Probably a fictitious case. The difficulty however, would have been the same if there had been only two brethren.

Ver. 33. **For seven.**—Rather, "for the seven" (R.V.). It is difficult to see what triumph the Sadducees would have won if Jesus had agreed with some of the rabbis who had discussed this question, and decided the matter in favour of the first husband.

Ver. 34. **The children of this world.**—The R.V. absurdly changes this to "the sons of this world." The phrase "marry" is appropriate to "sons," but "are given in marriage" applies only to women. Though "sons" is a literal translation, a general word like "children" is evidently called for.

Ver. 35. **To obtain that world.**—Or, "to attain to that world" (R.V.).

Ver. 36. **Neither can.**—Rather, "for neither can" (R.V.). The reason why there is no marriage in that state is that there is no death: so that it is not necessary to raise up a new generation to take the place of the old. **Equal unto the angels.**—*I.e.*, in being immortal. Christ distinctly asserts the existence of these beings, which the Sadducees denied. **Children of God.**—*I.e.*, not because of their ethical character, but because they become "partakers of the Divine nature," receiving life by the direct action of God in raising them from the dead.

Ver. 37. **Even Moses showed.**—Moses, whose supposed silence on this point the Sadducees laid such stress upon. **At the bush.**—Rather, "*in the place concerning* the bush" (R.V.); *i.e.*, in the section of the book of Exodus known by that name (chap. iii.).

Ver. 38. **Not a God of the dead.**—But for Christ's interpretation, the profound meaning of the name by which God then called Himself could scarcely have been discovered with any measure of certainty. "Our Lord here testifies of the conscious intent of God in speaking the words. God uttered them, He tells us, to Moses, in the consciousness of the still enduring existence of His peculiar relation to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob" (*Meyer*). "The groundwork of His argument seems to me," says *Alford*, "to be this: the words 'I am thy God' imply a *covenant*. There is another side to them: "Thou art mine" follows upon "I am thine." When God, therefore, declares that He is the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, He declares their continuance, as the other parties in this covenant. It is an assertion which could not be made of an annihilated being of the past."

Ver. 38. **All live unto Him.**—*I.e.*, none are annihilated; those who have passed away from earth and are counted by us as dead, are living in the sight of God. See this same thought expounded in Rom. xiv. 8 and Acts xvii. 28.

Ver. 39. **Thou hast well said.**—The Pharisees as a class would be glad to see their opponents, the Sadducees, refuted, and some of them were evidently generous enough to express their feelings of admiration at the wisdom displayed by Jesus on this occasion.

Ver. 40. **Durst not ask.**—*I.e.*, did not presume to frame any more captious questions, or to endeavour to entrap Jesus in His teaching.

Ver. 41. **To them.**—*I.e.*, to the scribes. **Christ.**—Rather, "the Christ" (R.V.). **David's son.**—Cf. John vii. 42.

Vers. 42. **David himself.**—Ps. cx. 1. David was popularly supposed to be the author of the psalm. Even if he were not, the point on which Christ lays stress—viz., that in it Divine honours are paid to the Messiah, who was to come of David's line, would be unaffected. Christ is not discussing the authorship of the psalm and affirming that it was written by

David, but drawing the attention of the scribes to a statement in Scripture which was inconsistent with their belief that the Messiah would be a mere man. **The Lord,** etc.—*I.e.* "Jehovah said unto my Lord."

Ver. 43. **Thy footstool.**—R.V. "the footstool of thy feet." The same tautology is in the original; but it is doubtful whether it was worth while to coin an awkward English phrase by such a literal translation.

Ver. 44. **How is He, then, his son?**—The solution is given in Rom. i. 3, 4; Christ was the Son of David according to the flesh, and yet the eternal, pre-existent Son of God.

Ver. 45. **Then in the audience.**—Rather, "and in the hearing" (R.V.).

Ver. 46. **Long robes.**—Either an official dress or an exaggerated obedience to the law concerning dress (Numb. xv. 38-40). **Chief rooms.**—Rather, "chief seats" (R.V.).

Ver. 47. **Devour widows' houses.**—Cf. 2 Tim. iii. 6. **For a show.**—Rather "for a pretence" (R.V.). **Damnation.**—Rather, "condemnation" (R.V.).

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 1—8.

The Question of Authority.—The question put by the chief priests and scribes as to the authority which Jesus exercised was not altogether an unreasonable one. They were the guardians of the religion of Israel, and of the institutions which had been founded by Divine sanction for the preservation of that religion. Had they been single-minded and upright men, with minds open to truth, their question might have been met by Jesus in a very different way. As it was, they were under the influence of a twofold prejudice, which incapacitated them for acting as judges of Christ's claims.

I. **They refused to recognise any authority as genuine which did not emanate from themselves.**—They regarded the office of the priesthood, of which they were ministers, as of supreme authority; and since Christ did not belong to the tribe of Levi, they failed to see that He had any right to assume exceptional power, or to set aside that which they exercised. They committed the mistake of overlooking the fact that the authority of the priestly office is secondary and derived, and therefore subordinate to the Living Word of God. Even under the Old Testament dispensation it had been evident, time after time, that authoritative declarations of the Divine will were not given exclusively through members of the priestly caste. Most of the prophets belonged to other tribes than that of Levi, and their authority was accepted by both priests and people. Yet the fact that Jesus had no official position—that He neither belonged to a priestly family nor was accredited as a teacher by any one of the rabbinical schools—was virtually taken by the priests and scribes as a proof that He was usurping functions to which He had no right, in teaching men and in laying down rules for their guidance in spiritual things. In the Epistle to the Hebrews we find an indication of the extent to which this question troubled the minds of Jews who had accepted Christ. There the writer asserts that Jesus is a priest of an order far older than that of Levi, and superior to it—a priest in the same sense as Melchizedek, whom even Abraham recognised as of higher rank than himself.

II. **They were blind to the ample proofs Jesus had already given of His Divine authority.**—This fact it is that causes us instinctively to regard the question as uncalled-for and impertinent. Christ had now been for more than two years a prominent figure in Jewish society, and we are astonished that His greatness had not impressed all beholders. The people who heard Him speak declared that He spoke with authority, and not as the scribes; but their rulers were too much under the influence of prejudice to form the same opinion. In the life and work of Christ abundant proof had been given, to those who had eyes to see, of His heavenly commission. 1. In the nature of His teaching. His intimate acquaintance with human nature, His exalted conceptions of the requirements of God's law, His unerring statements of the relations which man should sustain towards God and towards his brethren, and His stern condemna-

tion of all falsehood and hypocrisy, should have convinced His hearers of His right to the authority He claimed. The truth of His teaching was so apparent that no rank with which man might have invested Him would have added weight to His words. 2. In the holiness of His life. His conduct and actions were open to the scrutiny of all, and He could ask, without fear of a reply, "Which of you convinceth Me of sin?" A Divine holiness and a Divine compassion were manifested by Him. He thought of those whom the world forgot; He had pity on those who were ignorant and out of the way; the poor and outcast were the objects of His care: every hour of His life was devoted to ministrations on behalf of others. By these marks, as well as by His zeal for the honour of God, might the priests and scribes have perceived His consecration to the office of Redeemer of men. 3. In His miracles. Day after day He had displayed a mysterious power in overcoming ills that affect humanity. He had healed the sick, cleansed lepers, given sight to the blind, and raised the dead. A few days before, in the presence of a great assembly, He had performed the most wonderful of all His mighty works in recalling Lazarus from the grave. None contested the authenticity of these miracles; even the chief priests and scribes did not refuse to believe that He had performed them. Yet they failed to see that the works of Christ supplied the answer to the question they put to Him—that no one could have wrought these works unless God had been with Him. In all ages ecclesiastical prejudices have blinded men to the worth and significance of the teaching and of the holy lives and works of men who have not drawn their authority from the Church. Instead of frank acknowledgment of good work done, there are often curious and impertinent inquiries as to the validity of "the orders" such men have possessed. Such miserable prejudices find a sufficient reproof in the refusal of Christ to give any formal justification of His right to teach the ignorant, and show compassion to the miserable.

SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS ON VERSES 1—8.

I. A **rebellious** question (vers. 1-20).
II. A **malicious** question (ver. 21-26).
III. A **scoffer's** question (vers. 27-38).
IV. **Our Lord's question** (vers. 39-47).—*W. Taylor.*

Ver. 1. "*Came upon Him.*"—This deputation marks a deliberate and formal inquiry on the part of the Sanhedrim.

I. **It consisted of men who were entitled, from their office and rank, to institute careful investigation into the authority of all teachers of religion.**

II. **But of men who were prejudiced against Jesus.**

III. **It came at far too late a period.**—Jesus had now been at least two years before the public—had performed many indubitable miracles, and had been accepted as a teacher by multitudes in all parts of the land.

Ver. 2. "*By what authority?*"—A twofold question.

I. **Does Thy power proceed from God?**

II. **What messenger of God consecrated Thee to this activity?**—The reply of Jesus, requiring them to make up their mind as to the claims of John the Baptist, is, therefore, most pertinent to the second of these questions.

Ver. 3. "*I also will ask you.*"—The Divine method of judgment.

I. **Sinners are made to pass judgment on themselves.**

II. **Are reduced to silence in the presence of their Lord.**

Ver. 4. "*The baptism of John,*" *etc.*—The question (1) revealed that it was in no truth-loving temper of mind that the rulers had interrogated Jesus as to His authority, and (2) it con-

tained an answer to their question. If they accepted the mission of His forerunner as Divine, they were bound to accept His as of the same character; if they repudiated the Baptist, they virtually declared their own incompetency to judge spiritual things.

Ver. 5, 6. "*They reasoned with themselves.*"—The bad faith of the rulers of the people was manifested clearly by their present conduct. 1. They were more anxious to escape the dilemma in which the question of Christ placed them than to return a truthful answer. 2. They professed doubt as to John's Divine mission, though they had virtually pronounced against it by refusing to believe in him. 3. They were not ashamed to admit to themselves that they were animated by fear of the people rather than by fear of God—that they followed the dictates of carnal policy, while professing to be zealous for the interests of true religion.

Ver. 7. "*They could not tell.*"—They confessed their incompetency to decide on the authority of a prophet: Christ, therefore, declined to accept them as judges of His claims.

Ver. 8. "*Neither tell I you.*"—Now both are silent; but He, because, on good grounds, He will not speak; they because they, through their own fault, cannot speak. And among the people present as witnesses there is no one who could seriously doubt which of the two parties leaves the field victorious. —*Van Oosterzee.*

The Indignation of Jesus.—The words of Jesus are animated both by indignation and contempt. "If you declare yourselves incompetent to judge of the claims of John, much more are you incompetent to judge of my claims." They had admitted failure as leaders of the people: Christ proceeds to brand them, in the parable that follows, as faithless and rebellious.

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 9—18.

The Vineyard and its Keepers.—The pungent severity of this parable, with its transparent veil of narrative, is only appreciated by keeping clearly in view the circumstances and the listeners. They had struck at Him with their question of His authority, and He parries the blow. Now it is His turn, and the sharp point goes home.

I. **The preparation of the vineyard.**—1. It is planted and furnished with all needful appliances for making wine (see Matthew), which is its great end. The direct Divine origin of the religious ideas and observances of "Judaism" is thus asserted by Christ. The only explanation of them is that God enclosed that bit of the wilderness, and with His own hands set growing there these exotics. Neither the theology nor the ritual is of man's establishing. 2. Thus prepared, the vineyard is next handed over to the husbandmen. These are the Jewish people. No doubt the Sanhedrim was the chief object at which Christ aimed the parable. But they only gave form and voice to the national spirit, and "the people loved to have it so." National responsibilities are not to be slipped out of by being shifted on to the broad shoulders of governments or influential men. Who lets them be governments, and influential? Christ teaches both rulers and ruled, then, here, the ground and purpose of their privileges. They prided themselves on these as their own, but they were only tenants. They made boast of the law, but they forgot that fruit was the end of the Divine planting and equipment. Holiness and glad obedience were what God sought. 3. Having installed the husbandmen, the owner goes into another country. Centuries of comparative Divine silence followed the planting of the vineyard. Having given us our charge, God, as it were, steps aside to leave us room to work as we will, and so to display what we are made of. He is absent in so far as conspicuous oversight

and retribution are concerned. He is present to help, love, and bless. The faithful husbandman has Him always near, a joy and a strength, else no fruit would grow; but the sin and misery of the unfaithful are that he thinks of Him as far off.

II. **The habitual ill-treatment of the messengers.**—These are, of course, the prophets, whose office was not only to foretell, but to plead for obedience and trust, the fruits sought by God. The whole history of the nation is summed up in this dark picture. There is no more remarkable historical fact than that of the uniform hostility of the Jews to the prophets. That they should have had prophets in long succession is surely inexplicable on any naturalistic hypothesis. Such men were not the natural product of the race nor of its circumstances, as their fate shows. How did they spring up? The only explanation is that stated here: "He sent His servants." Christ treats the whole long series of violent rejections as the acts of the same set of husbandmen. The class, or nation, was one, as the stream is one, though all its particles were different; and the Pharisees and scribes, who stood with frowning hatred before Him as He spoke, were the living embodiment of the spirit which had animated all the past. In so far as they inherited the taint, and repeated the conduct, the guilt of all the former generations was laid at their door. They declared themselves their predecessors' heirs; and as they reproduced their actions, they would have to bear the accumulated weight of the consequences.

III. **The mission of the son and its fatal issue** (vers. 13-15).—Three things are noticeable here. 1. The unique position which Christ here claims, with unwonted openness and decisiveness, as apart from, and far above, all the prophets. They constitute one order, but He stands alone, sustaining a closer relation to God. They were faithful as servants, but He as a son. Rulers and people must decide whether they will own or reject their king, and they must do it with their eyes open. 2. The owner's vain hope in sending his son. He thought that he would be welcomed, and he was disappointed. It was his last attempt. Christ knew Himself to be God's last appeal, as He is to all men, as well as to that generation. He is the last arrow in God's quiver. When He has shot that bolt, the resources even of Divine love are exhausted, and no more can be done for the vineyard than He has done for it. 3. The vain calculation of the husbandmen. Christ puts hidden motives into plain words, and reveals to His hearers what they scarcely knew of their own hearts. But how was the rulers' or the people's wish to "seize on His inheritance" their motive for killing Jesus? Their great sin was their desire to have their national prerogatives and to render no true obedience. The ruling class clung to their privileges, and forgot their responsibilities, while the people were proud of their standing as Jews, and careless of God's service. Neither wanted to be reminded of their debt to the Lord of the vineyard, and their hostility to Jesus was mainly because He would call on them for the fruits. If they could get this unwelcome and persistent voice silenced, they could go on in the comfortable old fashion of lip-service and real selfishness. It is an account of the hostility of many men who are against Him. They want to possess life and its good, without being for ever pestered with reminders of the terms on which they hold it, and of God's desire for their love and obedience. They have a secret feeling that Christ has the right to ask for their hearts, and so they turn from Him with anger, and sometimes with hatred.

IV. **The application of the parable.**—Our Lord, in this last portion of His address, throws away even the thin veil of parable, and speaks the sternest truth in the nakedest words. He puts His own claim in the plainest fashion, as the corner-stone on which the true kingdom of God was to be built. He brands the men who stood before Him as incompetent builders, who did not know the stone

needed for their edifice when they saw it. He declares, with triumphant confidence, the futility of opposition to Himself—even though it kill Him. He is sure that God will build on Him, and that His place in the building, which shall rise through the ages, will be, to even careless eyes, the crown of the manifest wonders of God. Strange words from a man who knew that in three days He would be crucified! Stranger still, they have come true! He is the foundation of the best part of the best men; the basis of thought, the motive for action, the pattern of life, the ground of hope, for countless individuals; and on Him stands firm the society of His Church, and is hung all the glory of His Father's house. Rejection of Christ involves an awful doom. The doom has two stages: one, a lesser misery, which is the lot of Him who stumbles against the stone, while it lies, passive, to be built on; one more dreadful, when it has acquired motion and comes down with irresistible impetus. To stumble at Christ, or to refuse His grace, and not to base our lives and hopes on Him, is maiming and damage, in many ways, here and now. But suppose the stone endowed with motion, what can stand against it? And suppose that the Christ, who is now offered for the rock on which we may pile our hopes and never be confounded, comes to judge, will He not crush the mightiest opponent as the dust of the summer threshing-floor?—*Maclaren.*

SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS ON VERSES 9—18.

Ver. 9-18. *The Parable of the Vineyard.*—I. **Its references to the Jews.**—Its special reference was to the teachers, the scribes and Pharisees. The lesson is very plain. They or their fathers had rejected the prophets who had come in the name of God, and now they were about to cast out and even kill the beloved Son of God Himself. Here, therefore, they are warned solemnly that their privileges will be taken from them, and they themselves will suffer the just punishment of their abuse of these privileges.

II. **But the parable reaches to us also.**—We have each our own vineyard to keep—that is to say, our work to do for God, and our life to live for God. He will call us to account for the deeds done in the body. To teach us to live for Him, He has sent us also prophets and apostles and martyrs, preachers and teachers. They come in humble guise, perhaps; but when they are pure and true, the conscience and the Spirit of God tell us they are God's messengers. According to our treatment of them shall be our judgment.—*Hastings.*

The Wicked Husbandmen. — This parable tells—

I. **The greatest favour.**
II. **The greatest sin.**
III. **The darkest doom.**—*Wells.*

I. **The vineyard.**—1. The owner of the vineyard. 2. What he did with it.
II. **The husbandmen.**—1. Their privileges, and how they used them. 2. Their rebellion, and how it ended.—*Watson.*

I. **The circumstances in which the vine-dressers** (as representing the leaders of the Jewish people) **are placed.**
II. **Their past conduct** (vers. 10-12).
III. **Their present conduct** (vers. 13-15).
IV. **The chastisement to be inflicted on them.**

The History of the Theocracy.—Jesus here traces the course of the history of the theocracy. The true significance of that history is unveiled in a most profound manner. From the foundation of the ancient covenant, down through the ministry of the prophets to the advent of Jesus Himself, His rejection and death, the very consequences of His death not yet consummated—the rejection of Israel and

the transference of the kingdom of God from the Jews to the Gentiles;—all is presented in the simplest imagery and with the most terrible clearness. At the same time an answer is given to the question of the priests as to the source of His authority. He is the Son, the Heir, the last messenger from their Master.—*Godet.*

Ver. 9. "*To the people.*"—Christ had repelled the attack, but now He carries the war into His enemies' quarters. He had unmasked the hypocrisy of His enemies, and shown the dilemma in which their pretended ignorance placed them: now He brings their guilt to light and foretells that their rejection of Him will lead to the bringing in of the Gentiles.

"*Went into a far country.*"—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.—*Trench.*

Ver. 10. "*Sent a servant to the husbandmen.*"—Nothing is more remarkable in the history of Israel than the constant co-existence within her pale of two entirely opposite classes of men—that of the moral triflers, too numerously represented among those exercising official influence; and that of the men of consuming zeal for righteousness, that is, the prophets. —*Bruce.*

"*Give him of the fruit.*"—These fruits which are demanded are in no wise 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 redemption for its basis (Rom. iii. 20-25). 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 position, denied and slew these messengers of grace.—*Olshausen.*

Ver. 11. "*Entreated him shamefully.*"—Cf. Neh. ix. 26: "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." See also 2 Chron. xxiv. 20, 21; Jer. xliv. 4.

Ver. 12. *Cast him out.*"—The vine-dressers proceed from bad to worse: the first messenger they beat; the second they beat and outrage; the third they wound and fling out of the vineyard.

Ver. 13. "*I will send my beloved Son.*"—The failure of this attempt implies (1) that the resources even of heavenly love are exhausted, and (2) that the impenitent fill up the measure of their guilt.

"*It may be they will reverence.*"—Two alternatives:—

I. Reverence shown to the Son.

II. Or, at least, hesitation to inflict on Him ill-treatment like that suffered by the servants previously sent.

Anthropomorphism.—Strictly speaking, indeed, this thought does not apply to God, for He knew what would

happen, and was not deceived by the expectation of a more agreeable result; but it is customary, especially in parables, to ascribe to Him human feelings. And yet this was not added without reason, for Christ intended to represent, as in a mirror, how deplorable their impiety was, of which it was too certain a proof that they rose in diabolical rage against the Son of God, who had come to bring them back to a sound mind. As they had formerly, as far as lay in their power, driven God from His inheritance by the cruel murder of the prophets, so it was the crowning point of all their crimes to slay the Son, that they might reign as in a house which was without an heir.—*Calvin.*

"*They will reverence him.*"—The lord of the vineyard has one expedient left. He will send his only and well-beloved son. The thought which lies on the surface is the estimate formed in heaven of the mission of the Son of God. It was something different, not in degree, but in kind, from any other instrumentality that had been or could be employed for touching hard hearts and awakening dormant sensibilities. We know how opposite was the result. Hearts were only stimulated into a greater degree of resistance by the mission of the Divine Son. Not one generation or one nation only which has thus argued. Men in all ages have felt the critical nature of the interposition of Jesus Christ, and have roused themselves to put Him down with an energy stimulated by the thought of the finality of the enterprise. In this recognition of the greatness of the stake at issue, Christians find nothing to complain of, everything to rejoice in. Jesus Christ is the key of the position. The text describes the anticipation in heaven, chronologically antecedent to the reception below. "It may be they will reverence Him when they see Him." The word "reverence" used here occurs in several other places and contains three elements:—

I. **Attention.**—This is the first element of reverence. Can there be reverence without attention? Is there not much irreverence among priests and people alike? Neglect of Christ's word? Careless living?

II. **Awe is the second element in reverence.**—There is much unhallowed familiarity in present-day religion. Too much emotional fondness. Christ risen and enthroned is too much forgotten. How little is felt of St. John's awe in His presence!—"When I saw Him, I fell at His feet as dead."

III. **Shame is the third element.**—It might have been thought that the sight of the son would awaken in the husbandmen a sense of shame for those misdeeds of theirs which had made his coming necessary. Whether shame enters into all reverence is a question which may wait. It must, however, enter into all that reverence which forgiven sinners feel for Jesus Christ. There is nothing like the sight of the Saviour for quickening the sense of the multitude and the shamefulness of personal sins. Because I am ashamed before Him now, I hope not to be ashamed before Him at His coming.—*Vaughan.*

Ver. 14. "*Let us kill him.*"—We, on the contrary, say, "This is the Son of the Eternal God; let us believe on Him, and the inheritance shall be ours."—*Sutton.*

Ver. 15. "*And killed him.*"—Jesus relates, with striking calmness, and as a fact already accomplished, the crime which they are preparing to commit upon His person. It is as though He told them that He would not seek to escape out of their hands.—*Godet.*

Ver. 16. *Give the vineyard to others.*—If the husbandmen who are dispossessed represent the heads of the Jewish theocracy, the others who take their place must be understood to represent the apostles and their successors.

Vers. 17-19. *The Rejected Stone.*—A codicil added to the parable of the vineyard. The Jews were familiar with the ideas connected with the corner-stone.

I. **The stone at rest.**—Men falling or rushing on a big rock hurt, not the rock, but themselves. The Redeemer resisted in the day of grace, means loss and harm to those resisting. We must come into some kind of contact with the Son of God. Alas! He has, on earth, to bear the weight of many sinners striking against Him.

II. **The stone in motion.**—The rock is raised in mid-heaven, hovers over the assailants for a while, and then falls on their heads. Here the destruction is final and complete. Christ's enemies will be overwhelmed by His own power put forth in the day of judgment. The first bruising may be cured: the grinding to powder accomplished by the Judge when the day of grace is done can never be healed. Many resented this doctrine from the lips of Christ. Some resent it keenly still. But there is no escape from the solemn truth that those who in this life reject Christ must bear the weight of His judgment in the world to come.—*Arnot.*

Ver. 17. "*What is this, then?*"—*I.e.*, if the evil-doers were not to be overthrown, the prophecy of Scripture would not be fulfilled.

Ver. 18. "*Fall on this stone.*"—Those persons are said to *fall upon* Christ who rush forward to destroy Him; not that they occupy a more elevated position than He does, but because their madness carries them so far that they endeavour to attack Christ as if He were below them. Christ tells them that all they will gain by it is, that by the very conflict they will be broken. But when they have thus proudly exalted themselves, He tells them that another thing will happen, which is that they will be *bruised* under the *stone* against which they so insolently dashed themselves.—*Calvin.*

I. **An injury which may be healed.**—The bruising caused by a man's unbelieving opposition to Christ under the gospel.

II. **Irremediable destruction.**—Accomplished by the wrath of the Judge when the day of grace has passed.

Rejection of The Gospel.—The two clauses of the text figuratively point to two different classes of operation on the rejection of the gospel. The one class represents the present hurts and harms which, by the natural operation of the thing, without the action of Christ judicially at all, every man receives in the very act of rejecting the Gospel, and the other represents the ultimate issue of that rejection.

I. **Every man has some kind of connexion with Christ.**

II. **The immediate issue of rejection of Christ is loss and maiming.**

III. **The ultimate issue of unbelief is irremediable destruction when Christ begins to move.**—*Maclaren.*

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 19—26.

Cæsar and God.—Jesus thus refuses to decide formally a question of politics, just as, on another occasion, He had refused to interfere between the two brothers who were in dispute about an inheritance. It was not for settling questions like these that He came to earth. More than once the people sought to force Him to take up the *rôle* of a political leader, but in vain. He firmly refused to compromise His cause by associating it with any of the political factions of His time. Yet He did not merely maintain a prudent silence on this occasion, when the question of the lawfulness of paying tribute to Rome was

brought to Him for solution. He spoke words which cast a new light upon the whole subject, and which solved the difficulty which these men hypocritically professed to experience, but which really troubled many devout hearts in Israel.

I. **It was new to hear that the theocracy was now a thing of the past.**—Up to this time the religious ideal of Israel was the subordination of civil society to the priestly order: though the nation was actually subject to a foreign power, it was considered that the normal condition of matters ought to be the direct government of the state by ministers of Jehovah, acting in His name and employing, by His authority, all the resources and powers that are at the disposal of earthly kings and rulers. It was a magnificent dream, but all attempts to realise it had hopelessly failed. Christ now distinguishes between the two spheres of national life: the one is purely civil, and may be an empire, a kingdom, an oligarchy, or a democracy; the other is purely religious and in it God is the supreme Ruler.

II. **The duties belonging to both spheres are to be discharged in a religious spirit.**—Christ did not represent civil society as a domain which is withdrawn from holy influence, and, as it were, isolated from that in which God rules. One of the most striking characteristics of the gospel is that it ignores the pagan distinction between things sacred and things profane, and that it does not make religion a distinct part of life, but a Divine influence upon every part, which penetrates, pervades, and governs the whole. St. Paul states this fact in very strong terms: "Whether ye eat or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God." And wherever Christianity exists as a living power it acts upon the consciences of men and directs their conduct, not only in matters of specially religious duty, but also in all that concerns the well-being of the body social. It purifies public opinion, brands as evil all customs and practices of a degrading kind, and spreads its shield over the weak and helpless. None of the spheres of human activity can be sealed against it.

III. **Yet there is a profound distinction between religious and civil society, both with regard to the domains they occupy and the modes of action they employ.**—The domain of the State is that of the present life and of interests that are purely temporal. The State ought to secure for each individual the free enjoyment of all rights and liberties belonging to him, and to endeavour to increase the sum of happiness of all who are under its care. But it has to do only with man as a citizen. All teaching concerning God, the human soul, religious duties and aspirations, and the hope of immortality, are out of its province. It should stand neutral towards all varying forms of religious belief, as the defender of liberty of conscience, and of the religious rights of all. The Church and the State also differ in the nature of the means which they employ. The arm of the State is force; it has the power and the right to overcome, by material strength, all resistance to its laws. The arm of the Church is persuasion; it has not the power or the right to use force for the establishment or maintenance of any form of religious belief. "The weapons of our warfare are not carnal" (2 Cor. x. 4), said one of the greatest of its champions. Its sword is the Word of God; its instrument of triumph is the cross, which symbolises the submission of its Lord to sufferings and death; and the Spirit which animates it is compared to a dove. Such are the figures under which Holy Scripture represents the power it wields. To the State we owe tribute, obedience to its laws, and the sacrifice of our time and strength for securing the common good. To God we owe ourselves—the homage of mind, will, and heart. The influence of the world and of sin may almost have obliterated the Divine image and superscription upon the soul which proclaim that it belongs to God and should be rendered to Him; but they never wholly disappear.

SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS ON VERSES 19—26.

Ver. 19. "*The chief priests and scribes sought.*"—There is (1) a bitterness against Christ, which arises from a misunderstanding of Him; but (2) a still deeper and more intense bitterness is manifested here by men who understood Him far too well, and who were only the more estranged from Him in consequence.

Ver. 20. "*Take hold of His words.*"—They could not find Him guilty in any of His *actions*, but hoped to force Him into some hasty utterance upon a complicated question.

"*Just men.*"—*I.e.*, they came pretending to be upright persons who were perplexed on a point of duty; but their real intention was to entrap Him into the expression of an opinion which might be used against Him.

Ver. 21. "*We know that Thou,*" *etc.*—It is not hard to see the treachery that lay beneath this praise. The Jews were firmly convinced that it was unlawful to pay tribute to Cæsar, but found it advisable to conceal their feelings of aversion. Those who now approached Christ wished, by flattering His courage and integrity, to force Him to express an opinion of which they might take advantage to put Him to death.

Ver. 22. "*Is it lawful for us?*"—The difficulty of the question arose from the contradiction between the condition of subjection in which the nation actually was at the time, and the independence which it should have enjoyed, and which seemed to be anticipated and promised in the writings of the prophets.

The True Way to Follow.—The way to follow in this abnormal position was not that of revolt, which in this case would have been revolt against God, but that of humiliation, repentance, and devout submission to God, who alone could give them deliverance, since it had been national sin that had led to their being subjected to the Gentile yoke. The error which Jesus dissipates, in His reply, consisted in applying to the actual state of the nation the principle laid down by God as governing its normal state. Jesus virtually said to those who interrogated Him, "Become ye again dependent upon God, and He will render you independent of Cæsar; but until He has accomplished that deliverance you are bound to fulfil the duties which belong to your present state."—*Godet.*

Ver. 23. "*Perceived their craftiness.*"—Neither force nor craft could prevail against the Lord. In an instant He saw through the wiles of His enemies, and escaped the snare they had laid for Him. Thus He exemplified the counsel He gave to His servants and combined the wisdom of the serpent with the harmlessness of the dove.

Ver. 24. "*Show me a penny.*"—It was not to gain time that He desired that a *denarius* should be shown Him: the image and title it bore decided the question that was put to Him.

"*Whose image and superscription?*"—Christ serenely walks through the cobwebs spun by His enemies, and lays His hand upon the fact. "The currency of the country proclaims the monarch of the country. It is too late to ask questions about your tribute when you pay your bills in his money." Does not the other side of Christ's answer—"to God the things that are God's"—rest upon a similar fact? Does not the parallelism require that we should suppose that the destiny of things to be devoted to God is stamped upon them, whatever they are, at least as plainly as the right of Cæsar to exact tribute was inferred from the fact that his money was the currency of the country?

I **Note the image stamped upon man, and the consequent obligation.**—

Our spirits show that God is our Lord, since we are made in a true sense in His image, and therefore only in Him can we find rest. We are like God in that we can love; we are like Him in that we can perceive the right, and that the right is supreme; we are like Him in that we have the power to say "I will."

II. **Look, next, at the defacement of the image and the false expenditure of the coin.**—Our nature has gone through the stamping-press again, and another likeness has been deeply imprinted upon it. The awful power that is given to men of degrading themselves till, lineament by lineament, the likeness in which they are made vanishes, is the saddest and most tragical thing in the world. Yet every fibre in your nature protests against the prostitution of itself to anything short of God. Only misery and unrest can ensue. Only when we render to God the thing that is God's —our hearts and ourselves—can we find repose.

III. **The restoration and perfecting of the defaced image.**—Because Jesus Christ, the God-man, has come, and in our likeness presented to us the very image of God and irradiation of His light, therefore no defacement that it is possible for men or devils to make on this poor humanity of ours need be irrevocable or final, and we may look forward to a time when the coinage shall be called in and re-minted in new forms of nobleness and of likeness.—*Maclaren.*

Ver. 25. *Cæsar and God.*—We owe to kings, as rulers, (1) Honour; (2) obedience to the laws; (3) payment of taxes; (4) the duty of prayer. We owe to God (1) ourselves; (2) our substance; (3) our time, talents, and influence; (4) our love.

I. **Religion and loyalty should accompany each other.**

II. **In cases where the commands of earthly rulers interfere with the will of God, they are to be disobeyed,** at whatever hazard or loss.

Two Distinct Spheres.—Things civil and things sacred are (1) essentially distinct from each other, yet (2) quite harmonious. Neither may overlap or intrude itself into the sphere of the other. In the things of God we may not take law from men (Acts iv. 19, v. 29), while in honouring and obeying Cæsar in his own sphere we are rendering obedience to God Himself (Rom. xiii. 1-7).—*Brown.*

"*Render.*"—The chief priests and scribes had asked if it were lawful to *give* tribute to Cæsar, as if tribute were a boon. Christ reminds them that it is not a *gift*, but a *due*. Render, therefore, tribute of your coin to Cæsar; and tribute of yourselves, coined in the Divine mint, and stamped with the Divine image and superscription, to God.

"*Render unto Cæsar.*"—This precept of Jesus is developed in Rom. xii., xiii.; in Rom. xii., "Render to God," and in Rom. xiii. "Render to Cæsar."

Ver. 26. "*Marvelled at His answer.*"—All the synoptical Gospels lay stress upon the astonishment excited by the the reply of Christ, and thus imply that it was expressed in some very visible manner. The statement here made, that His enemies "could not take hold of His words before the people," gives a hint of the critical position in which He would have been placed if He had failed to silence the questioners.

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 27—40.

The Question Concerning the Resurrection.—There does not seem to have been any sinister intention on the part of the Sadducees who now approached Christ, saying that there is no resurrection, and stating a case which seemed, in their opinion, to cast ridicule upon the doctrine. They came to him with a stale piece of casuistry, conceived in a spirit of self-complacent ignorance, but

still sufficiently puzzling to furnish them with an argument for their disbelief, and with a difficulty to throw in the way of their opponents. It was drawn from what is called the levirate law of marriage, appointed by Moses to limit and curtail certain evils in the rude state of society then existing. A certain woman was married successively to seven brethren. Whose wife shall she be in the resurrection? What a confused state of society there must be in the future world—if, indeed, there is a world beyond the grave! Christ might have dismissed the stupid and frivolous question with contempt. If He had replied that the woman would be the wife of the first or of the last of the brethren, the Sadducees could scarcely have invalidated the reasonableness of the statement. But He was pleased to do more than rebuke the presumptuous ignorance of the questioners; He draws aside the veil that hides the future world, and gives us a glimpse of new conditions of life there, and also bestows upon mankind definite assurance of the immortality of the soul.

I. **He refutes the erroneous opinions of the Sadducees** (vers. 34-36).—He shows that their question went on the false theory that the forms and relations of the present, sensible life would be transferred to the future, spiritual life. In the resurrection-state there will not be a repetition, pure and simple, of our present conditions. It will not be a state of probation, but of perfect and unending blessedness. The children of the resurrection will be children of God, partakers of His nature, and subject no longer to the law of change and death which prevails here. Here it is but the species, the race, that has perpetuity; there the individual life is assured of immortality. No provision will, therefore, be necessary for the succession and renewal of the race. The Sadducees had virtually denied the power of God by asserting that life in another world must be a mere reflex and repetition of the life of the children of this world. With the shallowness and dogmatism that so often distinguish men of the rationalistic school to which they belonged, they took for granted that that which was incomprehensible to them must be set aside as untenable. And therefore Christ reminds them (Matt. xxii. 29) of the infinite power of God from whom all life comes—who created the present order of things, and who is able to re-form or transform our beings, and to fit us for life in a new and higher sphere of existence.

II. **He points out that the doctrine of immortality is implied in the Divine revelation to man** (vers. 37, 38).—The words of Christ plainly indicate that belief in the immortality of the soul is bound up with the very idea of religion. It is as though He had said, "You believe that God has spoken to men, summoned them to faith in Him, and to a life of obedience to His will, and that He has formed a covenant with them. How could God place Himself in so near a relation to individual men, and ascribe to them so high a dignity, if they were mere perishable existences?—if they had not a being akin to His own, and destined to immortality?" We may note the fact that the promise of blessings made when this special relationship was established between God and Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, was not fulfilled in this life. There was nothing in their earthly lot which distinguished them from others of their time, to whom no such promise was given. They had hardships and trials like other men, and confessed that that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth. In obedience to the call of God they gave up the ties of country and kindred; "wherefore God gave them a better country, that is an heavenly." The promise was not that God would reward their obedience by blessing them with wealth, length of years, tranquillity, or other earthly benefits, but that He would be *their God.* It was not limited by the condition that He would be their God so long as their earthly life would continue. And, centuries after the mortal bodies of these patriarchs had mouldered into dust, God spoke to Moses of His covenant with them (which was

also their covenant with Him), as still existing, and of them, therefore, as in possession of that heavenly and eternal inheritance after which they had longed. The Sadducees had probably supposed that the words simply meant, "I am the God in whom Abraham, Isaac and Jacob trusted." Yet to what had their trust come, if there were no resurrection? To death and nothingness, and an everlasting silence, and a land of darkness, after a life so full of trials that the last of these patriarchs had described it as a pilgrimage of few and evil years. Though we may never at any time cherish doubts concerning the facts of a resurrection and of the immortality of the soul, as these Sadducees did, we may derive spiritual strength and consolation from these words of Christ, especially from the way in which He associates these doctrines with God's mercy and condescension. He does not merely assert that, from the constitution of our nature, we are immortal, or that, from His own personal knowledge of the unseen world, He can assure us of the fact, but He points out that it is necessarily implied in the communion of the believer with His God. God has come near to us, and called us to love Him, and to be conformed to His will; if we obey Him, He takes us into His keeping, and makes us partakers of His own nature. The truth, as Christ expounds it, is not merely calculated to satisfy an intellectual curiosity which only few may feel, but to allay those doubts and fears concerning the future which, from time to time, trouble the hearts and consciences of all—not merely to assure us that there is a future world, but that it will be well there with all those who trust in God. He knows His own, each by name; His covenant is with each of them personally, it is an eternal bond between Him and them, and is a sure pledge of their highest welfare.

SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS ON VERSES 37—40.

Vers. 27-33. *The Question of The Sadducees*: designed (1) to set forth the unreasonableness of the popular faith, and (2) as an apology for their own unbelief. Yet propounded in a somewhat frivolous and sarcastic spirit.

Vers. 34-36. *The Reply of Christ.*

I. **The conditions of life in the world to come are absolutely different from those of the present world.**

II. **Death being abolished, marriage, which was instituted in order to preserve the race from extinction, will come to an end.**

Ver. 36. "*Children of God.*"—Lit., "sons of God." On earth men are sons one of another; but there each one will receive his new body from God Himself, by an immediate Divine action, so that, as among the angels, there will be no relation of filiation; hence the latter are all called "the sons of God."—*Godet.*

Ver. 37. "*Now that the dead are raised.*"—Christ does not remain satisfied with having triumphed over His opponents, but, knowing they are entangled in error, adds to His reply a further word of enlightenment.

"*God of Abraham,*" etc.—A twofold relation:—

I. **That by which God takes Abraham under His especial care.**

II. **That by which Abraham makes God the only object of his worship and his sole refuge.**

Ver. 38. "*Live unto Him.*"—*I.e.*, in relation with Him. The ties between them and men on the earth are broken, but they live in communion with God.

The God of the Living.—Our Lord's refutation of the Sadducees' question lay—

I. **In exposing their ignorance of the heavenly nature.**—Spiritual bodies are angelic; their relationship is that

of brothers and sisters in a great family.

II. **God's words through Moses imply the continued life in the unseen.**—That which is dead cannot realise or do its part to God, neither can God do His part to it. The "dead" really live. And life implies union of soul and body. Death seems division, but to God it is not really so. The "dead" body is in some calculable relation to the departed spirit, and they will come together again.

III. **What are the consequences of Christ's teaching?**—1. As regards the body. In heaven's language the body never really dies. Do not despise the body. You may long for its renewal. But meanwhile honour, reverence, use well, the body. 2. As respects the spirit. It is not dormant. It, too, "lives." Nearer to the fountain of life, drinking in more of its living waters.

IV. **Who, then, are the dead?**—Those who, in life, are living separate from their own souls. Awful words! Not considering their soul, not loving their soul, soulless. And so both soul and body are separate from God. These are the truly dead.—*Vaughan.*

Vers. 39, 40. "*Thou hast well said.*"—On hearing this prompt and sublime reply, the scribes, who had sought in vain for that which Jesus had with such ease brought to light, could not refrain from expressions of joy and surprise; and as they saw that every snare laid for Him only brought His wisdom into clearer relief, they abandoned this mode of attack.—*Godet.*

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 41—47.

A Warning against False Guides.—The attempts to check our Lord's activity, to betray Him into the expression of an opinion which might have been used against Him, and to cast ridicule upon His teaching, having failed, His adversaries withdrew from the contest. But He was not satisfied with having maintained His ground against them: He now carried the war into His enemies' quarters.

I. **He exposed the incompetency of the scribes and Pharisees as teachers** (vers. 41-44).—They prided themselves on their skill in expounding and interpreting the Word of God, and He drew their attention to one of the most famous of the Messianic prophecies in the Old Testament, and asked them to solve the difficulty which, according to their principles of interpretation, it contained. Their dead monotheism had blinded them to the intimations given in Scripture of the Divine dignity of the Messiah, and consequently they could return no answer to the question, "How could David apply the term 'Lord' to one who was to be descended from him?" Yet the question was not asked merely in order to show that the Word of God contained passages which they could not explain. It was also calculated to stir them up to profounder reflection upon a truth which they had not fairly faced, and to remove one of their principal grounds of objection to the claims He made. For frequently in the course of His ministry they had protested against His assumption of Divine attributes and prerogatives. Their obstinate silence, however, when confronted with the fact that Divine dignity was ascribed in Scripture to the Messiah, clearly proved that deeply rooted prejudices filled their minds, and that, therefore, they were incapacitated for acting as teachers of spiritual truths.

II. **He upbraids them with the moral corruption of their lives** (ver. 45-47).—He judged it necessary to set the people on their guard against those whose religion was only a cloak for the worst vices, and who took advantage of the reverence which the simple-minded naturally have for all who wear the garb of piety, to deceive and defraud them. Hypocrisy, pride, and covetousness, are the three charges He makes against them. They affect a piety of the most ex-

aggerated type, in order to conceal the real depravity of their characters. They are consumed with a desire to secure the applause of their fellows, instead of being any help or blessing to them. And, worst of all, they plunder the property of those whom they delude with their religious professions. The picture thus drawn reminds us of the ecclesiastical abuses in the worst time of the Middle Ages; but traces, at any rate, of the same vices will still be found. People are still so easily deluded by a profession of piety that it is a wonder that hypocrites are not even more numerous than they are. Popularity and notoriety are still too often sought after by ministers of religion; and silly women are still so inclined to run after those who profess an exaggerated piety that one cannot be surprised at seeing hypocrites and impostors occasionally flourishing at their expense.

SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS ON VERSES 41—47.

Vers. 41-44. *Christ's First and His last Visit to The Temple.*—Immeasurable is the contrast between the first and the last visit of our Lord to the Temple. The less may we leave unnoticed that the boy Jesus, who, once, by his questions, threw the teachers in Israel into astonishment, and by His answers often made them suddenly dumb, and the Messiah, who often, on the final day, both with questions and with answers, nobly maintains the field, exhibit really one and the same character. The Divine Sonship then presaged is now distinctly known.—*Van Costerzee.*

Deeper Truths Unveiled.—Our Lord's question does not, by the passage referred to, solve any difficulty, but rather throws out a difficulty which might arrest the attention of a scribe desirous to know the truth, such as would lead him to see there was something far higher and more mysterious about the Messiah than he supposed. Our Lord's words were a clue by which faith might apprehend the secret nature of the kingdom. To reason they proved nothing; but to faith they opened lofty views of the Divine economy in the gospel, as far surpassing anything which reason could have inferred, or imagination could conceive, as heaven is above earth.—*Williams.*

The Present and The Future.

I. Surrounded by enemies, victorious over enemies—those whom He has now confuted to be suppressed, if still impenitent, by His almighty power.

II. Enthroned in the hearts of a few disciples, but to be exalted to God's right hand, and have all authority in heaven and earth.

The Divine Nature of Christ.

I. Revealed to David.

II. Concealed from scribes and Pharisees.

III. Brought to light by Christ Himself.

IV. Accepted by His disciples.

Cf. Rev. xxii. 16—Christ the offspring of David and yet the root from which David sprang; and John viii. 58—the Son of Abraham, and yet before Abraham; also Rom. i. 3—born of the race of David, "*according to the flesh.*"

Mysteries Revealed to Faith and Love.—Scripture contains mysteries which can never be solved by the wise and understanding, but which are revealed to those who love and obey Christ, and to them alone.

Vers. 45-47. I. **Imposition practised upon society in general.**

II. **Usurpation of places of honour in synagogues.**

III. **Self-seeking ambition in social life.**

IV. **Making religion and philanthropy a cloak for the grossest frauds.**

Ver. 45. "*In the audience of all the people.*"—The minds of scribes and

Pharisees were hardened against Christ: the hearts of the people were receptive of His word. To them, therefore, He addresses a word of warning against blind devotion to unworthy leaders.

Ver. 46. "*Beware of the scribes.*"—Christ dwells upon the external guise of these self-appointed guides and rulers, as an indication of their inward character: "by their fruits ye shall know them."

Ver. 47. "*Devour widows' houses.*"—*I.e.*, either extort large sums of money from them, under some religious pretext, or take advantage of their position as directors of consciences to enjoy sumptuous feasts in the houses of their victims.

Cf. 2 Tim. iii. 6. "Pretenders to holiness practise most upon women, who are less apt than men to see through their hypocrisy, and are easily inclined to love them on the ground of religion" (*Chrysostom*).

CHAPTER XXI.

CRITICAL NOTES.

VER. 1. **Looked up.**—From the parallel passage in Mark. xii. 41 we learn that our Lord had taken his seat in the court of the women, where were the chests for containing gifts and offerings to the Temple. These chests were thirteen in number, and had trumpet-shaped mouths for receiving the money. On the chests were labels specifying the purposes to which the money was to be applied.

Ver. 2. **Saw also.**—Omit "also"; omitted in R.V. **Poor widow.**—The word "poor" is emphatic; almost equivalent to "beggar." **Two mites.**—The mite was the smallest Jewish coin, about equal to a tenth of an English penny.

Ver. 3. **More than they all.**—The estimate being formed, not on the amount given, but on the amount remaining after the gift; or, in other words, on the quality of the gift and not on its quantity.

Ver. 4. **Of their abundance.**—Rather, "of their superfluity" (R.V.). A sharp antithesis to the destitution of the widow. **All the living.**—Lit. "life"—*i.e.*, means of subsistence. "Yet the word seems chosen expressly to indicate entire devotion of herself, her life, as well as livelihood, to God's service" (*Speaker's Commentary*).

Ver. 5. **Gifts.**—Rather, sacred "offerings" (R.V.). "Such as the golden chain of Agrippa; gifts of Ptolemy Philadelphus, Augustus, Helen of Adiabene, and crowns, shields, goblets, etc.; the golden vine, with its vast clusters, given by Herod" (*Farrar*).

Ver. 7. **And they asked Him.**—St. Mark tells us (xiii. 3) that the questioners were the apostles Peter, John, James and Andrew. The discourse that follows is related by the two first evangelists as having been uttered on the Mount of Olives. St. Luke does not mention the place, and but for the parallel reports of the discourse we might have supposed that it was given in the Temple. There is, however, a break after ver. 7, which agrees with the change of place. We are, therefore, to understand that the opening incident took place in the Temple, and that the discourse was spoken in the evening, on the Mount of Olives (see ver. 37).

Ver. 8. **Many shall come.**—There are no distinct historical records of such false Christs appearing before the fall of Jerusalem; but no doubt there were such. **And the time.**—*I.e.*, special time, crisis. These are the words of false Christs, exciting the minds of men and leading to expect some extraordinary event as on the point of happening.

Ver. 9. **Wars.**—War against the Jews was threatened by Caligula, Claudius and Nero. **Commotions.**—"There were serious disturbances (1) at Alexandria, in which the Jews as a nation were the special objects of persecution; (2) at Seleucia about the same time, in which more than fifty thousand Jews were killed; (3) at Iamnia, near Joppa" (*Alford*). **Not by and by.**—Rather, "not immediately" (R.V.).

Ver. 11. **Great earthquakes.**—Alford gives a list of earthquakes that took place between the time of this prophecy and the fall of Jerusalem: in Crete, A.D. 46 or 47; in Rome, A.D. 51; at Apamæa in Phrygia, A.D. 53; at Laodicæa in Phrygia, A.D. 60; and one in Campania. **Famines and pestilences.**—Generally occurring together. One such famine is mentioned in

Acts xi. 28, happening in A.D. 49. Suetonius, Tacitus, and Josephus tell of others as taking place within this period. **Fearful sights.**—"Among these would be the 'Abomination of Desolation,' which seems best to correspond with the orgies of the Zealots, which drove all worshippers in horror from the Temple. Such, too, would be the rumour of monstrous births; the cry, 'Woe, woe!' for seven and a half years of the peasant Jesus, son of Hanan; the voice and sound of departing guardian-angels, and the sudden opening of the Temple-gate, which required twenty men to move it (Josephus, Tacitus, *passim*)" (*Farrar*). **Signs from heaven.**—The same historians speak of a comet shaped like a sword, and of the appearance of armies fighting with each other in the clouds.

Ver. 13. **Turn to you for a testimony.**—*I.e.*, give you an opportunity of testifying for your Lord.

Ver. 16. **Some of you.**—Certainly two of the apostles who had put the question to Christ, perhaps all of them, died violent deaths.

Ver. 17. **Hated of all men.**—Cf. Acts xxviii. 22.

Ver. 18. **Not a hair.**—From a comparison of this with ver. 16 we see that the promise is a *spiritual one*: no real harm come to you. In Acts xxvii. 34 the promise is a literal one.

Ver. 19. **In patience,** etc.—Rather, "in your patience ye shall win your souls" (R.V.); or, "by your endurance of all these things ye shall acquire your souls;" it is God's appointed way by which you will win salvation.

Ver. 21. **Flee to the mountains.**—It is recorded by Eusebius that the Christians left Judæa before the siege of Jerusalem, and took refuge in Pella, in the north of Peræa. Probably the "oracular warning," which is said to have occasioned this action, was in this passage of the Gospel. **In the midst of it.**—Rather, "of her" (R.V.)—*i.e.*, Jerusalem. **In the countries.**—Rather, "in the country" (R.V.), or "in the fields."

Ver. 22. **Days of vengeance.**—A reference, perhaps, to xviii. 8.

Ver. 23. **Woe unto them.**—The word "woe" here, contrary to the general rule, seems to express simply pity for those in that condition.

Ver. 24. **They shall fall,** etc.—*I.e.*, this people. Josephus says the slain in the war with the Romans amounted to 1,100,000, and that 97,000 were sold into slavery, mostly to Egypt and the provinces. **Trodden down of the Gentiles**—"All sorts of Gentiles—Romans, Saracens, Persians, Franks, Norsemen, Turks—have 'trodden down' Jerusalem since then" (*Farrar*). **Times of the Gentiles.**—*I.e.*, fixed times, seasons, or opportunities, until the acceptance or rejection of the gospel by the Gentiles.

Ver. 25. **Signs in the sun,** etc.—Omit the article before sun, moon, and stars; omitted in R.V. The signs seem to be metaphorical of the vicissitudes of nations and the downfall of thrones.

Ver. 26. **Men's hearts failing.**—Rather, "men fainting" (R.V.). **The earth.**—The word implies "the habitable world." **The powers of heaven.**—The stars, the Host of Heaven.

Ver. 28. **Your redemption.**—*I.e.*, the completion of it by Christ's appearing.

Ver. 32. **This generation.**—The word so translated means both those living at a certain time and also a race: in the former sense the prophecy found fulfilment in the destruction of Jerusalem, forty years later; in the latter sense it implies that the Jewish race will con-continue till the end of all things.

Ver. 34. **Surfeiting.**—The headache and dizziness resulting from drunkenness. In the three classes of danger—"surfeiting, drunkenness, and cares of this life"—we have results of *past* debauchery, *present* incapacitation for attending to spiritual interests, and anxiety concerning the *future*.

Ver. 35. **As a snare.**—This should be connected with ver. 34: "come on you suddenly as a snare;" so in R.V. **That dwell.**—Lit. "that sit" securely.

Ver. 36. **Accounted worthy.**—A better reading is "prevail"—"that ye may prevail to escape" (R.V.)—*i.e.*, be in a condition to escape.

Ver. 36. **And to stand.**—Lit. "to be set"—*i.e.*, by the angels.

Ver. 37. **And in the day time.**—"And every day" (R.V.). "The notice is retrospective, applying to Palm Sunday and the Monday and Tuesday in Passion Week. After Tuesday evening He never entered the Temple again. Wednesday and Thursday were spent in absolute and unrecorded retirement, perhaps with His disciples in the house at Bethany, until Thursday evening, when He went into Jerusalem again for the Last Supper" (*Farrar*). **Abode in the mount.**—Perhaps bivouacked in the open air.

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 1—6.

Self-sacrifice.—This little incident occupies a striking place in the Gospel records. Jesus has just uttered woe after woe upon His hypocritical and malignant foes, and is about to impart to His disciples a revelation of dread events yet to come—the overthrow of the Jewish people, the destruction of the

Temple, and startling phenomena that would usher in His Second Coming. Between His burning words of denunciation and the awe-inspiring disclosures He makes to His disciples, comes this genial appreciation of a deed of self-sacrifice and love, done by a poor and obscure worshipper as she passed out of the house of God. As if to show that no feelings of personal anger mingled with His righteous anger, and that, though his heart was sad, His mind was unruffled, He sat down as an unoccupied spectator in the court of the Temple, and, with gentle voice and mien, commented upon the good deed which had come under His observation. We may note His approval of the principle that self-sacrifice is an essential part of true worship, and the commendation He bestowed upon the action of this poor widow.

I. **Self-sacrifice an essential part of true worship.**—The fact that provision was made in the Temple for gifts and offerings to be presented by worshippers as they retired, is very significant. It teaches that all worship of God should tend towards and end in self-sacrifice. We come to church to worship God—to join with the saints upon earth, and with the angels and the redeemed in heaven, in adoring the Divine majesty and holiness. This is our reasonable service, and by it our lives are sanctified. We humble ourselves before Him who is of purer eyes than to behold evil; in His presence we disclose our thoughts, we acknowledge our transgressions and secret faults, and seek to exhibit that contrition that will justify forgiveness. We contemplate the mercy God has revealed, adore the Saviour whom He has sent, rejoice in the thought of the Divine compassion, and give expression to our gratitude in hymns of praise. This is the worship which God seeks; it is the holy incense which is acceptable to Him: but this worship should issue in self-sacrifice. Sacrifice is the one main idea in every form of religion known to man. Horrible as many of the forms of sacrifice have been, and are, among heathen races, yet in all cases they proclaim the same great truth, that man owes himself and all he has to God. And Christianity, above all other religions, sets forth this truth. What is the cross but the symbol of the greatest of all deeds of self-sacrifice—the complete surrender of a life for the glory of God and the good of mankind? What does it teach but that we belong altogether to God, and should yield ourselves to Him? This is how the holy apostles conceive of religion. In all their writings they remind us that we are not our own, but His, and that we should offer ourselves to Him as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable.

II. **The commendation bestowed upon the poor widow.**—Why were the two mites of greater value than all the gold and silver which others cast in lavishly? Because, trifling though they were in intrinsic value, they were the sign of a complete and unreserved sacrifice of the whole being to God. She gave herself; the tiny bits of copper were but the symbol of this higher, nobler offering. This it was that threw into insignificance all the treasures that enriched the coffers of the Temple, and even the gifts with which wealthy devotees had adorned the building and made it the pride of the nation. Others gave something they could afford to spare—gave of their superfluity—and in this way gave less than she did. So that it is not a question of giving much or little of our property to a good cause, but of discovering by the light of this passage of Scripture whether we are offering to God a complete sacrifice of ourselves, or are substituting for it something which we can afford to part with, but which in comparison with ourselves has no value. Anything short of the gift of our all to God is unacceptable to Him. Take the case of those who would fain dedicate only part of the life, of the affections, of the interests, to His service. The young man, let us say, plans out the sort of life he would like to lead; he forms schemes of self-advancement, happiness, and self-gratification, from which thoughts of God are excluded. Religion is kept, as it were, in reserve, to be a resource and a consola-

tion, when all the pleasures of life are exhausted, and the time of old age, weakness, and disappointment, has come. When the fortune is made, and success is won, there will be leisure for heavenly things. Is not this professing to give the superfluity and to retain the essential part? And yet we cannot be sure of retaining it, for at any moment death may seize the whole. We have the word of Christ to assure us that we do not lose what we give to God, but lay up for ourselves a treasure in heaven, which will never know diminution, but be an abiding possession. The life which is consecrated to God is not robbed of its delights—nay, it alone is the happy life; it multiplies present enjoyments a hundredfold, and secures for us the crown of eternal blessedness. But if we choose to keep all for ourselves, we are sure of losing it. "She cast in all the living that she had." "How foolish of her!" some will say. Yes; it has been by folly like this, by lavish and unselfish love, that the world has been redeemed. Her action remains as a cutting rebuke of the selfish, worldly spirit, and of that mean and calculating prudence which even the world despises. For if there are few in the present age who have imitated her literal impoverishment of herself for the sake of religion, there are many who have followed a like course for the sake of country. There are many who have, from patriotic motives, forfeited property, happiness, and even reputation, and are willing to give up their lives for their country's sake. And what is admirable in the lower sphere is surely not ridiculous in the higher. It is, then, with something like a reproachful pang of conscience that we should listen to the commendation bestowed on this poor widow: "She of her penury hath cast in all the living that she had; she hath cast in more than they all." (See an interesting sermon on this text by Bernier: "*La veuve, ou le don sans réserve.*")

SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS ON VERSES 1—6.

Vers. 1-6. *The Widow's Offering and the Stones of the Temple.*—While the disciples were wondering at the majestic towers and carved stone-work as a great offering dedicated by man to God, Christ had seen in the gift of the poor widow an offering equally great in the eye of Heaven. The contrast suggests—

I. **The true measure of sacrifice.**—Not the greatness of the outward act, but the perfectness of the inward motive.

II. **The true idea of a temple.**—The disciples saw God's dwelling-place in the house of stone with its Holy of Holies and altars of sacrifice. Christ saw it in the broken heart of the widow.

Three practical lessons we may learn: 1. A lesson of duty—to live to God in small things; to dedicate our lives to Him, even if we have no great opportunities of service, and are vexed by cares. 2. A lesson of encouragement. Live to God in *all* things; consider no sacrifice too great or too small; do your best in everything, as in His sight;—and you will find Him everywhere. 3. A lesson of warning. The Jews had come to see God *only* in the Temple at Jerusalem. As a consequence they became formalists—the surrender of their souls was forgotten. And the splendid Temple fell! So now and ever. Forget the Divinity of all life, and the temple of your soul will become desolate.—*Hull.*

Vers. 1-4. *The Eye of Christ.*—"He beheld." This text is full of instruction; it encourages the very humblest to give; it thus makes giving a universal duty and privilege; it proclaims a searching paradox as to more and less; and it requires us to feel that our givings are scrutinised by Him before whose judgment-seat we are to stand.

I. **The circumstances are instructive.**

II. **The scrutiny of the Saviour was very searching.**

III. **This poor widow gave all she had.**—Relatively, it was a great gift.

IV. **The Lord does not receive any offering unless it is large enough to prove self-denial on the part of the giver.**—The money in itself is valueless to God, but is of value as representing thankfulness, self-denial, prayer, and trust.—*Symington.*

Hypocrisy and Piety.

I. **Some pretended to love God.**—They did their good works, their "righteousness," to be seen of men. They loved themselves, their reputation—not God.

II. **One really loved God.** — She gave all she had. She had nothing left. There was no ostentation. There would have been condemnation had others known that all she gave was "two mites." Really, however, others only gave a little, this worshipper gave all, out of grateful love to God.

III. **What pleases God.**—Not outside show, not display of goodness, not ostentatious giving of much. But love, gratitude, humility, self-sacrifice — these are pleasing in God's sight. We can please God in little, if that little is our all.—"*Sunday School Chronicle.*"

Heartiness in Action.—Giving is one form of action for God. What is the aspect which many of the Lord's people present to the world in this particular? Where is their heartiness in it? How much is there of form, and how little of decided action! Many who are steeped in poverty are rich indeed in action. The poor widow is a case in point.

I. **She was of no account in the world's estimation.**

II. **She was of no account, so far as man was concerned, in the Temple of the Lord.**

III. **Yet she alone receives the commendation of the Lord.**—To Him who seeth not as man seeth she was immeasurably above all others.

IV. **Learn that when we think we are unobserved we are doing all under the immediate eye of God.**—We too often forget that we are the servants of One whose eye is ever on us, taking note of what we think, and speak, and do. In all our givings we should so perform these acts that we do not desire them to be hidden from the eyes of God. He who is like this poor widow will delight in the thought that his Lord knows all. Act, then, on all occasions as though you wished Jesus to look on.—*Power.*

"*Two mites.*"—Just between the woes and predictions of doom there befel an exquisite little incident, full of the tenderest and loveliest beauty. Jesus was sitting over against the treasury, watching the givers.

I. **He sees who give, what they give, why they give.**

II. **He is arrested by the liberal giving of a poor widow.**—He had pleasure in what she did. He commends her with an overflow of joy. He says nothing to herself—nothing in her hearing even; but He teaches the disciples a lesson in the political economy of the kingdom of heaven.

III. **The money value of the offering was very small.**—Probably it was the smallest of any presented there that day. But the relative value was very great. She had nothing left after giving her two mites. So this was the greatest offering of all contributed that day.

IV. **The offering had also spiritual value, because of what it represented.**—Men may value money for itself; the Lord does not. It is the heart He cares for. Jesus would not have spoken as He did unless her offering had expressed grateful love to God, and trust in Him for time to come, whatever may betide. Were the principles which appear in this little incident to pervade all Christian giving, the Lord's treasury would contain exactly the right sum.—*Culross.*

The Widow's Mites.

I. **It is good to have our Lord's estimate of the earth's gifts.**

II. **In the eyes of Christ, this offering was of great price.**

III. **This value arose from the motive and spirit of the giver.**—*Miller.*

Human and Divine Estimates.—The widow's offering was, in the eyes of men—

I. **Less than all.**—Only a farthing. Not worth giving.

II. **More than all.**—In Christ's estimate. She had given all, and left nothing. The others had retained much. What is Christ's estimate of *your* givings?—*W. Taylor.*

I. **The lively interest which Christ takes in the smaller details of our life.**

II. **The special interest He takes in the free-will offerings of His servants.**

III. **The mode in which He measures our offerings of money or service.**—*Ibid.*

Ver. 1. "*Looked up.*"—*I.e.*, turned His attention from those who had been listening to Him, and took note of what was going on near at hand, where the boxes for receiving offerings stood.

Ver. 2. "*Two mites.*"—She might have kept one of them.—*Bengel.*

Ver. 3. "*More.*"—Jesus draws attention to the moral *quality* of the action, and bestows on it the praise which vulgar minds usually reserve for liberality that bulks largely in *quantity*. With the two mites she gave her heart also.

Vers. 4, 5. I. **The action of the poor widow appeals to Christ as worthy of admiration.**—As having great moral and spiritual value.

II. **The disciples admire the magnificence of the Temple building.**—They are impressed with the splendour that appeals to the senses and delights the æsthetic taste.

Ver. 4. "*Of her penury.*"—I. **The loving heart counts no sacrifice too great.**

II. **The gracious Redeemer despises no gift, however small,** when the motive of the giver is pure.

A Flower in The Desert.—What a contrast to the greed with which the scribes and Pharisees are charged in the preceding verses! This incident, which meets His notice just at this moment, is like a flower which He sees suddenly springing up in the desert of official devotion, the beauty and fragrance of which fills His heart with joy.—*Godet.*

Ver. 5. "*Adorned.*"—1. Beauty of outward semblance. 2. Yet perishable for lack of the indwelling spirit of religion.

"*Gifts.*"—The disciples take pleasure in looking upon the splendid gifts, made for the most part by heathen princes; they delight in them (1) because of their beauty and value, and (2) doubtless because they saw in them the fulfilment of such prophetical passages of Scripture as Ps. lxxii., Isa. lx. They can scarcely fail to infer, from Christ's words, that a doom rests upon the sanctuary; yet they can scarcely realise the fact, and almost intercede for its preservation.

Ver. 6. "*Not be left one stone.*"—1. The beauty of these things will not persuade the enemy to spare them. 2. The strength of the buildings will not be able to resist the power of the enemy.

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 7—38.

The Great Prophecy.—The intimation so suddenly and unexpectedly given by Jesus, that the Temple, upon which the disciples looked with such admiration, was doomed to utter overthrow, filled their minds with a strong desire to know something of the course events would take in time to come. The veil had been partly

lifted, and they were eager to know more than had been disclosed by this hasty glimpse into the mysterious future. They could not disassociate the overthrow of the Temple from the end of the world and from the second coming of their Master, and in this discourse upon the last things, these three great events are the chief topics, no intimation, however, being given of the precise intervals of time that would elapse between them. In this prophetic picture time is, as it were, annihilated, and one great series of events after another is seen looming up in the distance with equal clearness of detail; so that we can easily believe that the impression was left upon the mind of the disciples that close upon the destruction of the Jewish state would come the end of the world, and the establishment of the visible kingdom of Christ. All through the discourse we see that the purpose Jesus has in view is rather to strengthen the faith of His disciples, by forewarning them of trials and difficulties through which they would have to pass, than to satisfy their curiosity as to the future.

I. **Events immediately succeeding His departure** (vers. 8-19).—He forewarns His disciples against dangers that would especially assail *them;* they would be liable to be misled by religious pretenders, to be terrified by startling changes and disasters, to be persecuted on account of their faith in Him, to be betrayed by kinsfolk and friends, and to be forced in some instances to choose between death and loyalty to their Master. Some of these dangers would be all the greater because of the strength of their faith; others because of the weakness of the flesh. Their firm persuasion of the fact that Christ would return to earth would predispose them to believe rumours of His having returned; their belief that all events are ordered by God might incline them to be hasty in offering interpretations of the significance of great changes in human society, or of remarkable natural phenomena. Nor are Christians in our own day free from the risks against which Christ here warns His disciples. A feverish expectation of the return of Christ has been and is cherished by many, and leads to an unwholesome form of religious life, and to a credulity that renders those who cherish it an easy prey to unscrupulous pretenders. Many, too, are eager to find in events of the present day the fulfilment of the prophecies of Scripture, and draw down contempt upon themselves and upon the studies to which they are addicted by the glaring errors and absurdities into which they fall. The second class of dangers of which Christ speaks are those which arise from human weakness; the stress of persecution, the treachery of friends, and the hatred of the world, were only too likely in some instances to put the loyalty of His followers to a severe test. Hence He lays great emphasis upon the special aid which He would give to those placed in such trying circumstances. He would impart wisdom and skill that would enable them to maintain their cause before kings and rulers, and see to it that no real loss or injury resulted to them. They might be put to death, but not a hair of their head would perish—their true life, their highest interests, were secure in His keeping.

II. **Provision for the safety of His followers when Jerusalem should be destroyed** (vers. 20–24).—For some years after His departure the fate of the Christian community seemed to be closely connected with that of the Jewish people and religion. Christ's followers still observed the Mosaic laws, and frequented the Temple, and were largely of Jewish race. Hence when the overthrow of the Holy City seemed at hand there was great danger that many of the Christian population would be carried away by the fanatical delusions of those about them, and believe that at the last moment God would intervene and save the nation by a miraculous deliverance. But Christ here warns them that at a certain period the path of duty and safety would lie in their separating themselves from those upon whom the Divine vengeance was to be poured out. When the Roman armies began to compass the city they must

save themselves by flight; a place of refuge would be opened up for them, and they must hasten to take advantage of it. No obscurity hangs about this part of Christ's prophetic discourse; the danger and the mode of deliverance are plainly pointed out, and history records the fact that none of the Christian community perished in the destruction of Jerusalem. Nor is the fate of the nation upon whom such dire chastisement was to be inflicted left surrounded with a cloud of darkness. They would be overwhelmed by many disasters, and their capital would be trodden down of the Gentiles; but only for a time—"until the times of the Gentiles be fulfilled." A gleam of hope enlightens the darkness; though cast off, they are not cast off for ever.

III. **The promise of the second coming** (vers. 25-36).—In an earlier discourse on this topic (xvii. 26-30) Jesus had described the state of carnal security in which the world would be plunged at the time of the end. He now describes the sudden breaking up of this security. "In the midst of this deep spiritual sleep and worldly torpor extraordinary symptoms will, in a moment, usher in one of those cosmical revolutions which our earth has more than once experienced. Like a ship which starts at every joint before it falls to pieces, the globe which we inhabit, and our whole solar system, undergo unwonted changes. The motive forces, which until now have been under rule, are, as it were, freed from the laws that govern them by some unknown power. And mankind, terrified by the shocks which break up what had been called the solid earth, and which are the prelude to its dissolution, pass an hour of anguish far keener than any yet known." In contrast with the fear and horror of the ungodly world stands the joy of those who see in the coming of the Son of Man the advent of their Redeemer. Their fainting spirits are revived, their hopes are crowned by the event which fills those who are unprepared with anguish and dismay. The practical exhortation which Jesus adds to this revelation of the future is the necessity of constant watchfulness and prayer. Those who are His should be free from the tyranny of the present, and should keep themselves from the vices and follies that consume those who live only for this world. They should be on their guard against sin, and should pray for heavenly succour to aid their own feeble strength. So shall they be found worthy, not only to escape punishment, but to stand accepted with the Son of Man.

SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS ON VERSES 7—38.

Vers. 7-38. *Last Words.*

I. **Last words in the Temple.**

II. **Warnings about the Temple.**—Its present beauty. Its approaching fall. The premonitory signs. The days of vengeance.

III. **Warnings for ourselves.**—"Watch and pray."—*W. Taylor.*

The Prophecy of the Overthrow of Jerusalem.

I. **The circumstances in which the prophecy came to be uttered** (vers. 5-7).

II. **The prophecy itself** (vers. 8-27). 1. The state of the world, and the position in which believers will be placed, after the departure of Jesus (vers. 8-19). 2. The destruction of Jerusalem and of the Jewish people (vers. 20-24). 3. The second coming of Christ (vers. 25-27).

III. **An exhortation to watchfulness.** (ver. 28-36).

Ver. 7. "*When shall these things be?*"—The desire to know the future is, within certain limits, natural and legitimate. Christ does not here condemn it, but satisfies and sanctifies it.

Ver. 8. "*That ye be not deceived.*"—This gives the key-note to the whole discourse. The purpose Christ has in

view is a practical one—to describe the course of duty to be followed in trying circumstances, and to supply grounds for encouragement and motives to perseverance.

The disciples of Christ would lie open to this danger—

I. Because of their strong desire for their Master's return.

II. Because many would be carried away by a foolish credulity.

III. Because it is difficult to resist a strong popular movement.

Ver. 9. "*Be not terrified.*"—1. You know the worst that any of these temporal judgments can do to you. 2. God is your refuge.

These things are (1) not accidental. (2) They are under the control of God. (3) They are overruled for His glory and for the welfare of those who trust in Him.

Vers. 10, 11. "*Nation shall rise,*" *etc.*—The passage combines in one view the whole of the various social and physical crises of development in the whole New-Testament dispensation.—*Lange.*

Vers. 12-17. *Evils to Be Anticipated.*—The disciples are to be prepared (1) for persecution, both on the part of the ecclesiastical and civil authorities; (2) for treachery on the part of kinsfolk and friends; (3) for violent death; (4) for the hatred of the world.

Vers. 12-15. *A Threefold Consolation.*—1. The persecution is for Christ's sake. 2. It gives an opportunity for testifying for Him in the most striking manner. 3. In circumstances of special danger they receive special aid from Him.

Ver. 15. "A *mouth and wisdom.*"—*I.e.* (1), wisdom to know what to say; (2) ability to say it as it should be said.

Ver. 16. "*Ye shall be betrayed.*"—The fate which Christ Himself was so soon to meet would fall to the lot of some of His disciples in the ages to come. The disunions prophesied in ii. 34, xii. 53, would lead to this unnatural cruelty — parents, brethren, kinsfolk and friends turning against the followers of Christ and betraying them into the hands of enemies.

Ver. 17. "*Hated by all men.*"—This prophetic word found fulfilment even in the first period of the Church. Cf. Rom. viii. 35-37; 1 Cor. iv. 9, 10; 2 Cor. xi. 23-29; Heb. x. 32-34.

Vers. 18, 19. *Security Promised.*

I. Negatively: no real harm should befall them.

II. Positively: by their perseverance in the midst of all these persecutions, they should preserve their souls.

Ver. 18. "*Not an hair . . . perish.*"—A figurative expression, which implies (1) that notice would be taken of every loss incurred for the sake of Christ; (2) that the cause would be well worth all losses undergone for it; (3) that an ample recompense would be given.

"*Not an hair . . . perish.*"—1. Not without the special providence of God. 2. Not without recompense. 3. Not before the time.

Ver. 19. "*In your patience.*"—The worldly method of keeping possession of life is by repelling force with force. Not so is it to be with the disciples of Christ. They find protection by endurance, and not by violence; thus they preserve the *true* life, whatever else they may lose.

Ver. 20. "*The desolation thereof is nigh.*"—*I.e.*, that the siege would not be raised. The Jews, in their obstinacy, believed, even to the last, that the siege would be raised, and that supernatural deliverance would come.

Ver. 21. "*Depart out.*"—*I.e.*, from the city. This warning was very necessary, for after the rebels had for

some time established themselves in the holy place, they would not allow any to quit the city.—(*Josephus, B. J.*, v. 12).

Ver. 22. "*Vengeance.*"—*I.e.*, of God's vengeance, not of man's. Even Titus seems to have been conscious that he was a minister of Divine retribution.

Ver. 23. "*Them that are with child,*" *etc.*—An ejaculation of compassion for those who (1) are unable to protect themselves; and (2) see those whom they love dearest exposed to great danger.

Ver. 24. *The Ruin of The Jewish People.*—1. Multitudes slain with the sword. 2. Multitudes carried captive. 3. Their beautiful city laid waste by the Gentiles.

Vers. 25-36. *The Second Coming.*

I. **The preceding terrors.**

II. **The hope and safety of believers.**

III. **The certainty of it.**

IV. **The way to prepare for it.**—*W. Taylor.*

Ver. 25. "*Signs in the sun,*" *etc.*—Different signs from those spoken of in ver. 11. The language is that of the Hebrew prophets: Amos viii. 9; Joel ii. 30, 31; Ezek. xxxii. 7, 8. Cf. also Rev. vi. 12-14. "How far this prophecy will be literally fulfilled cannot be determined. If the whole passage be taken figuratively, then a remarkable commotion in the sea of nations is predicted, but it may refer to physical perturbations ushering in the new earth. The perturbations, whether physical or not, will be portentous, producing general anxiety and despair in view of the further terror these events presage. This is evident from ver. 26.—"*Popular Commentary.*"

Ver. 26. "*For fear,*" *etc.*—*I.e.*, both (1) fear on account of the present state of matters, and (2) an anticipation of worse things to come.

Ver. 27. *The Last Judgment.*—Christ's second coming in point of time is first in the order of spiritual instruction. The study of it prepares us for that of the first coming.

I. **Our Lord is referring to a future event.** — The nearer coming at the destruction of Jerusalem is a shadow of the more remote and more awful Advent. The solemn words of Christ cannot be exhausted by a reference to the destruction of the Holy City. That, and every other judgment, is a forecast of the last day.

