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repeated that the argument rests upon no one passage, but on the concurrence of all.

The testimony is vast, incidental, and undesigned, it is concurrent in the four Gospels, and it is accumulative. It is not a question of how much or how little this verse or that can be forced to mean, but of the tenor and drift of His teaching as a whole, and what theory is possible concerning Him whose whole teaching looked this way.

Can anything less resemble the proper attitude toward God of His loftiest creature than this habitual and characteristic attitude of Jesus? Can any attitude better befit Him who should soon be adored as God, manifest even while veiled in flesh?

G. A. CHADWICK.

THE PARABLE OF THE UNJUST STEWARD.

WHAT is the real meaning of this very curious parable, and of the lesson our Lord draws from it? As usually taught, it is something like this:—A steward, threatened with dismissal, and unable to find any other means of support, resolves to use his remaining time in office for his own advantage. For this purpose he conspires with his masters' tenants to cheat that master, trusting to their gratitude, or fear, for his future maintenance. This he does so cleverly as to earn the praise of his master, who, though himself the loser by the man's dishonesty, cannot but admire the "shrewd and successful wickedness" by which the steward has turned his position of trust to his own personal profit. So (says our Lord, as generally interpreted) I advise you to use the good things of this world: "make friends" by their means, who shall receive you, when these good things fail you at death, into the everlasting habitations of God.

This is the interpretation of the parable usually given

in commentaries and devotional works, and it is supported by the general drift of the early Fathers, when they have occasion to speak of the passage. Thus Tertullian explains the "debtors" as the sinners whom the wise Jews laboured to convert. Origen carefully explains our Lord's reference to the superior "prudence" of the "children of this generation," as the genuine, but carefully guarded, recognition of a real fact. S. Ambrose explains the "friends" made with the "unrighteous mammon" as signifying the poor. And the pseudo-Chrysostom gives an ingenious explanation of the parable: "As often as a man, feeling his end approaching, lightens by a kind deed the load of his sins, either by forgiving a debtor his debts or by giving bountifully to the poor,—dispensing those things which are his Lord's, he conciliates to himself many friends, who will afford him real testimony before the Judge, not by words, but by demonstration of good works; nay, moreover, will provide for him, by their testimony, a resting-place of consolation." It is needless to multiply examples from ancient and modern commentators: in press and pulpit, such are the general lines on which this parable has generally been and is generally interpreted.

But every commentator thinks it necessary to preface this explanation with an apology. "The circumstance of conduct of great wickedness being put forth by our Lord as representing the wisdom that should be in His elect," proves an initial stumbling-block to almost every one. It is found possible to explain it, either by showing that our Lord was not occupied with the moral aspect of the steward's conduct or by supposing (as Dr. Isaac Williams, from whom the above words are quoted, does) certain unknown circumstances that might, if known, supply us with a reason for our Lord's choice of the story. But we cannot well explain obvious moral difficulties by drawing on an unlimited reservoir of unknown and unknowable cir-

cumstances; and, after all explanations have been given, we find it hard to realise the Lord of all good as telling, detail by detail, a story of successful villany, and drawing from it, as a moral, the superior wisdom displayed by the wicked when compared with the good.

Nor is this all. We might perhaps explain this difficulty away if it stood alone; but, as a matter of fact, it is only one out of many obstacles to the usual interpretation. Let us look at the parable, in its details and its context, and see how it will bear out the idea that it is a picture of shrewd, long-headed, successful, worldly wisdom.

In the first place, we can hardly avoid observing that it is one of a series of parables, and that it is connected with its predecessor, the Prodigal Son, by one remarkable word,—*διασκορπίζων*, "wasting." The conduct that led to the prodigal's fall was exactly the same as that which led to the steward's ruin. In the former parable the lessons include that of the result of misuse of God's gifts,—which are there regarded as *οὐσία*,—that which belongs to us. We can hardly avoid supposing that there was some similar thought in the second too. Indeed, the circumstances of the case would make the lesson more obvious, if there were anything in the parable to call attention to it. The son misused what was, at least, colourably his own: the steward wasted what belonged to his master. We have no right, in this connexion, to forget that this continued correction of errors that might arise from each parable taken by itself, is a marked characteristic of the whole group of parables to which that on which we are commenting belongs. It is perfectly obvious as regards the first three: the connexion of thought may make us reasonably suspect that it extends to the fourth also. From this point of view, the first lesson of the Parable of the Unjust Steward concerns the misuse of God's gifts,—or, rather, of the things that belong to God (*τὰ ὑπάρχοντα*

αὐτοῦ) entrusted to our care. Now the popular interpretation fails to find any place for this element: it is the story, from the common point of view, of the manner in which a rogue who has persistently misused his masters' goods managed to cover his retreat, and avoid his natural punishment.

