

prophecy. We must get rid of what is unsound in that argument if it is to have any real convincing power. We must get rid of false or forced interpretations of prophecy before we can get at the true meaning. And from that meaning alone we must draw our arguments. We have seen that the temporal event not merely suggested some

future prediction, but is the root and foundation of all prophecy. To what extent, and under what limitations, we have a right to say that the prophets looked beyond this event and foresaw the more distant future, is a question which demands a dispassionate inquiry. And this is what we shall have to consider in the following papers.

## The Parable of the Labourers in the Vineyard.

MATT. XX. 1-16.

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PROBABLY few passages of Scripture have puzzled thoughtful people more than the Parable of the Labourers in the Vineyard. And no wonder; for at first sight it seems to exhibit God as unfair in His dealings with men. Against such a thought the Christian's whole soul revolts. However much man may fall short of justice, God must be just, or we could not worship Him. If we did not believe in the ultimate triumph of justice and the infallibility of our heavenly Father, we should despair. If, however, we examine this parable closely, and "scratch beneath the surface," we shall find that the apparent difficulty vanishes, and a beautiful and important lesson is set before us, a lesson scarcely yet properly learned by the Church of Christ.

To comprehend the beauty of this lesson, we must remember that the Jew in our Lord's day was intensely carnal. He had little thought of doing right, irrespective of temporal reward. We train our children at first by rewards and punishments. But when they grow older, we teach them to obey from love to parents, and finally we get them to see that the crowning motive for Christian conduct is neither fear of hell nor hope of heaven, but the constraining love of our Lord. Now the children of Israel were morally very much children, until Christ came. The old dispensation relied largely on rewards and punishments. "Honour thy father and mother, and it shall be well with thee," is a typical motto for the ancient Jews. Even so good a man as Nehemiah repeatedly asks Jehovah to think on him for good. So encrusted with these selfish notions had the Jews become, that when Christ told them the Gentiles, who became Christians, would go into the kingdom of heaven on an

equal footing with the Jews, they were not merely disappointed, but really angry.

1. The first reference in the parable is to the Gentiles called at the eleventh hour, and entering into the Christian religion just the same as the Jews, whose nation had for many centuries been the privileged people, the only holders of the oracles of Jehovah. The Jews, like many others who have special advantages, forgot that *election to privilege means election to responsibility*. Christianity is a marvellous leveller—upwards. And with one word Jesus levelled up the Gentiles to the same privileges as the Jews in the Christian Church. This the Hebrew mind did not relish. It paid but little heed to the glorious prophecies of Isaiah, showing that the heathen would come within the fold through Messiah's influence. And it fostered the carnal spirit of expecting *temporal* blessing for spiritual excellence. The quintessence of this Jewish feeling is expressed in that most Hebrew of all the proverbs, "He that giveth to the poor lendeth to the Lord, and He will repay."

But we should miss the main lesson of the parable if we thought that it simply referred to the admission of the Gentiles to the same privileges as the Jews in the Christian dispensation. It teaches far more than this, though it certainly teaches this.

2. The apparent injustice of giving to those who worked longer no more reward than to those who only came in at the eleventh hour, has been explained by some by pointing out, that often a man called late to a work does more than those who have long been toiling in the field. This explanation holds good as far as it goes. But we must

scratch deeper to get at the main lesson. It is true that Cincinnatus, fetched from the plough to be dictator of Rome, achieved in a few hours the victory, which other generals had failed to reap after several weeks' work. It is true that a skilled physician, called in at the eleventh hour, may save the life of a patient when the ordinary practitioner had been prescribing for many days. It is true that a man lately taken into partnership may prove far more useful than the partner of many years' standing. It is true that Paul, though called later than the other apostles, did more work for Christ than any of them. And to-day a man suddenly converted late in life *may*, by his zeal and energy, do more for Christianity than a minister of many years' standing;—*may* do it, in rare cases.

3. But the hidden meaning of the parable is deeper yet. Does it not teach us this: *We are not to serve our Lord for reward?* We are not to be Christians for what we can get out of Christ. If we are true believers, our highest ambition will be to serve Him to the utmost without thought of reward. In that spirit the apostles worked. None of them was jealous, when Paul, called at the ninth hour, eclipsed them. They rejoiced in his success.

Observe that the gift of the Master was apparently the same to each. Every man had his denarius, his 8½d., the regular pay, the living wage, for a day labourer. It would go as far as 2s. 6d. nowadays. So each Christian worker gets eternal life in heaven, apparently the same, whether he toils from youth upwards, or only consecrates the tail-end of his life to the service. But the men called at first to the vineyard, if they worked from love to the Master and not for mere hire, got far more happiness from their denarius than the eleventh-hour men. So, in heaven, those Christians who devoted all their lives to the service of Christ in one sense get no more than the penitent thief, admission into Paradise. But the same gift, heaven, brings far more joy to the holy evangelist John than to a penitent Magdalen. Perhaps even in the next world a Christian who only gave his heart to the Lord late in life may have a tinge of regret that he did not on earth begin the blessed service sooner. Men who only give the fag-end of their earthly existence to the Master cannot have as much happiness in heaven, to start with, as those who were early disciples; nor can they be so

near the throne, or in such high places of honour, as the early workers.