II. **It is difficult to realise the certainty of the last judgment.**

III. **What will be the significance of that great event to each of us?**—We shall see Jesus Christ as He is. We shall know ourselves as never before. The "vain things" of earth and time will not avail us then. The materials for the judgment are getting ready. Only, He who is to judge us then, offers to save us now. There is time to take such fast hold upon His cross, as to look forward without terror to standing before His throne.—*Liddon.*

"*The Son of Man coming.*"—This coming is evidently that referred to in 1 Thess. iv. 16, at the first resurrection (Rev. xx. 5, 6); a comparison with Rev. xix. 11*ff.* suggests that this advent precedes the millennium, but upon that point there has been much dispute. The safest opinion is that a personal coming of Christ is here meant, to take place after the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled, and to be preceded by great catastrophes.—*Popular Commentary.*

Ver. 28. "*Look up.*"—The word means to raise one's self from a stooping posture, and is here applied to those previously bowed under tribulations. The idea of joy and hope is, of course, implied, as in the other phrase, "*Lift up your heads*"—which, however, suggests more strongly the idea of expectation. That which terrifies the world (the near approach of Christ), is hailed with delight by the Christian.

Vers. 29-33. *The Parable of The Trees.*—The budding forth of trees in spring shows that the coming of summer is (1) sure and (2) near at hand. So, too, the signs specified would indicate that the kingdom of God was near at hand, and that the prophecy of Christ would surely be fulfilled.

Ver. 29. "*The fig-tree.*"—Perhaps our Lord speaks here especially of a fig-tree, because this had served Him so frequently as a type of the Jewish people (Mark xi. 12-14; Luke xiii. 6-9).

Ver. 30. "*Know of your own selves.*"—*I.e.*, it is not necessary to inform you; the sight of the buds upon the trees convey their own message that summer is at hand.

Ver. 31. "*The kingdom of God.*"—*I.e.*, as a kingdom of glory; the final establishment of the reign of Christ.

Ver. 32. "*This generation shall not pass.*"—The reign of Christ over the Church militant on earth may, in one sense, be regarded as beginning with the destruction of Jerusalem. Then the old economy passed completely away, and Christ was made manifest to mankind as the only One who had fulfilled the Messianic prophecies of the past, and as the sole Mediator between God and man.

Ver. 33. "*Heaven and earth shall pass away.*"—After the discourse had risen to this height, there would ensue a dreary anti-climax, if we were to recognise in these words only a figurative description of the destruction of the Jewish state. Our Lord points evidently to the destruction of the earthly economy, which shall be followed by the appearance of a new heaven and a new earth (2 Pet. iii. 8-14), and gives assurance therewith that even then, when an entirely new order of things shall have come in, His words, in particular the promises of His coming, then first fully understood and fulfilled, would not cease to remain words of life for all His own.—*Van Oosterzee.*

"*My words shall not pass away.*"—The temple of the visible universe, an edifice much more firmly based than that which the disciples would fain have Jesus admire, is, for all that, less enduring than the warnings and promises of the Master who speaks to them.—*Godet.*

Ver. 34. "*Take heed.*"—Two forms of danger.

I. **Sensuality.**—Which stupifies the conscience and hardens the heart.

II. **Worldly cares.**—Which absorb the attention, and divert it from spiritual things.

Ver. 35. "*As a snare.*"—1. Will come unexpectedly. 2. Will hold them fast for destruction.

Ver. 36. "*Watch ye therefore.*"

I. **The aim to be kept in view.**—1. To escape punishment, and (2) to attain reward.

II. **The means to be used.**—1. Watchfulness—to be on guard against sin and attentive to duty, and (2) prayer—habitual communion with God.

"*To stand before the Son of Man.*"—1. To be acquitted by Him as our Judge. 2. To attend on Him as our Lord—to minister to Him and serve Him day and night in His temple.

Ver. 37. "*He was teaching.*"

I. **The labours of the day.**—He taught constantly in the Temple (1) in spite of opposition; (2) though He knew that the city and nation were devoted to destruction. Some might be persuaded to flee from the wrath to come.

II. **The peaceful nights.**—Partly spent, perhaps, in the society of friends,

and in communion with God—the noise and tumult of the city left behind.

Ver. 38. "*Came early in the morning.*"—1. The zeal of Christ in teaching awakened in many a special eagerness to hear Him. 2. The interest aroused in simple, unprejudiced minds afforded a greater testimony to the worth of His teaching than the sullen opposition and dislike of those in authority afforded against it.

CHAPTER XXII.

CRITICAL NOTES.

VER. 1 **Feast of unleavened bread.**—Which lasted for a week. **Called the Passover.**—An explanation for Gentile readers. Strictly speaking, it was the 15th Nisan, and not the whole week, that was the Passover, "the great day of the feast."

Ver. 2. **Chief priests,** etc.—The Pharisees now drop out of the foreground. Those now most active against Christ were the Sadducean party. **Sought.**—This corresponds to the calling of the council and the deliberation spoken of in John xi. 47. **For they feared.**—Before this clause such words as "but not on the feast day" are to be understood.

Ver. 3. **Then entered Satan.**—*I.e.*, put it into the heart of Judas to betray Christ. The phrase is used in John xiii. 27, with greater emphasis than here, to describe the final abandonment of Judas to his wicked purpose.

Ver. 4. **Captains.**—*I.e.*, of the Temple (see ver. 52). These were commanders of the body of Levites who kept guard in the Temple. They were, strictly speaking, civil and not military officers. One of them had the special title "captain of the Temple" (cf. Acts v. 26, iv. 1). **Betray Him.**—Rather "deliver Him" (R.V.).

Ver. 5. **Covenanted.**—*I.e.*, agreed to pay. The actual payment was evidently made at a later meeting, when the definite plan of betrayal was fixed upon. **Money.**—St. Luke does not state the amount, perhaps because the thirty pieces of silver foretold in prophecy would not have significance for a Gentile reader.

Ver. 6. **In the absence of the multitude.**—Or perhaps "without tumult" (R.V. margin).

Ver. 7. **The day of unleavened bread.**—Strictly speaking, the first day of unleavened bread was the 15th Nisan (*i.e.*, beginning from the evening of the 14th), when the paschal lamb was killed. But the day here spoken of was evidently the 14th, as the Passover was not yet slain. On this day it was usual, though not necessary, to abstain from leaven; and by including it the feast was sometimes reckoned as lasting eight days (Josephus, *Ant.*, II. xv. 1). If, then, we take the 14th day at its legal beginning (*i.e.*, after sunset on the 13th), it is possible that our Lord and His apostles celebrated the Passover a day before the usual time. This would harmonise the narrative of the synoptical Gospels with that of St. John. The former speak most definitely of the Passover being celebrated by our Lord, and the latter as definitely of the Passover as still to be observed by the Jews. The whole question is an extremely difficult and perplexing one, but probably the above is the simplest solution of it. **The passover.**—*I.e.*, the paschal lamb. **Killed.**—Rather, "sacrificed" (R.V.).

Ver. 8. **Peter and John.**—"It was a solemn message, and for it were chosen the two chief apostles" (*Alford*).

Ver. 10. **A man.**—The secrecy with which the place of celebration was pointed out was probably occasioned by a desire to prevent Judas being acquainted beforehand with it. It would seem that Christ Himself had, without His disciples' knowledge, made arrangements, perhaps with one friendly to Him, for celebrating the feast in his house. **Bearing a pitcher.**—Probably the significance of this sign is to be explained by the fact that it was the custom for the head of a family to draw a pitcher of pure water for kneading the unleavened bread. It was a formal piece of ritual

Ver. 11. **Goodman.**—*I.e.*, as in xii. 39, the paterfamilias. **Guest-chamber.**—The same word which is translated "inn" (ii. 7).

Ver. 14. **The hour.**—*I.e.*, appointed for the paschal supper. **Sat down.**—*I.e.*, reclined

the custom of standing at the paschal feast having been long given up by the Jews. **Twelve apostles.**—Omit "twelve"; omitted in R.V. Probably the word is taken from Matt. xxvi. 20; Mark xiv. 17.

Ver. 15. **With desire**, etc.—A Hebraism for "I have earnestly desired."

Ver. 16. **I will not any more**, etc.—"He should hold no more social converse with them on earth up to the period when the work of redemption by His blood (that sacrifice of which the Passover was the type) should be accomplished, and the kingdom of God established" (*Bloomfield*).

Ver. 17. **And He took.**—Rather "and He received a cup" (R.V.)—*i.e.*, the first cup of the Passover-meal, of which Christ evidently drank. **Gave thanks.**—As was usual before partaking of this cup. The formula of thanksgiving was, "Blessed be Thou, O Lord our God, who hast created the fruit of the vine." To this Christ evidently alludes in ver. 18.

Ver. 19. **Which is given for you.**—This clause is not found in the parallel passages in St. Matthew and St. Mark. In some MSS. the phrase that corresponds to it in 1 Cor. xi. 24 is "which is broken for you." In the R.V. this last is relegated to the margin, and the text is, "which is for you"—which seems a mutilated sentence. **New Testament.**—R.V. "new covenant." The word means both a will and an agreement. In the new relation between God and man there is both an *absolute* element (will), and a *conditional* (covenant).

Ver. 21. **Him that betrayeth.**—If the order of events be here given, it is clear that Judas partook of the last supper.

Ver. 22. **Determined.**—Fixed by the counsel of God (cf. Acts ii. 23, iv. 27, 28; Rev. xiii. 8).

Ver. 24. **A strife among them.**—Perhaps this is related out of its order, and is to be understood as having occurred at the beginning of the supper, when Christ practically rebuked it by washing the disciples' feet (John xiii. 4 *ff.*), to which action He here alludes in ver. 27.

Ver. 25. **Gentiles.**—A hint that the spirit animating the disciples was heathenish in its character. **Benefactors.**—A title taken by some kings—*e.g.*, Ptolemy Euergetes (the word here used).

Ver. 26. **Greatest.**—R.V. "the greater."

Ver. 28. **Have continued.**—Words specially appropriate to the present time, when the end of the time of trial was at hand. **Temptations.**—Or "trials" (cf. James i. 2, 3).

Ver. 30. **Sit on thrones.**—Perhaps the word "twelve" used in Matt. xix. 28 is here purposely omitted.

Ver. 31. **Simon, Simon!**—The repetition of the name gave combined solemnity and tenderness to the appeal. **Desired.**—R.V. "asked to have you," or (margin) "obtained you by asking." "Not content with Judas" (*Bengel*). **Have you.**—Plural—*i.e.*, the apostles.

Ver. 32. **I.**—Emphatic. **Fail.**—Implies total extinction. **Strengthen.**—The use of this word and the cognate substantive thrice by Peter in his two epistles (1 Pet. v. 10; 2 Pet. i. 12, iii. 17), and in the first passage in a connection with the mention of Satan's temptations, is remarkable.

Ver. 33. **I am ready.**—Rather, "Lord, *with thee* I am ready," etc. (R.V.). The "with thee" is emphatic.

Ver. 34. **Peter.**—"The only occasion on which Jesus is recorded to have used to him the name He gave him. It is used to remind him of his *strength* as well as his weakness" (*Farrar*). **Shall not crow.**—St. Mark alone says "twice."

Ver. 35. **When I sent you**, etc.—The kindness and hospitality with which they were met on the former occasion are contrasted with the enmity to which they will now be exposed—against which they will need to guard.

Ver. 36. **A sword.**—For self-defence. The strong figure makes the warning all the more memorable.

Ver. 37. **For the things**, etc.—*I.e.*, either the prophecies, one of which is quoted, are to be accomplished, or the things which befall me are approaching their termination. Probably the former is to be preferred.

Ver. 38. **It is enough.**—Not "they are sufficient," but "that will do." It seems to be an ironical reply, indicating that in taking His words literally they had misunderstood Him, and simply dismissing the matter.

Ver. 39. **As He was wont.**—This accounts for Judas being able to lead those who apprehended Jesus to the place where He was to be found.

Ver. 40. **At the place.**—A garden or farm called Gethsemane (*i.e.*, "the oil-press"), perhaps belonging to a friend or disciple. **He said to them.**—He left eight of the apostles, and took Peter, James, and John further into the recesses of the garden, and to them gave this exhortation.

Ver. 41. **Withdrawn.**—R.V. "parted from them"; lit. "torn away" (cf. Acts xxi. 1). The word implies reluctance to leave; but no great stress need be laid on it, as the special meaning may have been dropped in colloquial use.

Ver 42. **Father**, etc.—The sentence should be translated, "Father, if Thou be willing to

remove this cup from Me [well]; nevertheless, not My will, but Thine be done." The word translated "remove" is in the infinitive, and not in the imperative.

Ver. 43. **There appeared an angel**, etc.—This and the following verse are omitted in some very ancient MSS., perhaps from the mistaken idea that they derogate from the Saviour's majesty. It is possible, however, that they did not appear in the first edition of the Gospel, but were added later. There is strong evidence in their favour from patristic writers: Justin Martyr, Irenæus, and Hippolytus refer to them. The appearance of the angel was evidently after the first prayer Christ offered in the garden—that quoted here. St. Luke summarises the other two prayers in the phrase (ver. 44), "He prayed more earnestly." **Strengthening Him.**—The word implies imparting physical strength. We are not to think of spiritual strength or consolation being given.

Ver. 44. **Great drops of blood.**—The words might be understood either of copious streams of sweat pouring like blood from a wound or of sweat actually tinged with blood. It is, however, probable that the latter is meant. If the former had been meant, it is difficult to see why the words "of blood" should have been used. Cases are on record of such "bloody sweat" occurring in certain morbid states of body, or under the pressure of intense emotion.

Ver. 45. **Sleeping for sorrow.**—As is well known, extreme grief has a stupifying effect, and often induces heavy, though unrefreshing, sleep.

Ver. 47. **A multitude.**—"Composed of Levitical guards under their generals, a Roman tribune with some soldiers, part of a cohort from the Fort of Antonia, and some priests and elders" (*Farrar*). **To kiss Him.**—The preconcerted sign.

Ver. 48. **Betrayest thou?** etc.—In the order in the original the basest circumstance of the deed of treachery is made prominent—"Judas, with a kiss betrayest thou?" etc.

Ver. 50. **One of them.**—St. John tells that it was Peter, and that the servant's name was Malchus. Perhaps the synoptists omit the former name, from prudential motives. **Suffer ye thus far.**—If we are to understand these words as addressed to the disciples, they mean, "Let them do what they please; resist them not," and are equivalent to the longer speech reported in Matt. xxvi. 52-54. If, however, they are addressed to the captors, they might be interpreted to mean, "Allow Me thus much liberty"—*i.e.*, to set Him free for a moment to heal the wounded man. The former is perhaps to be preferred, as the words can be understood as virtually equivalent to the remonstrance addressed to the disciples in the parallel account in St. Matthew, and as the next words of Jesus are spoken to the captors.

Ver. 52. **A thief.**—Rather, "a robber" (R.V.).

Ver. 53. **This is your hour**, etc.—*I.e.*, "This is the time when power is given you against Me by the determinate counsel of God (Acts iv. 28), and in which the Power, or Prince, of darkness, is permitted to exercise his rancour against Me" (*Bloomfield*). Perhaps there is also an allusion to the darkness of the night, as harmonising with deeds of treachery and violence.

Ver. 54. **Then took they Him.**—R.V., "And they seized Him." **The high priest's house.**—*I.e.*, the house of Caiaphas. St. John alone mentions a preliminary and perhaps informal examination in the house of Annas.

Ver. 55. **Kindled a fire.**—"The spring nights at Jerusalem, which is 2610 feet above the level of the sea, are often cold" (*Farrar*). **Hall.**—Rather, "court" (R.V.). **Sat down among them.**—More literally, "sat in the midst of them" (R.V.).

Ver. 56. **Sat by the fire.**—Rather, "sat in the light [of the fire]" (R.V.).

Ver. 58. **Another.**—The gender of the original word is masculine. St. Matthew and St. Mark speak of this second accuser being a woman, or the same woman as first charged him with being a disciple of Jesus. The discrepancy, if any, is scarcely worth noticing. **Man.**—A term of expostulation in the original, to which our version here exactly corresponds —"man" being similarly used in English.

Ver. 59. **A Galilæan.**—Recognised as such by his dialect.

Ver. 61. **The Lord turned.**—This was not during the trial, for Peter was then in the outside court, but as Jesus crossed the court on His way from the house of Caiaphas. St. Luke gives no account of the trial before Caiaphas.

Ver. 65. **Blasphemously.**—Rather, "reviling Him" (R.V.). The word "blasphemy" has changed its meaning; it formerly denoted "reviling" or "scurrility."

Ver. 66. **As soon as it was day.**—The court of the Sanhedrim could only be held in the daytime; consequently all that was done in the presence of Caiaphas, when Christ was first tried, had to be repeated at the formal meeting. This accounts for the questions and replies recorded by St. Matthew and St. Mark, as spoken in the house of Caiaphas, being here set down as taking place in court. **The elders of the people.**—Properly, "the presbytery of the people," the body of elders—*i.e.*, the Sanhedrim (cf. Acts xxii. 5). The place of meeting is uncertain.

Ver. 67. **Art thou the Christ?**—Out of a claim to be the Messiah they wished to construct a charge of treason; as the Roman authorities, who alone had power of life and death, would not attach importance to a charge of "blasphemy."

Ver. 68. **If I also ask you.**—"If I put questions to educe from your own mouths proofs of

My innocence or of the validity of My claim to be Christ, ye will not answer Me or release Me." The words virtually mean, "The trial is an unfair one, as I am not allowed to argue My case." Nevertheless, Christ judges that the time has come for an open statement of His claims (vers. 69, 70).

Ver. 69. **Hereafter,** etc.—Rather, "but from henceforth shall the Son of Man be seated at the right hand," etc. The cross, now so near at hand, will be the first step to the throne of glory.

Ver. 70. **Ye say that I am.**—Or, "Ye say it, because I am" (R.V. margin). This is a Hebrew phrase, equivalent to, "Your words are true."

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 1—6.

The Unholy Covenant.—So great was the enmity of the chief priests and scribes against Jesus that they had definitely resolved to put Him to death. The only question was *how* they could best accomplish their design (ver. 2). The feast of the Passover was at hand, when the city would be crowded by pilgrims from all parts of the land, and from foreign countries; and the Jewish authorities were afraid that a serious riot might be caused if they took any open and precipitate step in carrying out their project. The inhabitants of Jerusalem were largely under their influence; but Christ still enjoyed a considerable measure of popularity among His Galilæan countrymen, many of whom would be present in the Holy City on the occasion of the feast. Their present intention evidently was to take no action during the feast, but to wait until the bands of pilgrims had returned to their homes. The unexpected offer, on the part of Judas, to deliver Him into their hands, however, determined them to act at once and to arrest Jesus before the feast. The sight of the chief priests and scribes entering into an unholy compact with the traitor apostle for the destruction of our blessed Lord suggests some solemn lessons.

I. **It brings to light the fact that there is no alternative between obedience to Christ and enmity against Him.**—It is impossible to ignore Him. The chief priests felt that power was slipping away from them, and that the movement with which Jesus was associated was out of their control. They must either yield to Him or take instant action against Him. In like manner Judas, who had cast off his allegiance as a disciple, went straightway to the enemies of his Lord and planned with them how he might betray Him unto them. This fact that there is no alternative between being a disciple and an enemy was clearly stated by Christ Himself in the word "He that is not with Me is against Me." And what was the case when the Saviour was upon earth, still holds good: all who are brought into connection with Christ are forced, by an inexorable law, to take up either the one attitude towards Him or the other. He claims our worship as God incarnate, and He lays down rules of conduct for the guidance of all men, and if we refuse to accept His claims, or to obey His precepts, we instantly become hostile to Him.

II. **It also shows that it is out of our power to fix the limit to which we will go, when once we have entered on a sinful course.**—Both the chief priests and scribes and the disloyal disciple were led, by their alienation from Christ, to the perpetration of the most shameful deeds: actions from which they would once have recoiled with horror now seem necessary, and do not shock them. They are deliberately planning the murder of an innocent person under the guise of zeal for religion. All checks of conscience are powerless to control them. The priests forget their sacred office, the claims of justice, and the covenant between God and Israel of which the feast now at hand was so solemn a memorial, and think of nothing but the gratification of their personal hatred of Jesus. Judas forgets all his Master's love and compassion, His wonderful deeds and teaching, His holy and innocent life; he forgets all that was due from him as a disciple,

a friend, and an apostle, to that Master with whom He had lived so long in intimate communion, and in whose character and conduct even the closest scrutiny could discover no flaw or stain. Without a shudder he sees the unhallowed joy upon the faces of the enemies of Christ as he discloses to them the hatred against Him that fills His breast also, and he arranges with them the price at which his treachery is to be rewarded. Probably neither of the parties would have believed it possible for them to descend to such a depth of infamy, when first they began to be conscious of alienation from Jesus. A sinful course is a course downhill; it may be in our choice to enter upon it or not, but when we have wilfully entered upon it, it is not in our power to check ourselves and to fix the point at which we shall stop.

III. **The historian lays stress upon the special guilt of apostasy from Christ.**—While both chief priests and scribes were guilty of grave sin in planning the death of Jesus, the traitor apostle was guilty of a worse offence than theirs. They had never been Christ's disciples; their enmity had been open and intense from a very early period in His career. The peculiar infamy of Judas is indicated by St. Luke in the reminder (ver. 3) that Judas had been of the number of the twelve, and in the statement that Satan entered into Him, as an explanation of his shameful conduct. He does not speak of Satan as entering into the chief priests and scribes. Some palliation of the guilt of the latter might be found in their ignorance of the Saviour, and in the false conceptions they had formed of Him. The knowledge Judas had of Christ only intensified the heinousness of his sin in betraying Him. A very solemn lesson is here contained for all who are professed disciples of Christ. Our responsibilities are increased by our relations with Him. The sin of those who wilfully depart from Him is necessarily greater than that of those who never acknowledged Him as their Lord and Master.

IV. **The history before us is an illustration of there being an over-ruling Providence.**—God makes even the wrath of men to serve Him. The priests had decided to take no present action, but to wait till the feast was past. But it was part of the Divine purpose that the death of Christ should occur at the time of the feast—that then He, who is our Passover, should be sacrificed. And hence the very treachery of Judas was made to serve a higher end. Without any violation of human free-will the purposes of God were carried into effect, and those who were simply bent upon gratifying their own selfish and evil feelings were unconsciously made to assist in accomplishing a plan predetermined by God. God's power cannot be resisted; if we are not fellow-workers with Him consciously and deliberately, He will yet be glorified by controlling and directing all our actions in accordance with His own will.

SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS ON VERSES 1—6.

Ver. 1. "*Feast of unleavened bread.*"—The rulers of the people were unwilling to put Christ to death at this season, as they dreaded an uproar being caused among the people. Yet in the providence of God their counsels were overruled. Had Christ been put to death at any other time, there would not have been that coincidence between the offering of the typical lamb, sacrificed year after year for nearly fifteen centuries, and the sacrifice of the true Passover, the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world.

Ver. 2. "*Sought how they might kill Him.*"—On more than one occasion before they had endeavoured to take Him, but He had escaped from them, for He would not then be taken (John x. 39). But at the very time when they were unwilling to take Him, He

willed to be taken: so, against their will, they fulfilled the types and prophecies in killing Him who is the true Paschal Lamb.

Ver. 3. "*Then entered Satan.*"—At first Satan came to make the heart of Judas his own; now he enters, because it is his own.—*Hall.*

Ver. 4. "*Went his way.*"—Unconscious of being under the control of the evil passion by which He had given Satan access to his heart.

Ver. 5. "*Were glad.*"—The thing wished for, but scarcely expected, being now within reach.

Ver. 6. "*Sought opportunity.*"—Doubtless he was baffled at first by the entire and unexpected seclusion which Jesus observed on the Wednesday and Thursday of that week.—*Farrar.*

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 7—20.

The Lord's Supper.

I. **The preparation.**—Peculiar to this Gospel are the names of the disciples sent to make ready the Passover and the representation of the command as preceding the disciples' question, "Where?" The selection of Peter and John indicates the confidential nature of the task, which comes out still more plainly in the singular directions given to them. How is the designation of the place which Christ gives to be understood? Was it supernatural knowledge, or was it the result of previous arrangement with the "goodman of the house"? Most probably the latter, for he was in so far a disciple that he recognised Jesus as the Master, and was glad to have Him in his house, and the chamber on the roof was ready "furnished" when they came. Why this mystery about the place? Because Judas was listening, too, for the answer to "Where?" thinking that it would give him the "opportunity" which he sought "to betray Him in the absence of the multitude." Jesus takes precautions to delay the cross. He takes none to escape it, but rather sets Himself in these last days to bring it near. The variety in His action means no change in His mind, but both modes are equally the result of His self-forgetting love to us all.

II. **The revelation of Christ's heart** (vers. 14-18).—He discloses His earnest desire for that last hour of calm before He went out to face the storm, and His vision of the future feast in the perfect kingdom. That desire touchingly shows His brotherhood in all our shrinking from parting with dear ones, and in our treasuring of the last, sweet, sad moments of being together. But the desire was not for Himself only. He wished to partake of that Passover, and then to transform it for ever, and to leave the new rite to His servants. We shall best conceive the course of events if we suppose that the earlier stages of the paschal ceremonial were duly attended to, and that the Lord's Supper was instituted in connection with its later parts. There is no need to discuss the exact stage at which our Lord spoke and acted as recorded in vers. 15-17. It is sufficient to note that in them He gives what He does not taste, and that, in giving, His thoughts travel beyond all the sorrow and death to reunion and perfected festal joys. The prophetic aspect of the Lord's Supper should never be left out of view. It is at once a feast of memory and of hope, and is also a symbol for the present, since it represents the conditions of spiritual life as being participation in the body and blood of Christ.

III. **The actual institution of the Lord's Supper** (vers. 19, 20).—Note its connection with the rite which it transforms. The Passover was the memorial of deliverance, the very centre of Jewish ritual. It was a family feast, and our Lord took the place of the head of the household. But this memorial of deliverance He transfigures—He calls upon Jew and Gentile to forget the

venerable meaning of the rite, and remember rather His work for all men. He must have been clothed with Divine authority to abrogate a Divinely enjoined ceremony. The separation of the symbols of the body and blood plainly indicates that it is the death of Jesus, and that a violent one, which is being commemorated. Both parts of the symbol teach that all our hopes are rooted in the death of Jesus, and that the only true life of our spirits comes from participation in His death, and thereby in His life. Jesus declares, by this rite, that through His death a new "covenant" comes into force as between God and man, in which all the anticipations of prophets are more than realised, and sins are remembered no more, and the knowledge of God becomes the blessing of all, and a close relationship of mutual possession is established between God and us, and His laws are written on loving hearts and softened wills. St. Luke alone preserves for us the command to "do this," which at once establishes the rite as meant to be perpetual, and defines the new nature of it. It is a memorial: "in order to My remembrance." Jesus knew that we should be in constant danger of forgetting Him, and therefore, in this one case, He enlists sense on the side of faith, and trusts to these homely memorials the recalling to our treacherous memories of His dying love. He wished to live in our hearts, and that for the satisfaction of His own love and for the deepening of ours. The Lord's Supper is a standing evidence of Christ's own estimate of where the centre of His work lies. We are to remember His death. Surely no view of the significance and purpose of the cross but that which sees in it a propitiation for the world's sins accounts for this rite. A Christianity which strikes the atoning death of Jesus out of its theology is sorely embarrassed to find a worthy meaning for His dying command, "This do in remembrance of Me."—*Maclaren.*

SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS ON VERSES 7—20.

Vers. 7-38. *Outline of The Narrative.*—1. Preparations for the Last Supper (vers. 7-13). 2. The Last Supper itself (vers. 14-23). 3. The conversation following it (vers. 24-38).

Ver. 7. "*When the Passover must be killed.*"—The example of Christ in observing the outward ordinances of the Jewish religion should suggest to us the duty of a like scrupulousness in keeping those of our religion.

Ver. 8. "*Sent Peter and John.*"—This errand was (1) an exercise in faith and obedience; and (2) the result of it was calculated to encourage them to believe in His hidden greatness, in spite of His humiliation.

Vers. 9, 10.—The mystery with which Christ surrounded His procedure on this occasion: 1. By concealing the information of the place from Judas, it was a measure of precaution for Himself. 2. It impressed upon the minds of His disciples the fact of His absolute foreknowledge of all events.

Vers. 10-12.—*A Sign Given to The Disciples:* 1. To impress them with the dignity and solemnity of this Passover celebration. 2. To convince them of His own Divine foreknowledge and almighty power—in predicting what was to happen and in making provision for celebrating the feast.

Ver. 10. *The Man Bearing a Pitcher.*

I. **The Passover was observed in the midst of ordinary life and its familiar surroundings.**—This was a specially solemn and significant occasion. And yet, peculiarly holy and full of world-wide, time-long meaning as it was, it took place among the common details of family life. It was not held in a court of the Temple, but in the upper room of an unknown citizen. It was not ushered in by pomp and ceremony and portent, but by a humble servant carrying a pitcher of water for

household purposes. *Our* Passover—the Lord's Supper—ought not to be dissociated from our ordinary life, and made an unearthly, unnatural experience. Too much superstitious feeling still clings to the ordinance. Many are afraid to partake of it. They practically disobey Christ's loving command.

II. **The Lord's Supper is, after all, but a household service, a family meal, linked most closely with all the familiar things of our common life.**—Bread and wine are common things. The Communion Service is a part of the common worship of the sanctuary. Only here the symbols appeal to the eye, and to the touch and taste. The Communion Table is only the upper chamber of the familiar Church. This is no high mystic service, no exclusive channel of grace. There is no sacramentarianism about it.

III. **Let the significant lesson of the man carrying the pitcher of water, pointing the way to the upper room, teach us that so every circumstance of our ordinary life, however homely, should have reference to and prepare for the Holy Supper as often as we are called upon to observe it.**—We should so live that no special preparation need be made for our sitting down at the Lord's Table—that wherever we are, and however engaged, we may always be in a suitable frame of mind to enjoy the Holy Communion. Let our whole life, religious and secular, be of one piece, and so our daily carrying of the pitcher of water for household purposes, the daily business of our life, will lead to and prepare for the perpetual communion feast of heaven.—*Macmillan.*

Ver. 11. "*The goodman of the house.*"—As there was among His friends a secret enemy, so was there among His enemies a secret friend.—*Braune.*

Ver. 12. "*Upper room.*"—The usual place of resort for large gatherings in a Jewish house; probably the very room which also witnessed the appearance of the risen Christ to the twelve, and the descent of the Holy Ghost at Pentecost.—*Farrar.*

The Best to be Offered to Christ.—The man who is to lend the room knows Jesus, and is, in some measure, a disciple. He had, apparently, already been told by some one that such a room would be required. But the "upper room" was not the "guest chamber" which the Master asked for. It was a quieter place, not on the ground floor, but upstairs. Christ asked merely for the lower room, the common guest-chamber, but was supplied with a better reserved for special purposes and occasions. When Christ makes any demand on us, let as give Him even more and better than He asks for.

I. **It was an upper room.**—A private room above the hall or guest-chamber. The "best" room in the house. He could have privacy there with His disciples. He wants it all, and all for Himself. Do we offer to Christ the best we have?

II. **It was a furnished room.**—It was supplied with couches and table, with cups and vessels. Are our hearts furnished and ready with what Christ loves—prayers, hymns, thanksgivings, holy thoughts, good deeds, kind words? *There* He can rest and abide.

III. **It was a large room.**—Of ample accommodation. A party of thirteen needed more room than a tiny chamber. Are we niggardly to Christ? Do we put Him in the smallest room? Have we place in our hearts for His disciples? He will come to bless. Give Him room to work.—*Plummer.*

Ver. 13. "*Found as He had said.*"—The directions had been given with great circumstantiality—the *entrance* of the city, a *man*, *meeting* them, carrying a *pitcher* of *water*, *entering a house.* Had any one of these particulars been found wanting, the prophecy would have proved untrue, and the disciples would have failed in their errand.

Vers. 14-23. 1. **The words of Jesus** introductory to the Supper (vers.

14-18). 2. **The Supper itself,** with the institution of the new rite (vers. 19, 20). 3. **The announcement of the treachery of one of the disciples.**

Ver. 14. "*The twelve apostles with Him.*"—The presence of Judas at this Last Supper in distinctly asserted here, as well as in ver. 21. The fact that Christ, who was acquainted with his secret villainy, did not exclude him is very significant. It implies that a man who makes profession of religion, and in whose outward life there is nothing scandalous, cannot reasonably be denied the external privileges of religion. The endeavour to secure, by rigid scrutiny and long probation, that none but the regenerate are in the visible Church finds little to countenance it in the New Testament. It is calculated to discourage the timid and self-distrustful, and as a matter of fact it does not keep out hypocrites.

The First Word at The Supper.—I. **An utterance of human tenderness.**—A consecration of all that is purest and loftiest in the brotherhood of men. Christ craves to eat with His brother men. He anticipates the responsive love of those whom He has called to Himself—"With you." This is beautifully, unselfishly human. The heart of God is human, and longs to find itself welcomed, understood, and responded to.

II. **An utterance full of the purpose and travail of the Redeemer.**—There is an element in the longing of Christ above and beyond the feeling of the Israelite towards the national festival. It is the *last* Passover of the true Israel of God. The time of the Re-formation has arrived. The kingdom is coming. The complete ingathering of the redeemed is in view. And, till then, he takes farewell of all earthly rite and ordinance.—*Lang.*

Vers. 15, 16. "*With desire,*" *etc.*

I. For the sake of His disciples to whom, on this occasion of farewell, He was to reveal the intensity of His affection for them.

II. For His own sake, because immediately after this Passover He was to enter into His glory.

Ver. 15. "*I have desired.*"—Very vehement desire is on no other occasion attributed to our Lord, either by Himself or by others. So great was this occasion, when, before He left His disciples, He had to give to them the new covenant of His Body and Blood.

"*Before I suffer.*"—This is the only instance in the Gospels in which the word "suffer" is used in its absolute sense, as in the creed—"He suffered under Pontius Pilate."

Reasons why Christ Desired so Earnestly to Eat this Last Passover.

I. **The Passover had now reached its end, and found its full meaning.**

II. **He desired it for the support of His own soul in the approaching struggle.**—"Before I suffer."

III. **Because His friends needed special support.** "To eat this Passover *with you.*"

IV. **Because this Passover looked forward to all the future of His Church and people.**—*Ker.*

Ver. 16. "*Until it be fulfilled.*"—Jesus has in view a new banquet, which will be held after the consummation of all things. The Holy Supper is the bond of union between the Jewish Passover, which is now nearing its end, and the heavenly banquet yet to come, just as the salvation of the gospel, of which the Supper is the monument, forms the transition between the external deliverance of Israel and the salvation, at once spiritual and external, of the glorified Church.—*Godet.*

Vers. 17-20. *The Lord's Supper is a Monument Sacred to the Memory of Jesus Christ.*—1. It refers to the *death* of Jesus. 2. Its significance does not depend upon the tragic circumstances

of that death, or to its glorious character as an act of martyrdom. 3. Jesus represents His death as a sin-offering; His blood is shed for the remission of sins. 4. The sacrament of the Supper represents Christ, not merely as a Lamb, to be slain for a sin-offering, but as a Paschal Lamb, to be eaten for spiritual nourishment.—*Bruce.*

The Last Supper.—The Supper brings before us—

I. **A Saviour.**—Every part of it fixes our gaze, not on it, but on Him.

II. **A human Saviour.**—He sits, eats, drinks, speaks, has a body and blood, dies.

III. **A suffering Saviour.**—The bread is broken through and through. The wine is poured out. These acts symbolise and emphasise His sufferings. His death is the central fact.

IV. **A willing Saviour.**—He gave thanks, though He knew of all that was in "the cup"—Gethsemane, Calvary, and the grave. With more than willingness—with positive joy—He gave Himself for our salvation.

V. **A sin-bearing Saviour.**—This is Christ's explanation of His own death. Let us be content with it. He came to "give His life a ransom for many."—*Wells.*

Ver. 17. "*He took the cup.*"—*I.e.*, the *Paschal* cup, of which Christ now partook for the last time: in ver. 20 it is the *eucharistic* cup of which He did not partake.

Ver. 18. "*I will not drink.*"—As ver. 16 means, "This is My last Passover," so this means, "This is My last meal"—My last day. To the reference here to a future banquet, in which Christ Himself will participate, corresponds the saying of St. Paul, "until He come" (1 Cor. xi. 26).

Vers. 19, 20. *The Lord's Supper* is (1) a memorial of Christ; (2) a standing evidence of the truth of Christianity; (3) an act by which we profess our faith in His atoning sacrifice; (4) an act of communion with God, and with our fellow-believers; and (5) one which is intended to lead us to anticipate our Lord's second coming.

Divine Object-Lessons.—"This bread.' "This cup."

I. "**This bread.**"—God does not separate sign and thing signified. Nor should we. 1. *Take.*—Christ is to be taken as we take the bread. He comes to us from without. He is offered to us. 2. *Eat.*—The bread is ready for eating. It is not grain, but food. Eating is a perfect illustration of appropriation, assimilation, incorporation. Eaten bread makes brain, heart, hand. Christ should thus create and nourish convictions, affections, activities. 3. *Divide it.*—Pass it round. It is a family meal. A reminder of brotherly love. It is free to all. There is enough for all.

II. "**This cup.**"—1. It is filled. You are not offered an empty cup. He gave Himself to fill this cup with His life-blood for you. 2. It is offered to you. Not a far-off, vague uncertainty, like the Holy Grail. It is brought near, it touches your hand, your lip. Not to take it were an outrage. 3. It is to be partaken of. Untouched, it mocks your thirst as the cup of Tantalus did. It cheers you only when you taste its contents. 4. It is passed on. It is a social, not a solitary cup. The Divine order is from Christ through His disciples. A symbol of fraternity. Let all taste of it.—*Wells.*

Ver. 19. "*Gave thanks.*"—1. For the higher food symbolised by it. 2. As ordaining it to be a means of spiritual nourishment.

Old and New.—I. **An old feast.**—The Passover feast.

II. **A new feast.**—Christ the Passover Lamb.

III. **The new command.**—Do *this.*—*W. Taylor.*

"*In remembrance of Me.*"—The word used is more emphatic than *remembrance* (which may be involuntary); it is a deliberate, inward act of the will, showing itself by external signs.

