

The Nomenclature of the Parables.

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THAT common denominator, by which we have been guided in our study of the parabolic symbolism, sheds light on other aspects besides this of the parabolic record and its doctrine. The fact it bears witness to, of a subject common to all the Synoptic parables, the development of which is traced throughout their whole sequence, gives us a unifying element, its relation to which should prove the distinguishing feature of each single parable. The history we have been following in these parables of our Lord is that of man's spiritual nature, from the point where it is only potential, or at most dormant, to that where it has attained its full development and glory, honoured with the fellowship, and entrusted with the authority of its Maker.

We might well expect that this would have been seen all along, and have its reality and importance kept before us, in the common designations, as well as in the popular expositions, of the several parables. As a matter of fact, however, the case is very far from answering to these legitimate expectations. Quite one-half of the Matthean parables, and a full third of the Lucan ones, are generally referred to by names, which distinctly withdraw our attention from the main and unifying point of their teaching. Our present purpose is to study this popular nomenclature, and to note its influence on parabolic exposition.

At the very outset we are confronted with what warns us to be careful in our criticism. For our Lord's first parable, although clearly picturing man's spiritual state in the several soils therein described, and expounded in this sense by its divine Author, is referred to by Christ Himself as the Parable of the Sower. It is one of two designated by name in the New Testament, the other being that of the Tares. There is this common to them both, that they were spoken at the very outset, and so prior to any development, of the parabolic teaching. Appearing thus, these parables might the more readily be named after the leading figure, or special word, which their several narratives present.

It is, however, only the first of them to which their Author Himself gives its name. And as it

opens with the sower going forth to sow, so the other which immediately follows, opens with a man sowing good seed, and his enemy thereafter sowing tares in his field. Now it is these two sowers who make possible every element in the parabolic doctrine. But for the Sower of the good seed, and that enemy who sows the tares, the whole atmosphere and environment of man's spiritual development would disappear. There is then a special fitness in Christ's drawing attention, by the designation He applies to His first parable, and by the way in which He opens His statement of the second, to these the great opposing forces in that spiritual world to which all His parables relate, and the contrast between which is the special subject of their opening triad.

These two initial parables are distinguished in having Christ as their first expositor; and, in as far as relates to the former of them, the divinely authentic interpretation has been generally followed by all expositors since. And consequently this parable has as a rule been expounded in relation to the several soils it sets before us. Thus Dr. Bruce says it is meant to teach that there are diverse classes of hearers, corresponding to the four sorts of ground; while Dr. Dods regards it as explaining why the good seed fails so frequently to fructify, by showing that this depends upon the nature of the soil upon which it falls.

The same good guidance has not been so generally followed in regard to our Lord's interpretation of His second parable, that of the Tares. Christ distinctly says in His exposition of its imagery, 'The field is the world,' but the perversity of expositors, even good ones, has led them to maintain that this field is the Church. The spirit of the Old Testament chronicler, whose whole view of his nation's history is coloured by the ecclesiasticism of Jerusalem, lives in the view of this parable taken by Augustine, Luther, and Beza, not to mention others, and retained by several modern expositors. It was the exigencies of a desperate position that led the Donatists to maintain the other view, which, with his strong good sense, Dr. Dods has accepted. It is enough

for us that we have its Author's clear exposition in favour of regarding this parable as having reference to those influences for good or evil which characterize the whole field of humanity, and thus have a wider range than any Church on earth, although the contrast between them is here set in that full light which the coming of the Son of Man has brought to bear upon the kingdoms of light and of darkness.

There is a premonition of the many ecclesiastical controversies with which the interpretation of this parable has become associated, in the fact that its original hearers have shown, by the designation which they gave it, how far the trying tares had got a foremost place in their minds. When, similarly affected, we substitute here an uncalled-for guidance on the treatment of heretics for the plain warning of the parable in regard to the evil influences affecting us all every day, we clearly miss the point of the parable. And we cannot say but that its ancient designation, by diverting attention from the two sorts of seeds, has had its share in producing this result.

