

would leave the rest and go after it. Why should not the Good Shepherd seek His wandering creatures? Had the piece of money been lost amid the dirt and rubbish of the floor; nevertheless, the woman would seek it there, for it was precious; so would the Lord seek the precious soul that bore His image. And if an *earthly* father would receive back his wayward, wandering, sinning son; how much more would the loving Father above welcome back every returning sinner! Observe, also, the rebuke of their self-righteousness and selfishness, in the picture of the elder brother: how he boasts of his own goodness, complains of not being recompensed, and even disowns his brother,—this *thy* son, not *my* brother; how good he makes himself, how bad his brother, vs. 29, 30. So the Pharisees boasted of their righteousness, complained of Christ's attention to these outcasts, and disclaimed any relationship with them. But if such was their conduct there were those above who would rejoice over their recovery, v. 16.

"Sister relates that Daniel Krammacker, being once asked who, in his view, was the 'elder son' replied laconically, 'Myself,' and then confessed how, on the previous day, he had felt offended because a very ill-conditioned person had been enriched with a remarkable visitation of grace."

"The first two of the three parables of this chapter regard the recovery of the sinner on the *Divine side*: the sheep and the coin can do nothing of themselves. The third regards it on the *human side*: the prodigal 'comes to himself' and returns to his father. In the first two, God seeks the lost, in the third the lost seeks God. Almost all expositors consider that the shepherd represents Christ going to seek and save the lost; the woman, the Holy Spirit, 'working through the church, lighting the 'candle of the Lord' and searching the sinner out; and the father of the two sons, God the Father graciously receiving the returning prodigal. It can scarcely be supposed that Christ designed the parables to convey this three-fold meaning directly, yet the agencies are so too striking to be wholly unfulfilled."—*Stock*.

"In the two sons, there is certainly no direct reference to the Jews and Gentiles, though an application to this effect can be drawn, just because the relation of the Jews to the Gentiles illustrates the truth the parable conveys. The elder son stands for the Pharisees, the younger for the 'publicans and sinners,' as the whole context shows. The Pharisees are also the 'ninety and nine just persons' of v. 7; but neither in this expression, nor in the father's words, v. 31, 'Son, thou art ever with me,' does our Lord mean to endorse their self-righteousness. He only argues with them on their own ground, and, in fact, in the cheerful and unloving elder son, He draws a sufficiently severe portrait of them."—*Stock*.

Much ingenuity has been exercised in finding exact spiritual meanings for the 'robe,' the 'ring,' the 'shoes,' and the 'fattened calf.' But we must beware of being drawn aside from the *great general drift* of the parable, by fancies that involve one in the mazes of speculation, and yield no profit. The great truths of man's wandering and misery, and God's infinite love and mercy to returning sinners, are sufficiently clear and important to occupy our devout attention. For the rest, it is best to consider them but the drapery suggested by the customs and circumstances of the people. "The kiss, the robe, the ring, the shoes, (servants and slaves did not wear shoes) express the idea of complete restoration. The fattened calf, the music and dancing, of general rejoicing."—*Stock*.

One shrinks from attempting an exposition of this wondrous parable; any attempt to explain it seems only to mar its grand simplicity and surpassing beauty. Of all the parables of our Lord, this stands alone, like Mount Blanc, in its grandeur and beauty.

IN THE CLASS.

The following will serve to draw attention to its principal points: 1st. His selfish request; 2nd. His early departure; 3rd. His downward career; 4th. His sad condition; 5th. His mournful reflections; 6th. His wise resolution; 7th. His loving reception.

HIS SELFISH REQUEST.

And he said, "Never certainly, in human language was so much—such a world of love and wisdom and tenderness—compressed into such few, immortal words. Every line, every touch, of the picture is full of beautiful, eternal significance."—Two sons. "Not in any direct or primary sense, Jews and Gentiles. The two parties standing in the foreground of the parabolic mirror, are the Scribes and Pharisees, as the elder brother, the publicans and sinners as the younger—all Jews."—*Alford*. "In the younger son is a pattern of all those who, whether Jews or Gentiles, have departed from God."—*French*.

And the younger of them said. The portion of the younger was one-half that of the elder, Deut. 21: 17. He desired the *immediate* possession of that, which, in the common course of nature, would in time be his. Why he so desired it is evident from his subsequent conduct. He wished to be free from the restraints of home, and enjoy what many call *liberty*, the license to give free course to his carnal desires. It was *rebellion* against his parent's will; and such is the germ, the secret source, of all our departures from God. Self before God; our wills, not His.

HIS EARLY DEPARTURE.