Ver. 20. "*This cup.*"—The fact that Jesus took in His hands a portion of bread and a cup of wine forbids that literal identification of the bread and wine with His body and blood upon which both Roman Catholic and Lutherian divines have insisted. The distinction between the two was evident at the time. If such literal identification were intended, the words of institution would virtually mean, "This, in time to come, will be My body, My blood." Is it possible that such an idea entered into the minds of those who were present at that Supper?

"*New Testament.*"—A new covenant between God and man, based upon the sacrifice of Christ.

I. **The free gift of salvation on the part of God.**

II. **The acceptance of it, by faith, on the part of man.**—This is symbolised by the cup which Jesus hands to His disciples, and which they may freely take and raise to their lips.

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 21—38.

Words of Warning and Counsel.—In the words which Christ spoke after the institution of the Supper, and before He went forth to meet suffering and death, we have another proof of His unselfish and disinterested spirit. His thoughts are not absorbed in His own concerns, but He has leisure to think of His disciples—to utter words of warning and reproof, and to give them counsels for the time when they will be deprived of His presence and be brought face to face with new conditions of life, for which their previous experience would not have prepared them.

I. **He reveals the fact that one of the twelve is to betray Him** (vers. 21-23).—Both sorrow and indignation appear in the exclamation, "But, behold, the hand of him that betrayeth Me is with Me on the table." As He sees the cup pass from hand to hand, His attention fastens upon Judas, and He cannot refrain from disclosing the fact that one of those who are now His guests will deliver Him into the hand of His enemies. For long He had kept silence concerning the true character of Judas: why does He now break that silence? Surely it was in mercy to the traitor, who might, even at the eleventh hour, have repented of his sin and found forgiveness. Death would still have come to Christ, but his guilt would have been averted. For Christ makes it quite clear that the traitor's power over Him is but slight. He does not lament that He is doomed to death, for He knows that a Divine decree has prescribed death for Him. But He shudders at the fate of the man who deliberately and wilfully betrays Him. So skilfully had Judas disguised his real feelings towards Christ, that he averts from himself the suspicions of his fellow-apostles. Yet, after all, there was nothing very wonderful in his escaping observation, for those of innocent mind are much more inclined to suspect themselves of faults and shortcomings than to discern them in others.

II. **He allays the strife for supremacy that had again risen among them** (vers. 24-30).—The question as to who should be the greatest among them had more than once, before this, raised disputes and contests among the apostles. But it surprises us to read that on this solemn occasion it should again have been raised. Perhaps the origin of the present dispute was in rival claims being put forward to occupy the place of honour by the side of Jesus at the supper-table. Yet, though the disciples were so far out of sympathy with their Lord as to indulge in selfish strife for precedence or for supremacy at this

moment, when the thought of His coming sufferings and death was pressing upon His mind, we discern no trace of anger or of disappointment in His words. He is neither irritated nor discouraged by the fact that, in spite of His example and teaching, His disciples still manifest a spirit of carnal ambition, for He knows that the leaven which is to change their characters has been deposited in their hearts, and He is fully convinced that in due time the transformation which He has sought to effect will be wrought. 1. He contrasts the ideal of greatness which prevails in ordinary human society with that in the new society of which He is the founder: there strength or ability gives precedence, here he is greatest who is most eager to be of service to his fellows. And He brings forward His own example as an illustration of the spirit that should prevail among them: He had abdicated the honour He might have insisted upon and had been among them as one that served. 2. He promises due satisfaction of the aspirations after glory and honour which it is lawful for even the humblest believer to cherish (Rom. ii. 7), though the way to have them realised is not by seeking lordship over others. He acknowledges the fidelity of the apostles to Himself in the time of His humiliation, and He assures them that they shall be associated with Him in His exaltation. As they are His guests at this paschal supper, so shall they sit down with Him at the heavenly banquet; as they have recognised Him as their King, and sought to extend His kingdom, so shall they be partakers of His royal authority.

III. **The warning against self-confidence** (vers. 31-34).—Christ discloses the fact that a serious trial is at hand for all the apostles—that he who was chiefest among them in faith and devotion would be exposed to greatest danger; but He also promises help in the time of need, and anticipates a victorious issue from the trial. 1. *The imminent danger.* The enemy of God and man was to assail the apostles and to attempt to overthrow their faith. His desire to have them, that he might sift them as wheat, was to be gratified; and, as in the case of Job, he was to be allowed to try every device for shaking their loyalty to their Master. He would choose an opportune time for his attempt, when they were separated from their Master, and left dependent upon their own strength and resources. Yet his power was but limited; it was by God's permission that he was allowed to sift them; and though he might desire that the wheat might be found to be but chaff, he could do no more than shake the sieve. 2. *The intervention of the Intercessor.* Christ presents Himself as more than a match for the enemy. He has already foreseen the danger, and has already provided against it ("I *have* prayed"). One apostle is, though he is unconscious of it, in more danger of utter overthrow than any of his fellows; and for him the prayer of intercession has been offered with special fervency. The prayer is not that he may escape the trial, nor even that he may escape from it unscathed, but that his faith may not fail—that, however low he may fall, he may still not be utterly cast down. 3. *A happy issue from the trial.* Christ anticipates a change being wrought in the character of the apostle that would make him helpful to others in time to come. By his fall and restoration his rashness and self-confidence would be purged away, and the experience through which he had passed would make him sympathetic towards the weak, and able to understand the trials and difficulties that beset them. Those who have themselves fallen and been truly penitent are more likely to be helpful to their brethren than others, whose experience has been more happy and uneventful. The reply of Peter shows how unconscious he was of the danger in which he stood.

IV. **A new order of things at hand, requiring special foresight and courage** (vers. 35-38).—After preparing the disciples for the special trial which is to befall them in the course of a few hours, He forewarns them that in the days and years to come they will be confronted with a very different condition of

matters from that which had been familiar to them in the time of His earthly ministry. They had enjoyed a measure of comfort in consequence of the popularity which He had won in many sections of Jewish society. But now the final conflict between Him and the authorities of the Jewish people would entail upon them also a measure of hardship and persecution. 1. *He recalls the past.* When He had sent them on their mission through the land, they had found friends everywhere; though they had gone out without money or provisions, they had suffered no lack of anything they needed. 2. *He foretells the future.* He is to suffer, and they are, to some extent, to suffer with Him. Instead of trusting to the generosity of others they will need to make provision for themselves; instead of friends they will find enemies, against whom they will need to use all legitimate means of self-defence. He would no longer be with them to protect them, and therefore they would need to use every precaution for guarding themselves from harm. The disciples, for the moment, took the precept literally, and pointed out that they were prepared; for they had two swords in their possession. The Lord does not correct the error, except by implication; two swords are enough for protecting the twelve, since literal swords are not to be used—since their most efficient weapon would be an all-suffering patience like His.

SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS ON VERSES 21-38.

Vers. 21-23. *Treachery Unveiled.* Note—

I. **That the traitor was an apostle.**

II. **That he would be successful in accomplishing his evil work.**

III. **That he would bring down upon himself a terrible doom.**

Ver. 21. "*But, behold.*"—Though I am about to shed My blood for you, and for all men.

"*The hand.*"—The hand which had received the bread and the cup—the hand which had pledged a covenant with the enemies of Christ.

Ver. 22. "*As it hath been determined.*"—Cf. Ps. xli. 9.

Ver. 23. "*Began to enquire.*"—In their guilelessness they were (1) distrustful of themselves, and (2) unsuspicious of others.

Vers. 23, 24. "*Which should do this thing! . . . which should be accounted the greatest.*"—In the one question their *humility*, in the other their *pride*, are manifested. A strange contrast!

Vers. 24, 25. *True Greatness.*

I. **What did the apostles, at this time in their lives, mean by "the greatest"?**—The most influential, the most capable, the most considered. To some men greatness consists in physical prowess; to others, the possession of wealth; to others, the power of intelligence. In our times, we often mean by greatness a combination of all these forms of power—force, wealth, intelligence.

II. **Our Lord's ideal of greatness.**—Very unlike that of the natural man. An entire contrast. Is it an unpractical ideal? No. For (1) man's true greatness must be the greatness of his true self; (2) must be in harmony with the true law of his being. 3. Love is the gift, the expenditure of self—"God is love." And He permits man to share in the most glorious of the Divine attributes, and his share in this attribute is the measure of his greatness. The apostles became really great men after Pentecost, simply because they followed their Master. Note, in conclusion (1) the importance of a true ideal in life. (2) The true ideal of life—service—is within the reach of all of us. We can all of us be really great if we will. The possibilities of service are manifold and inexhaustible. They lie around us on

every side; they grow under our feet; they outnumber our capacities for meeting them. To be like our Lord, we must unlearn the world's current ideas of greatness.—*Liddon.*

Ver. 24. "*Also a strife among them.*"—One apostle was a traitor; the others though faithful, manifest a spirit of selfish rivalry which could not fail to grieve their Master.

"*Should be accounted the greatest.*"—Christ is neither irritated nor discouraged by the unseemly contest; He gently bears with the weakness of the disciples, and He lays down the principle which should animate them, in the full consciousness that, in due time, it would influence and govern their conduct.

Vers. 25-30. *To Strive for Pre-eminence was Unbecoming.*

I. **Because it manifested a spirit like that of the heathen** (vers. 25, 26).

II. **Because it was inconsistent with the example of Christ Himself** (ver. 27).

III. **Because a high and princely recompense was reserved for all who had been faithful to Him.**—A kingdom, a throne, and a place at His table, for each (28-30).

Ver. 25. "*Benefactors.*"—Our Lord draws a marked contrast between princes who had assumed the title because of their beneficent rule, and Himself, who deserved it, not for exercising authority over His followers, but for "serving" them.

Vers. 25-27.—I. **The worldly ideal of greatness.**

II. **The Divine ideal which Christ introduced and exemplified.**

Ver. 26. "*As he doth that serve.*"—Let all the strife of men be—who shall *do best;* who shall be least.—*Whichcote.*

Humility and Greatness.—1. Humility a way to greatness. 2. Doing good the object to be kept in view, rather than being great.

Ver. 27. "*I am among you,*" *etc.*—1. A summary of His earthly life of humiliation. 2. A fit introduction to His passion. 3. The watchword, even now, of His heavenly life.

Vers. 28, 29. "*Continued with Me:*" *Fidelity and Its Reward.*

I. **Christ's grateful acknowledgment of the fidelity of His disciples.**—They had done nobly. Their behaviour had been heroic. Persistence in spiritual life, throughout a curriculum of trial, is not easy.

II. **Christ's promise of a great reward.**—Noble shall be your reward—such is the import of the pathetic utterance. I shall do this in turn to you who have persisted in fidelity to Me. Are not the apostles the true rulers of the world to-day?—*Bruce.*

Ver. 28. "*My temptations.*"—1. The privations of His lot. 2. The absence from His life of the elements of worldly greatness. 3. The calumnies and plots of His enemies. 4. His rejection by so large a section of the people, and by their rulers.

I. **The loneliness of Christ's life.**

II. **The temptations that had beset Him.**

III. **His gratitude for the fidelity of the apostles.**

Christ's Temptations.—We must not forget that the Saviour described the space between the wilderness temptation and the temptation at the end as "My temptations." Not "My sorrows," "My difficulties," "My pains," but "My temptations." His virtue was not cloistered and untried. It was subjected to the hottest fires.

I. **He was tempted all His life by bodily pain and privation.**

II. **He was constantly tempted to use His supernatural power.**

III. **He resisted the temptation to adopt a false Messiahship,** accordant

with the worldly spirit of Judaism, in favour of an inward kingdom to be developed by the power of the Divine Spirit. He would not please His disciples by taking a temporal kingship. How significant, then, it is, that when He describes His life it should come before His memory as "My temptations"!—*Nicoll.*

Vers. 29, 30. "*I appoint unto you a kingdom.*" — The words virtually signify: "I will give you a royal dignity, which will be associated with that which I myself have received, so that you, who are now My guests at this Paschal supper, will also sit down with Me at the heavenly banquet, and will, in My name, judge the tribes of Israel."—*Godet.*

Ver. 29. "*I appoint.*"—Lit. "I bequeath"; a word appropriate for one so near death.

Ver. 30. "*That ye may eat,*" *etc.*—It is their association with Christ that is the source of the honour and power which the apostles enjoy.

I. As they are faithful to Christ in His temptations, and now sit beside Him at the last Passover, He promises them a place at the heavenly feast.

II. As they share in His humiliation, they are assured of participation in His exaltation—they occupy the highest places of honour and authority, even now, in His Church.

Vers. 31, 32. *The Sifting of Peter.*

I. **Such a character obviously needed sifting.**—He was full of self-confidence. Self-confidence is the enemy of true faith. The process is severe, is fiery; but if Peter is to be cured of his tendencies, he must suffer. However hard the trial, let us pray for sifting, if only we can thereby learn Peter's lesson—if only we can be saved from the failure and regret which follow confidence in self.

II. **But his fall is only half his story.**—The restoration is the completion of the sifting process. Christ's look was the turning point in Peter's life. No words were needed to break his heart.

III. **Christ's further dealing completed his restoration.**—Three open and shameful denials were followed by three searching questions, reminders of his threefold fall. But he bears the trying ordeal patiently. No more boastfulness. The old self-confidence is gone for ever. At last he is fit to lead, to counsel others. He has become "Rock."

IV. **Two lessons.**—1. Look how the Divine order runs through his life, and makes its unity impressive. 2. Peter did not lose strength when he surrendered self-confidence. He became stronger than ever, but not in himself. His confidence is now in his Master.—*Eyton.*

The Prayer and the Counter-Prayer.—The setting and framework give significance and solemnity to the words.

I. **A revelation of danger.**—The Old-Testament imagery of the scene in heaven, in the first chapter of Job, gives the key to the expression of the text. Satan has again petitioned for the apostles—to explore and search. Christ has his fan, Satan has his sieve. Body, mind, soul—each has its own danger and temptation. But there is a dignity, an elevation, and a trembling anxiety in the battle and in the victory.

II. **The special personal assurance.**—The transition is from the many to the one, from the company to the individual. Was it only for Peter that the prayer was offered? Then it was the one prayed for who fell—who, when trial came, thrice denied his Lord. But from the fall arose the conqueror. Christ's prayer *was* answered.

III. **The responsibility and privilege of the restored.**—There are many conversions in one life, there is need of many turnings. Whenever we forget God we need to be turned. And the privilege, as it is the responsibility of the converted, is to strengthen others.

Peter did so. By his ministry, by his epistles, by his life and example. This is the work to which all converted men are summoned. Pray to be made acceptable to and potent for good over other lives.—*Vaughan.*

A Dangerous Crisis.—1. Jesus regards the crisis as a *sifting* time for the disciples. 2. As, though perilous, one which shall not prove deadly to their faith. 3. As one which shall not only end happily, but result in spiritual benefit to themselves, and qualify them for being helpful to others.—*Bruce.*

I. The **warning** to Peter of coming danger.
II. The **encouragement** given him.
III. The **charge** laid upon him.

Unconsciousness of Danger.—1. Satan eager to destroy Peter. 2. Christ eager to deliver Peter. 3. Peter unconscious of the danger in which he stood.

Ver. 31. "*Desired.*"—He cannot act except with God's permission. Cf. Job i. 12, ii. 6.

"*That he may sift you.*"—"Whose fan is in his hand," but with the purpose of gathering the chaff for himself. Judas had been separated from the apostolic band: Peter now stood in danger.

"*Sift.*"—The word has not been preserved to us elsewhere, but the signification is not doubtful. The *tertium comparationis* is the testing agitation: as the wheat is shaken in the sieve, that the chaff may thereby separate itself from the wheat and fall out, so will Satan also disquiet and terrify you through persecutions, dangers, tribulations, in order to bring your faithfulness towards Me to apostasy.—*Meyer.*

Ver. 32. "*But I have prayed.*"—1. The power of the Intercessor greater than that of the enemy. 2. It is through this power alone that the faith, even of an apostle, is sustained.

"*Strengthen thy brethren.*"—Those who have themselves been tempted, and who have learned their own weakness, should be all the more helpful to their weaker brethren; they should be all the more compassionate in feeling, and charitable in the judgments they form, and hopeful in temperament.

Vers. 33, 34. I. **Peter's ignorance of himself.**
II. **Christ's knowledge of him.**

Willingness and Weakness.
I. His sincere desire to share his Master's sufferings.
II. The weakness that would betray him into denying his Master.

Ver. 33. "*Ready to go with Thee.*"—The words indicate (1) a measure of self-confidence, as though there were little ground for the warning just given; yet also (2) a conviction that the Lord was the source of his strength. The phrase, "with Thee," is specially emphatic. When the trial came, Peter was following "*afar off.*"

Vers. 34-38. *The Conversation after Supper.*
I. Relative to the dispute for superiority (vers. 24-30).
II. To the denial of Peter (vers. 31-34).
III. To the hour of danger now at hand (ver. 35-38).

Ver. 34. "*Peter.*"—This is the only place in the Gospels where Christ is said to have addressed the apostle by his name, Peter. "Doubtless there is a reference to his good confession (Matt. xvi. 18). Thou, when uttering the revelation from My Father, and confessing Me to be the Christ, the Son of the Living God, wast a true Petros, or stone, built on Me, the living Rock; but now thou wilt deny Me thrice, because thou speakest thine own words and reliest on thine own strength, instead of on Me" (*Wordsworth*).

"*The cock shall not crow,*" *etc.*—The fact that Peter would succumb before

the approaching trial might have been guessed by a shrewd observer of character. Christ, however, shows Divine foreknowledge in predicting the particulars of his fall: the time when (cock-crowing), the threefold assertion, and the form, in which the denial would be made.

Vers. 35, 36. *The Past and The Future.*

I. **The ample provision** which had been made for them whilst they had been in His service.

II. **The troubles** they would now have to face. Then they had been, in a measure, independent of earthly resources; now they would need to make use of them. Then their safety had been assured; now their enemies would be more embittered, and self-defence be necessary.

Principles, not Rules.—The Lord Jesus Christ came, not to give men exact and binding rules of conduct, but large general principles, capable of the most flexible and various application. Rules of conduct *are* to be found among His sayings, indeed, as, *e.g.*, when He bade His disciples, if smitten on the one cheek, turn the other also; or when He bade them, if any man took their coat, to let him also rob them of their cloak; or when He bade them give to every one that asked an alms of them, or go out on a journey unprovided with any change of clothing and with an empty purse. But these rules were not meant for a literal, and still less for a universal, obedience, since our Lord Himself did not in all cases obey them, nor His apostles; nay, more, these rules were thrown into a paradoxical form, in order that we might see that they were not mere rules, and be compelled to search for the principles which underlie them. The rules He gave were passing illustrations of great principles of justice, compassion, trust in God, and brotherly kindness. Observe what our Lord is here doing. He is repealing a rule which He Himself had given to His disciples only a few months ago, although, as they confess, that rule had worked very well. He is replacing it by a new rule, a rule the very opposite of that which He had previously given them; a rule which no sane and reflective man can possibly suppose He intended them to obey *as a rule*, since it is alien to the very spirit, to the whole drift, of His teaching. Here, then, we have a clear proof that the rules given by Christ were not intended to become ordinances of perpetual observance; that He did not mean men to render them a literal, and still less a perpetual and universal, obedience; that we must interpret them, as all other of His utterances, by aid of our own common-sense and spiritual insight; that what we are to obey in Him is the sacred and eternal principles which they illustrate. Formerly the twelve were to go forth penniless, unprovided with aught but a staff, and to bear with meekness whatever wrongs or insults the world might inflict on them. Now they are to put money in their purse, to pack their scrip with provisions and conveniences, to exchange their staff for a sword—not to submit to, but to defy and conquer, the hostility of the world. It is impossible to render literal obedience to *both* these rules, and we have no evidence that the twelve ever attempted to obey the latter rule literally. Only a few hours after these words were spoken, St. Peter struck Malchus with his sword, and only received a rebuke from Christ for his pains. The fact is, that when Christ threw His teaching into the form of rules He did not intend us to take them as rules, but as picturesque and paradoxical illustrations of principles. Here is the proof. Christ Himself repeals a rule which He Himself had given, and replaces it with a rule the very opposite of that which He had given—nay, replaces it with a rule which never was, and never will be, literally obeyed; and thus He drives us to look for the principles which underlie His word.

He teaches us that as there are times when we are to win upon the world by unselfishness and an unresisting, uncomplaining submission to wrong—in short, by *not* resisting evil—so also there are times in which we *are* to resist, to strive against it manfully, to arm and nerve ourselves for the defence and furtherance of the faith. If, at times, we are to be *meek* for the truth, at other times we are to be *valiant* for the truth. Rules breed customs, and customs breed corruption. Whereas, if we have principles instead of rules, we are obliged to use our common-sense in applying and in varying our application of them; we are compelled to observe and reflect, to let our thoughts play freely round them, to learn and grow wiser by experience. And all these—observation, reflection, the use of good sense and experience—are educational influences of the highest value. It is by these we live, and keep our principles alive, and help to give life to the world around us.—*Cox.*

Vers. 35-38. *Sword and Garment.*

I. **In the letter these counsels seem to point to a policy the opposite of non-resistance.**—Jesus seems to say that the great business and duty of the hour for all who are on His side is to furnish themselves with swords. So urgent is the need that he who wants a weapon must sell his garment to buy one.

II. **But the very emphasis with which He speaks shows that His words are not to be taken in the literal, prosaic sense.**—It is very easy to see what He means. His object is, by graphic language, to convey to His disciples an idea of the gravity of the situation. "Now," He would say, "now is the day, yea, the hour, of battle. If My kingdom be one of this world, now is the time for fighting, not for dreaming. Now matters have come to extremities, and ye have need of all your resources. Equip yourselves with shoes, and purse, and knapsack, and, above all, with swords and warlike courage." The disciples did not understand His meaning. They put a stupid, prosaic interpretation on Christ's parable. "It is enough,' said Jesus, with a melancholy smile. "Two swords." What were two swords for twelve men and against a hundred weapons? Enough only for one who does not mean to fight at all. They were not called on to fight literally, against flesh and blood, but in the bloodless spiritual conflict.—*Bruce.*

Ver. 35. "*And He said unto them.*"—Not without reason have I spoken of what is so momentous (vers. 31-34); for now, when I am no longer with you, your situation will be quite otherwise than before. There now comes for you a time of care for yourselves and of conflict.—*Meyer.*

Ver. 36. "*But now.*"—Once the least care was superfluous; now the most anxious care was not too much.

"*A sword.*"—*I.e.*, they would now be reduced to such a condition, in which the men of this world would resort to such means of defence.

Parable of the Sword and the Garment.—No saying like this is to be found in any of the other gospels. It is a parable. Let us enforce it.

I. **It is uttered with solemn emphasis.**

II. **It teaches that there is a conflict in the Christian life.**—A sword is needed. Better lack a garment than lack a sword. But it is a battle in, and not of, this world that Christ speaks of.

III. **Marvel not at the vehemence of the words.**—There are two reasons for it. 1. They contradict flesh and blood. It is painful to be always armed. It makes life a perpetual effort. Nature would let us be indolent and self-sparing. 2. In this conflict deception and self-deception are ever busily working, and he who might gird himself for more difficulty

is in danger of relaxing effort under illusion. It is Satan's master-art to persuade us that there is no battle—that all are agreed. But no! one must fight either against the world or for it. He cannot be neutral. So delay not the purchase of the sword. Sell your very garment now, and buy it. The garment of pride, of slothfulness, of carelessness, of worldliness, of besetting sin—sell it, discard it, fling it away, and buy of Christ the sword of grace and faith, of love, and the Spirit, which whosoever hath must be more than conqueror. Thus, in this world, in all courage and in all strength, you shall be Christ's soldiers.—*Vaughan.*

Ver. 37. "*Reckoned among the transgressors.*"—The connection is this: "Your situation among men will be one of neglect, and even of danger; for I Myself am about to be reckoned among transgressors."

Ver. 38. "*Here are two swords.*"—Note (1) the slavish, literal interpretation which the disciples gave to the words of Christ—how different from that spiritual enlightenment which they manifested after the day of Pentecost! and (2) the patience and gentleness of our Lord in dealing with them.

"*It is enough.*"—Perhaps the words are slightly ironical. "Two swords are enough for all the fighting that you will be called upon to engage in."

The Conversation Broken off.—If it were possible for us to imagine our Lord for a moment in the Paschal night with a melancholy smile on His heavenly countenance, it would be at the affair of the two swords. Two swords over against the whole might of the world, of hell, and of death, which were to engage in the assault upon Him! He accounts it impossible to make the whole preposterousness of this thought as visible to them as it is to Himself, and therefore breaks off the conversation on the subject, in the tone of one who is conscious that others would not understand Him, and who therefore holds all further speech impossible.—*Van Oosterzee.*

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 39—46.

The Strife and the Victory.—At first sight there is something very surprising in this scene in the garden of Gethsemane. Without anything to prepare us for its occurrence it suddenly breaks in upon the gospel narrative, like a storm coming one knows not whence. After the peaceful celebration of the Passover, after the institution of the Supper in which His sacrificial death is so plainly indicated, after the long conversations which, for pathos and depth of significance, have no parallel in history, and after the quiet walk through the sleeping city, there comes in an instant this profound outburst of anguish. Certainly Jesus knew beforehand, and for a long time past, that His work of salvation would be concluded by His death. When He entered Jerusalem He knew that He would not depart alive from the city that slew the prophets. He clearly saw events hurrying on to this close, and knew that but a brief interval divided the fleeting popularity that attended His triumphal entry into the city from His condemnation and death. Yet it was only in the course of this evening that He knew that the hour—*His hour*—was at hand. He had seen Judas leave the room, and had perceived that this night was to be His last. Then once more the enemy whom He had defeated in the wilderness made a final assault upon Him, and the last temptation possible beset Christ in the garden of Gethsemane: it arose from the fear of death.

I. **First of all there were the dreadful circumstances of the form of death He was to meet.**—Doubtless this constituted part, though perhaps but a sub-

ordinate part, of the temptation now presented to Him. Must He not have shuddered as He thought of the sufferings involved in a death by crucifixion. He was clothed with our flesh and was as sensitive as we are to bodily pain. The first of His temptations in the wilderness had been to put an end to the bodily pains excited by hunger by acting independently of the Divine will, and we can easily believe that the tempter now again appealed to the natural instinct of self-preservation by suggesting that He should not submit to the tortures of crucifixion.

II. **Then, too, there was the moral infamy connected with His execution as a malefactor.**—He knew that crucifixion would expose Him to the abhorrence of the whole Jewish people, for it was written in their law, "Cursed is every one that hangeth on a tree." It was a lingering form of death, which subjected those who underwent it sometimes to days of helpless misery, and left them at the mercy of all who chose to mock and insult them. It was a death which would proclaim Him as a false pretender to the rank and dignity of the Messiah, and brand Him as a malefactor. What wonder if the thought of dying such a death filled Him with agony!

III. **Death itself, apart from the pains and ignominy of crucifixion, was full of horror for Him.**—He was partaker of our nature, and for every man death, though inevitable, has something terrible in it, which can never fail to strike dread into the spirit. It was a man of God who gave to it the name of "the king of terrors." There is in all of us a natural instinct which recoils from it, and Christ, who was in all points like us, doubtless partook of this. But if there is in our case an instinct which leads us to recoil from death, there is, doubtless, another which accepts it as natural and sees in it a punishment for sin. We feel that we have not, or have no longer, an inalienable right to life. But He who suffered agony in Gethsemane had that right, and it is a feeling of this which rises up in revolt in Him at the very moment when He sees death to be imminent. Death is the wages of sin, and sin never had any hold upon Him. Now all at once He realises that He must pass through that dark portal through which all sinners are doomed to pass. He who was without sin must accept the wages of sin. Yet, did Jesus Christ hesitate as to accomplishing His work? In this hour of anguish, does He consider whether He will carry it through to the end or give it up? No, not for a moment. He is determined to accomplish His work, but the question rises in His mind, Are death, and the death of the cross, the necessary means for that end? His work He does not even name. That which He asks His Father to spare Him, if possible, is the act which appears to Him as the consummation of His work—the "cup," which represents His death. It was necessary, not only that Jesus should die, but that He die of His own free-will—that He should wish to die. And when once His will had been brought into conformity with the will of His Father His agony was past. He has won the victory by complete renunciation of Himself. The sacrifice He offers is accepted, though not yet consummated, and in Gethsemane the fundamental act of our salvation is accomplished. There are in the history of the plan of God two gardens—the garden of Eden and the garden of Gethsemane. The one is exactly the counterpart of the other. In the one the first son of God asserted himself against his Father, and sought, by disobedience, to add some Divine element to his humanity. The consequence was that he died and entailed death upon the whole of his race. In the other the second Son of God subjected His own will to that of His Father, and, in perfect obedience, offered Himself unto God. The consequence, in His case also, was that He died; but, since He gave up His life freely, He took it again, and became the Author of life to all His brethren, who, for His sake, receive the pardon of their sins. (See *Berguer's Sermons*: "Gethsémané").

SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS ON VERSES 39—46.

Vers. 39-46. *Gethsemane.*—One of the most prominent and mysterious passages in our Lord's life.

I. **Suffering of peculiar intensity.**

II. **A conflict between inclination and duty.**

III. **Explainable only on the ground that He died to bear the great burden of sin.**

IV. **Duty overmasters inclination.—He offers Himself willingly for the cross and the grave.**—*Nicoll.*

Ver. 39. "*As He was wont.*"—Retirement for (1) converse with God, and (2) with our own hearts, is salutary for us, especially after celebration of the Lord's Supper. The fact that Christ Himself found solace and strength in this way is highly significant.

The Calmness of Jesus.

I. **Note the spirit in which the great agony was approached.**—How we go into a trial is often of as much importance as how we behave ourselves in it. In entrance into trial, in continuance in it, in egress from it, Jesus was perfect. What He had dreaded all His life long was just at hand. The cross, in clear-cut sharpness, was just in view. But He went in calmness to the accustomed place, and for the accustomed purpose.

II. **There is but little of this calmness manifested in even the great saints of God.**—Abraham, Job, Moses, Elijah, all were greatly troubled in trying crises of their lives. Not so Jesus. See His calmness in the midst of provoking and angry men; before Pilate, how unlike the excitement that goes on in the world!

III. **How suggestive is the phrase as to the habits of Christ's life!**—His great trial was to find Him in the midst of prayer. His enemies knew where to look for Him. Judas knew His place and occupation. And as with His habits of devotion, so with His thoughtfulness and generosity, tenderness and pity. Is He not still the same? He is unchanged. The habits of His earthly life have left their impress on Him for ever.—*Power.*

Vers. 40-46. *Lessons from Gethsemane.*

I. **About Christ.** — 1. His true humanity. 2. His wonderful love. 3. His touching forbearance with His disciples.

II. **About sin.**—1. Its exceeding sinfulness. 2. Its terrible power. 3. Its awful curse.

III. **About temptation.**—1. To expect it. 2. How to conquer it by watchfulness and prayer.—*W. Taylor.*

Ver. 40. "*Enter not into temptation.*"—1. They were to be exposed to trial. 2. There was danger of the circumstances in which they were to be placed serving as a temptation to forsake Him or to deny their faith in Him. 3. The great means for their preservation was prayer.

Vers. 41-44. *The Prayers in the Garden.*—What is the subject of Christ's repeated prayer? He does not seek deliverance from the cross. It was from a thing worse than death to the holy soul of the God-Man. It was from the hour of conscious sin-bearing and sin-becoming; from this awful horror He shrank back.

I. **The angel strengthening was the first answer to His prayer.**

II. **The redoubled fervour of the prayer was the second answer.**—There was a growth of submissiveness between the two prayers. The first prayer was submissive, asking the boon; the second accepts the refusal, asking *only* that the Divine will be done.—*Vaughan.*

Vers. 41, 42. *The Great Example of Prayer.*—1. The soul separated from all others and in communion with God. 2. Reverence of manner and attitude

before God. 3. The expression of sincere desire. 4. Resignation to the will of God, whether He grant or deny the request.

Ver. 41. "*Was withdrawn.*"—The word, the reluctance, as it were, with which one tears himself away from friends. Of course, we are not to understand the word as if our Lord, almost against His will, separated Himself from the circle of His disciples, but simply thus, that He, following the constraint of His agitation of soul, with visible intensity of feeling and rapid steps, sought the still solitude.—*Van Oosterzee.*

Ver. 42. *The Cup of Suffering.*

I. **Christ's sufferings were not purely, nor even principally, physical.**

II. **Nor could His sufferings have risen merely through His foreknowledge of death.**

III. **Nor were His sufferings endured as an equivalent for a certain amount of sin.**

IV. **His sufferings arose from His profound sympathy with humanity, and intense perception of man's sin.**—*Hull.*

"*Nevertheless.*"

I. **The response which may be given to the unthwarted love of God by the heart that is perfect towards Him is heralded by this word.**—Here, really for Himself, and ideally for all those who partake in Him through faith, Christ determinedly set His will in harmony with God's. He made the supreme sacrifice of self which God accepted as the sufficient sacrifice for us all. His will, as man, was that the cup should pass; God's will was that He should drink it.

II. **This word, again, represented a defiance of circumstances, an appeal from the compulsion and the pressure of the world and the flesh to the right of self-determination.**—The weakness of His human flesh, the shrinking from the hatred and cruelty of man, the fear lest, as His life, so His death might be a failure,—all these made up the strong stream of temptation against which Christ set the whole force of His being, when He cried, "Nevertheless." It was not merely surrender. It was victory.—*Nicoll.*

Vers. 43-44. *Three Signs of the Deep Agony of Christ.*

I. **A weakness, calling for immediate and heavenly succour.**

II. **More earnest prayer.**

III. **Sweat, "as it were great drops of blood."**

Ver. 43. "*There appeared an angel.*"—In the temptation in the wilderness the angels ministered to Christ *after* the conflict. Here He is sustained by heavenly aid *during* the conflict—thus showing us how much more trying was the second experience.

"*Strengthening Him.*"—God may help us either (1) by removing the cause of sorrow, or (2) by imparting to us fresh strength.

Ver. 44. "*Being in an agony.*"—His delicately sensitive humanity shrinks from death; His holy humanity from the night of darkness; His loving humanity from the hatred that is now about to reach its most fearful culmination. Nay, if His humanity was of a finite nature, He might, standing over against the burden of the sin of millions, conceive, as we believe, even the possibility of sinking under His fearful burden. Sin and death show themselves now to His eye in an entirely different light than before His incarnation, when death stood already, it is true, before Him, without, however, having dared to essay any direct assault upon Himself.—*Van Oosterzee.*

I. **A mysterious agony.**—1. His dread of coming into contact with the world's evil. 2. His task of learning obedience by the things that He suffered.

II. **A mighty prayer in the agony.**

III. **The gracious answer.**—*Davies.*

Terror of Death.—We men, conceived and born in sin, have an impure, hard flesh, that is not quick to feel. The fresher, the sounder the man, the more he feels what is contrary to him. Because Christ's body was pure and without sin, and our body is impure, therefore we scarcely feel the terrors of death in two degrees where Christ felt them in ten, since He is to be the greatest martyr and to feel the utmost terror of death.—*Luther.*

Ver. 45. "*Sleeping for sorrow.*"—1. The weakness of the disciples—failing to watch with their Master. 2. The kindly construction put upon it.

Ver. 46. "*Lest ye enter into temptation.*"—The temptation was now past for Jesus; by watching and prayer He had overcome it. The disciples, by neglecting His warning, were unprepared for the trial to which they were to be exposed.

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 47—53.

The Arrest.—The agony (lit. "struggle") in the garden of Gethsemane was now past, and Christ had won the victory, so that now He was fortified against the new form of temptation to which He was subjected. For still the "power of darkness" (ver. 53), was arrayed against Him, and the tempter, who had sought in vain to overthrow His self-possession by suggestions of coming evil, now resorts to force and arms. The quiet of the garden and of the midnight hour is broken in upon by the arrival of a multitude of enemies, led by one into whom Satan had entered. All through the scene that followed the Divine majesty and calmness of the Saviour are very conspicuous. Neither the baseness of the act of betrayal, nor the rash conduct of one of His would-be defenders, nor the malignant rage of His enemies, provokes Him to a hasty word. He expostulates in turn with the traitor, with the disciple who drew his sword, and with His captors.

I. **An appeal to conscience.**—If anything might have aroused the fiercest and most righteous indignation, it was surely the conduct of Judas. He knew the place where Christ was to be found, and the reason why He was accustomed to resort thither. Yet He did not hesitate to violate the sanctity of the place of prayer used by his Master, so bent was he upon carrying out his evil purpose. He goes before the armed band as their leader, and as if to make sure that Christ should not escape, even if he had to capture Him with his own hands. And then, too, as the crowning act of baseness, he had arranged to point out the Saviour to His captors by drawing near to Him and kissing Him. Surely we have sin here in its last and most hateful form: when the evil purpose is disguised by hypocritical pretence, and the sinner is so hardened as not even to recognise his own baseness. There is a certain severity, mingled with tenderness, in the expostulation addressed by Jesus to the traitor. His calling him by his name might have reminded him of friendly, confidential intercourse in former days. "Is it by this mark of affection, the kiss of discipleship and friendship, that the signal is to be given to the enemy? Dost thou kiss and betray?" In words calculated to sting and arouse the sleeping conscience, Jesus reveals to the fallen apostle the blackness of his guilt. He calls the evil by its name and reveals it in all its hideousness. And had not the heart of Judas been hardened, the remonstrance of Jesus might not have been in vain. Had he, even at his last moment, repented and asked forgiveness, we cannot doubt but that it would have been freely extended to him. The pleading of Christ with the sinner falls in vain on the heart that is wedded to its sin.