But whether this be so or not, there can be no doubt that the Net of that third parable, whose immediate connexion with the initial two, others have recognized before us, has proved a snare for more than one excellent theologian. It is the spirit of a narrow-sighted ecclesiasticism that causes Dr. Trench here, as in the case of that tare-sown field, to see but the Church, where a much wider net, that of humanity itself, is clearly indicated. But why Dr. Bruce should tilt against the sane judgment and common sense of Grotius, in contending that the net is the kingdom, is not so easy to understand by those who have felt the inspiration of his wide unconventional outlook and wise spiritual insight. For surely it is the deadening blight of the letter that, in the formula, 'the kingdom of heaven is like unto a net,' is put forward, to eclipse the sunlight of Christ's own expository reference to the end of the world. But here, again, one must not overlook the fact that this parable of the good and bad Fish has not yet got rid of its puzzling entanglement with the net. If owing its position in the Matthean record to its symbol, that of course must be the fish, but it is possible that its distinctly eschatological reference may account for its postponement here, till after parables with more relation to the course of man's life on earth.

The Matthean parables of growth have not, like those of the great distinction, caused any misapprehension of their meaning through their names. There has been but some slight difference of terms, too, in their exposition. Thus, while the Mustard Seed for Dr. Trench is Christ, for Drs. Bruce and Dods it is the kingdom; and while for the former the Leaven is the gospel, for the latter divines it is the Christian morality and spirit, affecting the world through personal influence. Mark's Parable of the Growing Corn has had its true place and value assigned it by Dr. Bruce, but why Trench and he should severally put so much weight on the secrecy, and sourness, associated with the growth here depicted, as to designate the parable in view of these features, is not so easy to appreciate. The point of the parable is to portray the development of the kingdom in the individual, as the growth of the mustard does that of the visible Church, and the diffusive potency of the leaven that of the Christian spirit. Now Growing Corn as a name denoting the growth of good seed, seems best to meet all the needs of the case.

We meet with misleading names again, in the next group of the Matthean parables, in the cases of those of the Hid Treasure, and the Pearl of Great Price. For it is the Treasure Finder, and the Pearl Merchant on whom we must fix our attention, to read aright the lessons taught us here. It is man's finding and winning of the kingdom, that is the subject of these parables, as it is these actions, rather than the value and nature of either the treasure or the pearl, which are here described. And in the latter of the two parables, the usual formula itself puts us on this the right interpretation, for it reads, 'the kingdom of heaven is like unto a man that is a merchant, seeking goodly pearls.'

The conventional designations have, however, led expositors to extract as much as possible from the little that is said about the thing found or sought for, to the neglect of what is plainly told us about the seeking. The mention of a field in the earlier parable again enables Dr. Trench to get a sight of the Church, although his conscience seems to trouble him lest this should prove to be the Bible. In every exposition of these parables, full justice and more is done to every glint of light shed upon the Treasure, and the Pearl. Fortunately there is no serious difference, if any,

as to what these represent, the kingdom and its value, nor can these parables be expounded at all, without some fair share of justice being done to the active agents who figure in them. But it shows how entirely apart from their place in the development of the parabolic doctrine they have been treated, to note that Dr. Dods says their purpose is to exhibit the incomparable value of the kingdom of heaven, and that Dr. Bruce sums up their meaning as the kingdom of God the *summum bonum*, in both of which cases we see that it is the Treasure and the Pearl, rather than the Finder and the Merchant, that are most considered.

It is the light got from Matthew's next parable, that most encourages us in the view we take of these two. For here, in this Parable of the Unmerciful Servant, or Unforgiving Debtor, as Dr. Dods prefers to call it, we have a third parable on finding, here conjoined with again losing, which beautifully crowns and interprets the other two. It proclaims grace to be the thing found, and in furnishing us with a condition of its retention, draws our attention to the conditions of its procural too. That, in our judgment, is the main point of the preceding parables, explaining, as it does, the need for the purchase of a field, in connexion with an already discovered treasure.

Now in view of this, it is distinctly interesting to note how these two sets of conditions, those of the getting, and of the keeping, are associated in the expositions given of this parable. Thus Dr. Bruce regards the implacable spirit as not only justly forfeiting, but as precluded from any receipt of mercy; Dr. Trench says of the forgiven man, that in showing mercy he renounces no right, having pledged himself on asking and accepting grace to show it. And Dr. Dods finds this parable proclaiming in the plainest language, that the mere cancelling of our guilt does not save us, and that unless the forgiveness of God begets within us a truly gracious spirit, we cannot be owned as His children.

It is such expositions as these, showing how close is the connexion between what relates to the finding and the forfeiting of grace, which enable us to see how suitably this Parable of the Unforgiving Debtor follows that of the Pearl Merchant, and to appreciate how much underlies that parting with all, required in order to the purchase of the

treasure-field and of the pearl. But it would seem as if the connexion, between this, the last of the Galilean parables, and the two earlier finding ones, had escaped expository notice.

