

The Parable of the Labourers in the Vineyard.

MATT. XX. 1, 16.

In undertaking a journey where many experienced travellers have found great difficulties, by reason of the nature of the way, it well becomes us, not only to avail ourselves of their discoveries, but also to consider well their mistakes:—we ought not only to search for every guide post on the true way, but also for every indication of false ways, that we may be able to keep the right and avoid the wrong. Even so, when undertaking the interpretation of a very difficult passage of Scripture, we should hold fast by that which is sure and certain, while we reject altogether what is known to be false, and examine with great care what is, as yet, untried.

While looking into different interpretations of this parable, and taking note of the difficulties—not to say contradictions—which even the commentators themselves seem to have felt, we have come to the conclusion that these difficulties have arisen from making certain assumptions on the one side, while certain great and well defined truths were neglected on the other.

To say that the vineyard mentioned in the parable is the Church, is an assumption, since it has nowhere in Scripture been decided that the vineyard shall always represent the Church in every figure of speech in which it is used, and there is nothing in the parable itself, in our opinion, which requires it to be so interpreted. Lange thinks that “it is unnecessary to prove that the vineyard is intended to designate the kingdom of heaven. (See Is. v. 1.; Matt. xxi. 28, 33.)” It is a great pity that he did not try to prove it, for he might, in trying, have found his mistake. The fact that the vineyard is used in other passages to represent the kingdom, is no proof at all that it does so here. It is only a principle of common sense, that when anything is used as an illustration, what it signifies, is to be determined by its immediate connections, and not by what it sets forth in other and totally different connections. The absurdity of Lange’s statement may be easily seen, by just reading: ‘The *vineyard* is like unto a certain householder who went out to hire labourers into the vineyard, or, the king-