II. **A call to patience.**—Before Jesus had had time to reply to the question of the apostles, "Lord, shall we smite with the sword?" one of them, Peter, acted on his own impulse and struck wildly at one of the crowd. Perhaps Malchus,

the servant of the high priest, who received the blow, was more prominent than his fellows in laying hands upon Jesus; yet was he less guilty than others—less guilty, for example, than the high priest, from whom probably he caught by contagion the spirit of rancorous hatred against the Saviour. The high priest veiled his hatred under courteous phrases and legal forms: the uncultured, rude servant manifested his hatred in a rough, brutal way. Yet was the master more guilty than the servant. Peter's action was hasty and ill-advised. It is not for the Church to wield the sword of justice; she is apt to strike the wrong person. His action, too, not only endangered his own safety, but was calculated to compromise his Master's cause. For it was necessary for Jesus, in order to clear Himself from the accusations brought against Him by the Jews, to be able to say, "My kingdom is not of this world; if My kingdom were of this world, then would My servants fight, that I should not be delivered to the Jews" (John xviii. 36). And so Christ restrained the apostle from striking another blow, and healed the wound he had inflicted. His words prescribed patience instead of resistance. "Suffer ye thus far"—"allow these men to go as far as this, to bind Me and take Me away." How marvellous the patience shown by Him, whose next action proved His possession of superhuman power! What a rebuke does not His submission to violence and wrong administer to us, who are so eager to resent every petty affront! He returns good for evil, and blesses His enemies. He heals the man who was binding His hands, and who not only asked for no benefit, but was even devoid of faith in Him who conferred it.

III. **A rebuke of cowardice.**—Christ turns from those who were merely acting under orders, and addresses the members of the Sanhedrim, who had not thought it beneath their dignity to be present at the arrest of their victim, and rebukes their cowardice. Surely all this parade of soldiers and officers for the capture of one man, who offered no resistance, was unnecessary! He was no desperate malefactor, but one who had often taught the people the way of righteousness, in the courts of the Temple. Had He been an evil-doer they might have arrested Him openly, in the daylight. And even now it was not the force they brought against Him that compelled His surrender. It was "their hour"—the hour appointed by God for their triumph and for His submission; a greater than an earthly power aided them, but it was "the power of darkness." And so, even at the time when Christ yielded to His foes, He declared plainly that He was the light, that resistance to Him was of the essence of sin, and anticipated the triumph of the light over darkness. This hour would pass, and the Sun of Righteousness, which was now suffering eclipse, would shine forth in His strength.

SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS ON VERSES 47—53.

Vers. 47-53. *The Arrest of Jesus.*

I. The traitor's kiss (vers. 47, 48).

II. The attempt, on the part of the disciples, to defend Him (vers. 49-51).

III. The protest of Christ against the treachery and cowardice of His enemies (vers. 52, 53).

Ver. 47. "*Went before them.*"—A twofold act of treachery Judas was guilty of. 1. He led the band to the place where they might find Jesus. 2. He pointed Him out, so as to secure His apprehension.

Ver. 48. "*Judas, betrayest thou?*"—Every word in the sentence indicates the depth of guilt belonging to this evil deed.

I. **Its treachery.**—"*Judas*, betrayest *thou?*"

II. **Its malice.**—"*Betrayest.*"

III. **Its ingratitude.**—"*The Son of man.*"

IV. **Its hypocrisy.**—"*With a kiss.*"

"*Betrayest thou?*"—Jesus spoke appealingly to Judas, but only cast a look upon Peter. The words were lost upon

Judas: the look brought Peter to repentance.

Vers. 48, 61. *Two Rebukes.*—These rebukes were given by our Lord to two disciples. Both quiet, but potent.

I. **To the arch-hypocrite.**—A few mild words.

II. **To the denying disciple.**—A look.

III. **Their results.**—Each rebuke was followed by repentance. But what a difference! Heaven in the one; hell in the other. The one tearful; the other tearless. The one leading to contrition and restoration; the other to remorse, anguish, suicide. —*Campbell.*

Ver. 49. "*Shall we smite?*"—The enigmatical warning of ver. 36 was evidently in the minds of the disciples. They were not sure whether or not He intended them to use the swords they carried.

Ver. 50. "*Smote a servant.*"—By this action Peter (1) endangered his own safety, and (2) compromised the cause of his Master, both by manifesting a spirit antagonistic to His and by giving occasion for the charge of resisting the officers of justice being made against Him.

Ver. 51. "*Healed him.*"—A mark (1) of Christ's *power*, (2) of His *mercy*, even towards an enemy.

I. **How readily the Saviour repaired the damage caused by the mistaken zeal of His servants!**

II. **How Christ blesses His enemies, even while manifesting intensest opposition!**

III. **Christ teaches us that in doing good the need is the claim.**—*Hastings.*

Vers. 52, 53. *The Weapons and Stratagems used against Christ Unnecessary.*—1. His whole previous conduct might have made it clear to them that He would offer no resistance. 2. He had oftentimes been within their grasp, but they had not had courage to seize Him.

Ver. 52. "*Chief priests.*"—In spite of their dignity, they were drawn, by motives of curiosity and malice, to witness His arrest. The phrase "which were come to Him" seems to imply that they had just arrived, possibly to receive Him into their custody the moment He was apprehended.

Ver. 53. "*Your hour.*"—1. A time appointed by God. 2. A time strictly limited, and short.

"*This is your hour.*"—Our Lord here distinguishes between the power exercised over Him by *men*, and that by the *Evil One*; but so as to make the "power" which rules over them to be that of darkness, while His own assertion of this shows that all was by the determinate counsel and fore-knowledge of God.—*Alford.*

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 54—71.

Denial, Mockery, and Condemnation of the Lord.—In this section we have a further account of our Lord's sufferings, and a revelation of man's sin. A trusted friend proves faithless, the underlings of the rulers brutally ridicule His prophetic claims, and their masters vote Him a blasphemer for asserting His divinity and Messiahship.

I. **The failure of loyalty and love in Peter's denials.**—The morning was cold, and Peter, exhausted, sleepy, sad, and shivering, was glad to creep near the fire in the court-yard. Its light betrayed him to a woman's sharp eye, and her gossiping tongue could not help blurting out her discovery. Curiosity, not malice, moved her, and there is no reason to suppose that any harm would have come to Peter if he had said, as he should have done, "Yes, I am His disciple." The day for persecuting the servants was not yet come, but for the present it was

Jesus only who was aimed at. No doubt cowardice had a share in the denials, but there was more than that in them. Peter was worn out with fatigue, excitement, and sorrow. He was always easily moved by surroundings, so now he could not resist the current of opinion, and dreaded being unlike even the menials among whom he sat. He was ashamed of his Master, and hid his colours, not so much for fear of bodily harm as of ridicule. May he not, too, have begun to doubt whether, after all, Jesus was what he had thought Him? Christ prayed that Peter's *faith* should not fail, or be totally eclipsed, and that may indicate that the assault was made on his faith, and that it wavered, though it recovered steadfastness. The sight of Jesus bound, unresisting, and evidently at the mercy of the rulers, might well make a firmer faith stagger. We have not to steel ourselves to bear bodily harm if we confess Christ, but many of us have to run counter to a strong current flowing round us, and to be alone in the midst of unsympathising companions, ready to laugh and gibe; and some of us are tempted to waver in our convictions of Christ's divinity, because He still seems to stand at the bar of the wise men and leaders of opinion, and to be treated by them as a pretender. It is a wretched thing to be persecuted out of one's Christianity by fire and sword, but it is worse to be laughed out of it, or lose it because we breathe an atmosphere of unbelief. Peter slipped away to the gateway, and there, apparently, was again attacked, first by the portress and then by others, which occasioned the second denial, while the third took place in the same spot about an hour afterwards. One sin makes many. The devil's hounds hunt in packs. Consistency requires the denier to stick to his lie. If Peter had been less confident he would have been more safe. What business had he thrusting himself into the palace? Over-reliance on self leads us to put ourselves in the way of temptations it were wise to avoid. In the very flood-tide of Peter's oaths the cock-crow is heard, and the half-finished denial sticks in his throat at the sound. At the same moment he sees Jesus led past him, and that look, so full of love, reproof, and pardon, brought him back to loyalty, and saved him from despair. The assurance of Christ's knowledge of our sins against Him melts the heart when the assurance of His forgiveness and tender love comes with it. Then tears, which are wholly humble, but not wholly grief, flow. They do not wash away the sin, but they come from the assurance that Christ's love, like a flood, has swept it away. They save from remorse, which has no healing in it.

II. **The rude taunts of the servants.**—The mockery here comes from Jews, and is directed against Christ's prophetic character, while the later jeers of the Roman soldiers made a jest of His kingship. Rude natures have to take rude ways of expression, and the vulgar mockery meant precisely the same as more polite and covert scorn means from more polished people—namely, rooted disbelief in Him. These mockers were contented to take their opinions on trust from priests and rabbis. How often, since then, have Christ's servants been objects of popular odium at the suggestion of the same classes, and how often have the ignorant people been misled, by their trust in their teachers, to hate and persecute their true Master! Jesus is silent under all the mockery, but then, as now, He knows who strikes Him. He will speak one day, and His speech will be detection and condemnation. Then He was silent, as patiently enduring shame and spitting for our sakes. Now He is silent, as long-suffering and wooing us to repentance; but He keeps count and record of men's revilings, and the day comes when He whose eyes are as a flame of fire will say to every foe, "I know thy works."

III. **The formal rejection and condemnation by the council.**—The ruler's question was put simply in order to obtain material for the condemnation already resolved on. Our Lord's answer falls into two parts, in the first of

which He declines to recognise the *bona fides* of His judges, and the competency of the tribunal, and in the second goes beyond their question, and claims participation in Divine glory and power. Jesus will not unfold His claims to those who only seek to hear them in order to reject, not to examine, them. Silence is His answer to ingrained prejudice masquerading as honest inquiry. Jesus will gladly speak with any who will be frank with Him, and let Him search their hearts; but He will not unfold His mission to such as will refuse to answer His questions. But, while He thus declines to submit Himself to that tribunal, He will not leave them without once more asserting an even higher dignity than that of Messiah. As a prisoner at their bar, He has nothing to say to them, but as their King and future Judge he has something. It was fitting that the representatives of Israel, however prejudiced, should hear at that supreme moment the full assertion of full deity. It was fitting that Israel should condemn itself, by treating that claim as blasphemy. It was fitting that Jesus should bring about His death by His twofold claim—that made to the Sanhedrim, of being the Son of God, and that before Pilate, of being the King of the Jews. The whole scene teaches us the voluntary character of Christ's death. It carries our thoughts forward to the time when the criminal of that morning shall be the Judge, and the judges and we shall stand at His bar. If His claim to be Divine was true, do we worship Him? If false, what was He? It mirrors the principles on which He deals with men universally; He meets hypocritical pretences of seeking the truth about Him with silence, but He is ever ready to open His heart to the honest and docile spirits who are ready to accept His words, and glad to open their inmost secrets to Him.—*Maclaren.*

SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS ON VERSES 54—71.

Vers. 54-71. *The Religious Process: Christ before the Sanhedrim.*

I. **The denial of Peter** (vers. 54-62).

II. **The ill-treatment of Jesus by the Jews** (vers. 63-65).

III. **The sentence of condemnation pronounced by the high priest** (vers. 66-71).

Vers. 54-60. *Peter's Fall.*

I. **He follows afar off.**—He will not altogether forsake Christ, and yet seeks to avoid danger by not keeping too near to Him.

II. **He takes his place among the enemies of Christ, without avowing his discipleship.**

III. **His presence of mind fails him when danger arises.**

IV. **He persists in denying his Master,** though time for recollection was given him, between each accusation of being one of His disciples.

Causes of Peter's Fall.

I. **Self-confidence.**

II. **Indecision.**

III. **Fear of man.**

IV. **False shame.**

V. **Evil company.**

Ver. 54. "*Brought Him into the high priest's house.*"—The high priest unconsciously receives the sacrificial Victim who is to be offered for the sin of the world. Contrast the blindness and malice of the high priest with the clear consciousness of Jesus of the part He was to play in the great work of redemption, and with the meekness with which He submitted to His sufferings.

"*Followed afar off.*"—It is scarcely possible to form a distinct image of the mood in which the impetuous disciple, impelled by curiosity, anxiety, and affection, ventures to enter the high-priestly palace.—*Van Oosterzee.*

"*Afar off.*"—Peter is the David of the New Testament. He did not fall into the same sins, but he fell, was penitent, was forgiven, was restored.

His sin was faithlessness, failure in affection, ceasing to regard Christ as first and to follow Him closely to the last. His case illustrates a phase of disciple-life—how one, under fear, may get out of the range of Christ's influence, and, while continuing a disdisciple, follow only "afar off."

I. **Peter followed afar off; still, he followed.**—Many had never followed Christ, or followed only to hate and harass Him.

II. **He was too much influenced by the feelings and conduct of others.**—And so he thought a little distance from Christ was safer than perfect nearness. This is often the state of mind of those who begin deliberately to follow Christ at a distance. It is cowardice.

III. **It was a sad episode in an otherwise devoted life.**—No need to excuse or exaggerate. It was very natural. Without all-mastering faith in Christ self-distrust is sure to betray us.

IV. **The only remedy is to rise and follow again.**—To begin afresh, to come near, to keep near, at all hazards; to be ready for sacrifice, to be reliant on the look, the word, the hand, the help of our Master. All this will keep us near, and make us faithful.—*McColl.*

Ver. 56. "*A certain maid.*"—The women introduced on this occasion are the only women mentioned as taking part with the enemies of our Lord, and even *they* are not concerned in bringing about His condemnation, nor any further than to detect St. Peter. It is remarkable that no woman is mentioned, throughout, as speaking against our Lord in His life, or having a share in His death. On the contrary, He is anointed by a woman for His burial, women are the last at His grave, the first at His resurrection; to a woman He first appeared after His rising from the dead; women from Galilee ministered to His wants; women bewailed and lamented Him; a heathen woman interceded for His life with her husband, the governor: and, above all, of a woman He was born.—*Williams.*

Ver. 57. "*I know Him not.*"—No excuses can be found for Peter's guilt, but it is only just to him to remember the very trying circumstances in which he stood.

I. His hopes had been overthrown; he saw his Master the sport of cruel foes.

II. He was subjected to special temptation by Satan.

III. He felt himself alone among enemies—one apostle had become a traitor, and the others had forsaken their Master.

Ver. 58. "*Another saw him.*"—The longer he continues in the company of enemies of Christ the worse it is for him—the more frequent do the temptations to unfaithfulness become. Flight from temptation is often the only safe course.

Ver. 59. "*Confidently affirmed.*"—The apostle is now overwhelmed by proof of the charge against him. As St. John tells us (xviii. 26) it is a kinsman of Malchus who identifies him as having been in the garden with Christ.

Vers. 60-62. *Peter's Repentance.*

I. **His conscience awoke when the crowing of the cock reminded him of Christ's prophecy.**

II. **He was gently reproached and convicted of ingratitude and cowardice by the look of his Master.**

III. **He is filled with godly sorrow and penitence.**

Ver. 60. "*I know not.*"—St. Luke omits reference to the "cursing and swearing" which accompanied this last denial (Matt. xxvi. 74).

Vers. 61, 62. *The Fall and The Rising.*—Such is the after-taste of sin. Such is the awakening from the sleep of the soul, to which the tempter has successfully presented one of his bright,

seductive visions. It is an example of the process of temptation. Three things are to be noticed: 1. The sleep. 2. The dream. 3. The awakening.

I. **The state of the soul before sin.**—A state of sleep, or of security. Not of safety, but of imagined safety. Peter was ignorant, rash, self-confident. Christian people are all liable to this state of fancied strength. It is our chief bane.

II. **The state of the soul during the sin.**—The sort of disguise under which the offence comes. The temptation came suddenly and repeatedly. The apostle's only impulse was that of self-preservation. What a picture of human nature! in our little timidities about the world's opinion.

III. **The state of the soul after the sin.**—Christ's prayer did not prevent the fall, but it secured the rising. The look of Christ, full of pity, of sorrow, of tenderness, recalled the sinner to himself, and brought a flood of penitence. If we have sinned like him, may we, like him, bitterly lament our cowardice and ingratitude, and hasten back to Christ's feet for forgiveness. Happy these whose shameful fall has been salutary. But to how many has there been no return from the downward course!—*Vaughan.*

Peter's Repentance, a Type of True Sorrow.—I. **Peter's sorrow did not arise from the fact that his guilt was known.**

II. **It was not simply the suffering of remorse.**

III. **It rose from the sense of Christ's love.**

IV. **It was manifest in the conquest of self-trust.**

V. **It became the element of spiritual strength.**—*Hull.*

Ver. 61. "*The Lord turned and looked.*"—O Saviour, couldst Thou find leisure, when Thou stoodest at the bar of that unjust and cruel judgment, amidst all that bloody rabble of enemies, in the sense of all their fury and the expectation of Thine own death, to listen unto this monitor of Peter's repentance, and, upon the hearing of it, to cast back Thine eyes upon Thy denying, cursing, abjuring disciple? Oh mercy beyond measure, and beyond all the possibility of our admiration, to neglect Thyself for a sinner, to attend to the repentance of one, when Thou wert about to lay down Thy life for all!—*Hall.*

The Saviour's Look.—What was expressed in that look of our blessed Saviour, thought of man cannot conceive, and words cannot utter. That it spoke of all that had passed in our Lord's long intimacy with St. Peter, and especially of the conversation of that night, and that it derived a peculiar force and meaning from the indignities which our Lord was suffering—that it implied something of this, we may well suppose; but what more we cannot tell. The conciseness and sublimity with which it is mentioned resembles the account in Genesis of His word being spoken, at which the world was created. Christ looked, and light filled the soul of Peter. The thought of his Lord's Divinity, which he had believed, but had forgotten, now rushed afresh on his mind. In the darkness and silence of the night, his eyes were opened to all that had passed. —*Williams.*

Ver. 62. "*Wept.*"—The word means rather "wept aloud" than "shed tears." He "went out" from the presence of men, and after this, in the whole history of the Passion we no longer discover the least trace of him.

Peter and Judas: a Contrast.

I. **Consider their privileges.**

II. **Contrast their characters.**

III. **Contrast their sins.**—In their origin, their growth, their results.

IV. **Contrast their repentance.**—*W. Taylor.*

Vers. 63-65. "*Mocked Him and smote Him.*"—One is fain to pass hastily over the record of the brutality

to which Jesus was exposed. Yet, in reading it, two thoughts strike us.

I. That the insults disgraced those who offered them, rather than Him who bore them.

II. That these servants followed their masters' example—the rancour which priests and elders cherished was thus manifested by their attendants in ruder, coarser ways. Sin ever tends to grosser and baser forms as it passes from mind to mind.

Vers. 63-71. *Christ here an Example to us in* (1) His patience; (2) His innocence; (3) His prudence; (4) His holy boldness.

Ver. 66. "*Art Thou the Christ?*"—There was nothing in itself blasphemous in claiming to be the Christ. This claim, even if false, did not infringe upon the honour of God. If, then, the statements concerning His Messianic dignity, which Jesus made, assumed a blasphemous character in the opinion of the Jews, it was because the title "Son of God," which He so often used of Himself, expressed a higher claim than that of Messiahship. Hence the question here asked is merely preparatory to that in ver. 70: "Art Thou then the Son of God?" It was only as the first claim was completed by the second that a capital charge against Jesus could be constructed.—*Godet.*

Vers. 67-69. *The Enemies of Christ are Not Fair Judges of His Claims.*

I. They ask a question, but have their minds already made up against Him.

II. If confuted they do not admit the fact, but maintain a sullen silence.

III. Yet a convincing answer will they receive when they see Him on the throne of His power and appear at His tribunal.

Vers. 67, 68. "*If I tell you,*" *etc.*—They were neither fair-minded judges, whom He might convince of His innocence, nor disciples whom He might instruct.

Ver. 69. "*Sit on the right hand.*"—The present, with all its ignominy, is contrasted with the glory of the future: now a prisoner, at the mercy of men; then to be supreme ruler of the universe.

Ver. 70. "*The Son of God.*"—The Jews regarded the Messiah as Son of God in virtue of His theocratical office; but they are here face to face with the fact that Jesus claims the title as belonging to Him on other grounds—those of His essential Divinity.

Ver. 71. "*What further need?*"—The ground on which Christ was condemned was His own claim to be the Son of God. Either His claim was well-founded, or the Jews were right in putting Him to death. To deny or to ignore His Divinity is to side with His murderers.

CHAPTER XXIII.

CRITICAL NOTES.

VER. 1. **Whole multitude.**—Rather, "company" (R.V.). The word is a different one from that so often used to denote "the crowd," or "the mob." It here simply means the members of the Sanhedrim. **Pilate.**—His rule in Judæa had been marked by many acts of harshness and cruelty. His hatred of the people rendered it necessary for considerable adroitness to be made use of by the Jewish rulers to get him to do as they wished. They drop the charge of blasphemy in claiming to be the Son of God, and concoct an accusation of a political character.

Ver. 2. **We found.**—This a legal term, implying "we have tried and convicted him of." **This fellow.**—Rather, "this man" (R.V.). **Perverting.**—Seducing, deceiving. **The nation.**—Rather, "our nation" (R.V.). **Forbidding to give tribute.**—This is a direct falsehood. See xx. 20-26. **Christ a King.**—This is a translation of the term Christ, or Anointed One, for Pilate's benefit.

Ver. 3. **And Pilate asked Him.**—The history in the fourth Gospel casts great light on vers. 3, 4 (see John xviii. 33-38). Jesus had been brought into the Prætorium, while His accusers were without. Pilate examines Him, and finds that the kingdom spoken of is not "one of this world." Then he returns to the accusers and declares Jesus to be innocent of the charge. Without the supplementary narrative of St. John, Pilate's words in ver. 4 would scarcely be intelligible. Pilate must have known well that one who had done the things laid to the charge of Jesus would be no such object of hatred to the Sanhedrim. He may have had some previous knowledge of the actual character of Christ's public ministry.

Ver. 5. **And they were the more fierce.**—Rather, "but they were the more urgent" (R.V.); or perhaps the words mean "they strengthened" or "redoubled the charge." **All Jewry.**—Rather, "all Judæa" (R.V.). This is another indication of more prolonged labours in Judæa than are recorded in detail in the synoptical Gospels. **From Galilee.**—Perhaps this is mentioned to provoke Pilate against Jesus, because of his quarrel with the Galilæans (xiii. 1) and enmity against their ruler (ver. 12); it serves, however, only to give Pilate an apparent way out of the difficulty.

Ver. 7. **Sent Him.**—The word is a technical one, and implies transference of a case to a court of competent jurisdiction. **Also was at Jerusalem at that time.**—*I.e.*, the Passover-time. Herod usually resided at Tiberias, but had come up to Jerusalem to the celebration of the Passover; Pilate, who usually resided at Cæsarea, had come up to see to the maintenance of order while the capital was crowded with pilgrims. The purpose of Pilate in sending Jesus to be tried by Herod was to remove the responsibility of condemning an innocent person from himself, and to conciliate the Jewish ruler **At that time.**—Lit., "in these days" (R.V.).

Ver. 8. **Desirous to see Him.**—Cf. ix. 7-9. St. Luke shows himself specially well informed in matters concerning Herod Antipas. Joanna, the wife of Chuza, Herod's steward (viii. 3), was in Jerusalem at this time (xxiv. 10), and was a most faithful disciple of Jesus. She may have supplied information concerning Herod's relations with our Lord. **Heard many things of Him.**—Omit "many things"; omitted in R.V. "Had heard concerning Him."

Ver. 9. **Answered him nothing.**—"The murderer of the Baptist, who was living in open incest, and who had no higher motive than curiosity, deserved no answer" (*Farrar*).

Ver. 10. **Vehemently accused Him.**—Probably this refers to accusations of blasphemy, added to those made before Pilate; the former, Herod, as a Jew, might be expected to treat as of grave importance.

Ver. 11. **Men of war.**—*I.e.*, the body-guard in attendance upon Herod. **Set Him at nought.**—Treated as deserving of nothing but contempt. **Gorgeous robe.**—"The same word as in Acts x. 30—'shining'—not purple or scarlet (as in Matt. xxvii. 28; John xix. 2), but white, in allusion to the claim to kingly dignity" (*Speaker's Commentary*).

Ver. 12. **Were made friends together.**—Rather, "became friends with each other" (R.V.). **At enmity.**—The cause is unknown; probably it was about some question of jurisdiction. Herod may have resented Pilate's summary procedure in the case of the Galilæans above mentioned.

Ver. 14. **Ye have brought.**—Rather, "ye brought" (R.V.).

Ver. 15. **For I sent you to him.**—A better supported reading gives, "for he sent Him back unto us" (R.V.). **Is done unto Him.**—R.V. has "done by Him." A much better rendering is suggested in *The Thinker*, September 1893: "Nothing deserving death *has been laid to*

His charge." The writer contends that the word is used as a technical term for taking proceedings against any one accused, and he points out that this view is substantiated by the rendering in the Vulgate, not "*factum ab eo*," but "*actum ei*," *ago*, meaning bringing a suit, raising an action, or taking proceedings, civil or criminal—against any one.

Ver. 17. **For of necessity**, etc.—This verse is omitted in the R.V., as insufficiently supported by MS. authority. It may be a gloss, but one phrase in it, translated "of necessity," is highly idiomatic and characteristic of St. Luke's style. It is not a mere repetition of any of the parallel passages. In some MSS. it occurs after ver. 19. "The Gospels are our only authority for the existence of the custom of releasing a prisoner at this religious festival, but it is in accordance with Roman policy" (*Farrar*).

Ver. 18. **All at once.**—R.V. "all together"; lit. "in full number." **Barabbas.**—The name is not strictly a proper name, but means "son of a [distinguished] father," or if the reading Barrabban, found, as Jerome says, in the Gospel according to the Hebrews, be preferred, "son of a teacher." In Matt. xxvii. 16 some MSS. of no great authority have "Jesus Barabbas." As an insurgent against Roman rule, he probably enjoyed a certain measure of popularity in some sections of Jewish society.

Ver. 20. **Willing to release Jesus.**—Rather, "desiring to release Jesus" (R.V.).

Ver. 21. **But they cried.**—Rather, "but they shouted" (R.V.).

Ver. 22. **Hath He done.**—Rather, "hath this man done" (R.V.).

Ver. 24. **Gave sentence.**—The word is a technical one, and means "gave final sentence."

Ver. 25. **Him that for sedition**, etc.—This substitution of a description for the name Barabbas is an indication of the writer's indignation. It is but seldom that the evangelists display personal feeling in their narratives. **Whom they had desired.**—Rather, "whom they had asked for."

Ver. 26. **Simon, a Cyrenian.**—Rather, "of Cyrene" (R.V.). There was a colony of Jews in Cyrene, and they had a synagogue in Jerusalem (Acts vi. 9, xi. 20). Probably he had come up to the Passover in Jerusalem. St. Mark speaks of his two sons "Alexander and Rufus," who were evidently well known in Christian society as disciples. Probably Jesus was unable, because of being exhausted by His agony in the garden, and the scourging He had undergone, to bear the cross. This seems to be indicated by the words "laid hold upon," or, as St. Mark says, "compelled"; Simon was impressed to assist in bearing the burden, which would scarcely have been necessary if Jesus had been able to do it. Perhaps Simon showed some sign of commiseration on meeting the procession. **Coming out of the country.**—This might mean coming from work, but scarcely can have that signification here. Perhaps it simply denotes his meeting the procession: he was on his way into the city; they were on their way out of it. **Bear it after Jesus.**—Apparently assist in carrying; Simon bearing the hinder part, Jesus the fore part.

Ver. 27. **A great company.**—As is usual at an execution. **Women.**—Not Galilæan women (cf. ver. 49), but women of Jerusalem. Their sorrow was evidently that excited by sympathy with a condemned criminal; but, of course, some of them may have been disciples of Jesus.

Ver. 28. **Daughters of Jerusalem.**—Inhabitants of a doomed city. **For yourselves.**—No doubt some of them afterwards experienced the horrors of the siege.

Ver. 30. **Begin to say**, etc.—A quotation from Hos. x. 8.

Ver. 31. **Green tree.**—*I.e.*, "if these things are done to one who is innocent, what shall be done to those who are guilty?" The idea of dryness suggests "fit for burning."

Ver. 32.—**Malefactors.**—Called by St. Matthew and St. Mark "robbers." Probably they were insurgents against Roman rule, who had been more like brigands than patriots.

Ver. 33. **Calvary.**—Rather, "The Skull." The Greek word is simply "kranion," a rendering of the Hebrew "Golgotha"; our A.V. adopts the Latin word for the same thing. There is no reason for speaking of the place as a mount; it was probably a knoll of ground somewhat like a skull in shape. The idea that it derived its name from the skulls of persons who had been executed, lying on the ground, is erroneous. The Jews scrupulously buried the dead.

Ver. 34. **Then said Jesus.**—Probably during the act of crucifixion; and the words referred primarily to the Roman soldiers who nailed Him to the cross. St. Luke records three of the seven sayings from the cross—vers. 34, 43, 46. This saying is strangely omitted in some very ancient MSS., but there can be no doubt of its genuineness. **Parted His raiment.**—The clothes of the criminal in most countries being appropriated by the executioners.

Ver. 35. **Stood beholding.**—Though the attitude tells nothing of their state of mind, there is no reason to believe that any reaction in popular feeling had set in, or that those who demanded His death now abstained from deriding Him. **With them.**—Omit these words: omitted in R.V. **If He be Christ.**—Rather, "if this is the Christ of God, His chosen" (R.V.). The word translated "this" implies contempt.

Ver. 36. **Soldiers.**—Four in number (John xix. 23), with a centurion. **Vinegar.**—*I.e.*, sour wine; probably forming part of their midday meal.

Ver. 38. **A superscription.**—"A *titulus*" written in black letters on a board smeared with white gypsum. It was usual to put such a board over the head of a crucified person. **In letters of Greek,** etc.—Omitted in R.V. Perhaps the words are taken from the parallel passage in John xix. 20. **This the King,** etc.—The title on the cross is variously given, probably because of the varying forms of expression in the three languages used. One evangelist may have in his mind the Hebrew rendering, another the Greek, another the Latin, and another may give us the general substance of all three.

Ver. 39. **One of the malefactors.**—St. Matthew and St. Mark say that those crucified with Jesus reviled Him; but they evidently speak of *classes* of persons who did so—those that passed by, chief priests, scribes, elders—even the robbers; though, of course, it is possible that both of His companions in death at first joined in the derision, and that after a time one of them repented of having done so. **If Thou be Christ.**—Rather, "Art not Thou the Christ?" (R.V.).

Ver. 40. **Dost not thou?** etc.—Rather, "Dost thou not even fear God?" (R.V.).

Ver. 41. **For we receive,** etc.—Lit., "for we are receiving back things worthy of what we did."

Ver. 42. **Into Thy kingdom.**—More correctly, "in Thy kingdom"—a consummation in the far-distant future.

Ver. 43. **To-day.**—This is the emphatic word: immediate instead of far-off reward. **Paradise.**—"This is a Persian word for park, or garden; used in LXX. of Eden (Gen. ii. 8). In 2 Cor. xii. 4 it is used as equivalent to "the third heaven"; in Rev. ii. 7 it is the same as the restored Eden figured in Rev. xxi., xxii. as the New Jerusalem. The language is figurative, but no doubt in accordance with the truth concerning the unseen world" (*Speaker's Commentary*).

Ver. 44. **Sixth hour.**—*I.e.*, midday. **All the earth.**—R.V. "the whole land." This darkness could not have been an eclipse, as it was now (Passover) full moon.

Ver. 45. **The sun was darkened.**—R.V. follows the reading, "the sun's light failing"; which seems more like a gloss to explain the darkness than the original text. **Veil of the Temple.**—*I.e.*, the veil that divided the Holy of Holies from the Holy Place.

Ver. 46.—**Father, into Thy hands,** etc.—From Ps. xxxi. 5. **Gave up the ghost.**—None of the evangelists use the words "He died," but say "He breathed forth," or "gave up His spirit."

Ver. 47. **Glorified God.**—"A notice characteristic of St. Luke (ii. 20, v. 25, vii. 16, xiii. 13, xvii. 15, xviii. 43)" (*Farrar*). **A righteous man.**—*I.e.*, innocent, just; and as Jesus had, in his hearing, twice spoken of God as His Father (ver. 34, 46), he was persuaded He must be a Son of God. The latter is given as the saying of the centurion in St. Matthew and St. Mark.

Ver. 48. **Smote their breasts.**—*I.e.*, in token of penitence. They were now, to some extent, repentant for the actions into which they had been goaded by the priests.

Ver. 50. **A counsellor.**—*I.e.*, a member of the Sanhedrim.

Ver. 51. **Had not consented.**—*I.e.*, had absented himself, and had taken no part in the action of the council against Jesus. **Arimathæa.**—Some identify this with Rama in Benjamin, or Rama (Ramathaim) in Ephraim, the birthplace of Samuel (1 Sam. i. 1). The form of the name is more like the latter.

Ver. 52. **Went unto Pilate.**—An action needing some courage, especially on the part of one in Joseph's position, who, up to this, had not avowed the fact that he was a disciple of Jesus.

Ver. 54. **The preparation.**—The ordinary designation of Friday, as on that day the Jews prepared for the Sabbath which began at sunset. **Drew on.**—Lit. "began to dawn"—*i.e.*, the phrase properly used of the natural day is here applied to the conventional day.

Ver. 56. **Returned.**—*I.e.*, to the city or to their homes in it. **Spices and ointments.**—*I.e.*, dry and liquid substances for embalming. The intention of the women was to come, after the Sabbath was over, to complete the embalmment, which had been only partially effected.

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 1—25.

Various Forms of Antagonism to Christ.—In the trial before the ecclesiastical court of His nation Jesus had been condemned to death on the charge of blasphemy in claiming to be the Son of God. He is now brought before the civil court, in order that the sentence of death may be ratified, and is subjected to examination both by the Roman judge and by Herod, to whom, as the ruler over Galilee, the case was referred. A court of justice is usually an impressive sight, and suggests to a thoughtful mind the Divine tribunal before which all men must appear. But in this case accusers and judges are seen to be animated

by malign and unworthy motives, and the forms of justice are simply used to cloak the murder of an innocent man. We see enmity, frivolity, and injustice in those who co-operated together to put Jesus to death.

I. **The enmity of the priests.**—The grounds of their hatred were their dislike of the teaching of Christ, their irritation at His correction of the abuses at which they had connived, and their jealousy at the popularity which He enjoyed in certain parts of the country and in certain sections of society. They felt forced into antagonism towards Him—that they must either submit humbly to Him or crush Him; for He did not merely ask for toleration, but required them to accept Him as the Messiah and the Son of God. And a like choice is now forced upon all to whom Christ is presented; they must either yield to Him or resist Him. He cannot be ignored. So resolute are they in their determination to secure His death, that they are unscrupulous in selecting means for their end. A heathen judge, they know, would probably refuse to sanction a sentence of death on a charge of blasphemy, and therefore they proceed to accuse Him of being a disturber of the public peace and of setting up claims to sovereignty which must necessarily lead to insurrection against the Roman power. And when these accusations break down, they use their influence with the people, to stir them up to demand the death of the prisoner, in spite of the judge's repeated protests that he could find no fault in Him. Their conduct strikes us with the deeper horror when we reflect that they were men who served at God's altar, and who should have been conspicuous examples of uprightness and compassion. The evil-doing of a minister of religion is all the more heinous because of the vows of consecration which rest upon him.

II. **The frivolity of Herod.**—Jesus was sent to Herod because, as a Galilæan, He belonged to Herod's jurisdiction. Could there be a greater contrast between king and subject than was here presented? The record of Herod's life is black with many a stain. He had been a debauchee and a murderer, and his guilt was enhanced by the fact that he sinned against the light—he had stifled the voice of conscience, violated the precepts of the religion he professed, and resisted and slain the messenger from God who rebuked his evil life. He was the only man concerning whom Christ used an epithet of sheer contempt—"that fox." He had once been susceptible to religious impressions, and for a time shown some signs of amendment of life, in obedience to the preaching of John the Baptist. But the sin he would not give up had seared his conscience and hardened his heart. He had once trembled at the report of Christ's teaching and works, from the superstitious belief that this new prophet was the Baptist come to life again. But all this is now past. He has now no fears in the presence of Christ Himself, but is glad to see Him, as one of whom he has heard so much. He thinks of Christ as a wonder-worker, and hopes to induce Him, as the price of His acquittal, to perform some miracle. So frivolous and debased has he become that he looks upon Jesus as a kind of juggler or magician, who may provide some amusement for him by performing some wonderful feat. "Then he questioned with Him in many words; but He answered him nothing." He had nothing to say to one of Herod's temper and spirit. There were no formal judicial proceedings conducted by the Jewish king, or Christ might have opened His lips in defence or protest, as He had done in the presence of His other judges. The Saviour was silent because He would not gratify the cravings of an empty curiosity. Yet let us not imagine that mere indignation and contempt animated our Lord in thus dealing with Herod. The silence He maintained was the very thing most fitted to speak home to the conscience and heart of the Jewish king. "Had there been a spark of conscience left in him, those Eyes, looking him through and through, and that Divine dignity, measuring and weighing him, would have caused his sins to rise up out of the grave and

overwhelm him. Jesus was silent, that the voice of the dead Baptist might be heard." The profound significance of the silence of Jesus was evidently not understood by Herod, or he did not wish to understand it. He affected to treat Christ as a pretender whose claims had broken down and whose power had deserted Him; and with mockery and contempt he dismissed Him from his presence.

III. **The injustice of Pilate.**—Had the Roman judge been called upon to deal with religious questions, his task would have been a difficult one, owing to his ignorance and inexperience, and we would sympathise with the perplexities of his position. As it was, the path of duty should have been very plain to him. He had found the Prisoner innocent of the charges brought against Him—charges which were of a kind easily dealt with, as they involved merely matters of fact and not of belief or opinion. All that he was required to do was to order the release of a man whom, after full examination, he had found innocent of the charges brought against Him; and his failure to do this has rendered his name infamous in history. He was fully aware of the evil motives that animated the enemies of Christ, and of their hypocrisy in pretending to be zealous for the maintenance of Roman authority and for the payment of tribute to Cæsar. Yet he allowed himself to be used as the tool of men whom he despised, for the gratification of an enmity in which he did not share. His sole motive was to acquire a little popularity with his subjects, and he did not consider the judicial murder of an innocent man too high a price to pay for it. Nor would he have hesitated to do as he was asked but for the strange impression produced upon him by the demeanour and words of Jesus. And so he tries one way after another to escape from the perpetration of the crime into which he was being forced; he seeks to impose the responsibility of dealing with the case upon another; he suggests scourging as a substitute for death; and he proposes to grant release as an act of favour. His miserable subterfuges only revealed his weakness and indecision to those who were resolute that their victim should not escape out of their hands. The case of Pilate shows us how dangerous it is to resist the voice of conscience, to what fatal errors indecision and infirmity of purpose may expose us, and how selfish aims may blind the soul to the beauty and majesty of Christ.

SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS ON VERSES 1—25.

Vers. 1-12. *Jesus before Pilate and Herod.*

I. **The Jews brought three charges against Jesus.**—All of these were carefully chosen to influence Pilate against Him. Two of them were false—that He perverted the nation, and that He forbade to give tribute to Cæsar. The third was true in the letter, but thereby the more treacherously false in the spirit—that He claimed to be Christ—a king. Pilate took up the last only, and learned that Christ's kingdom was not temporal, but spiritual.

II. **The mob expected this.**—But Pilate can be moved *by clamour and threats.* And Pilate gladly evades responsibility by sending Jesus to Herod.

III. **Herod is pleased to see Jesus.**—But his pleasure arises from vulgar curiosity—he hopes to see some miracle done by Him. But Jesus is silent before Herod. What a lesson in that! He conversed with the ignorant Roman, but to the well-taught Hebrew's questions He has nothing to say. For Herod has thrown away exceptional opportunities, and now what is there but a fearful looking-for of judgment? *Hastings.*

Ver. 1. "*Led Him unto Pilate.*"—The heathen world becomes partaker with the Jewish in the greatest wickedness that has ever been committed. In this it appears that the

true light is hated as well by those who are under the Law as by those who are without the Law, and the judgment (Rom. iii. 19, 20), appears as a perfectly righteous one. But at the same time there is also revealed therein the grace of God, as having appeared to all who believe, without respect of persons (Rom. iii. 21-31).—*Van Oosterzee.*

Ver. 2. *Began to accuse Him.*"—Note (1) the contemptuous description—"this *fellow*" or "man," without naming Him; (2) the affected gravity of the accusers—"we found"; (3) the pretence of consulting for the best interests of the people—"our nation" (R.V.).

The Threefold Accusation.—1. His seeking to turn the people aside from the good road on which they and the Romans would have them to walk. 2. Forbidding payment of tribute to Cæsar. 3. Claiming to be a king.

"*Christ a King.*"—The explanation of Christ as meaning a king is a stroke of malice. It was only by attributing a political meaning to the title of king that the accusation of forbidding to pay tribute could be brought against Him. If He were a king in the ordinary sense of the word He must necessarily forbid the payment of tribute to any other but Himself. They declare that He has done what, according to their theory, He was logically bound to do.

Ver. 3. "*The King of the Jews.*"

I. **Jesus did not look much like a king.**—He stood there, with hands bound, and a cord round His neck. Pilate's question sounds like ridicule. Yet Jesus answered, "Yes, I am a King." Strange answer! Where were His throne, His crown, His sceptre, His royal robe? Who recognised His sway? Pilate probably looked at Him with mingled contempt and pity.

II. **But to us to-day how different does it all appear!**—Christ is on the throne. In heaven He is honoured as "King of kings." On His head are many crowns. All over the earth, as well, His sway is felt.

III. **And He was really a king when He stood before Pilate.**—For His kingdom is spiritual, a kingdom of truth, righteousness, grace, holiness, love. He seemed the weakest of men; in reality He was the grandest, mightiest, kingliest. The real power of the world is Christ's power—the kingdom whose sway is over human hearts and lives.—*Miller.*

Ver. 4. "*I find no fault.*"—Though Jesus had confessed that He claimed to be a king (ver. 3), the conversation which is recorded in John xviii. 33-38 had clearly proved to Pilate that he had not to do with one who was a rival to Cæsar.

Ver. 5. "*He stirreth up the people.*"—The false accusations are a testimony to Christ's integrity. None of the things He had actually said and done could be brought forward as a charge against Him.

"*To this place.*"—An allusion to the triumphal entry of Christ into the city a few days before.

Ver. 6. "*Whether the man were a Galilæan.*"—Those who gave the information to Pilate were ignorant of the fact that Jesus was born in Bethlehem.

Ver. 7. "*Sent Him to Herod.*"—Not necessarily to relieve himself from responsibility, but perhaps either to obtain a favourable opinion from Herod concerning the accused or to elicit some further information in reference to the case, as well as to show courtesy to the Jewish king.

Vers. 8-12. *Jesus and Herod.*

I. **Herod's reception of Jesus was characteristic.**—He was not abashed or terrified. He once had been so, but all that was past. He was "exceeding glad" to see Jesus. It was a new

excitement. And it was also a compliment from the Roman. And chiefly he hoped to see Jesus work a miracle. Now was his chance to gratify his curiosity and wonder. He put Christ on the level of a new singer or dancer. He expected entertainment from Him. He addresses Him in a friendly way. He talks of religion, and waits for no replies. No mouth is more voluble than that of a characterless man of feeling.

II. **Christ has nothing to say to such a man.**—Herod grew angry at His silence, but Jesus held His peace. For one thing the entire proceedings were irrelevant. Jesus had been sent to Herod to be tried, not to be made a spectacle of. Religion to Herod was a mere diversion. So Christ will not stoop to please him. He has nothing to say to such a character. There are many to whom religion and its services are only a form of amusement or dissipation. Christ never speaks to the soul in such surroundings. Did Jesus miss an opportunity? Should He have spoken? His silence was in itself an eloquent appeal. Christ's silence is the most eloquent of all appeals.

III. **Did Herod understand the meaning of Christ's silence?**—We cannot tell. It is impossible to say. Probably he did not wish to understand it. At all events, he acted as if he did not; he treated it as if it were stupidity. Jesus, he thought, was discredited, was an impostor, a mere pretender. So he thought, and so he said, and his satellites chimed in. And they would, doubtless, think it a great stroke of wit for Herod to send Jesus back to Pilate with a gorgeous robe cast over His shoulders, probably in imitation of the white robe worn at Rome by candidates for office. The suggestion was that Jesus was a candidate for the throne of his country, but one so ridiculous that it would be a mistake to treat Him with anything but contempt. —*Stalker.*

Ver. 8. "*Hoped to have seen some miracle.*"—No petitioner, however humble, ever had his hopes disappointed when he applied to Christ for relief; yet Christ defeats the hopes of this frivolous prince.

Ver. 9. "*Answered him nothing.*"—Mark (1) the wisdom, (2) the dignity, (3) the eloquence of this silence. "The shade of John could have observed no more inviolable silence, if it had really appeared to his murderers" (*Van Oosterzee*).

Vers. 10, 11. I. **The hatred of the priests.**

II. **The contempt of the courtiers.**—How easily might Christ have overwhelmed both with confusion! Yet He refuses to work any miracle for His own advantage now, as in the temptation in the wilderness.

Ver. 10. "*Vehemently accused Him.*"—From ver. 15 we learn that Pilate had commanded His accusers to appear before Herod. Doubtless in any case they would have gone, in order to try to prevent their Victim's escape from condemnation. The indifference manifested by Herod only increased their vehemence in accusing Him; yet, after all, it was Herod's disappointment, and not their accusation, that led to fresh ignominy being heaped upon the Saviour.

Ver. 11. "*Set Him at nought.*"—"He is despised and rejected of men. He was despised and we esteemed Him not."—Isa. liii. 3.

"*Mocked Him.*"—The priests accuse the Saviour, the courtiers mock Him. The former are animated by hatred, the latter by contempt.

"*A gorgeous robe.*"—Unconsciously Herod did honour to Christ, as did Pilate afterwards in the title which he ordered to be affixed to the cross.

Ver. 12. "*Became friends together.*"—Though the coalition of Herod and Pilate was not based upon any active

enmity to Christ, yet by the indecision of the Roman judge and the indifference of the Jewish king, the way was prepared for the unjust sentence of death being passed upon the Saviour. And so their conduct was a virtual fulfilment of the prophecy in Ps. ii. 2. Cf. Acts iv. 27.

Vers. 13-25. "*Back to Pilate.*"—Herod's worldliness was of a frivolous type. Pilate's was strenuous—the worldliness which makes self its aim and subordinates everything to success. The more common type. It reveals itself in Pilate under the search-light of Christ's scrutiny.

I. **Pilate should have released Jesus, on receiving Him back from Herod.**—But he most unjustly threatens to scourge Him, as a sop to the rage of the mob, and then set Him at liberty as a tribute to justice. A most unjust proceeding! but characteristic of the man. The spirit of compromise was characteristic of Rome. Manœuvre and expediency were universal. It is not true that this spirit is always and everywhere displeasing to God?

II. **He grasps at a way of escape.**—It was the custom to release a prisoner on the Passover morning. He welcomes the chance of releasing Christ. He offers Jesus to the crowd—unjustly—for Jesus was not a criminal; and worse, he was staking the life of an innocent man on a guess, which might be mistaken, as to the fancy of the mob. He, doubtless, considered it kind. And the offer he makes—Jesus or Barabbas—is the essence of all the great choices of life. Every individual has to face this decision.

III. **The mob chooses Barabbas.**—A surprise, a staggering blow, to Pilate. Jesus is left on His hands. "What shall I do with Jesus?" He tries to free himself of guilt. He washes His hands theatrically. He ought to have exerted them rather. Blood does not come off so easily. He could not thus abnegate responsibility and cast it upon others. He ought to have opposed the popular will at all risks. But this would have meant loss to himself. The mob gained their end. They clamoured for Christ's blood, and the will of Pilate broke down before their well-directed persistency.—*Stalker.*

Ver. 13. "*And the people.*"—Pilate communicates his views both to the rulers and to the assembled people, for both were now associated together in seeking to have a sentence of condemnation passed upon Jesus.

Ver. 14. *Three Good Points in Pilate's Procedure*—

I. **He had carefully investigated the case.**

II. **He had declared his conviction of the innocence of Jesus.**

III. **He had sought the opinion of one who was qualified to give a decision upon the questions at issue.**

"*Perverteth the people.*"—*I.e.*, one who turns them from their allegiance to Cæsar.

Ver. 15. "*Nor yet Herod.*"—The phrase implies that if even Herod, though well acquainted with the Jewish Law, and, as the sovereign of the accused, especially solicitous that He might not be allowed to stir up the people against the Romans, Herod's patrons—if even he could find no matter of complaint, the case might be looked upon as decided.

Ver. 16. "*Chastise Him and release Him.*"—Pilate hoped, by this proposal, to effect two objects: 1. He would not burden his own conscience by imposing a heavier sentence. 2. He would do something towards satisfying the enmity of the Jews against the Saviour. A certain measure of mercy towards Jesus is implied in the suggestion; but "the tender mercies of the wicked are cruel."

Ver. 17. "*Must release one.*"—And what does this signify but that at this great Feast, the true Passover, we, to whom death is due, are let

go free? Christ is taken; we, who are guilty, like Barabbas, escape."—*Williams.*

"*He must release.*"—Perhaps this custom commemorated the great national deliverance from Egypt, and so was appropriate at the time of the Passover.

Ver. 18. "*Release unto us Barabbas.*"—*I.e.*, one who was actually a revolutionary—guilty of the same kind of crime as that of which they had accused Jesus.

Ver. 19. "*And for murder.*"—In this and in ver. 25 there is an undertone of indignation at the blindness and hardness of heart which impelled the Jews to make such a choice. Cf. Acts iii. 14, "But ye denied the Holy One and the Just, and desired a murderer to be granted unto you."

Ver. 20. "*Spake again to them.*"—The substance of his speech or exclamation is not given, but may be guessed from the words "desiring to release Jesus." The excited multitude interrupted him and did not allow him to give full expression to his desire.

Ver. 21. "*Crucify Him.*"—For the first time the terrible cry is here heard, which, as the secret wish and thought of the chief priests, is now by these placed upon the people's lips, and with fanatical rage raised by them.—*Van Oosterzee.*

Ver. 22. "*What evil hath He done?*"—It is very noteworthy that Pilate took step after step to secure the acquittal of Jesus. 1. He emphatically and publicly announced His perfect innocence. 2. He sent Him to Herod. 3. He made an offer to release Him as a boon. 4. He tried to make scourging take the place of crucifixion. 5. He appealed to compassion.—*Farrar.*

Ver. 23. "*And of the chief priests.*"—Even they, unmindful of decorum, join in the impetuous cry of the raging people for blood.

Ver. 24. "*It should be as they required.*"—The weakness of Pilate led him to become the confederate of those whose hatred of Christ he did not partake in. His case is a striking illustration of the saying, "He that is not with Me is against Me."

Ver. 25. *Fatal Decision.*

I. **So ends Pilate's weak struggle with his conscience and with his sense of right.**—He has tried every way to evade the issue; then he has temporised; at last he has yielded. His name is pilloried for ever as the man who delivered Jesus to the will of the mob. He is known by no other act. Better a thousand times to have remained in obscurity.

II. **He took water to wash his hands.**—In symbol he declared that he was not responsible for Christ's death. It was in vain. The water did not wash away one particle of his guilt. On him the final responsibility rested. No other could send Jesus to the cross. That others urge us to sin does not take away our guilt for that sin. No being in the universe can compel us to do wrong; if, then, we do wrong, the sin is our own.

III. **The Jews took the responsibility of Christ's death.**—"His blood be on us, and on our children!" The self-imprecation was awfully fulfilled. The story of the next forty years is the terrible record of its fulfilment. The crime was successful, but what came of the success in the end? Sin always brings woe. The worst of all sins is sin against the Lord Jesus Christ.—*Miller.*

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 26—31.

Two Alleviations of Jesus' Sufferings.

I. **The strength of a man relieved His body of the burden of the cross.**—Though He bore His own cross out of the palace of Pilate, He was not able to

carry it far. Either He sank beneath it on the road, or He was proceeding with such slow and faltering steps that the soldiers, impatient of the delay, recognised that the burden must be removed from His shoulders. One or two of the soldiers might have relieved Him. Out of a spirit of horseplay and mischief they laid hold of a passer-by and requisitioned his services for the purpose. To the man it must have been an extreme annoyance and indignity. Doubtless he was bent on business of his own, which had to be deferred. His family or his friends might be waiting for him, but he was turned the opposite way. To touch the instrument of death was as revolting to him as it would be to us to handle the hangman's rope; perhaps more so, because it was Passover time, and this would make him ceremonially unclean. It was a jest of the soldiers and he was their laughing-stock. As he walked by the side of the robbers, it looked as if he were on the way to execution himself. This is a lively image of the cross-bearing to which the followers of Christ are called. We are wont to speak of trouble of any kind as a cross; and doubtless any kind of trouble may be borne bravely in the name of Christ. But, properly speaking, the cross of Christ is what is borne in the act of confessing Him, or for the sake of His work. When any one makes a stand for principle, because he is a Christian, and takes the consequences in the shape of scorn or loss, this is the cross of Christ. The pain you may feel in speaking to another in Christ's name, the sacrifice of comfort or time you may make in engaging in Christian work, the self-denial you exercise in giving of your means that the cause of Christ may spread at home or abroad, the reproach you may have to bear in identifying yourself with militant causes or with despised persons, because you believe they are on Christ's side—in such conduct lies the cross of Christ. It involves trouble, discomfort, or sacrifice. One may fret under it, or sink under it; it is ugly, painful, shameful often, but no disciple is without it. Our Master said, "He that taketh not his cross and followeth after Me is not worthy of Me." Apparently this *rencontre* issued in Simon's salvation and in the salvation of his house. There can be little doubt that the connection of his family with the Church (noted by St. Mark), was the result of this incident in the father's life. Is this not a significant fact, proving that nothing happens by chance? Had Simon entered the city one hour sooner or one hour later, his after history might have been entirely different. On the smallest circumstances the greatest results may hinge. A chance meeting may determine the weal or woe of a life. How much may follow when Christ is revealed to any human soul! The salvation of those yet unborn may be involved in it—of children and children's children.

II. **The pain of Christ's soul was cooled by the sympathy of women.**—It was, indeed, a surprising demonstration. It would hardly have been credited, had it not there been made manifest, that Jesus had so strong a hold upon any section of the population of Jerusalem. In the capital He had always found the soil very unreceptive. Yet now it turns out that He has touched the heart of one section, at least, even of this community. It is a great testimony to the character of Christ, on the one hand, and to that of woman on the other. Woman's instinct told her, however dimly she at first apprehended the truth, that this was the Deliverer for her. Because, while Christ is the Saviour of all, He has been specially the Saviour of woman. At His advent, her degradation being far deeper than that of men, she needed Him more; and wherever His gospel has travelled since then, it has been the signal for her emancipation and redemption. His presence evokes all the tender and beautiful qualities which are latent in her nature; and under His influence her character experiences a transfiguration. It may be that there was no great depth in the emotion of the daughters of Jerusalem; but this response of womanhood to Christ was a beginning, and therein lay its significance. It was to Him a foretaste of the

splendid devotion which He was yet to receive from the womanhood of the world. The sounds of sympathy flowed over His soul as gratefully as the gift of Mary's love enveloped His senses, when the house was filled with the odour of the ointment. His words, in response to their sympathy, (1) reveal Himself—they show how completely He could forget His own sufferings in care and anxiety for others; (2) they show the depth and fervour of His patriotism; (3) they reveal His consideration for women and children; (4) they contain an exhortation to repentance.

The two incidents are a parable of what men and women can do for Christ still. He needs the strength of men—the strong arm, the vigorous hand, the shoulders that can bear the burden of His cause; He seeks from men the mind whose originality can plan what needs to be done, the resolute will that pushes the work on, in spite of opposition, the liberal hand that gives ungrudgingly what is required for the progress and success of the Christian enterprise. From women He seeks sympathy and tears. They can give the sensibility which keeps the heart of the world from hardening; the secret knowledge which finds out the objects of Christian compassion, and wins their confidence; the enthusiasm which burns like a fire at the heart of religious work. The influence of women is subtle and remote, but it is on this account all the more powerful; for they sit at the very fountains, where the river of human life is springing, and where a touch may determine its entire subsequent course.—*Stalker.*

SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS ON VERSES 26—31.

Vers. 26-46. *Outline of The Narrative.*—1. The procession to Calvary (vers. 26-32). 2. The crucifixion (vers. 33-38). 3. The time passed upon the cross (vers. 39-46).

Vers. 26. "*On him they laid the cross.*"—The Christian's bearing of the cross is like that of Simon.

I. The cross is not chosen willingly, but imposed.

II. It is best borne in a spirit of resignation.

III. There is a reward attached to the patient bearing of it.

Simon and Jesus.

I. The greatness of trifles: accidentally coming up at that moment; catching the eye of the centurion.

II. The blessedness and honour of helping Jesus Christ.

III The perpetual recompense and record of the humblest Christian work.

IV. The blessed results of contact with the suffering Christ.—*Maclaren.*

Simon the Cross-bearer.

I. **The incident.**—A very singular one. A strange providence in Simon's life.

II. **Simon bore Christ's cross.**—At first by compulsion. No one was anxious for this task. But the compulsory task became to him a joy and honour. A type of the future power of the cross. Compulsion was changed into delight. The task was a brief one, but it made his name immortal.

III. **The lessons.**—1. Let us do, in spirit, what Simon did literally. Let us take up our cross and follow Christ. And let us do this willingly. 2. Christ is our pattern Cross-Bearer. Let us seek, in everything, to be conformed to His image.—*Hutchings.*

Vers. 27-34. *Prophet, Priest, and King.*—It is remarkable how, in three following sayings, the Lord appears as Prophet, Priest, and King: as Prophet, to the daughters of Jerusalem; as Priest, interceding for forgiveness; as King, acknowledged by the penitent thief, and answering his prayer.—*Alford.*

Ver. 27. "*Women, which bewailed.*"—St. Luke, in whose Gospel the most of the women who stood in connection with Jesus are described, relates to us

here how their compassion strewed yet one last flower for our Lord upon His path of thorns.—*Van Oosterzee.*

"*Lamented Him.*"—Though there were two others led with Him to execution, it was to Him alone that this sympathy was shown.

Ver. 28. "*Weep not for Me.*"—He Himself wept over the city, and did not weep for Himself.

Ver. 29. "*Blessed.*"—The word introduces a fearful woe. Compare for a similar thought to that here, Hos. ix. 12-16.

"*Say to the mountains,*" *etc.*—It is interesting to see how often David, who frequently hid among the rocks of the wilderness from Saul, calls the Lord His *Rock* (Ps. xviii. 2, 46, xlii. 9, etc.). Those who have this defence will not need to call on the rocks to hide them.

"*Cover us.*"—The words found a literal fulfilment at the time of the siege of Jerusalem, for the Jews in multitudes "hid themselves in the subterranean passages and sewers under the city."

Ver. 31. "*The green tree.*"—The green tree is Jesus, whom the Jews deliver over to death by the hands of the Romans, in spite of His constant submission to pagan authority; the dry is the Jewish people, who, in consequence of their spirit of rebellion, will draw down upon themselves in a proportionately greater degree the vengeance of the Romans.—*Godet.*

"*What shall be done in the dry?*"—With these words our Lord's teaching closes, and His high-priestly office begins. His first three sayings on the cross are for others. See ver. 43; John xix. 26, 27.

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 32—49.

Three Words from the Cross.—Seven words, in all, Christ spoke from the cross; St. Luke records only the prayer He offered for His murderers, His promise to the penitent, and the last cry in which He commended His spirit into the hands of His Father.

I. "**Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do.**"—Notice: 1. *The invocation.* The first utterance of Jesus was a prayer, and His first word "Father." Was it not an unintentional condemnation of those who had affixed Him there? It was in the name of religion they had acted, and, in the name of God; but which of them was thus impregated through and through with religion? Which of them could pretend to a communion with God so close and habitual? It is a suspicious case when, in any trial, especially an ecclesiastical one, the condemned is obviously a better man than the judges. The word "Father," further, proved that the faith of Jesus was unshaken by all through which He had passed, and by that which He was now enduring. Great saints have been driven, by the pressure of pain and disappointment, to challenge God's righteousness in words which it is not lawful for a man to utter. But when the fortunes of Jesus were at the blackest He still said "Father." 2. *The petition.* Our hearts burn with indignation at the treatment to which He was subjected. The comment of Jesus on it all was, "Father, forgive them." Long ago, indeed, He had taught men, "Love your enemies, . . . and pray for them which despitefully use you." And here He practised what He taught. He is the one teacher of mankind in whom the sentiment and the act completely coincide. His doctrine was the very highest; too high, it often seems, for this world But He proved that it can be realised on earth when He offered this prayer. Perhaps nothing is more difficult than to forgive. Even saints in the Old Testament curse those who have persecuted and wronged them, in terms of uncompromising severity. Had Jesus followed these, who would have ventured to find fault with Him?

Even in that there might have been a revelation of God, because in the Divine nature there is a fire of wrath against sin. But how poor would such a revelation have been in comparison with the one which He now made! It told that God is love. 3. *The argument.* This allows us to see further still into the Divine depths of His love. The injured are generally alive only to their own side of the case, and they see only those circumstances which tend to place the conduct of the opposite party in the worst light. But at the moment when the pain inflicted by His enemies was at the worst Jesus was seeking excuses for their conduct. It is true of every sinner, in some measure, that he knows not what he does. And to a true penitent, as he approaches the throne of mercy, it is a great consolation to be assured that this plea will be allowed. God knows all our weakness and blindness; men will not make allowance for it, or even understand it, but He will understand it all, if we come to hide our guilty head in His bosom.

II. "**To-day shalt thou be with Me in paradise.**"—There was probably malice in the arrangement by which Jesus was hung between the two thieves. Yet there was a Divine purpose behind the wrath of man. Jesus came to the world to identify Himself with sinners; He had lived among them, and it was meet that He should die among them. It gave Him, too, an opportunity of illustrating, at the very last moment, both the magnanimity of His own character and the nature of His mission. As the parable of the Prodigal Son is an epitome of the whole teaching of Christ, so is the salvation of the thief on the cross the life of Christ in miniature. There is no reason to doubt either that this thief was a great sinner or that he was suddenly changed. And therefore his example will always be an encouragement to the worst of sinners when they repent. It is common for penitents to be afraid to come to God, because their sins have been too great to be forgiven; but those who are encouraging them can point to cases like Manasseh, and Mary Magdalene, and this, and assure them that the mercy which sufficed for these is sufficient for all: "The blood of Jesus Christ, God's Son, cleanseth us from all sin." How complete the revolution was in the penitent is shown by his own words. St. Paul, in one place, sums up Christianity in two things: repentance towards God and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. And both of these we see in this penitent's words. It is worth noting that it was not by words that Jesus converted this man. He did not address the penitent thief at all till the thief spoke to Him. The work of conviction was done before He uttered a word. Yet it was His work. It was by the impression of His patience, His innocence, His peace, and His magnanimity, that Jesus converted the man. Yet His words, when He did speak, added immensely to the impression. He accepted the homage of His petitioner; He spoke of the world unseen as of a place native and familiar. He gave him to understand that He possessed as much influence there as he attributed to Him. This great sinner laid on Christ the weight of his soul, the weight of his sins, the weight of his eternity; and Christ accepted the burden.

III. "**Father, into Thy hands I commend My spirit.**"—1. The final words of the dying Saviour was *a prayer.* It was not by chance that this was so, for the currents within Him were all flowing Godward. While prayer is appropriate for all times, there are occasions when it is singularly appropriate —at the close of day, in moments of mortal peril, at the Communion Table, and before death. On this last occasion it is more in its place than anywhere else. Then we are, perforce, parting with all that is earthly. How natural to lay hold of what alone we can keep hold of! And this is what prayer does; for it lays hold of God. Yet, natural as prayer is at that time, it is only so to those who have learned to pray before. It had long been to Jesus the language of life, and it was only the bias of the life asserting itself in death when, as He

breathed His last, He turned to God. 2. The last word of the dying Saviour was *a quotation from Scripture.* If prayer is natural to the lips of the dying, so is Scripture. In the most sacred moments and transactions of life there is no language like that of the Bible. Especially is this the case in everything connected with death. In this supreme moment Jesus turned to the Psalms. This is undoubtedly the most precious of all the books of the Old Testament. It is a book penned as with the life-blood of its author; it is the record of humanity's profoundest sorrows and sublimest ecstasies; it is the most perfect expression which has ever been given to experience; it has been the *vade-mecum* of all the saints; and to know and to love it is one of the best signs of spirituality. 3. It was *about His spirit* that the dying Saviour prayed. Dying persons are sometimes much taken up with their bodies, or with their worldly concerns. Nor did Jesus altogether refrain from bestowing attention on these things, for one of his sayings on the cross had reference to His bodily necessities, and another to His mother's future comfort. But His supreme concern was His spirit, to the interests of which He devoted His final prayer. He placed it in the hands of God. There it was safe. Strong and secure are the hands of the Eternal. They are soft and loving too. With what a passion of tenderness must they have received the spirit of Jesus. 4. His last word revealed *His view of death.* The word used by Jesus in commending His spirit to God implies that He was giving it away in the hope of finding it again. He was making a deposit in a safe place, to which, after the crisis of death was over, He would come and recover it (cf. 2 Tim. i. 12). Death is a disruption of the parts of which human nature is composed. But Jesus was looking forward to a reunion of the separated parts, when they would again find each other, and the integrity of the personal life be restored. His dying word proves that He believed for Himself what He taught to others. Not only, however, has He, by His teaching, brought life and immortality to light; He is Himself the guarantee of the doctrine; for He is our immortal life. "Because I live," He has said, "ye shall live also."—*Stalker.*

SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS ON VERSES 32—49.

Ver. 32. "*Two others.*"—Probably these had been former associates of Barabbas, in whose place Jesus was crucified. They were, as it were, assigned as subjects to "the King of the Jews," in order to mock His claims. Yet one of them did actually become His subject. God added fresh glory to His Son by causing the wrath of men to turn to His praise.

Ver. 33. "*One on the right hand.*"—The very cross was the tribunal of Christ, for the Judge was placed in the middle; one thief, who believed, was set free; the other, who reviled, was condemned: which signified what He was already about to do with the quick and dead, being about to set some on His *right hand*, and some on the *left.*" —*Hall.*

Christ Crucified.

I. There **they** crucified Him.
II. There they **crucified** Him.
III. There they crucified **Him.**
IV. **There** they crucified Him.—*Young.*

The Three Crosses.

I. We shall look at **the two crosses upon which the malefactors suffered.**—1. We consider the crucifixion of the malefactors as *the protest of human society against rebellion, in the vindication of its own life, and of the sacredness of its own laws.* This was a terrible punishment, even to malefactors, who were evidently men of the lowest type. They were looked upon as the recognised enemies of human society. The worst punishment civilisation could inflict upon, and the most terrible weapon

it could use toward, those who, by their desperate conduct, had forfeited existence, was the cross. We know of what type these malefactors were—not thieves, as the A.V. gives it, but robbers or brigands; men who never considered aught binding in their war with their fellows. These men belonged to that terrible class which becomes the pest of oppressive governments or ill-regulated human communities, just as epidemics are the outcome of bad sanitation, or the neglect of the first laws of health. These belonged to a class of men who represent all the desperation of which grinding poverty is capable, and all the degradation which irresponsibility can produce. Thus in these two crosses—losing sight for the present of the great central Cross—we have human society's vindication of its own life and its own laws. 2. We also find here *the triumph of justice over rule and rebellious force.* This is so far gratifying. Thus the crosses upon which the malefactors were crucified were the safety of society and the vindication of law. In those crosses we see the due reward of human criminality, the last weapons that society, and the justice of the community, could use. Justice, having failed to restore, can only destroy. *Justice can do no more.* Thus in these two cases we have the triumph of human society and human government over men who otherwise would lay the earth waste, and make countries a devastation.

II. We next view **the central cross, upon which Christ died.**—That cross taught a very different lesson from that which was taught by the other crosses. The other crosses revealed the criminality of those who suffered, but (1) *That central cross revealed the sinfulness and criminality of those who crucified the Innocent One.* 2. This cross *bears a relationship with every man.* Since He who died upon it died not as a criminal, not even as one who was falsely condemned, or as a martyr only, but as one who was vindicated by His own judge, who found "no fault in Him," and vindicated by the very man who betrayed Him, and who exclaimed, "I have betrayed innocent blood." One who did no crime against man—yea, no sin against God: "He did no sin, neither was guile found in His mouth." 3. This, too, was *a death which He voluntarily accepted,* though He had the power to escape it. It was not the infliction of death upon one who could not withstand the power that inflicted it. It was the death of One who beforehand said, and gave this as the clue to His disciples of the nature of His Cross and passion, "I lay down My life, that I might take it again." I accept, then, that central Cross, as telling of sin; but as telling of it in a very different way from the other crosses. 4. In the Cross of Christ I find *the greatest condemnation of sin.* I find there the greatest and most awful revelation of the possibilities of human sinfulness. 5. But it also tells of more than that. As the Cross was the condemnation of man and the revelation of human guilt, so was it the revelation of *a Divine love that triumphed over all the guilt, ingratitude, and hatred, of men in a sacrifice that knew of no reserve,* even the death of the Lord's Anointed One.

III. And now let us look at **the relationship between that cross and the two other crosses.**—There was one man who died impenitent—one man who sank deeper and deeper into the iniquity in which he had already sunk so low, and defied every sacred influence; one, moreover, who was not overcome by those things that overcame the centurion who presided over the execution; and, finally, one who was not touched by the protest of that fellow-sufferer who, though as sinful as himself, could no longer resist, but pleaded with him in the earnestness of a fresh conviction—pleaded in tones which quivered alike with the agony of suffering and with the earnestness of a new belief, but died an impenitent and hardened sinner. There was another cross, upon which was to be seen the penitent one, who at first found expression in

the blasphemy which came from both malefactors, but who at length paused as he felt the drawing power of Him who died on that central Cross, and then at every risk became the first vindicator of that great Sufferer in the presence of the chief priests and scribes who mocked, and an angry multitude who beat like a furious storm around those crosses. He became the first to rebuke blasphemy in the presence of the Cross, and then in the additional light that comes to every man who acts up to the light that he has already received, turned to the crucified Christ and exclaimed, "Lord, remember me when Thou comest in Thy kingdom." Thus, there are exhibited here *two typical attitudes towards Jesus Christ.* Now, the world to-day is represented by the one or the other—the impenitent, who is still untouched; and the penitent, who breaks down in the presence of the Cross. There is no third class.—*Davies.*

Ver. 34. "*Father.*" — With this name both the first and the last (seventh) saying upon the cross opens.

"*Father, forgive.*"—A model prayer.

I. God addressed as Father.

II. Forgiveness of sin the chiefest benefit to be asked for.

III. Inspired by love, even for enemies.

"*Know not what they do.*"—This suggests a *motive* for forgiveness—that of pity—and not the *ground* of forgiveness. Ignorance may be a palliation of guilt, but does not remove it, or else no prayer for forgiveness would be needed.

Ignorance is (1) a plea for forgiveness; (2) yet is culpable and needs forgiveness.

The First Word.

I. **Sin needs forgiveness.**

II. **Forgiveness is obtainable.**

III. **The great Intercessor pleads for it.**—*Ireland.*

I. **His first word was no cry of pain.**

II. **His first word pleads for His murderers.**

III. **His first word was the beginning of an intercession that is still going on.**

IV. **His first word teaches us a great lesson on Christian forgiveness.**—*Miller.*

Ignorance in Doing Wrong.—"Father, forgive them; they know not what they do." These words, so full of pathos and Christian spirit, are the words of our Christ while He was being fastened to the cross, or while in agony upon it. They breathe the noble spirit of love to man, even to bitterest enemies, whose cruel acts spoke the hatred of their hearts. "Forgive them!" How deep must have been the love of that noble heart! "They know not what they do." How clear was the spiritual vision of that great soul! That heart knew sorrow, but not hatred. That soul saw the right, and knew that no temporal eclipse could put wrong on the everlasting throne. It has been well said that "the brave only know how to forgive." The power of forgiving flows only from a strength and greatness of soul. These words may apply to the people—the unthinking mass, easily led for good or bad. They may apply to the obedient tools of power—the Roman soldiers—those who were His immediate crucifiers. Or Pilate may have been most prominent in Jesus' mind,—poor, weak creature, with the semblance of greatness, but without the real thing. His outward exterior belied the weak soul within. Perhaps it is Caiaphas who needs the prayer—the man who ought to speak the word of truth and justice; the really strong man, with a fixed purpose, and with means to attain that purpose. Jesus meant all. All were men in error and sin. But did not these, one and all, know what they were doing? How far the people knew it is difficult to say. They gave little time to any careful thought over the matter. Their leaders demanded

the life of this Jesus. Right or wrong, they followed their leaders. Small aims, little policies, poor, superficial reasons, satisfied them. The immediate present was all they saw. The Roman soldiers were trained to obey: this was their first duty. Not for them to reason why, but to do. They were, as are all soldiers, mere instruments of higher powers. They were the brute and blind means by which the higher powers maintained themselves. But, for all this prayer, these people and soldiers knew better than they acted; they did not live up to what little Divine light they had. They must stand in judgment, and receive their well-merited stripes. Pilate *did know* what he was doing. He knew he was twisting, in his weakness, the Roman law (which had some bit of justice in it) to please the Jews, whose governor he was. He trembled before the cry of the priests: "If thou let this man go, thou art not Cæsar's friend." He sought outside, not inside, approval. He thought more of public opinion, of the opinion of the great, than of the opinion he could have of himself. He sacrificed moral integrity on the altar of power. Let Pilate be Cæsar's friend at all cost, though to be so he violated Cæsar's law. Pilate thus far knew what he was doing, He was thinking of his own hold on the governorship of Judæa. Those in power know what they are doing. We need waste no pity on them. They know that the one thought is not the benefit of man or country, but how to maintain themselves in powerful places. There is no need to ransack history—to tell of the deeds of tyrants, of their trampling down by their soldiers the mass of human kind, of their courts and judgments. History is full until it flows over with examples. We must get power, we must hold on to power, by all means. Let God and man, and country and justice, and truth and integrity, go. Let all that is held to be principle be crucified. You cannot pray, "Forgive them: they know not what they do." They *do* know. And that is the worst of it. Caiaphas and the hierarchy knew what they were doing. This gentle rabbi, Jesus, who would get at the spirit under the ceremony, who laid so little stress on form, who would have men come direct to God as children, was really a destroyer of the Temple worship and of priestly power. He represented the new, larger, freer thought; they, the old, outgrown thought. He stood for progress, they for stagnation. They were wise men; they would use the enactments of men to thwart the laws of God. If they did not enforce these ordinances, the Temple would go, the service would go, the people would no longer worship the God of their fathers, Moses would be dishonoured, the prophets despised, and holy Judaism, purchased at fearful cost, would be a thing forgotten. Let, therefore, this young man be silenced, and, if it must be, by death. Let the old crush this destroying new. They knew well what they were doing. In the same sense the men who, all along our trail of blood called history, have sent their fellows to death, knew what they were doing. They knew what they were doing, or, to be more exact, they thought they knew. But did they know, after all? Let us see. In the broad sweep of the question, did they know? Of course, the blind mass did not know. Nor do they know now; and, in their ignorance, they commit crime and do acts of folly. Those who do know suffer through the ignorance of the ignorant. When one stops and thinks that he is the product of his age—his age with all its blindness, folly, and sin; when he thinks that his soul and its everlasting destiny is being moulded by his surroundings, and that his surroundings include the besotted, the knaves, the brutish, and the brutal, —he may bestir himself to improve these surroundings, to make better his age. He feels the great solemnity of the prayer of Jesus when applied to these darkened masses. "Father, forgive them; they know not what they do." They know not the real nature of sin or the majesty of Divine

justice. Nor did the soldiers know what they were doing. They thought they were carrying out the law, whereas they were the blind instruments of cruelty and injustice. It is a sad picture, this yielding up of will and moral responsibility to a supposed superior. It is a most dangerous thing, and it has ever, in the end, proved a terrible thing to the weak. It is something to make one pause when one really takes in the thought of thousands, hundreds of thousands, of men yielding up to another will their wills and consciences. It gives food for reflection when these thousands practically say, "Think for me. Be responsible to humanity and God for me. I will act. I will dye my hands in blood, guilty and innocent. Only be thou responsible." They did not know that, no matter what may be the customs and ordinances of nations, no man can shift to another his responsibility to man and God. Pilate—did he really know what he was doing? In one way, yes; but, in a deeper way, no. He fancied he was upholding Roman power. The majesty of human law asserted itself in him. He thought that human ordinances were final. He knew not that at the back of these arose, as clouds of threatening darkness and as clouds of approving light, the everlasting principles of justice. Pilate was a lawyer, and most naturally confounded the judgments of men with the wisdom of God. He thought that to apply human ordinances was the only way to order and good government. He forgot, or never knew, that government is a means, not an end. In the interest of his earthly empire he was blinded to the deeper interest of the kingdom of God. He saw the Roman army, the Roman power, the Roman law. He did not see higher powers and Diviner principles than had then or have now found their way into human ordinances. Poor, blinded man. And Caiaphas! Oh, we pity him! His name and memory have suffered. His deed has brought down upon the heads of noble men, pure women, and innocent children the curses and cruelties of the ignorant and bigoted. Poor priest, of a once great religion, the one who was to lead to hope, to faith, to duty, leads to hate, death, and destruction. He fancied that religion was a thing of the outer man, not the living principle of the soul. He did not see that God can uphold His own cause. He needs no man's crime to assist Him. He called for the death of one greater than the Temple, greater than all the Temple's ritual, greater than Moses,—a new man, with a new, large word from the God in heaven and the God in the human soul. He knew not what he did. When we think of Pilate and Caiaphas, the men in power, on whose will the lives of their fellows depended; when we think of their dense ignorance; —we pity our humanity, and them with it. Men find it a most difficult lesson to learn that you may slay men, but you cannot thus take the life of God out of those deep, fundamental principles on which all life rests, and by which all life is sustained,—those fundamentals that make thought possible, that regulate the moral universe. These are as eternal as God is eternal. Men may come, men may go; but these abide for ever. So runs the law of God, Oh, how real, then, the prayer, "Father, forgive them; they know not what they do"! These men, one and all—people, soldiers, governor and priests—knew and did not know. They knew better than they lived up to, but they were ignorant of the great fact that God's laws are eternal. Their ignorance is their excuse. It is also their crime. God pities man's ignorance, but God's law punishes that same ignorance. We do not know. Let Him forgive. But we ought to know. Ignorance is often our own fault as well as our only excuse. But, ignorant or wise, there is mercy. Beneath and above the blindness of the people, the submissive obedience of the soldiers, the folly of the governor, and the bigotry of the priest, is the Divine pity. Oh, the mighty heart

which, with its flowing blood, cried out for this forgiveness to its enemies! From it we may gather, not all its grandeur, but a small portion of its power of love to man.—*Walkley.*

The Calmness and Justice of Christ upon the Cross.—Dying is just a part of living—sometimes a long part, often a hard part. With Christ, life and death were all of a piece—simple and calm. Even on the cross He took up things in order, and gently. His first word was about His enemies.