But let us look at the parable itself. How far does it bear out the belief that it is a description of an instance of "shrewd and successful wickedness," set before us by Christ for an example, in reference to its prudence, but not to its morality? I, for one, can see no proof of the wisdom —in any sense of the word—of this untrustworthy servant. He had been squandering his master's property,—not, perhaps, a rare fault. But he had contrived to squander it so that detection, when it came, found him absolutely unprovided for. Dr Farrar notes this in his Commentary on S. Luke, and points out that it is in accordance with the usual facts as to the improvidence of vice. This I believe: but what becomes, in that case, of the supposed contrast between the *providence* of vice and the improvidence of virtue, on which the moral of the Parable is supposed to hang? In the vices that led to his fall, the steward was not only a knave, but a fool: he lost his character and had nothing to show for it, but stood face to face with the choice of honest hard labour or beggary. We can hardly believe that He who "knew what was in man" meant to give us a picture of a rogue, whose foolish dishonesty had brought him to dishonour, turning suddenly wise, though not honest, at the pressure of impending ruin. We can hardly believe that He who traced the man's ruin to his own evil ways meant to give us a picture of his recovery by the very same vices that had brought him to misery. If so, admitting a connexion between this Parable and that of the prodigal son, the moral of this story would stand out in curious contrast to that of its predecessor. And the story,

as told by Christ, will not possibly bear any such interpretation. See what it is that the steward does, and how it fares with him.

He has no refuge but one: his incapacity on the one hand, and his pride on the other, shut him out from any means of sustenance save one only. And that one is—the very dishonesty that has failed to provide for him, has been at last detected, and has brought him to ruin. He has no reason to think he can escape detection now: if, when he was trusted, he could not cheat his master with impunity, how can he do so when his actions are sure to be closely watched? Nevertheless, he simply repeats his old devices. In combination with his Master's debtors, he contrives another cheating plan,—with what object? "That, when I am put out of the stewardship, they may receive me into their houses." This servant under notice of dismissal showed little knowledge of human nature. Did he reckon on the gratitude of his lord's tenants or on their sense of their own interest? Men are not wont to show much thankfulness for the good other men do them for their own benefit; and the partner of a rogue in a matter of joint profit does not usually give much help to his fellow in consideration of their past union. On the other hand, self-interest would hardly lead the tenants to help the steward, when, an officeless and discredited man, he had lost all opportunity of either benefiting or injuring them. It is a significant fact that our Lord tells us nothing as to the success or failure of the unjust steward's scheme, but passes on at once to the comment made by the master when he discovered the trick.

"When he discovered the trick." He did then discover it,—else he could not have commented on it. From my point of view of the parable, there was no need to say that this dishonesty of the steward, like the others that had gone before it, was detected and baulked. It *could not* have

escaped detection. The praise, then, of the steward's "prudence" was given by a master who spoke "from the safe side of the fence"; he had made sure that he was not injured, and, if so, it is hard to see where the dishonest servant found his profit. In fact, the Master's comment appears to be pure sarcasm,—the perhaps somewhat cruel taunt of one who had before his eyes proof of the evil conduct of one whose crimes he before knew by accusation only.

In full agreement with this view of the matter is our Lord's "moral" drawn from the parable. "And I say unto you, make unto yourselves friends by means of the mammon of unrighteousness, that, when it fails, they may receive you into the everlasting tabernacles." We can hardly avoid noticing this peculiar phrase τὰς αἰωνίους σκηνάς—"the everlasting tents." A tent is by its very nature transitory, and the true interpretation of the parable must take account of this remarkable expression.