The Matthean parables on the divine claims, or man's duties towards God, are, like those on growth, in no way misleading, through their ordinary titles of the Labourers, the Two Sons, and the Husbandmen or Tenants. For it is in these several relationships that the human soul is at this point represented. And hence we prefer the Labourers as a title, to that of the Hours, given this parable by Dr. Bruce.

The expository treatment of these parables attests our contention, that, with the finding group, we step from the sphere of morality and law into that of grace. Thus Dr. Bruce notes that it is the spirit of the service, rather than the amount of work done, that is held of account in the payment of the labourers, in keeping with which Drs. Trench and Dods find the parable directed against mercenary service, and the bargaining spirit, in man's dealings with his Maker. Again, in the Parable of the Two Sons, Dr. Bruce finds a rebuke of insincerity, and Dr. Trench one of a vain self-righteous profession, while Dr. Dods regards it as commending deeds not words, all alike thus emphasizing its call to a hearty loyalty to God as man's loving Father. And so, too, with the third parable of this group, for all three expositors regard the conduct of the husbandmen as representing man's abuse of the divine trust. Trench says it sets forth the despite done to Jehovah by His favoured people; Bruce that it portrays the truculent ill-treatment of Jesus by the Jews; and Dods that it represents the selfish perversion of sacred duties and official dignity, on the part of men set to maintain and further God's own cause.

The parables of the Wedding Feast and Robe, of the Ten Virgins, and of the Talents, which close the Matthean record, are all somewhat misleading in regard to their titles. The Royal Wedding Guests and the Intruder, the Bridesmaids, and the Trading Servants, are designations which would better indicate their relation to the parabolic doctrine as a whole, for, as we have pointed out, it is the complimentary relationships which these terms denote, with the duties they imply, which constitute the subject of their teaching. Dr. Trench passes censure on the

Wedding Garment, as a faulty name, for the first of these parables, and himself calls it the Marriage of the King's Son, although both names alike divert attention from the real point of the parable. We note with interest Dr. Trench's observation that in these later parables the deity ever figures in a higher rôle. He is thus in turn Employer, Father, Landlord, King, Bridegroom, and Supreme Lord. This is the only contribution to our own view of the parables which we have come across, and we hail it as adding a confirmatory point which we had missed.

Our modern expositors have not failed to do justice to the several notes of warning, in regard to the contempt and abuse of grace, the lack of vigilance, and the neglect of active Christian duty, which these solemn parables afford. Just as the word Virgins led Chrysostom and others strangely astray in their exposition of this parable in the early ages, so has the oil in this parable proved a stumbling-block to some modern expositors, and Dr. Bruce has rendered a good service in showing that it ought to be regarded as a symbol of the means of grace, rather than of grace itself. No less has the wedding robe given rise to various and conflicting interpretations. Theophylact's words 'that the entrance to the wedding-feast being of grace is without scrutiny, but not so the life of those who have entered,' sheds most light on this matter, and shows such interpretations as faith, or charity, to be but partial expressions of what is better denoted as a gracious and righteous disposition, or a character worthy and recognizant of divine grace. Dr. Trench, true to his predilections, finds the Church here doubly symbolized, alike in the bride and in the guests of this wedding-feast. His comparison of the over-confidence of the bridesmaids, and the under-confidence of the unprofitable servant entrusted with the talent, has more to commend it, while Olshausen's remark that 'while the children of darkness are cast into eternal fire, the children of light are cast into outer darkness,' serves to remind us that it is the duties and responsibilities of grace that are set before us in these last three parables.

Turning now to the Lucan record, we find nothing to criticize in the designations of the lost and found parables. Complaint has been made that their main feature as a notable evangelic utterance would be more fitly denoted by the titles of the Good Shepherd, the Good Woman, and

the Good Father. But such names, we can see, would be out of keeping with the unity of the parabolic doctrine. Besides, in view of the divine standpoint from which they regard man's natural condition, we prefer the names, Lost Coin, Lost Sheep, and Lost Son, even to those of the Strayed Sheep, and Prodigal Son, which have more relation to the human side of this subject.

In regard to their exposition, we note that our modern divines seem to be at one, in identifying the elder brother of the Lost Son with the Pharisee, while Trench stands suggestively alone, in considering the woman of the Lost Coin as a symbol of the Church, with her candle representing the Bible. We have our doubts about this strange honour done to the Pharisee, in view of the father's words, 'Son, thou art ever with me,' and since making acquaintance with Mr. G. O. Barnes' suggestion of the Trinity being represented in the agency of the three-one parable, have been no less fascinated by the view that the woman represents the Spirit, than convinced that the Good Shepherd, and the Heavenly Father, are severally represented in the two companion parables.