I. **Forgiveness is His first thought in death.**—The ruling thought of His mission, men's need of it, and how they could have it.

II. **Pain shakes the sense of justice.**—Christ suffered agony unspeakable. But His sense of justice was unaffected. He judged as scrupulously as He will from His white throne. He apportioned degrees of guilt.

III. **The men who nailed Him had little knowledge of Him.**—They were nearly as much instruments, we might say, as the nails they hammered. But even the smallest knowledge of Christ brings responsibility. How much more a full knowledge! With what measure shall those be judged who claim a true and just acquaintance with Christ?—*Nicoll.*

The Unselfish Christ.—His voice is heard—not of anger or resentment, but of pleading intercession.

I. **He finds an excuse for those who pierced Him.**—The most glorious instance of a Divine unselfishness—of an absolute self-sacrifice. His self-sacrifice rises into the sublimer region of a literal self-forgetfulness: enough, surely, of itself, to explain how Jesus Christ, coming to minister to all the diseases of humanity, has a right to undertake the treatment and cure of this particular disease of selfishness.

II. **How does He heal us of this malady of selfishness?**—Is not the question half answered in the asking? He *was* unselfishness. Selfishness and He cannot co-exist. In the heavenly glory He still forgets Himself in the sorrows of His "brethren."

III. **To see Him, to be united to Him, to be one with Him—this is to be a Christian.**—This is to be like Him in His unselfishness. When Christ came to bear our sins, He not only took away by His cross the mid-wall of guilt between each man and his God; He also took away the mid-wall of selfishness between each man and his brother. He made that possible in all cases to Christian love which was impossible before in any case to the natural. Selfishness is done away with by the introduction of a new self which embraces and comprehends us all.—*Vaughan.*

The Forgiveness of the Cross.—I. **One thing is not said here, nor anywhere else, by the Saviour.**—There is no confession of sin, and no cry for personal forgiveness. He neither did, nor could, pray for His own forgiveness. He did pray for the pardon of others.

II. **We are taught here the simple and primary duty of the forgiveness of injuries.**—Christ seems to be almost more exacting in relation to forgiveness than in relation to purity.

III. **A limit is affixed to Christ's prayer.**—Who come within the scope of the word, within the embrace of this appeal? The prayer included the executioners and the Jewish chiefs and rulers. And perhaps it reaches out to a wider area. But there is no charter of universalism in the prayer—no assurance that all sin will be remitted and every sinner forgiven. No doubt, however, ignorance lessens the guilt of sin, but it does not obliterate it. If the sinner could always say boldly, "I knew not," then there would have been no need for this intercession of the Mediator.—*Alexander.*

Vers. 34, 43, 46. *Luke's Record of the Words from the Cross.*—I. **The beauty of forgiving tenderness.**

II. **The beauty of pardoning power.**

III. **The beauty of perfect peace**—*Ibid.*

Ver. 35. "*Cast lots.*"—Lots would be cast for the division among the four soldiers of the robe, the turban, the girdle, and the sandals of Jesus, and then again for disposing of His tunic which, as the other gospels tell us, was of some special value.

"*He saved others.*"—This may be ironical, or it is a recognition of His miracles of mercy, to taunt Him with a supposed loss of His power just when He needed it most for Himself. His very mercy is used in mockery.

"*The chosen of God.*"—The epithet describes Christ as appointed beforehand by God for the realisation of His plans for Israel and for the world. Cf. ix. 35.

Vers. 37, 38. "*The soldiers also mocked Him,*" *etc.*—In deriding the claim of Christ to be a king, probably both the soldiers, who offered Him a mock homage, and Pilate, who drew up the title upon the cross, desired rather to give expression to their contempt for the Jewish people than to insult the Saviour.

Vers. 39-43. *The Experience of the Malefactor.*

I. **As a convert.**—1. The previous character of the penitent enhances the greatness of his conversion. 2. The unlikelihood of his conversion in the special circumstances of the case. 3. The suddenness with which it was produced. 4. The completeness and maturity by which it was marked. 5. The scantiness of the means by which it was effected.

II. **As a witness.**

III. **As a suppliant.**—*Cairns.*

The Penitent and Christ.—I. **The penitent** (1) humbly acknowledges his guilt; (2) eagerly seeks for salvation; and (3) courageously confesses His Saviour.

II. **The Saviour** (1) pardons the guilt; (2) hears the prayer; and (3) bestows a reward far in excess of the penitent's hopes or expectations.

Despair and Faith.—Compare the despairing cry "Save Thyself and us" with the humble petition, "Lord, remember me."

Abundant Teaching of This in Advent.—We have here (1) a most wonderful illustration of the glory and grace of the Saviour; (2) a striking example of the efficacy of prayer; (3) an antidote to despair; (4) a proof of nearness and reality of the spiritual world.

Encouragement and Warning.

I. The case of the penitent thief shows that conversion is possible, even at the last hour.

II. The case of the impenitent thief shows the danger of postponing conversion to the last hour.

All the Elements of Genuine Conversion Present.—Brief as the utterance of the penitent thief was, yet there is nothing lacking to it that belongs to the unalterable requirements of a genuine conversion: sense of guilt, confession of sin, simple faith, active love, supplicating hope—all these fruits of the tree of the new life we see here ripen during a few moments.—*Van Oosterzee.*

No Encouragement to Delay Repentance.—His case affords no encouragement to any one to *put off* repentance to a death-bed. *Our* faith cannot come up to that of *this* penitent, for our condition is very different from his. *We* have seen Christ's glorious resurrection and ascension into heaven. We have received the Holy Ghost from heaven. He had none of these benefits. *He* saw Christ deserted by His disciples and dying on the cross, and yet He confessed Him as a King, and prayed to Him as his Lord.—*Wordsworth.*

A Witness for Christ Raised Up.—This is a comfortable symbol and example for all Christendom, that God

will never let faith in Christ, and the confession of His name, go down. If the disciples as a body, and those who were otherwise related to Jesus, confess not and lose their faith, deny Him in fear, are offended, and forsake Him—a malefactor or murderer must come forward to confess Him, to preach Him to others, and teach all men who He is, and what consolation all may find in Him.—*Luther.*

Vers. 40-43. 1. **The penitent malefactor.**—1. His expostulation with his companion in suffering. 2. His confession of guilt. 3. His recognition of Christ's innocence. 4. The faith, humility, and earnestness, manifested in his prayer to Christ.

II. **The gracious Redeemer.**—1. He has sympathy for others in the midst of His own dire sufferings. 2. He anticipates entrance upon a state of blessedness. 3. He is conscious of power to open the gate of Paradise to others, 4. He gives far more than was asked from Him.

Ver. 40. "*Dost not thou fear God?*"—The thought of the Divine justice before which he was so shortly to appear might well cause him to refrain from mocking his fellow-sufferer: the thoughtless crowd were under no such restraint.

Ver. 41. "*Hath done nothing amiss.*"—Even had the robber said nothing more than this, yet he would awaken our deepest astonishment, that God—in a moment wherein literally all voices are raised against Jesus, and not a friendly word is heard in His favour—causes a witness for the spotless innocence of the Saviour to appear on one of the crosses beside Him.—*Van Oosterzee.*

Vers. 42, 43. *The Absolution of the Cross.*

I. **The assurance.**—There is absolute certainty in it. Christ's especial utterance is, not "I think," but "I say."

II. **The promise.**—It is twofold: 1. *A gracious promise of the abridgment of suffering.* 2. *The better part.* More than the penitent thief thought of or asked for. Not possibly, in some remote future and vaguely, but verily, to-day, and close to Himself.

III. **The revelation.**—This is one of Luke's words of revelation, unveiling. It is the great *dictum probans* for the rest of the saints in Paradise. To say "in heaven" would be inaccurate. Oh the preciousness of the hope which enfolds our dead in Christ, ever since the dying Lord said to the dying penitent "to-day in Paradise"! What speed, what rest, what companionship! —*Alexander.*

"*With Me in Paradise.*"

I. **What did the robber expect?**—That they two would die. That the long trance would come; that the wrong would be righted at last; and that when it was, Jesus would be Lord. And then, "Have a thought of me."

II. **What was the answer?**—"When I go to My kingdom, thou shalt keep Me company, and that before the setting of the sun." The prayer was great, but the answer was greater still. We may suppose that the robber did not understand much of the word "Paradise," but he understood the word "with Me," and it was enough. If the prayer was like a river, the answer was as a great sea.—*Nicoll.*

I. **The word of the dying thief.**
II. **The word of the dying Lord.**—*Ireland.*

Ver. 42. *The Dying Thief.*

I. **We see here an illustration of the cross, in its power of drawing men to itself.**

II. **We have here the cross, as pointing to and foretelling the kingdom.**

III. **Here is the cross as revealing and opening the true Paradise.**—*Maclaren.*

The Penitent Thief.

I. **What he thought of himself.**
II. **What he thought of Christ.**
III. **What Christ thought of him.**

Ver. 43. "*To-day.*"—The penitent thief could scarcely have expected death on that day, for those crucified often lingered several days upon the cross. The breaking of the legs of the two who suffered with Christ secured the fulfilment of this prophecy and promise. Thus the enemies of Christ unconsciously brought about the fulfilment of Christ's words.

I. A **place** in Paradise.
II. The **presence** of Christ with Him in Paradise.
III. An **entrance** with Him into Paradise that very day.

Ver. 44. "*There was a darkness,*" *etc.*—There is evidently something extraordinary in these phenomena, whether their exceptional character is to be ascribed to a supernatural cause, or simply to a providential coincidence. It is impossible to ignore the profound relation which exists, on the one hand, between man and nature, and, on the other, between humanity and Christ. For man is the soul of the world, as Christ is the soul of humanity.—*Godet.*

Ver. 45. "*The veil of the temple was rent.*"—1. This was a type of the violent rending of Christ's body on the cross (Heb. x. 20). 2. It typified our Lord's own entrance into heaven (Heb. ix. 24). 3. It intimated that the ceremonies of the Law were abolished. 4. That the distinction between Jew and Gentile was at an end. 5. That there was freedom of access to the throne of grace. 6. That Christ had opened up, by His death, an entrance into heaven for all His followers (Heb. ix. 7).—*Foote.*

The Temple no longer the Abode of God.—Was not this sign meant to show that the Temple was no longer the abode of God? As the high priest rent his robe in the presence of a great scandal, so God rent the veil which covers the Holy of Holies, where formerly He had manifested Himself. It implied a desecration of the most holy place, and consequently of the Temple, with its courts and altar and sacrifices. The Temple is profaned, abolished by God Himself. The efficacy of sacrifice has henceforth passed to another blood, another altar, and a new order of priesthood. This fact is implied in the declaration of Jesus: "Slay Me, and you will thereby have destroyed this Temple."—*Godet.*

Ver. 46. *Last Words.*

I. **Christ's work as Redeemer was done.**—His previous word, "It is finished" marked its completion. Now He is ready to return to His Father. Before Him lies the mystery of death.

II. **Here we see His calm, trustful faith.**—The terrible struggle is over, and He is at perfect peace. His use of the word "Father" shows that His soul has recovered its serenity. The darkness is gone. The Father's face beams upon His in loving approval.

III. **A picture of Christian dying.**—It was but a breathing of the spirit into the hands of the heavenly Father. It is natural to regard death as a strange experience. What is it? Where shall we be when we escape from the body? Will it be dark or light? Shall we be alone or accompanied? Here comes this word of our Lord, and we learn that the soul, when it leaves the body, passes at once into the Father's hands. Surely that is enough for us to know. We shall be perfectly and eternally safe if we are in our Father's keeping. If we think thus of death, it will have no terrors for us.—*Miller.*

The Peace of the Cross.

I. **The view of death taken by the Lord Jesus.**—Not fate: irresistible and irrevocable necessity. Not impersonal absorption into the universal life, or positivist immortality of a subjective character. His death comes as from

a Father's love. He has the assurance of life in definite personality, the true life of the *spirit* after the body has gone down into the grave. It is free, spontaneous, unhesitating surrender. The deposit must be safe that is lodged with such a Depository.

II. **The use to be made of Scripture during the approach of death.**—One chief employment of Scripture is for the dying. Scripture is not only a rule of *life*. How much of it is of use for the spirit in dying!

III. **This word supplies an answer to an objection not seldom made to the Atonement.**—How the Atonement effects its object we are not told. But this last word attests how *willingly* Jesus died. There was no reluctance, no repugnance, no shrinking, no compulsion. His dying word shows how true was His own repeated declaration, "I lay down My life."—*Alexander.*

I. **The work of the Dying One.**

II. **The attitude of the Dying One.** 1. Making satisfaction for sin. 2. Alone with the Father.

III. **The spirit of the Dying One.**—1. Voluntary surrender. 2. Obedient love and holy peace.

IV. **Our interest in the death and dying word of Jesus.**—A lesson (1) for dying, (2) for living.—*Ireland.*

"*Into Thy hands.*"—The Father receives the spirit of Jesus; Jesus receives the spirits of the faithful (Acts vii. 59).

"*I commend My spirit.*"—At the moment when He is about to lose self-consciousness, and feels that His spirit is passing away, He commits it in trust to His Father.

Vers. 47-49. *The Effects Produced upon Spectators by the Death of Christ.*—1. Upon the Roman centurion. 2. Upon the people. 3. Upon His adherents.

Ver. 47. "*A righteous man.*"—More than mere innocence of the charge on which He suffered is implied in this testimony. Jesus had claimed to be the Son of God, and if He were righteous He must be more than man. Hence the form in which St. Luke gives this testimony is in virtual agreement with that in which it is reported by St. Matthew and St. Mark: "Truly this was the Son of God."

Ver. 48. "*That sight.*"—They came, from motives of curiosity, to look on that spectacle, but they depart with feelings of awe and alarm.

"*Smote their breasts.*"—As the exclamation of the centurion is an anticipation of the conversion of the pagan world, so also the consternation which seizes upon the Jews, who witness this scene, is an anticipation of the penitence and final conversion of that nation (Zech. xii. 10-14).—*Godet.*

Ver. 49. "*All His acquaintance.*"—In what mood they now stood there, after they were now no longer hindered by the scoffings of the people from coming near, may be better felt than described. With the deepest sorrow over this irrevocable loss, which was not yet softened by the joyful hope of the resurrection, there is united melancholy joy that now at last the agonising conflict is ended, and the heart-felt longing to render now the last honours to the inaminate corpse.—*Van Oosterzee.*

The Ministering Women.

I. **These were the earliest of a great and noble army of Christian women,** attached to Christ by deep personal love, following and ministering unto Him.

II. **Woman has always been grateful, to Christ, and has served Him with great devotion.**

III. **There is a field everywhere for woman's ministry.**

IV. **Let every woman imitate this company, by following Christ.**—*Miller.*

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 50—56.

The Last Offices of Love.—With the crucifixion of Christ the rage of His enemies was spent; they had done their worst, and retire into the background, while His friends and disciples draw near, to show their love by taking reverent care of His lifeless body. Not only do His known and accredited followers come forward at this hour, but also some from unexpected quarters, who had been disciples secretly, have now the courage of their convictions and manifest openly their affection for Him who had been put to such an ignominious death. One of these was Joseph of Arimathæa, a member of the Sanhedrim itself, a man of wealth, of well-known probity and piety, who had taken no part in the proceedings against Jesus. At the moment when the cause of Christ is at its lowest ebb this hidden friend comes forth, constrained by love of Him, and gives honourable interment to the body of his Master.

I. **Love towards Christ gives courage.**—Joseph had much to risk by coming forward at this time to confess his love for Christ; he exposed himself to the enmity of the Sanhedrim, and to the penalty of excommunication by the ecclesiastical authorities of his nation—with all that it implied of loss of station, separation from kindred, and from the society of his fellows. The fear of this had already restrained him from confessing himself to be a disciple of Jesus; but now love raises him above fear. It was the violence of the enemies of Christ that urged him to religious decision; it reached a point at which he felt himself bound to make a stand, and openly to identify himself with the hated and persecuted cause. Thus does religious persecution overreach itself; it cows the timid and half-hearted, but it rouses up others to cast in their lot with what they know to be the side of God and truth. He went in boldly to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus.

II. **This love inspires deeds of devotion.**—Joseph did all that love could suggest as possible to be done. He took down the body from the cross, wrapped it in a linen cloth with costly spices, and laid it in his own new tomb. He did not employ his servants to do this work, but did it with his own hands. Love could not be satisfied with less than this. The tomb was one which he had had excavated for himself. Though he belonged to a city at a distance from Jerusalem, he wished, like many of his nation, to be buried in the most sacred spot in the land, and hence had made preparations beforehand against the day of his death. But now he gives up with great generosity, this highly valued property, and consecrates it to be the tomb of Jesus. We note from this that rich men have ways of serving Christ which are inaccessible to their poorer brethren. Joseph's rank, and dignity, and wealth, doubtless disposed Pilate to listen to his petition. The Roman judge would probably have refused to accede to a like petition, if it had been presented by some poor and obscure disciple. Another might have had all Joseph's love and devotion to the Master, and yet have been unable to provide an equally suitable place of burial for Him.

III. **The love of one towards Christ stirs up the like feeling in others.**—We learn from the fourth Gospel that Nicodemus, too, came forward to assist in the work of burial, and brought "a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about a hundred pound weight," and here we read that the women which came from Galilee, when they saw what was being done, made preparations for bringing fresh spices and ointments as soon as the Sabbath was past. The example of one loyal, loving disciple prompted others to imitation. They would not be behindhand in honouring the Master. What had been done in the way of anointing was amply sufficient for the purpose; but they would not be satisfied with merely

being spectators of the piety of others, they must themselves assist in rendering honour to Him. "To what purpose is this waste?" a cold-hearted, utilitarian world might ask; but every loving heart knows that nothing is wasted which is given out of love to Christ.

SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS ON VERSES 50—56.

Ver. 50. "*A good man and a just.*"—St. Luke names the more comprehensive quality first; for every good man is also just, while not all just men are good.

"*A good man, and a just.*"—Each evangelist describes Joseph in his own way. St. Luke's words correspond to the Greek ideal of character (καλὸς κἀγαθός): St. Mark speaks of him as "an honourable counsellor" — the Roman ideal: St. Matthew as "a rich man"—the Jewish ideal.—*Godet.*

Ver. 51. "*The counsel and deed.*"—*I.e.*, he had not consented to the sentence passed on Jesus, nor to the shameful artifices by which the Roman judge had been urged into ratifying the sentence.

Ver. 52. *Joseph of Arimathæa.*

I. **Joseph had been a secret disciple of Christ for some time already.**

II. **Now he throws away his timidity, and comes out boldly as a friend of Jesus.**

III. **True love for Christ cannot always keep hid.**

IV. **We must ever be grateful that Joseph gave Jesus such noble burial.**

V. **Yet, after all, his love blossomed out too late.**—He ministered, not to this living, but to the dead Christ. He discipleship was incomplete.—*Miller.*

Ver. 53. *The Sepulchre.*

I. **Christ touched life at every point.**—He began at infancy and ended at the grave. There is no path on which His holy footprints are not seen. Why should we dread the grave, since Jesus has lain in it?

II. **He lay in a borrowed grave.**—His friends provided it. Another mark of His deep humiliation.

III. **How hopeless the prospect seemed!**—Jesus was buried; the disciples were scattered. The grave seemed to be the tomb of all their hopes. And yet it was simply the lowly gateway to honour and glory. So no hopes perish when a Christian is buried—just beyond is glory.—*Ibid.*

Ver. 54. "*The Sabbath drew on.*"—What different feelings would fill the minds (1) of those who had slain Jesus; (2) of those who were His disciples, on this day of rest. For Him it was a day of rest and peace indeed.

Ver. 55. "*Beheld the sepulchre.*"—*I.e.*, they followed those who carried Jesus to the grave, and took notice of the place, with the intention of returning after the Sabbath was over to complete the embalming which had been hastily begun. Though Christ had foretold His resurrection, yet, as the words of the penitent thief imply, a glorious reappearance of the Saviour after death was expected, at least by some of His followers, but not the rising again of the body which was laid in the tomb.

Ver. 56. "*Rested the Sabbath day.*"—These words reveal the pious and humble fidelity of these Jewish women to the law of the Sabbath. It may be said that this Sabbath was the last of the Old Covenant, which came to a close with the death of Christ. It was scrupulously respected by all those who, unconsciously, were about to inaugurate the New.—*Godet.*

CHAPTER XXIV.

CRITICAL NOTES.

VER. 1. **Very early in the morning.**—Rather, "at early dawn" (R.V.); lit. "deep dawn." **And certain others with them.**—Omit these words; omitted in R.V. Probably a harmonistic insertion.

Ver. 4. **Two men.**—*I.e.*, men in appearance. **Shining garments.**—Rather, "dazzling apparel" (R.V.); the word "shining" literally meaning "flashing."

Ver. 5. **The living.**—The ground of the rebuke lies in the designation applied to our Lord, "the Living One" (absolutely)—He who hath *life in Himself* (John v. 26), and of whom it is elsewhere said, that God raised Him up; "having loosed the pains of death, because it was not possible that He should be holden of it."—*Speaker's Commentary.*

Ver. 6. **Yet in Galilee.**—These were women from Galilee to whom the angels spoke (see chap. xxiii. 55).

Ver. 7. **Sinful men.**—The Gentiles (chap. xviii. 32).

Ver. 11. **Idle tales.**—R.V. "idle talk."

Ver. 12. **Then arose Peter,** etc.—This verse is omitted by one of the great uncial MSS., D., but is no doubt genuine. **Departed, wondering in Himself.**—Rather, "departed to his home, wondering," etc. The change arises from connecting the phrase translated "in himself" with "departed" and not with "wondering," and rendering it by "to his home."

Ver. 13. **Two of them.**—It is evident from ver. 33 that neither of them were apostles. The name of one of them is given in ver. 18, Cleopas (*i.e.*, an abbreviation of Cleopatros), a different name from Cleopas of John xix. 25. Conjectures as to the name of the other are futile. **Went.**—Rather, "were going" (R.V.). **Emmaus.**—Mentioned in Josephus, *B.J.*, VII. vi. 6. Omit "about"; omitted in R.V.

Ver. 14. **They talked.**—Rather, "communed" (R.V.); the same word as in ver. 15.

Ver. 15. **Reasoned.**—Rather, "questioned together" (R.V.).

Ver. 16. **Their eyes were holden.**—A certain change had passed over Jesus, so that He was not instantly recognised in all cases by the disciples after His resurrection (see ver. 37; Matt. xxviii. 17; John xx. 14, xxi. 4). In the present instance St. Mark refers to this in saying that He appeared to these two disciples "in another form." St. Luke, however, speaks here of a subjective impediment to recognition in the disciples themselves: perhaps their absorption in grief. A supernatural restraint may possibly be indicated: cf. ver. 31.

Ver. 17. **What manner?** etc.—Lit., "What words are these that ye exchange one with another?" **As ye walk and are sad.**—A better reading is, "and they stood still, looking sad" (R.V.).

Ver. 18. **Art thou only?** etc.—Rather, "Dost thou alone sojourn in Jerusalem?" (R.V.) or "Dost thou sojourn alone in Jerusalem?" (R.V. margin). "Cleopas thought that the supposed stranger was one of the numerous persons who had come up to sojourn at Jerusalem during the period of the paschal feast, and expressed his surprise at his being there without having heard of the death of Jesus of Nazareth; he assumes that no other person could have been in Jerusalem at the time without hearing of it" (*Speaker's Commentary*).

Ver. 19. **A prophet,** etc.—See a similar description in Acts ii. 22.

Ver. 20. **Our rulers.**—This shows that the speakers were Jews. **Delivered him.**—*I.e.*, to Pilate.

Ver. 21. **We trusted.**—Rather, "we hoped" (R.V); "a word of weakened trust, and shrinking from the avowal that they 'believed' this" (*Alford*). **Is the third day.**—The expression in the original is peculiar, and might be translated, "He is now in the third day, since," etc. The reference, of course, is to the prophecy about rising again on the third day.

Ver. 22. **Yea, and certain women.**—R.V. "moreover." The phrase used implies, "Certainly, thus much has happened, that," etc. **Made us astonished.**—R.V. "amazed us."

Ver. 24. **Certain of them,** etc.—This refers to the apostles; to the visit of Peter and John to the sepulchre, though St. Luke has in his narrative only mentioned Peter (ver. 12).

Ver. 25. **O fools.**—Rather, "O foolish men" (R.V.); the word means unintelligent. Defects both of understanding and of heart accounted for their unbelief.

Ver. 26. **Ought not Christ?**—Rather, "behoved it not the Christ?" (R.V.). "The sufferings were the appointed way by which Christ should enter into His glory" (*Alford*).

Ver. 27. **Beginning at.**—*I.e.*, taking His arguments from. Taking up the words of one sacred writer after another, he deduced from them in turn certain great principles; basing what He taught upon their testimony. **In all the scriptures.**—The general tenor of the Old-Testament Scriptures, types, Law, and prophecies, led up to Christ.

Ver. 28. **Made as though,** etc.—There was no dissimulation, for He would have gone further, if they had not constrained Him to abide with them. His having joined them on the road was no pledge that He would remain an unlimited time in their society.

Ver. 29. **Abide with us.**—*I.e.*, in the same quarters with us. It is not implied that the home of either of the disciples was in Emmaus; indeed, from Christ's assuming the position of master of the household, it would seem probable that the resting place was an inn. **To tarry.**—Rather, "to abide" (R.V.); the same word as in the earlier part of the verse.

Ver. 30. **Sat at meat.**—Rather, as in other places, "reclined at meat." **Took bread,** etc.—No reference to any sacramental rite. These disciples could not have been reminded by His action at the last supper, for neither of them was then present. But they may have witnessed similar actions at common meals with the disciples and at the miraculous feeding of the multitudes. Perhaps they recognised the prints of the nails in His hands.

Ver. 32. **Did not our hearts?** etc.—Rather, "Was not our heart burning within us" (R.V.). **Talked with us.**—Rather "to us" (R.V.).

Ver. 33. **Rose up the same hour.**—"They have now no fear of the night-journey from which they had so lately dissuaded their unknown companion" (*Bengel*). **Found the eleven.**—With the exception of Thomas, if this appearance of Jesus be the same as that recorded in John xx. 19.

Ver. 34. **Appeared to Simon.**—*I.e.*, to Simon Peter. No details are given of this appearance, but it is mentioned again in 1 Cor. xv. 5. Probably at this interview between Jesus and Peter, the sin of his threefold denial was formally forgiven.

Ver. 35. **In breaking of bread.**—Rather, "in the breaking of bread" (R.V.),

Ver. 36. **Jesus Himself.**—Rather, "He Himself" (R.V.). **Stood in the midst.**—A sudden appearance, corresponding to the disappearance in ver. 31. St. John (xx. 19) says that "the doors were shut." **Peace be unto you.**—The ordinary Jewish salutation, but having special significance in the mouth of our Lord. Cf. John xiv. 27.

Ver. 37. **Terrified.**—"On account of His sudden appearance, and the likeness to one whom they knew to have been dead" (*Alford*). **A spirit.**—*I.e.*, a ghost or spectre.

Ver. 38. **Thoughts.**—Rather, "reasonings" (R.V.), or "disputing."

Ver. 39. **My hands,** etc.—Probably as evidence both of His corporeity and of His identity. The latter was proved by the marks of the nails. Sometimes those crucified had their feet *tied* to the cross: from this it is evident that the feet of Christ had been nailed to the cross. **Handle me.**—St. John uses the same word in the same connection (1 John i. 1). **Flesh and bones.**—From the omission of "blood," some have argued that this was absent in His resurrection body, as being the seat of animal life. But this is doubtful.

Ver. 40. Some ancient authorities omit this verse; but it is, no doubt, genuine. It is not an interpolation from John xx. 27.

Ver. 41. **Believed not for joy.**—A very natural touch. **Any meat.**—Rather, "anything to eat."

Ver. 42. **Fish.**—Fish was brought in great quantities to Jerusalem at the principal festivals. **Honeycomb.**—Curiously enough these words are omitted from the most important uncial MSS. They are, however, of great antiquity, and are found in nearly all the cursive MSS. and in some of the uncials. It is difficult to understand how they could have been inserted if they had not been genuine. This proof of the resurrection by eating with the disciples is referred to by St. Peter (Acts x. 41).

Ver. 44. **These are the words.**—*I.e.*, "this is the meaning of the words." Probably in vers. 44-49 St. Luke gives a summary of Christ's discourses during the time between the Resurrection and the Ascension. **Law of Moses,** etc.—Perhaps here we have a reference to the Jewish division of the books of the Old Testament—*i.e.*, into the Pentateuch, the Prophets (Joshua, Judges, four books of Kings, and the Prophets, except Daniel), and the Hagiographa.

Ver. 45. **Then opened.**—Cf. ver. 27.

Ver. 46. **And thus it behoved.**—Omit these words; omitted in R.V.; probably an explanatory note.

Ver. 48. **These things.**—*I.e.*, His death and resurrection.

Ver. 49. **The promise of My Father.**—The allusion is to Old-Testament prophecies and

to the discourses in John xiv.-xvi. **Tarry ye.**—Lit. "sit ye down." **City of Jerusalem.**—Rather, "the city" (R.V.). **Endued.**—Rather, "clothed" (R.V.). Cf. Judges vi. 34, where the same figure is used in the original.

Ver. 50. **Led them out.**—*I.e.*, either from the house in which they were, or from the city. **As far as Bethany.**—"Not quite to the village itself, but over the brow of the Mount of Olives, where it descends on Bethany; see Acts i. 12" (*Alford*). "On the wild uplands which immediately overhang the village, He finally withdrew from the eyes of His disciples, in a seclusion which, perhaps, could nowhere else be found so near the stir of a mighty city; the long ridge of Olivet screening those hills, and those hills the village beneath them, from all sound or sight of the city behind; the view opening only on the wide waste of desert-rocks and ever-descending valleys, into the depths of the distant Jordan and its mysterious lake. At this point the last interview took place. 'He led them out as far as Bethany;' and they 'returned' probably by the direct road over the summit of Mount Olivet. The appropriateness of the real scene presents a singular contrast to the inappropriateness of that fixed by a later fancy, 'seeking for a sign,' on the broad top of the mountain, out of sight of Bethany, and in full sight of Jerusalem, and thus in equal contradiction to the letter and the spirit of the gospel narrative" (*Stanley, Sinai and Palestine*). **Lift up his hands.**—Rather, "lifted up His hands" (R.V.), "lift" being archaic. The attitude was that of prayer and benediction.

Ver. 51. **Was parted from them.**—Rather, "parted from them" (R.V.); the verb is not in the passive. **Carried up.**—"Not by an angel or by a cloud, but absolutely and without reference to any particular agent. We must imagine our Saviour slowly rising above His disciples, with His hands still raised in the attitude of blessing, until a cloud conceals Him from the eyes of His followers."—*Speaker's Commentary.*

Ver. 52. **Worshipped Him.**—This can only mean here the adoration which is offered to a Divine Being. **With great joy.**—"The joy of the disciples in consequence of their Master's exaltation, which was a pledge of the victory of His cause, already fulfilled the saying of Jesus, 'If ye loved Me ye would rejoice, because I said, I go unto the Father, for My Father is greater than I (John xiv. 28)" (*Godet*). "A prelude to Pentecost" (*Bengel*). **Amen.**—Omit this word; omitted in R.V.; probably a liturgical addition.

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 1—12.

The Empty Tomb.—None of the evangelists describe the rising of Jesus from the dead, but all of them assign it to an hour early in the morning of the first day of the week, before the visit of the women to the tomb where He had lain. They came to the place as the day began to dawn, but Jesus had already left the tomb. The rising of the Sun of Righteousness anticipated the dawn of the natural day. Three classes of persons are here mentioned as having relationship with Christ, each possessing special characteristics—the women, the angels, and the apostles.

I. **The love of the women.**—As soon as the Sabbath was past and the darkness of the night was about to give way to the coming day, the band of holy women assembled together and set out for the tomb, carrying the spices with which they proposed to anoint the body of their Lord. Love to Him made them regardless of their own comfort, and generous in their gifts to Him, and drew them together into holy fellowship one with another. Bountiful provision had been made by others already for embalming the body of Jesus, but they will not be satisfied unless they are allowed to join in showing this last mark of affection for Him. It is the motive that animates us that gives value to the offerings we make to God or the services we seek to render to our fellows. Love to Christ is the one strong emotion that distinguishes these women all through the incident here recorded, but in the course of the strange experience through which they passed many other emotions and feelings rose to the surface. On their way to the tomb they were anxious about being able to carry through the work on which they were bent. The stone that sealed the tomb was large, and they wondered who would roll it away for them. Yet, after all, the obstacle existed only in their

imaginations, for when they reached the tomb the stone was rolled away. In like manner many of the obstacles that our imaginations conjure up as likely to hinder our service of Christ or of our fellows disappear of themselves if we press on resolutely in the path of duty. Feelings of surprise, perplexity, and fear filled their minds when they came to the tomb and found it open and empty, and had a vision of angels; but these feelings were succeeded by great joy as they realised the fact that He whose lifeless body they had come to embalm had risen from the dead, in accordance with the prophetic words He had spoken in Galilee, but which they had been unable to understand. Love to Jesus kept alive a spark of faith within their hearts, and they gradually attained to that spirituality of mind which enabled them to grasp spiritual truths and to understand the deep significance both of Christ's death and of His resurrection. In obedience to a very natural impulse they hastened to convey the news of the resurrection to their fellow-disciples. Yet, as often afterwards in the experience of those who proclaim the gospel, their message did not win immediate credence; the faith which filled their hearts did not find entrance to those of others, and the tidings they brought seemed as idle tales. In their disappointment the words of the prophet may well have recurred to their minds, "Lord, who hath believed our report?"

II. **The kindly ministrations of the angels.**—As angels heralded the birth of the Saviour, so was it fitting that they should herald His rising from the dead. On the one occasion their message was that He who was Lord of all had deigned to assume our nature and appear in fashion as a man; now they proclaim Him as the conqueror of death, and as having entered into a glorified existence and delivered from the weaknesses and limitations of the condition which he had for a time accepted. They appear as guardians of the tomb where He had lain, and reveal, by their words and manner, their deep interest in the mystery of the redemption of the human race by the sufferings and death of their Divine Lord. They can scarcely understand the slowness of these disciples in comprehending the great fact of the resurrection, and their words are almost a reproof—"How could it be thought that the Living One could remain among the dead, or could be long holden of the bands of death?" Very beautiful and tender is the way in which the minds of the disciples are gradually prepared to receive the assurance that Christ had indeed risen. Had He appeared to them at once in living form, as they journeyed to the tomb, or had He presented Himself to them at the instant they stood by it and found it empty, the sudden shock of wonder and joy might have been too great for them; but in His love He caused the truth to distil slowly into their minds. First, the sight of the empty tomb prepared them for some great event that had happened, and then the message of the angel filled their hearts with wonder, joy, and hope. It is as we are able to bear it that spiritual truth is communicated to us.

