

the appointment of the twelve apostles. The two things constituted his practical reply to their plot for his destruction and indicated that in his opinion the breach between him and the Pharisees was now virtually final. Henceforth he hoped for nothing but evil at their hands.

In view of these facts it is in no wise derogatory to his character that he should now represent himself as speaking in such a way as to prevent them from understanding. Spiritual and intellectual blindness is ever the penalty for perversity. When men are not willing to see the truth, or to follow it if they do see it, then does God ever give them over to strong delusion to believe a lie. The responsibility for such an untoward result is wholly their own and not his. However sad it is, they have brought it upon themselves and can have no good ground of complaint.

So far from having a right to complain, we may discern a merciful purpose even in the form of their punishment. If the truth is put in such a way that there is greater difficulty in penetrating its meaning, there is at least for them the less sin in rejecting it. They are still responsible for doing so, inasmuch as they have unfitted themselves by their own act for the discernment of it. But there is less of conscious wilful perversity in doing so. They have at least something of the excuse of ignorance and the reflex influence of their course upon themselves is less serious. They are less

hardened from doing so than if they had understood clearly to the very end what it was they were doing.

We may even say that such a mode of statement increases the possibility of their ultimate repentance. Under the influence of excitement or of partizan feeling men will often do what their better judgment condemns, and once they have committed themselves to a certain course they find it hard to draw back. They want to be consistent, however clearly mistaken, and are afraid of the reproaches of those whom they have supported or encouraged in the same course. But there is always the possibility, however remote, that by and by they may come to a better state of mind when the excitement has passed away, when the party ends recede into the back-ground and there is time for silent reflection. The course that a man will take then depends to a large extent upon the degree in which he has paltered with his conscience and trampled upon his convictions. The little less or the little more may decide whether he will repent or not, and so determine all the eternal issues that hang upon the decision. It is in mercy then as well as judgment that the truth is not made too plain to the wilfully evil. And if, as here, it should chance to be thrown into some form that even if not understood, may yet cleave to the memory and excite some curiosity when the time for reflection comes, by so much is increased the chance of his finding his way