One is at a loss to understand why the prayer parables, of the Midnight Borrower, and the Importunate Widow, should have come to be so much better known as those of the Friend at Midnight, or Selfish Neighbour, and of the Unjust Judge, as the latter two figures have at most but the impersonal significance of a frowning providence, and are invariably utilized expositively on the score of their unlikeness to the Hearer and Answerer of prayer. It is clearly the petitioners here, as also in the Parable of the Pharisee and Publican, whose conduct furnishes the lessons which these parables are intended to teach. In connexion with their exposition, we note that Dr. Trench does not miss the chance of finding the Church symbolized by the Importunate Widow, an amusingly suggestive and dubiously complimentary similitude.

The parables of the Two Debtors, the Good Samaritan, and Dives and Lazarus, belonging to the typical rather than to the symbolical class of parabolic utterances, give us examples, rather than symbolic pictures, of the effects and fruits of grace, as also of the ungracious character and its fate. They in fact translate into actual life and

experience the figures of Matthew's finding group of parables, revealing in the needs of a robbed and half-dead man, and of a leprous beggar, the real field in which a lasting treasure may be found, and exposing the disaster of neglecting such opportunities of manifesting grace, and winning an immortal prize. Their titles are in no way misleading nor unsuitable to their teachings.

The Lucan parables on the divine claims give us, in that of the Barren Fig-tree, one, the title of which fully explains itself, and a pair by no means so satisfactorily designated. These are the parables of the Pounds, and of the Unprofitable Servants, or of Extra Service, as Dr. Bruce has better named it. The Farm Servant would perhaps best designate the latter, and the King's Pedlars the former parable. For what is set forth in them is severally, the devotion of a hard-wrought but faithful attendant, and the duties of servants, who, with a very small capital, are set to trade by the master who becomes their king. The poor endowment in this case is clearly made with a view to testing the ability of his subjects, in order to their state employment, by the sovereign.

Expositors generally have recognized in the Barren Fig-tree, a symbol applicable alike to the Jews as a nation and to man's personal disposition towards God, although some have contented themselves with expounding it in the former connexion. The resemblance which the Parable of the Pounds bears, in some of its features, to historic incidents in the fortunes of the Herodian family, has led Trench here, as in the former case, to deal mainly with its Jewish bearings, while Dr. Bruce has well turned to account its more helpful personal ones.

The several names under which Drs. Trench and Bruce expound the Parable of the Farm Servant, serve well to show how the parabolic nomenclature may affect parabolic exposition. Trench's Unprofitable Servants is a parable describing, but not prescribing, duties which God might, but does not, exact of His servants. Bruce's parable of Extra Service shows how in the household of a gracious lord, no duties are held irksome or exacting, because a loving devotion is the cardinal virtue of all its members.

The story of the Rich Fool presents no less solemn a parable of judgment, than any of the final three in Matthew's Gospel, and on it many

an impressive sermon has been preached. Its teachings are obvious, its exposition easy, and its title suitable enough. That of the Great Supper represents no less forcibly the fate of those rejecting God's grace, than the other does that of those serving Mammon. Even more to the point than its suggested name of the Excuses, or the title it generally bears, would be that of the Recusant and Ready Guests, for it is the indifference of the former that is its main feature, as it is through the cheerful acceptance by the latter of a gracious host's invitation that we have a sunny side put upon this dark parable of doom.

In the name we give the Parable of the Unjust Steward, may be discerned something like a lack of that very sagacity which this parable commends. For thus absurdly designated, it has naturally given occasion for such misconceptions of its meaning, as found their extreme expression in the charges made against its attributed Christian teachings, by that philosophic but prejudiced apostate, the Emperor Julian. While Christ, by His use of the term unjust as descriptive of this steward, passes condemnation on his unscrupulous conduct, it is for his prudence and alertness that he is commended, as an example to be imitated by the servants of God. Clearly, then, the title of the Sagacious Steward would best suit this parable, and remove the ground for those misapprehensions to which its usual designation is fitted to give rise.