III. **The unbelief of the apostles.**—Blameworthy as was the reception which the apostles gave to the first tidings of the resurrection, their unbelief shows us that nothing but the actual fact of Christ's having risen from the dead could have produced the change in them which they subsequently underwent. Men whose minds were so unprepared for the event were not likely to have been the subjects of hallucination. Their doubt tends to "the more confirmation of our faith." One indication of incredulity is that the apostles did not go at once and in a body to verify the reports which the women had brought them. St. Luke speaks merely of St. Peter as setting out to visit the tomb, while the fourth evangelist tells us that he himself was the only one who accompanied him. The intensity of feeling which animated him is indicated in his "running" to the tomb. He who had sinned so grievously against his Master is not afraid at the thought of the possibility of meeting Him, for his mind is cleansed and strengthened, and his

love quickened, by the genuineness of his repentance. He saw that the tomb was empty, and that the grave-clothes were carefully folded up and laid aside. It cannot be that enemies have violated the sanctity of the grave and taken away the body. Can it be after all that the tidings the women brought are true, and that these signs of deliberation and care indicate that the Lord, come to life again, has divested Himself of the habiliments of the grave, as no longer fit for Him? Yet a little while and the wonder which this sight has aroused will be dissolved in joy, as the penitent apostle again beholds the face of his Master. The last time he saw Jesus was at the moment when he was strenuously denying that He knew the Man;—then "Jesus turned and looked on Peter." The circumstances and emotions of this first interview between the disciple and the Lord after the resurrection are not revealed to us; they are a secret, known only to them. Holy reticence concerning the most sacred moments of our lives is not inconsistent with full and open testimony to the Saviour.

SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS ON VERSES 1—12.

Vers. 1-3. I. **The love and devotion manifested by these holy women.**—(1) In their visiting the tomb at early dawn; and (2) in the preparations they had made for embalming the body of their Lord.

II. **Their surprise and distress at finding the tomb open and the body of the Lord Jesus no longer in it.**—That which should have given them encouragement and hope was only a ground of anxiety and sorrow.

Ver. 4. "*Much perplexed.*"—Parallel between the announcement of the Nativity and that of the Resurrection. 1. On both occasions heavenly visitants speak words of encouragement and hope to anxious, expectant souls. 2. On both occasions attendant circumstances are related at length, but a veil of mystery hangs over the beginning of the Incarnation and of the Resurrection of the Lord.

"*Two men.*"—The supposed discrepancies in the number of the angels seen near the sepulchre of Jesus are effectively dealt with in the well-known words of Lessing: "The evangelists do not count the angels. The whole grave, the whole region round about the grave, was invisibly swarming with angels. There were not only two angels, like a pair of grenadiers who are left behind in front of the quarters of the departed general; there were millions of them. They appeared, not always one and the same, not always the same two; sometimes this one appears, sometimes that; sometimes at this place, sometimes at that; sometimes alone, sometimes in company; sometimes they said this, sometimes they said that."

Vers. 5, 6. *The Living not Among the Dead*—1. A gentle remonstrance. 2. The announcement of a fact.

Ver. 5. "*The living.*"—The *Living One* and the Cause of life, for He said, "I am the Resurrection and the Life" (John xi. 25).

The Living Sought Among the Dead.—Who comes under these words of rebuke, and does this now?

I. **It is done, in the worst sense, by those whom Scripture calls "the children of this world."**

II. **The same question has its application to formalism in religion.**

III. **We approach more nearly to its first meaning when we speak of its bearing upon the case of doubters.**

IV. **Upon those Christians who never advance beyond the cross and the grave into the clear light and full glory of a risen Saviour.**—*Vaughan.*

Ver. 6. "*Is risen.*"—The Resurrection is (1) a restoration of the

broken bond between soul and body; (2) a continuation of the previous life (cf. ver. 39); and (3) a glorification of the former existence.

Ver. 7. "*Sinful men.*"—According to Jewish phraseology the Gentiles are denoted by this epithet. The sins of the Jews themselves are recalled by the word "delivered."

Ver. 8. "*They remembered His words.*"—By which we are taught that, though they had made little proficiency in the doctrine of Christ, still, it was not lost, but was choked up, until in due time it yielded fruit. —*Calvin.*

Ver. 9. "*Told all these things.*"—Compare their journey to the sepulchre with their return from it. Then their hearts so heavy with sorrow; now "anointed with the oil of gladness above their fellows."

Ver. 10. "*And other women.*"—Among them was Salome, the mother of James and John (Mark xvi. 1), and perhaps also Susanna, mentioned by St. Luke in connection with Joanna in viii. 3.

Ver. 11. "*They believed them not.*" —The verb is in the imperfect and implies *persistent* incredulity. "They *disbelieved* them."—*Farrar.*

Ver. 12. "*Wondering.*"—The sight which produced merely *wonder*, in the case of St. Peter, produced *belief* in the case of St. John (John xx. 8).

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 13—43.

The Eyes of the Understanding Opened.—Jesus appeared in the morning first of all to Mary of Magdala the second appearance was vouchsafed to Peter. Then, in the course of the day, He appeared to the two brethren who journeyed to Emmaus, and in the evening to the eleven apostles—or rather, to the ten. In the two last of these cases we notice a difference in the order of procedure followed by Jesus. In the one case He opened the eyes of the understanding first, and the eyes of the body second; in the other He reversed this order.

I. **The eyes of the understanding opened.**—In thus varying the order of revelation Jesus was but adapting His procedure to the different circumstances of the persons with whom he had to deal. The two friends who journeyed to Emmaus did not notice any resemblance between the stranger who joined their company and their beloved Lord of whom they had been thinking and speaking. "Their eyes were holden, that they should not know Him." The main cause of this, we believe, was sheer heaviness of heart. Sorrow made them unobserving. They were so engrossed with their own sad thoughts that they had no eyes for outward things. They did not take the trouble to look who it was that had come up with them; it would have made no difference though the stranger had been their own father. It is obvious how men in such a mood must be dealt with. They can get outward vision only by getting the inward eye first opened. The diseased mind must be healed, that they may be able to look at what is before them and see it as it is. On this principle Jesus proceeded with the two brethren. He accommodated Himself to their humour, and led them on from despair to hope; and then the outward senses recovered their perceptive power, and told who the stranger was. "You have heard," He said in effect, "a rumour that He who was crucified three days ago is risen. You regard this rumour as an incredible story. But why should you? You believe Jesus to be the Christ. If He was the Christ, His rising again was to be expected as much as the passion, for both alike are foretold in the Scriptures, which ye believe to be

the Word of God." These thoughts having taken hold of their minds, the hearts of the two brethren began to burn with the kindling power of a new truth; the day-dawn of hope breaks on their spirit; they wake up as from an oppressive dream; they look outward, and, lo! the Man who has been discoursing to them is Jesus Himself.

II. **The eyes of the body opened.**—With the ten the case was different. When Jesus appeared in the midst of them they were struck at once with the resemblance to their deceased Master. They had been listening to the story of Cleopas and his companion, and were in a more observing mood. But they would not believe that what they saw really was Jesus. They were terrified and affrighted, and supposed that they had seen a spirit—the ghost or spectre of the Crucified. The first thing to be done in this case, therefore, manifestly, was to allay the fear awakened, and to convince the terrified disciples that the Being who had suddenly appeared was no ghost, but a Man; the very Man He seemed to be, even Jesus Himself. Not till that has been done can any discourse be profitably held concerning the teaching of the Old Testament on the subject of Messiah's earthly history. To that task, accordingly, Jesus forthwith addressed Himself, and only when it was successfully accomplished did He proceed to expound the true Messianic theory. Something analogous to the difference in the experience of the two and of the ten disciples, in connection with belief in the resurrection, may be found in the ways by which different Christians now are brought to faith. The evidences of Christianity are divisible into two great categories, the external and the internal; the one drawn from outward historical facts, the other from the adaptation of the gospel to man's nature and needs. Both sorts of evidence are necessary to a perfect faith, just as both sorts of vision, the outward and the inward, were necessary to make the disciples thorough believers in the fact of the Resurrection. But some begin with the one, some with the other. Some are convinced first that the gospel story is true, and then, perhaps long after, waken up to a sense of the importance and preciousness of the things which it relates. Others, again, are, like Cleopas and his companion, so engrossed with their own thoughts as to be incapable of appreciating or seeing facts, requiring first to have the eyes of their understanding enlightened to see the beauty and the worthiness of the truth as it is in Jesus. They may at one time have had a kind of traditional faith in the facts as sufficiently well attested. But they have lost that faith—it may be, not without regret. They are sceptics, and yet they are sad because they are so, and feel that it was better with them when, like others, they believed. Yet, though they attempt it, they cannot restore their faith by a study of mere external evidences. They read books dealing in such evidences, but they are not much impressed by them. Their eyes are holden, and they know not Christ coming to them in that outward way. But He reveals Himself to them in another manner. By hidden discourse with their spirits, He conveys into their minds a powerful sense of the moral grandeur of the Christian faith, making them feel that, true or not, it is at least *worthy to be true.* Then their hearts begin to burn; they hope that what is so beautiful may turn out to be all objectively true; the question of the external evidences assumes a new interest to their minds; they inquire, they read, they look, and, lo! they see Jesus revived, a true historical person for them—risen out of the grave of doubt to live for evermore the sun of their souls, more precious for the temporary loss coming—

> "Apparelled in more precious habit,
> More moving, more delicate, and full of life,
> Into the eye and prospect of their soul"—

than ever He did before they doubted.—*Bruce.*

SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS ON VERSES 13—43.

Vers. 13-32. *The Unrecognised Presence: a Narrative with a Typical Value.*

I. **Christ draws near while they talk of holy things.**

II. **He draws them out by His inquiries.**

III. **He draws out the meaning of Scripture.**

IV. **He draws out their invitation.**

V. **Then He goes in to tarry.**—Sits at meat, He blesses and breaks and gives the bread.

VI. **Two forms of revelation.**—1. He makes their hearts burn. 2. He makes Himself known in breaking bread.

The Journey to Emmaus.

I. **The way.**

II. **Christ with us by the way.**

III. **Christ opening the Scriptures to us by the way.**

IV. **Our hearts burning in us in the company of Jesus.**—1. The kind. 2. The degree. 3. The effects of this emotion.—*Arnot.*

The Journey to Emmaus.

I. **Two sad travellers on the way to Emmaus.**—1. The afternoon journey. 2. The sympathising Companion. 3. The willing Teacher. 4. The risen Lord.

II. **Two glad travellers on the way to Jerusalem.**—1. A rapid, eager, impatient return. 2. Glad and joyful hearts. 3. A journey to convey glad news to others.—*W. Taylor.*

These Two Men Types of Disciples in Calamity.—If these two men are types of disciples suddenly visited by calamity, the Saviour's dealings with them are manifestations of His permanent method of comforting such as they.

I. He first brings them in a human way to open their hearts to Him. This is, however homely, really always the first step to comfort.

II. Then comes the light of His Divine instruction.

III. A still greater comfort was in store for them—the discovery of the Lord Himself.

IV. There are two lessons from this story: 1. One as to experience. The "burning" heart had been a token of His presence with them all the way. The real signs of the Divine life are within. 2. One as to service. After vision comes work. Worship is followed by service to their brethren. Christ in the heart, then the heart in Christ's work.—*Macleod.*

Ver. 13. "*That same day.*"—They left the city, probably, between three and four o'clock in the afternoon, as they arrived at Emmaus (six and a half miles) before sunset.

Ver. 14. "*They talked together.*"—In the verse following they are spoken of as "reasoning," so that we may conclude that they were not altogether of one mind on some of the questions that engaged their attention. As the one of them named Cleopas in the ensuing dialogue speaks in a tone of deep melancholy and despair, it is probable that his companion was inclined to a somewhat more hopeful view of matters.

Ver. 15. "*Jesus Himself drew near.*"—A fulfilment of the promise, "Where two or three are gathered together in My name, there am I in the midst of them" (Matt. xviii. 20).

I. **Jesus draws near when His friends speak of Him.**

II. **How much we miss when we meet if we fail to speak of Christ!**

III. **What a blessing every hour of conversation would be if we would only talk together of Christ and His kingdom!**—*Miller.*

Ver. 16. "*Their eyes were holden.*"—When Jesus in temptation holds our

eyes, so that the soul neither can nor may recognise, that is good, for soon will joy, light, and comfort, follow; but when the sinner holds his own eyes, and will not recognise Jesus, that is evil, for he incurs danger of eternal blindness and darkness.—*Starke.*

Ver. 17. *The Sadness of The Two Disciples*—1. The sadness of bereavement. 2. Sadness caused by mental perplexity. 3. Sadness of a shattered career. In our modern world, too, nominal disciples are to be found vexed by almost the same kind of sadness. There is (1) the sadness of mental perplexity; (2) the sadness of conscience; (3) that which arises from the want of an object in life. Christ draws near to them (1) in His Church; (2) in His Scriptures; (3) in His sacraments.—*Liddon.*

"*Sad.*"—The sadness was an indication (1) of unbelief, but also (2) of love. They parted very reluctantly with their faith in Him for whose memory they cherished so strong an affection. The unbelief which is conjoined with sadness is likely to be transformed into faith, while that which is devoid of regret or sorrow is likely to undergo no change for the better.

Ver. 18. "*Hast not known.*"—So absorbed are they in grief that they take for granted that every one else must be fully acquainted with the events that have occasioned it.

Vers. 19-24. *Causes of The Disciples' Despondency*:—

I. **The memory of the holy and beneficent life of Jesus so sadly brought to an end by His ignominious death.**

II. **The defeat of the hopes of redemption through Him which they had cherished.**

III. **The perplexing nature of the reports which had reached their ears.** All that they certainly knew being that the tomb was empty, but that no one had seen Christ.

Vers. 25-27. I. **Rebuke** (ver. 25). II. **Instruction** (vers. 26, 27).

Ver. 25. "*O fools and slow of heart.*"—Folly in the state of their minds; slowness in the state of their affections.

Ver. 26. "*And to enter into His glory.*"—What had seemed to them incompatible with the glory of the Messiah was precisely the appointed way thereto. The Lord does not mean that He is already entered into His glory, but speaks as one who has come so near to His glory as that He sees already the suffering behind Him.—*Van Oosterzee.*

The Need of a Suffering Saviour.

I. It was necessary that Christ should suffer, in order to His work of **salvation.**

II. In order to the exercise of **sympathy with us.**

III. To fit Him for His office of **sovereignty.**—*Ker.*

Ver. 27. "*The things concerning Himself.*"—Doubtless He began with the *prot-evangelium* (Gen. iii. 15): the Seed of the woman who would inflict a deadly wound on the serpent, yet be Himself wounded. Then there were the types of the brazen serpent (Numb. xxi. 9; John iii. 14), and the paschal lamb (Exod. xii. 46; John xix. 36). Nor can we doubt that Isa. liii. was the central prophecy which he expounded. Add to these the psalms of the Crucifixion (cf. ver. 44), the 22nd (Matt. xxvii. 46; Mark xv. 24) and the 40th (Heb. x. 5); then, further, Dan. ix. 26, and the book of Jonah, and Zech. xii. 10, xiii. 7.

Types of Christ.—The likeness of the promised Mediator is conspicuous throughout the Sacred Volume; as in a picture, moving along the line of history in one or other of His destined offices—the dispenser of blessings, in Joseph; the inspired interpreter of truth, in Moses; the conqueror, in Joshua; the active preacher, in Samuel; the suffering combatant, in David;

and, in Solomon, the triumphant and glorious king.—*Newman.*

The Testimony of the Scriptures to Christ.—In studying the Scriptures for Himself He had found Himself in them everywhere (John v. 39, 40). He had now only to let this light which filled His heart ray forth from Him.—*Godet.*

Ver. 28. "*He made as though.*"—The reasons for this were (1) that this was in accordance with the assumed character of a stranger under which they had hitherto known Him, and (2) that, having enlightened their minds, He would make trial of their affections.

"Our blessed Saviour pretended that He would pass forth beyond Emmaus; but if He intended not to do it, yet He did no injury to the two disciples, for whose good it was that He intended to make this offer; and neither did He prevaricate the strictness of simplicity and sincerity, because they were persons with whom He had made no contracts, to whom He had passed no obligation, and in the nature of the thing it is proper and natural, by an offer, to give an occasion to another to do a good action, and, in case it succeeds not, then to do what we intended not; and so the offer was conditional" (*J. Taylor*).

Ver. 29. "*They constrained Him.*"—Consider on how many occasions besides the present it is intimated that constraint is necessary on the part of those who would secure the abiding presence of Christ. "Pass not away, I pray Thee, from Thy servant," was the respectful language of the patriarch Abraham (Gen. xviii. 3); and, "I will not let Thee go, except Thou bless me," was the earnest exclamation of the patriarch Jacob (*ibid.*, xxxii. 26). "Depart not hence, I pray Thee, until I come unto Thee, and bring forth my present, and set it before Thee," said Gideon to the angel (Judges vi. 18). "I pray Thee, let us detain Thee" was the entreaty of Manoah and his wife (*ibid.* xiii. 15).—*Burgon.*

Entertaining Strangers.—They had not been "forgetful to entertain strangers" (Heb. xiii. 2), and they found a reward in being privileged to entertain the Son of God unawares.

"*Abide with us.*"

I. **But for this request, Jesus would have passed on.**—He loves to be constrained.

II. **We have so little of Christ's fellowship, because we do not ask for it.**—If we wanted more we would get it.

III. **If we were truly to desire Christ to abide with us always, He would never go away.**—*Miller.*

Our Need of Christ in Later Life.—The words of the text may suggest to us our special need of the presence and the power of Christ in the different, and particularly in the later, periods of our life. We begin with—

I. **Our special need of Christ in the midday of life.**—When we have to say of ourselves that it is "towards noon," or when it is the early afternoon with us; when we are in the midst of life, when the burden of its cares, and its anxieties, and its responsibilities, rests upon us; when we are feeling most of its strain and stress;—then there are two peculiar perils besetting us. 1. *That of over-confidence.* We are tempted to speak thus to ourselves: "I am through the heats and excitements of youth; I have met and mastered its temptations (to impurity, intemperance, irreverence, etc.); I may relax a little now, I may trust myself now, I may give the reins to inclination now"; and then comes indulgence, which begins by being occasional and harmless, and may end by being habitual and harmful. Then comes declension, and, it may be, even downfall. 2. *Absorption.* The claims of the business, of the household, of friendship; invitations to various gratifications, each of which is innocent, but which, in their aggregate, are seriously taxing;—these are so urgent and imperative, so present and powerful, that they absorb; they absorb time, strength, energy; so much so

that too little is left for worship, for communion, for the direct service of Christ; and the soul is starved, Christian character is weakened; we are in serious peril of "losing those things which we have wrought" (2 John 8). There is, therefore, abundant need for us to make an earnest and continual appeal to our Divine Lord, to address Him thus: "Abide with us, O Master, for it is noontide with us; uphold us by Thy power in the way of heavenly wisdom and holy service; so help us to abide with Thee that we shall never become lax and careless, but shall always watch unto prayer; so aid and influence us that we shall not let this world wind its silken cords around us, but that we shall always give the strength and wealth of our hearts and lives to Thee. Be Thou ever near us, to shelter and support us, or our spirits will be bent under the burden and scorched by the heat of the day."

II. **Our special need of Christ in the late afternoon of life.**—There comes a time when our life has passed its meridian, and when the sun is sinking in the sky; it is late afternoon with us. Our powers are not what they were, physical or mental. We cannot walk or work as long, or so well, as we could; we cannot think as hard, or remember as easily, or sustain our attention, as long as we once could; we are falling behind those whom we were once before—our sons and daughters can do many things better than we can. Peculiar perils belong to this hour of life. 1. That of *pride* or of *vanity*, of refusing to acknowledge to ourselves or to admit to others the waning of our power. 2. That of *envy*, a disposition to disparage the work of those who are younger and stronger than ourselves, to depreciate their work, or, at any rate, to withhold the admiration and delight which a more generous spirit would cherish in what they are and in what they do. Here is special need for looking up and praying, "Lord, abide with us, for it is toward evening; we are not what we were, and we need Thy abounding grace that we may be true enough and humble enough to recognise that our days and powers are failing—in order that we may be able to welcome those who are coming up, to honour and to love them, and to work heartily and happily with them, to say with joy, like Thy servant John, 'They must increase, but we must decrease'" (see John iii. 29, 30).

III. **Our special need of Christ in the late evening of life.**—"The day is far spent." This is that (1) we have *been privileged to witness.* We have known those who have gone through all the hours of the day, and have gone down into the night of death. Their health failed them; the infirmities of age overtook and imprisoned them; life lost its charm for them, its worth to them; their treasures were taken from them; nothing was left, of this world's giving, in their hands: only the future beyond the grave remained to them. What they needed was a Divine Friend whose hand they could hold as they took their last steps on earth, and as they entered the "silent land." "Abide with us," they had reason to say, and (in some language *did* say) "for the day is far spent"; let us know and feel that Thou art near. And their Divine Lord did not fail them; He was with them at the end, and unto the end; and in their "glorious Leader's" presence they went down with tranquil, if not triumphant, spirit into the darkness of death, to awake in the bright and glad morning of immortality. (2) The hour will come—and it will arrive sooner than we think—when *we also shall have occasion to say, "the day is far spent"*; when we shall have had our earthly heritage, shall have played our part, shall have nothing more to look for as citizens of the present time. Well, indeed, will it be for us if then we have some resources of which time has no power to rob us—which are imperishable and unfailing; well, indeed, if we can then look up confidently to a Divine Saviour, and say, "Lord, abide with us, for the day is far spent; our friends have fallen from us, or gone beyond us; but be

Thou ever with us, that we may have fellowship with Thee. Earth has no enjoyment for us; but speak Thou Thine own peace to our souls [John xiv. 27]; we have no prospects this side the grave, but let us hear Thy voice, speaking of the many mansions in the Father's house, and we shall be at rest." "They constrained Him . . . and He went in." Our Lord will need but slight constraining on our part. Let us only wisely accept Him in the earlier years, and be loyal to Him through all the periods of our life, and He will not withdraw Himself from us at the last; having "loved His own," He will "love them to the end"; He will—

"Meet us in the valley
When heart and flesh shall fail,
And softly, safely, lead us on,
Until within the veil."

Clarkson.

The Evening Prayer of Christ's Friends.—Some of the feelings which must have been in the hearts of those who presented it.

I. **Grateful interest in a spiritual benefactor.**

II. **A desire to have such conversation continued.**

III. **The presentiment of something more than they had yet seen or heard.**

Circumstances in which this request may be offered by us:—

I. It is suitable to the whole earthly life of every Christian.

II. It is suitable to those who are suffering under some special despondency of spirit.

III. It is suitable to those who are approaching the evening of life.—*Ker.*

Ver. 30. "*Took bread,*" *etc.*—The position of superiority which Jesus had assumed in the rebuke He had administered and in His exposition of the Scriptures, authorises Him to act as the head of the household. Though nominally a guest of the disciples, He becomes their host and they become His guests.

Ver. 31. "*Their eyes were opened.*" But before this the eyes of their understandings had been opened. Christ did not reveal Himself until He had effected the principal object of His appearing to them at all.

"*Vanished out of their sight.*"—The expression is a peculiarly strong one, implying a sudden and supernatural disappearance. His body was now approaching its glorified condition, and obeyed more freely than before the will of His Spirit. Moreover, we must recollect that, properly speaking, Jesus was already no longer *with them* (ver. 44), and that the marvel lay rather in His appearance than in His disappearance.—*Godet.*

Ver. 32. *The Emmaus Journey a Type of Christian Experience.*

I. **The pilgrimage of sadness.**—Darkness comes because of (1) the trial of doubt and unbelief; (2) the trial of solitude and bereavement; (3) that of backsliding and repentance.

II. **Light and gladness return** when (1) we seek this blessing in company; (2) when we seek it through the Scriptures; and (3) when we seek it at the Communion Table.—*Cairns.*

The Emmaus Road.

I. **This question suggests the difficulty which we commonly have in understanding the real importance of many incidents in our lives at the time of their occurrence.**

II. **Religious emotion is a precious gift of God.**—Only it should always be made to lead to something; it is a means, not an end.

III. **The duty of making an active effort to understand truth as it is presented to us.**—*Liddon.*

"*Did not our hearts burn?*"—The heart of the genuine believer, who has communion with Christ, burns with joy, with hope, with longing, and with love.

"*While He opened.*"—It is a good sign for their inner growth that at

this moment it is not the breaking of bread, but the opening of the Scriptures, which now stands before the eye of their memory.—*Van Oosterzee.*

Burning Hearts.—The cause and the effect of successful Christian work.

I. **The cause—the burning heart of the teacher.**—Spiritual intercourse with Jesus Himself will give it.

II. **The result—the burning heart of the taught.**—The fire will communicate itself to the hearts of those we teach.—*Stock.*

Ver. 34. "*Appeared to Simon.*"

I. **A proof of Christ's love.**—1. In the implied forgiveness of his heinous sin. 2. In appearing to him first of all the apostles. 3. In appearing to him without any witness.

II. **A special boon to Peter in banishing his doubts and fears, and in absolving him from guilt.**

III. **Welcome news to the disciples of Emmaus.**—1. It confirmed their faith. 2. It restored Peter to their fellowship. 3. It prepared them to expect fresh revelations of the Risen Lord.

Ver. 36. "*He Himself stood.*"—With this word begins the evening appearance, which we unhesitatingly venture to name the crown of all His appearances on the Resurrection-day. Till now He has satisfied individual needs, but now He comes into the united circle, into the first Church of His own.—*Van Oosterzee.*

The Salutation of the Resurrection.

I. **Peace: the storm is over.**

II. **Peace: old associations are to be revived.**

III. **Peace: the prospect will never be darkened.**

Ver. 37. "*Terrified.*"—The evening hour, fear of the Jews, and anxieties concerning their own future, may well have tended to increase the feelings of surprise and alarm occasioned by the sudden appearance of Christ and the supernatural character of His entering into the room where they were.

Ver. 38. "*Arise in your hearts?*"—How gentle is the rebuke! Jesus speaks of the "thoughts" or questionings arising, as it were, of themselves in the hearts of the apostles, as doubts and perplexities for which they were not fully responsible. The heart is not under our control; but out of a pure heart, which is strong in faith, no such perplexities and gainsaying thoughts can rise.

Ver. 39. "*Behold My hands,*" *etc.*

I. The **identity** of Him who appeared to them with Him whom they had known.

II. The **reality** of the appearance.

"*Handle Me and see.*"—1. An encouragement for the timid. 2. A direction for the perplexed.

I. **Our Lord's indulgent treatment of mistakes and imperfections in religious belief.**

II. **His sanction of the principle of inquiry into the foundations of our religious belief.**

III. **The direction which our Lord purposely gave to the thoughts of His perplexed disciples.**—*Liddon.*

Ver. 40. "*He shewed them His hands and His feet.*"—Not merely as the signs of His crucifixion, for the identification of His body, did the Saviour show His wounds, but manifestly as *signs of victory,* proofs of His triumph over death. Moreover, therefore—and this is properly the deepest sense of His entering salutation — as the *signs of peace,* the peace of the sacrificial death, of the completed atonement.—*Stier.*

Ver. 41. "*Believed not for joy.*"—It was doubtless belief that He had really risen that filled their hearts

with joy; yet the excess of joy hindered their faith. It seemed too good news to be true.

"As St. Luke had excused the sleeping of the apostles in Gethsemane, on the ground of their being overcome by sorrow, so here he attributes the difficulty they experience in believing to the excess of their joy" (*Godet*).

Ver. 43. "*Did eat before them.*"—Not because He had need of food for the body, but because they had need of faith for the soul.

MAIN HOMILETICS OF THE PARAGRAPH.—Verses 44—53.

The Church Below, the Lord Above.—These closing verses of the Gospel are a summary of all our Lord's instructions during the forty days before the Ascension. The Gospel reaches its climax in the Resurrection. The space between it and the Ascension, as well as the Ascension itself, are but the results of the Resurrection manifested in act, and as a kind of border-land between the two halves of our Lord's activity, are even more properly narrated as the foundation of "all that Jesus" continued "to do and teach" since then, than as the crown of His earthly ministry.

I. **The teachings of the forty days** (vers. 44-49).—1. *First was taught Christ's relation to the Old Testament.* He recalled His former declarations, which had sounded so enigmatical then, and were so clear now. The teaching here summarised bore both upon His dignity and office as the Christ and the Fulfiller of the Old-Testament revelation, and on the inmost purpose and contents of that revelation as in all its parts pointing onward to Him. Law, Prophets, and Psalms make up the whole Hebrew Scriptures. So Jesus saw Himself in all the sundry times and divers manners of the older Word of God. The fact of prediction of Him as Messiah, and of His death and resurrection as being the very heart of the Old Testament, is attested by His own authority, which cannot be waived aside as of no moment in the controversies now raging as to these books. Nor can we understand the significance of the Old Testament by dint of learning only. There must be a moral and spiritual preparation; Jesus must open our minds, that we may understand the Scriptures. 2. *Instruction in the universal blessings flowing from His death and resurrection.* If any gross idea of outward dominion, secured by the sword, lingered in the disciples' minds, this teaching would end them, unfolding, as it did, the sublime prospect of a universal monarchy, of which the instrument was the proclamation of the Cross and Resurrection, and of which the blessings were repentance and the remission of sin. The weapon seems feeble, but it is mighty, because it is in His name, "based on His revealed character and nature, wielded by His authority, and in dependence on His might, and in a very real sense as representing Himself. 3. *The personal duty of the disciples.* "Ye are witnesses of these things." For the first disciples that was true in a way that it cannot be for us. And it is significant of much that the office was declared by Jesus to be that of witnesses; for witness implies "fact." Not theories nor principles, nor speculations, nor dogmas, still less imaginations and fancies, had they to speak. The gospel is a veracious record of things that actually happened, and is established, not by argument, but by testimony. In a sense, each generation of Christians has the same office and responsibility. We cannot say we have seen, but we can say we have felt. Every man who has himself tasted that the Lord is gracious, is able, and therefore bound, to proclaim Him to others. The Church, in all its members, is Christ's witness. 4. *The gift of the needful qualifications.* "The promise of My Father" is that Holy Spirit which is the last of all the Father's promised gifts, of which He had spoken so abundantly in the last discourses in the upper room, and which, according to

St. John, He had breathed upon them when He rose. The possession of that gift is our fitness for the office of witnessing.

II. **The departure.**—Did the disciples know, like Elisha, that "the Lord would take away their Master from their head that day"? At all events He knew, and the knowledge would breathe peculiar tenderness and urgency over His unrecorded words. "He lifted up His hands and blessed them." Like the high priest when he had finished his service, He lifted up His hands over the congregation to give the blessing. The hands which had been pierced with nails, the arms which had been stretched out upon the cross, were spread above the bowed heads of the little group, and dropped gifts which fulfilled His benediction. His whole work is summed up, and His whole heart revealed, in that last attitude and act. Sweet, and ever to be remembered, are the last looks of our dear ones. Jesus would have this remembrance of Him stamped deepest on all our hearts. In the act of blessing, our Lord withdrew a step or two, and then, possibly, with arms still lifted in benediction, "was carried up into heaven." The word employed implies a slow, continuous motion, which we cannot but contrast with the whirlwind which swept Elijah to heaven. The mortal needed to be lifted by an external and forcible agency from his native earth. But Jesus was going to His own home, and needed no aid to raise Him thither, whence it had needed the strong compulsion of His infinite love to bring Him down. The Ascension witnesses to the completeness of His sacrifice, to its acceptance by the Father, to the presence within the veil of our all-powerful Intercessor, to the elevation to supreme authority of the Man who is our Brother. The eternal Word ascended where He had been from before the beginning, but the manhood is new to the throne of the universe. Where He is, there shall also His servants be; and as He is, so shall they, too, become. The disciples showed us how we should think of the Ascension, when they worshipped Him, thus declaring Him to be the Son of God, and then turned all the more joyfully to their homely tasks, and drowned the pain of parting in the flood of joy which poured over their spirits. They made all life worship, every place a temple, and every act and word adoration.—*Maclaren.*

SUGGESTIVE COMMENTS ON VERSES 44—53.

Vers. 44-49. *The Last Instructions.*

I. **He recalls His earlier teaching,** and causes them to understand the fulfilment He had effected of the prophecies of the Old Testament.

II. **He gives directions for the future, and promises help to enable them to accomplish their task.**

Ver. 44. "*While I was yet with you.*"—The expression is worthy of notice, for it proves that Jesus felt that His departure was already accomplished. He was no longer with them otherwise than exceptionally. His abode was elsewhere.—*Godet.*

Vers. 45. "*Opened their understanding.*"—This teaches us (1) that Christ has immediate access to the human spirit and power over it; and (2) that the interpretations of the Old Testament given by the apostles have the direct sanction of Christ.

"*That they might understand the scriptures.*"—The Word of God by itself is not sufficient; for our due understanding of it we need the illumination of the Spirit.

Vers. 46, 47. *The Substance of Christian preaching.*

I. **Good tidings** founded upon the work of the Saviour—His sufferings and His resurrection.

II. **The duty** of repentance.

III. **The privilege** of the remission of sins.

Ver. 46. "*To suffer and to rise.*"—Here, as everywhere, suffering and glory are inseparably connected.

Ver. 47. "*Beginning at Jerusalem.*"—1. Jerusalem was the centre of the then existing kingdom of God. 2. It contained the worst of sinners—those who had insulted and crucified the Saviour.

Ver. 48. "*Ye are witnesses.*"—That which renders testimony valuable is its being given by witnesses who are (1) possessed of full information; (2) who are sincere in character; and (3) who are sober-minded. In all these points the apostles were admirably qualified for their office as witnesses, and their willingness to seal their testimony with their blood shows us how firmly convinced they were of the truths they taught.

Ver. 49. "*The promise of the Father.*"—The gift of the Spirit as bestowed on the day of Pentecost. This gift promised in Isa. xliv. 3; Jer. xxxi. 33; Ezek. xxxvi. 27; Joel ii. 28.

An Equipment of Power.

I. **The Lord's servants must be men of power.**

II. **An equipment of power is provided.**—1. It is power. 2. It is power from on high. 3. It is not developed out of ourselves. 4. Nor is it obtained by connection with the world.

III. **Power is to be waited for.**—*Roberts.*

Ministerial Power.—Some of those powers of the Spirit which experience teaches us to be of most avail in meeting the exigencies of ministerial life in our time.

I. The power of **holiness.**
II. The power of **knowledge.**
III. The power of **a single aim.**
IV. The power of **sympathy.**
V. The power of **the Divine commission.**—*Vaughan.*

Vers. 50-53. *The Ascension.*

I. **The identity of the crucified and risen Saviour.**

II. **We, too, must ascend, to be judged, to stand before the throne.**

III. **The goal of the Church's hope is the return of the ascended Christ.**—*Markby.*

Christ's Departure.

I. **He ascended by His own power and His own will.**

II. **He alone left behind Him a finished work.**

III. **He ascended to begin the second work.**—That of intercession—distinct from the work on earth, but yet of one piece with it, and serving to accomplish the same great end.

IV. **By His Spirit, He still works in the world.**

V. **He has marked a way for us into heaven.**—A track of light goes through the darkness into the very heart of heaven.—*Nicoll.*

The Ascension.

I. **The gospel is all fact.**—All our gospel mysteries, are, in their basis and substance, facts. The Christian year is a commemoration of facts. The Ascension is an event, a historical fact.

II. **It is something more.**—It is not mere history; it is a life. Like each gospel fact, it presupposes or else predicts every other. The Ascension presupposes the Incarnation, and predicts the Advent. The Ascension says: 1. Your home is not here. Yonder is your rest and your home. Home is a presence more than a place. Where Christ is, is the soul's true home. 2. Seek Him yonder, correct all that is superstitious and carnal in your religion.—*Vaughan.*

Ver. 50. *Christ's Last Hours on Earth.*

I. The last **meeting.**
II. The last **journey.**
III. The last **promise.**
IV. The last **blessing.**
V. The last **glimpse.**—*W. Taylor.*

"*He lifted up His hands.*"—As a father, who is about to leave his children, gathers them together once more, speaks to them, and then raises his hands to bless them, so, at the moment of re-entering into the invisible world, Jesus imposes a benediction upon the head of His apostles which will remain upon the whole Church until His return.—*Godet.*

Ver. 51. "*While He blessed them.*"—As Elijah left his mantle with Elisha, by whom he was seen when taken up, so Christ, at His ascension, left a blessing with His apostles and with His Church.—*Wordsworth.*

"*Carried up into heaven.*"—By His resurrection He had taken up again His human life which He had voluntarily given up to death; by His ascension He resumes His celestial life, His life in *the form of God* (Phil. ii. 6), which He had laid aside on becoming incarnate in human form. And in the new condition in which His exaltation places Him, His human life is so interpenetrated by His Divine life that it becomes the adequate and eternal manifestation of it. "I see," said the dying Stephen, "the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God" (Acts vii. 56). "The fulness of the Godhead dwells in Him in a bodily form" (Col. ii. 9).—*Godet.*

The Parting Blessing.—The Saviour's life had been one of continual blessing. And here we have the last impression left on the apostles' minds of their Lord's feeling towards them. His last thoughts were with them, His last energies were for them.

I. **This thought is the inheritance of the Church.**—The "while" bound Christ and the Church together, in the power of a last impression, for the rest of their earthly lives. His ascent on high does not sever Him in blessing from us.

II. **But besides connection there is activity.**—The ascended Christ is a blessing Christ, unchanged by His exaltation. He uses His exaltation for the benefit of His friends.

III. **The thought we should have of the other world is, therefore, one of joy.**—To the Christian the unseen must ever be a place of blessing. The place whither Jesus went must partake of His aspect in entering it. The disciples knew, from their Master's teaching, something of the awfulness of the other world. But now He leaves them something better to think of. He is to bless from heaven. It was to be henceforth a place in which they had the dearest interest. He blessed in ascending, and if so, what but blessing could they look for from that other sphere?—*Power.*

Ver. 52. "*They worshipped Him.*"—No one can reasonably doubt that this worship was offered to Him as a Divine being. St. Luke only uses this word in another place in his gospel (iv. 7, 8), and there it is used in the sense of rendering the honour due to God alone. In the Acts it is employed in the same sense (vii. 43, viii. 27, xxiv. 11, x. 25, 26).

Ver. 53. "*In the Temple.*"—The narrative of St. Luke begins in the Temple and ends in the Temple.

"*Praising and blessing God.*"—The two essential elements of worship.

I. **Adoration.**—Acknowledgment of the Divine perfections.

II. **Thanksgiving** for all the benefits He has bestowed.

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