

in the church have found equal pleasure and profit in the study of them; so much so that they have been almost overdone with expositions which put a great deal into them they were never meant to convey. They have been the delight of children and have done much among all classes to keep alive an interest in the Bible. In fact there could hardly be a more charming form into which religious teaching could be thrown.

Nor is it to be assumed, notwithstanding the declared purpose of Christ, that even his most embittered enemies altogether failed to catch the meaning of his parables. In some cases there is evidence that they saw the drift of them clearly enough. When for example he had finished his parables of the two sons bidden to work in their father's vineyard and of the wicked husbandmen, we are distinctly told that "the chief priests and the Pharisees perceived that he spake of them." (Matt. xxi. 45.) It must be remembered that the parable was by no means a novel method of instruction invented by Christ. Similar parables are found in the Old Testament and are common in the Talmud which reports the current traditional teaching of the schools. They ought, therefore, to have been well able to profit by them, if they had taken the trouble to think them out with any desire to know their meaning. At any rate we may be sure that Jesus would have been only too ready to

welcome any indication on their part of a willingness to apprehend the spiritual lessons he was striving to impress on the world.

But just here lay the cause of the whole difficulty. Except when in search of something to feed their spite against Jesus, these Scribes and Pharisees had no real desire to know the meaning of the parables, nor indeed the true meaning of anything that he said. He had taught them many things plainly enough without veiling them under parables or under any other disguise whatever, and they had perversely misunderstood him. The unsophisticated common people heard gladly and recognized the obvious truth of his teaching, for he went straight to the heart of every subject he touched. But their leaders, dreading the effect of his teaching on their influence and prestige, wilfully put a sinister construction on everything he said, and even went the length of charging him with having a devil. They were in no state of mind to listen to him calmly or to put a fair interpretation on any of his words. They, therefore, had no reason to complain, if he now threw his teaching into a form which was to them less easy of comprehension or at least that required a little patience and goodwill to extract the meaning from it.

It is significant that this form of address is adopted for the first time by him apparently, at least on any large scale, about the same time as