There is, however, a third point of view from which the story must be considered if we want to get at its real meaning. It occurs embedded in the midst of moral teaching, and this teaching is very evidently connected with it. Now if the popular interpretation were correct, we should expect to find this teaching dwelling on the right use of riches and expanding the lesson as to our "making friends by means of the mammon of unrighteousness." Instead of this, it not only passes entirely by this lesson, but uses the machinery of the parable for inculcating a lesson completely at variance with the popular view of the story. The steward had been unfaithful, and the Christ goes on to condemn unfaithfulness. He had tried to "serve two masters"—his lord and the tenants of his lord, and the Christ goes on to show that such service is an impossible thing. It is as hard to believe that our Lord meant to link with this teaching a moral depending for its effect on the assumption that the unrighteous steward succeeded

in making unfaithfulness pay, and turned his divided allegiance to his own profit, as it is to avoid the conclusion that, when He sums up the whole lesson in the words "Ye cannot serve God and mammon," He means to leave us, as the teaching of the parable, a lesson of whole-heartedness, singleness of service, and sincerity, very far indeed from the means by which the steward attempted to retrieve his fallen fortunes. If we take the popular interpretation, the lesson runs thus: "Imitate the prudence of the steward, who played off his master's and that master's tenants' interests against each other, and contrived to recover the ground lost through unfaithfulness by unfaithfulness still greater. Be ye faithful, and remember that ye cannot serve two masters." The story, thus interpreted, and the teaching based on it are not merely unconnected; they are repugnant to each other. And the repetition, in the teaching, of the characteristic words and phrases of the parable shows that our Lord meant us to regard them as connected. If we take the hints conveyed to us by (1) the marked omission of any statement as to the result of the steward's action, (2) the indirect statement that the master found out what had been done, and (3) the phrase "everlasting tents," we can find but one way of interpreting the parable. It stands out as sarcasm pure and simple. Our Lord told a story of a foolish, unfaithful servant, whose folly remained with him to the end, and who, even when suffering the results of his dishonesty, could find no other means of escape from them than a repetition of the very dishonesty that had brought them on. We shall see presently the particular lesson that He seems to have desired to enforce; for the present we content ourselves with observing that the teaching in *vv.* 10–14 is natural and forcible, with a force rendered all the greater by its repetition of the characteristic words of the parable, if the latter be sarcastic. If it be not, it is almost impossible to reconcile the story and the teaching that follows it.

When we trace out the further teaching of our Lord in the same context, we come upon something else that seems to confirm our view of the matter. "The Pharisees, who were covetous, heard all these things, and they mocked Him," or "sneered at Him" (ἐξεμυκτήριζον αὐτόν). Our Lord meets their mockery with a fourfold answer: (1) He tells them that they justified themselves before men, but were an abomination to God. (2) He tells them, in effect, that the law, the prophets, John Baptist, and "the kingdom of heaven" had, successively, brought God's law before them with ever stronger force, and obviously means to imply that they were earning some condemnation by neglecting it. (3) With a connexion by no means obvious on the surface, He presses home on them the absolute sanctity of the law of marriage. (4) With even less apparent connexion, He adds the parable of Dives and Lazarus, the fifth and last of the series beginning with the lost sheep.

Now I am far from saying that it is necessary to show a vital connexion between all these parables. It would be quite in accordance with our Lord's manner, and the manner in which the evangelists record His teaching, to suppose them unconnected,—spoken perhaps at different times, and brought together only for convenience. But I think it can be shown that there are strong reasons against treating this special group in that way: (1) The whole five parables are peculiar to S. Luke. (2) The first three are very obviously directly connected, and the fourth, as we have seen, is connected with the third by a remarkable word as well as by a certain continuity of thought. In the same way the fifth is directly connected by the evangelist with the teaching that obviously springs from, and is just as obviously intended to drive home the meaning of, the fourth. It is a peculiarity of the fifth that it is not introduced by any statement as to our Lord's utterance of it,

such as is usual at the beginning of parables, but runs on continuously with the teaching that precedes it. (3) In any case, an interpretation that shows a vital connexion between the various parts of what seems to be a continuous discourse is more probably correct than one that obliges us to split up and divide the discourse into separate and unconnected parts.