The highest service, then, is unselfish. Not from hope of reward will true Christians toil in the vineyard. They cry, "Give me the wages of going on;" "and I will ask for no reward, except to serve Thee still." Those lines of Whittier, concerning a man who gave up wealth and ease to work for the liberation of the slaves, express very beautifully the sentiment of the Parable of the Labourers in the Vineyard—

No trumpet sounded in his ear,  
He saw not Sinai's cloud and flame;  
But never yet to Hebrew seer  
A clearer voice of duty came.

God said, "Break thou these yokes: undo  
These heavy burdens. I ordain  
A work to last thy whole life through,  
A ministry of strife and pain.

Forego thy dreams of lettered ease,  
Put thou the scholar's promise by;  
The rights of man are more than these."  
He heard and answered, "Here am I."

He set his face against the blast,  
His feet against the flinty shard,  
Till the hard service grew at last  
Its own exceeding great reward.

*Altruism*, that bugbear of all philosophers except Christian ones, comes natural to a believer in the Lord. The word is a dismal hybrid. But the thing is a blessed reality, thanks mainly to the gospel. True workers in the vineyard work from love to the Master and His brethren; they have no jealousy. William Lloyd Garrison spent a lifetime in cutting down the deadly upas tree of slavery. But in the Civil War, with a stroke of the pen, Abraham Lincoln set two million negroes free. Was Garrison jealous that the eleventh-hour man got more applause than himself? Never.

The parable we have considered touches on one of the deepest mysteries of life. How is it that some are called long before others? When the householder went out a second time, and asked, "Why stand ye here idle?" they replied, "Because no man hath hired us." They were willing to work, but the call had not come. Let those of us who went into the vineyard early in life not be puffed up, but thankful. Perhaps some who entered later were not called so early as we were, or they would have responded to the call. *E.g.* there is a young man brought up in a professedly religious

home. His nature is honourable. But he sees things done in that home which remind him of the old story of the hypocritical grocer, who said to the new apprentice, "When you have sanded the sugar and dusted the tea, come into prayers." (It is a silly story; because sand won't melt in water, and such a grocer would have been detected at once. But the moral of the story holds good.) Our young man gets a distaste for religion. Years afterwards he learns to know a genuine preacher with a ring of sincerity in his words, and at the ninth hour the call comes, and he enters the vineyard.

Most mysterious again; there are two brothers in one family. In early life the call comes to one, and he enters the vineyard. The other meets with snares, temptations, cruel unbelief, from which

the first is to a large extent mercifully spared. Only very late in life, when he has lost all and begun to be in want, only when passion is played out, and the hollowness of unbelief practically demonstrated, only at the eleventh hour does this brother enter the vineyard, and the prayers of many years are heard at last.

The Christian does not deny "government by rewards and punishments." That is as plain as the sun in the heavens. "He that soweth to the flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption." But the sincerest Christians are constrained not by fear of punishment or hope of reward, but by the love of Christ. The chief lesson, then, of this beautiful parable is, that Christian service is entirely unselfish, not seeking for reward, but only asking for fresh work for the beloved Master.

## The Books of the Month.

AN INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY OF THE NEW TESTAMENT. BY SAMUEL DAVIDSON, D.D., LL.D. (*Kegan Paul*. 8vo, third edition, 2 vols., pp. xxii, 563; 599.) No better way can be thought of, or perhaps could be found, of calling attention to this new edition of Dr. Samuel Davidson's *Introduction to the New Testament*, than the transcription of his own brief Preface.

"Amid the increasing infirmities of age and with failing sight, I have been spared to see another edition of my *Introduction to the New Testament* through the press. It is the best work which I can do. I trust that readers will find it materially improved, though some may think with its author that it is capable of still further amendment. I have at least attempted to make it more acceptable to scholars and students.

"Since the last edition a somewhat similar work has appeared in England from the pen of Dr. Salmon, based on the old orthodox lines; published by Mr. Murray, lauded by Dr. Wace in the *Quarterly Review*, and eagerly welcomed by the orthodox. Other books advocating traditional views I have not consulted, deeming them unimportant, and perhaps polemic against myself. In a country so ecclesiastically conservative as this, orthodox books are naturally greeted with a favour denied to productions of another stamp.

But minds look at evidence differently, especially when that evidence is varying and doubtful. I need hardly say that I have tried to state it fairly, and to deduce from it such conclusions as appear just. Bound by no dogmatic creed, I am free to follow wherever truth leads; having no sect, denomination, or church to please, I am subject to no temptation to conceal my real sentiments, or to play the hypocrite for the sake of fame and gain. As to religion, it does not consist in theological science, and allows intellectual freedom when the heart is right.

"Here then I take my leave of the public, and calmly wait till the time for departure comes, when we shall know even as we are known."

No one will miss the genuine pathos of these quiet words. No one will deny that Dr. Davidson has tried to deduce from the evidence "such conclusions as appear just." "But minds look at evidence differently, especially when that evidence is varying and doubtful"—the whole matter lies in that. The evidence is varying, and *in detail* doubtful; it is only in its accumulation that it is convincing, that it becomes overwhelming. If you let each doubtful detail dip one way, say against the traditional opinion of the ownership of the Fourth Gospel, the accumulation by and by becomes irresistible that St. John was not and could