Matthew and Luke have each his respective introductory formula for the parables recorded by them, while Mark uses one which approaches that of Matthew. That of Matthew is 'The kingdom of heaven is like (or likened) unto,' and that of Mark, 'is as if,' while Luke begins, in more narrative fashion, with 'A certain man.' Four parables in Luke, one in Mark, and one in Matthew begin interrogatively; and two in Matthew, the Sower, and the Husbandmen, severally 'Behold,' and 'Hear,' while Mark in his report of the Sower parable begins with both these words. It is undoubtedly the general adoption of the first leading word after these formulæ to designate the several parables, that has occasioned the use of the misleading titles of which we have taken note, but it is the lack of a synthetic view of the parabolic doctrine that has hitherto prevented the adoption of a series of more helpful, because more consistent, names.

THE PARABLES, DESIGNATED IN TERMS OF THEIR
SYMBOLISM FOR THE HUMAN SOUL, INDI-
VIDUALLY OR COLLECTIVELY.

The Great Distinction.

Soils, good and bad, Mt 13.	Lost Coin, Lk 15.
Seeds (Wheat and Tares), Mt 13.	Lost Sheep, Lk 15.
Fish, good and bad, Mt 13.	Lost Son, Lk 15.

Growth and Prayer.

Growing Corn, Mk 4.	Midnight Borrower, Lk 11.
Mustard Seed, Mt 13.	Importunate Widow, Lk 18.
Leaven, Mt 13.	Pharisee and Publican, Lk 18.

Grace and its Conditions.

Treasure Finder, Mt 13.	Dives and Lazarus, Lk 16.
Pearl Merchant, Mt 13.	Good Samaritan, Lk 10.
Unforgiving Debtor, Mt 18.	Two Debtors, Lk 7.

The Divine Claims.

Labourers, Mt 20.	King's Pedlars (Pounds), Lk 19.
Two Sons, Mt 21.	Farm Servant, Lk 17.
Tenants (Husbandmen), Mt 21.	Barren Fig-tree, Lk 13.

Judgment and Doom.

Rebels, Royal Guests and Intruder, Mt 22.	Recusant and Ready Guests, Lk 14.
Bridesmaids, Mt 25.	Sagacious Steward, Lk 16.
Trading Servants (Talents), Mt 25.	Rich Fool, Lk 12.

Literature.

SOCIAL LIFE AT ROME.

SOCIAL LIFE AT ROME IN THE AGE OF
CICERO. By W. Warde Fowler, M.A.
(Macmillan. 10s. net.)

THE leading authority on the religion of Rome, in this country at least, is Mr. W. Warde Fowler, Fellow and Lecturer of Lincoln College, Oxford. Mr. Fowler does not confine his attention to Roman Religion. His principal books are on the Roman festivals of the Republic and on the City-State of the Greeks and Romans. But he recognizes, as all reliable writers now recognize, that secular and sacred is a distinction without existence among ancient peoples, probably even without comprehension, and that every act of life was a religious act. It is, therefore, not in spite of his wider interests that he is spoken of as the leading authority on religion. It is because his interests are wider than those we now associate with religion. It is because he sees that however little depth religion might have to a Roman, it had an unlimited breadth, war being as religious an act as worship.

In his new book Mr. Warde Fowler has a separate chapter on Religion. But that does not mean that the rest of the book is not on religion. Let the subject be marriage or aqueducts, ever there appears on the page the name of Jupiter or of Juno, or else there is some reference to tabu or divination. The chapter on Religion is the last

chapter in the book, and it is not so much a separate chapter as a summary of the whole.

When St. Paul was in Athens he told the Athenians (according to the Authorized Version), 'Ye men of Athens, I perceive that in all things ye are too superstitious.' By some he has been much taken to task for his rudeness of speech; while by others much ingenuity has been exercised to rub the rudeness smooth. The Revisers translate his words, 'somewhat superstitious,' and allow us (in the margin) to say 'religious' if we like. But notice two facts, both brought clearly out by Mr. Warde Fowler.

The first is the clear-sightedness of the phrase 'in all things.' On that phrase Mr. Warde Fowler's book is a commentary. The other thing is the word 'superstitious' itself. St. Paul was speaking to Greeks. If he had been speaking to Romans (and very likely there were Romans in his audience), he would certainly have said 'religious.' But what would he have meant? He would have meant superstitious. For, says Mr. Fowler, to the Roman '*religio*' meant primarily awe, nervousness, scruple—much the same, in fact, as that feeling which in these days we call superstition.' And not only was it what we call superstition, but it was what they—the philosophers whom St. Paul addressed—themselves called superstition. So that when we condemn St. Paul's bad manners, we merely make it known that we have not read Mr. Warde