There is only one view of the meaning of the Parable of the Unjust Steward that, so far as I can see, will at once account for its own peculiarities, bring it into relation with the teaching that followed it, blend the various parts of that teaching into a harmonious whole, and give it a natural place in the series of parables of which it appears as a member. We have already seen reason to believe it sarcastic; now we may go further and suggest that it was, in the first instance, political. With politics in the highest sense of the word we know that our Lord did concern Himself. His prediction of the fall of Jerusalem naturally leads us to believe that He was interested in the causes that led to that fall. From this point of view we may well believe that in the Parable of the Unjust Steward He described the usual policy of the religious Jewish world of His day, and that it was this description of their temporising conduct, as they played fast and loose with the law of God in order to preserve their temporal prosperity, that roused the anger and sneering mockery of the "Pharisees, who were covetous," who cared so much for the things of this world that they sacrificed for them the kingdom of God. It must not be forgotten that these words were spoken near the end of our Lord's ministry, and probably after He had perceived the full and dangerous hostility of *all* the Jewish schools of thought. In this connexion we can hardly forget (1) that the Sadducean party assigned the danger of hostile action on the part of Rome as a reason for our Lord's death; and (2) that the Pharisees, in general

little friendly to the party then in power, made common cause with the Sadducees and Herodians against Him.

From this point of view our Lord, in the Parable of the Unjust Steward, describes the Jews of His generation. They had a trust from God, and they had misused it. They had the Law, and neglect of the Law had brought them the captivity. They had the Prophets, and Jerusalem had "killed the prophets, and stoned those that were sent to her"; and the natural result of all this had been the troubles that had culminated in their national enslavement. And now they were in fear of greater dangers. They knew that they might at any time lose the wretched remnant of independence they possessed. But their old sins did not forsake them. They still temporised with unrighteousness; they still made the word of "God of none effect" through convenient traditions. You can read them in the Talmud, you can find them in Maimonides—these subtle tricks by which they served the letter of the law while breaking it in spirit, and strove to keep the blessings of God while avoiding the responsibilities He laid upon them. And now, when our Lord spoke, they were the servants of the Herods, striving to maintain, in the pseudo-Jewish kingdom of that family, the shadow of their old independence. They were the servants of Rome, ready to own (as they did before Pilate's tribunal) Cæsar as their king, and to cringe to their conquerors for the sake of obtaining what they still ventured to call "their place and nation." And to do so, they were quite ready to set aside the law of God and falsify their trust anew. The most marked and characteristic case of this, perhaps, was the acquiescence of the Jewish religious world in the Roman deposition and appointment of the high priests on the one hand, and in the unspeakably foul marriage traditions of the Herods on the other. The gospel narratives show us the succession of high priests in a state of chaos, and the Jewish annals confirm this impres-

sion. The protest of John Baptist against the adultery of Herod Antipas makes it pretty plain that the other religious teachers of his time gave it at least the assent of silence. Like the Unjust Steward they had lost their stewardship through unfaithfulness; like the Unjust Steward they were unfaithful to the end. The fourth parable gives the political side of the national unfaithfulness, whose other results appear in the other stories of the series. They *all* deal with various results of the one fundamental national sin.

We can easily see this as to the three great and closely associated parables that head the group. There can be no doubt that in these our Lord was primarily dealing with the "publicans and sinners"—the great body of neglected and irreligious Jews, whom the religious leaders of the time were content to leave as the people who knew not the law, and were accursed, and might as well remain so. The missionary life of Judaism was dead—dead at home, so that religion contentedly remained the possession of a few. In the last of those three stories our Lord gives us a view of the ordinary religious man of His time, in the envious elder brother, caring only for his own safe abiding in his father's home.[1] He follows this up with the sarcastic Parable of the Unjust Steward, in which He sets forth the political side of the same policy. He strikes the lesson home by drawing from this parable the two lessons of faithfulness and single-hearted service; and he meets the mockery of the Pharisees by following up these lessons with others. He reminds them (1) that this policy might win them the good opinion of men, but that God saw through it. As a matter of fact,

[1] It is perhaps worth observing, in this connexion, that, from this point of view, the third and fourth parables mutually illustrate each other. (1) We have in the waste of the prodigal, when compared with that of the steward, a picture of the common sin of all the Jews; but the "publicans and sinners" had repented and come to Christ, the others had not. (2) The fourth parable *corrects* the false inference that might have been drawn from the account of the elder son. It estops all attempts of the Pharisees to claim that they had continued faithful to God, and needed no repentance.