Not many days after. Having secured the means for the gratification of his desires, he is not long in placing as great a distance possible between home and its restraints. Home had lost its charms for him, for his heart was in the halls of sinful revelry and the haunts of vice. And yet he does not at once depart. He does not immediately reveal what is in his heart. The apostasy of the heart goes before the apostasy of the life. Evil is working within, before it appears without. But it will, if within, eventually appear. If men's hearts are with the evil, the feet will soon be there. Hence the truth of the words, "an evil heart of unbelief in departing from the living God," Heb. 3: 12. Gathered all. He left nothing behind to hold his heart, nothing to fall back on in case of disaster. He went with all his heart and with all his goods; and so the sinner goes with all his powers and energies in his chosen course.

HIS DOWNWARD CAREER.

And there wasted his substance. "His property." That is wasted, which falls of the true use for which it was given—he it property, time, talents, or opportunities. The sinner wastes his substance when he uses health, strength, time, talents and possessions in sin, or the neglect even of the opportunities God has given him to secure the salvation of his soul. How sad a wasted life!

Riotous living. "The word here rendered riotous, is used both in Latin and Greek, and expresses the utmost abandonments of character, and is, in fact, the original of the English word 'sot.'"—*Wholen*.

HIS SAD CONDITION.

And when he had spent all. There comes an end to everything except eternally—opportunities, life, and so forth. Even sinful pleasure cannot last forever, indeed, it is the shortest of all.

A mighty famine. Just when he had spent all, a famine arose. "He who lies down to sleep on a bed of roses will awake to find the roses withered, and the thorns only remaining." After the debauch comes the waking in the morn-

ing, with trembling limbs and aching brow. He began to be in want. But it was only the beginning. Where are his gay companions who shared so cheerfully his freely flowing wealth? Summer friends, like summer birds, they have flown on the first appearance of chilling poverty and icy want. "Willful waste makes woful want." How changed! And he went—Poor, forsaken, degraded, starving—lower and lower—so sinks the sinner: he becomes at length the *vermin* of sin—its *hand slave*, compelled to sift when sin no longer gives pleasure. The drunkard drinks to satisfy a craving that only deepens as he drinks; and so with every sin. Prov. 14: 13; Eccl. 11: 9; Jer. 2: 19; John 8: 34; 2 Pet. 2: 19.

HIS MOURNFUL REFLECTIONS.

And when he came to himself. Up to this time he had been beside himself. He wakes as it were from a dream to the realization of what he had been doing, and where he had brought himself. Sin is madness. It is drugged wine that dethrones the reason, and crazes the soul. Until the sinner comes to himself, realizes his sad condition and his true position towards God, he has not taken the first step towards a return. These mournful reflections, these tears of regret and sorrow, seen only by the eye of God, are precious as pearls in His sight. They are the signs of a new life. Ps. 38: 3-5; 40: 12; Luke 18: 13.

HIS WISE RESOLUTION.

I will arise. "Here are the four parts of true repentance: conviction, 'he came to himself'; contrition, 'no more worthy'; confession, 'I will say unto him, I arose and came';"—*Stock*. Go to my father. Against whom he had sinned, but who was his father still. "God is our Father in one sense, however unworthy we are to be His children. There is none else to whom the sinner can go." I have sinned against myself. "I have injured myself, we may wrong our neighbour by our conduct, but strictly speaking we can sin only against God. And the recognition of our evil as first and chiefly against Him is the essence of true repentance."—*French*. And he arose. "Action is the very life of 'repentance unto salvation.' Feelings and tears, and remorse, and wishes, and resolutions, are all useless, until they are accompanied by action in a return to God and a change of life. In fact they are worse than useless. Inensibly they sear the conscience, and harden the heart."—*Lyke*. The father's tenderness would not have saved the son if he had not returned, if he had not said, 'I will arise,' and done what he said.

HIS LOVING RECEPTION.

But when a great way off. If we return to God, He will come to meet us. Hos. 5: 15. Had compassion. "The return of the sinner is expressed by the word *give*, v. 18, but God's coming to the sinner by *run*. Hence, God maketh greater haste to the sinner, than the sinner does to God."—*Farington*. "The atonement was not made to soften God's heart; it was given by God's tender heart to remove the difficulty which inflexible justice placed in the way."—*Wholen*. Kissed him. More than the sign of affection, it was also of reconciliation and peace. Gen. 33: 4; 2 Sam. 14: 33; Ps. 2: 12. And the son said. He does not indeed say that he intended to say. Bengel thinks that his father lovingly cut him short, and so took the words out of his mouth. He is not permitted to say, 'make me as one of thy hired servants.' He is welcomed as a son—long lost, and dead; but now alive and found, and all the tokens of sonship are given unto him. So does our heavenly Father give to us the tokens of full restoration to His favor and family.