it won them only the good opinion of their fellow countrymen. The Roman writers prove clearly that the policy of the Jews of that day did not impose on their masters in the imperial city. (2) He sums up the ways in which God had given them that teaching which was their trust for the world, dwelling both on its present urgency and its everlasting and perfect claims. (3) In association, apparently, with the name of S. John Baptist, He calls their special attention to *one* part of that law—the law of marriage. It must be remembered that the fate of His cousin had sunk deep into the human heart of Christ, and this fact, joined to the occurrence of S. John's name in the immediate context, makes it probable that the allusion here is to the adulteries of the Herods. At any rate this view blends best with the rest of the context, and gives a connected meaning to a long passage which, on the ordinary interpretation, is chaos and no more. (4) Finally, He clinches the whole with the great picture of Dives and Lazarus—the well-to-do reputedly pious Jew of that generation, living, in spite of "Moses and the prophets," in self-regarding ease, and the neglected and miserable remnant of the people, forgotten by those "rich" in blessings, but not forgotten by God. So He ends in a manner where He began; but whereas at first He dwells only on God's welcome to the "lost" ones, He leads the way up to the other side of the problem, and shows at last the guilt and punishment of the "unfaithfulness" that issued alike in personal and in national selfishness and breach of trust.

This, I claim, is a reasonable and connected view of the whole discourse, and gives to the parable of the unjust steward its natural place and meaning. But, whatever we may think of the details, the popular interpretation of that parable seems to me absolutely indefensible. It fills the story with difficulties. It ignores plain hints in the story itself. It cuts off the parable from its whole context,

throwing it out of relation to the moral teaching that follows it, and making the connexion of the parts of that teaching with one another unintelligible. It takes the parable out of the heart of a series, all the other members of which are evidently related to one another, and sets it by itself as a thing apart.

I know only one objection that can be urged on the other side. It may be said that it was not our Lord's habit to speak sarcastically. Speaking for myself, I know nothing of "habits" in Christ; I can trace human nature, but not individual personal character, in Him who is to me Perfect Man. But, waiving this, one may ask whether sarcasm is wrong in itself, or only in general inexpedient. If it be not wrong in itself, our Lord's use of it here is plainly parallel to several other cases, in which he made a *rare* use of certain modes of action that are in most cases undesirable. Contemptuous language is in general inexpedient, but there may be cases in which it is wholly deserved and wholly suitable; in *one* such case our Lord spoke wholly contemptuously of one man. By our Lord's action in the wilderness, and by his general practice, He showed that it was in general inexpedient for Him to use His miraculous power for His own protection; but *once*, on the precipice at Nazareth, He broke through His usual custom. He came for mercy, not for judgment; yet in *one* famous case He worked a miracle to destroy. It is in general morally inadvisable to "pretend"—yet every one knows of cases in which it is plainly right; and *once*, and once only, we find our Lord doing so, in lovingkindness, when He "made as though He would have gone further." Personally, I see no reason to condemn sarcasm in its proper place: it is often a very suitable means of giving a cutting edge to a wholesome truth. And I am not sure that Christ never elsewhere used sarcasm; irony, at any rate, is its very near relation, and there is a clear irony in His words, "I came not

to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance." But let it be granted that sarcasm is rarely justifiable: I am satisfied then with believing that Christ used it rarely, as here. There were obvious and special reasons against teaching *this* lesson to those particular hearers in any more direct way.

I may add that, if this were the primary meaning of the parable, it is easy to understand its memory being lost at an early period. The Fathers, as we have seen, generally treated it exactly as most commentators do to-day: seeing that, from any point of view, it directly referred to local and special circumstances that had passed away long before any commentator wrote about it, it would be strange if a tradition as to its true meaning had survived.

Our Lord says nothing as to how the Unjust Steward's last dishonesty fared. For those of whom Christ spoke the parable history soon filled up the blank, and its answer was the fall of Jerusalem and ruin of the Jewish nation. The plain moral of the story is just that which our Lord draws from it, and it applies to us all,—that unfaithfulness, temporising, half-hearted service, means double ruin. We can as little serve two masters as the Jews of our Lord's day, but we are quite as fond of trying to do so.

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THE POSITION OF APHEK.

(A) *Judges* i. 31. Neither did Asher drive out the inhabitants of Accho . . . nor of Aphik.

(B) 1 *Sam.* iv. 1*b*. [Israel] pitched beside Eben-ezer, and the Philistines pitched in Aphek (BA^{a}PHEḲ).

(C) 1 *Sam.* xxix. 1. The Philistines gathered all their armies to Aphek (APHEḲAH). (Cp. 1 *Sam.* xxviii. 4. The Philistines gathered themselves together and came and pitched in Shunem.)

(D) 1 *Kings* xx. 26. Ben-hadad numbered the Syrians and went up to Aphek (APHEḲAH) [with the intention of fighting in the plain (MISHOR), *ib.*, *v.* 23].