

THE SATURDAY PREACHER.

No. II.

THE UNJUST STEWARD.

LUKE xvi. 1—9. There was a certain rich man, which had a Steward, and the same was accused unto him that he had wasted his goods, &c.

In this remarkable parable, our blessed Saviour, at the same time that he exposes and condemns the artifice and sinfulness which often marks the "wisdom of this world," deduces from the success of that fraudulent cunning an argument for corresponding diligence in securing the imperishable treasures of the world to come.

In our Lord's parables, the prominent trait is the striking, natural and familiar character of the similitudes he adopts; but in the one before us, although the inferences deduced are immediately intelligible and their application strictly appropriate, they are marked by a peculiarity which would not readily or directly lead the mind to the instructive conclusion which our Saviour draws from it. The incident which he selects is a familiar one; nor is it unnatural that the ingenuity manifested by the fraudulent steward should command the admiration of his master;—but the inference drawn from the whole, "make to yourselves friends of the mammon of unrighteousness," is one which would not so readily occur to the ordinary reasoner. A brief examination of the whole may serve to develop its excellencies, and establish in our minds its instructive import.

The unjust steward, in "wasting his master's goods," added to the wickedness of dissipating the property of another, a breach of the confidence that had been reposed in him. It is wicked enough to rob another by dark and secret theft; but it enhances the crime, to impose upon the subjects of such injury by assumed integrity and pretended faithfulness,—to add hypocrisy to dishonesty,—to delude with fair protestations, while in secret injury is plotted and ruin is preparing. Seriously, then, does it become all who are partakers of such a trust to remember the wickedness and the danger of such infidelity; for sooner or later, that hidden injustice, however artfully and speciously concealed, will be blazoned to the world; sooner or later, the tongue of rumour, the whisper of malice, or the abhorrence of dishonesty will "accuse" them, to those most interested, of "wasting their goods;" and, in an evil moment, ere suspicion is awakened or a subterfuge devised, they may be suddenly alarmed with this language, "Give an account of thy stewardship; for thou mayest be no longer steward." Then may they be turned forth upon the world, with the brand of dishonesty upon them, without even the faint hopes of that steward who, in the prospect of a similar destination, reasoned so wisely and acted with so much prudence in providing for his future wants.

Yet, in the plan adopted, of voluntarily reducing the amount of debts due to his master, there was renowned dishonesty added to his former unfaithfulness,—fresh acts of injury and injustice to his lord. He hoped to engage the gratitude and favour of his master's debtors by lessening the amount of their dues, and to transfer to his own security and benefit what his master would thus be deprived of. Cunning as the contrivance was, it was no less a wicked one,—a striking instance of the truth of the observation that one crime is usually accompanied by many to ensure the success or ward off the evil consequences of the first;—and although so ready an ingenuity might command the present admiration even of him who suffered by it, it could gain neither approbation nor encouragement. The title bestowed upon him by our Lord in the parable is that of the "unjust steward," even while he is "commended for having done wisely;" and while, by his master, his wisdom and foresight, his subtle and ingenious management in securing to himself friends against the anticipated day of want is praised, the sense of his injustice is sufficiently marked by his dismissal. He is commended only for his wisdom; not a word is spoken in praise of his honesty; and his example is set before us as fit to be imitated, not in his injustice, fraud and waste of his master's property, but in providing for our own reception into "everlasting habitations," when death shall have removed us from our stewardships.

"For the children of this world are in their generation wiser than the children of light." The children of this world,—such as "mind earthly things," and steadily pursue them with a total disregard or indifference to any higher interest, are, in general, "wiser,"—more dexterous in the means, more steady in their efforts to obtain the advantage they are seeking, than the "children of light," than such as confess and feel that the favour of God and future happiness is the "one thing needful." For the children of this world, in their peculiar pursuits and efforts,—whether wealth or power or pleasure be their aim,—are generally cautious, diligent, active and persevering; they are seldom checked by difficulties, thwarted by accidents, or deterred by disappointment. On the other hand, "the children of light" are comparatively remiss in their important pursuit: they are often affected by indifference; they are frequently discouraged by danger, or drawn off by temptation.

But in the pursuit of righteousness, our Saviour teaches us, we are to use the same circumspection and diligence which the "children of this world" exert to compass their designs and ends: we are required to be as active, as earnest, and as zealous in the pursuit of a future and eternal inheritance, as mankind generally are to secure to themselves the possessions and comforts and distinctions of the world.

And here it is not possible to imitate more than the wisdom of the unjust steward: his dishonesty is entirely incompatible with the nature of that pursuit in which we are admonished to exercise his prudence: for in that great concern, the necessary and commended "wisdom of the serpent" must have, as an indispensable associate, the "harmlessness of the dove."

But, as this Parable is particularly designed for the instruction and help of those who fix their hopes upon, and are directing their steps to heaven,—to those "everlasting habitations" into which we would fain be received when the term of this earthly stewardship is over; let us more closely pursue the si-

multitude betwixt our own state and that of the office and conduct of the unjust Steward here brought before our view.

The "rich man," there introduced, may well represent Him whose "the whole world is and all that is therein;" and to this great Being we may all well be considered "stewards," as "the earth is the Lord's and the fulness thereof." Though we may be tillers of the ground, and allowed to enjoy the fruits of our labour and industry; still God is the owner and proprietor of all. The product of the soil may be ours, but the soil itself is his. We are but his tenants;—tenants at will, and tenants of a day; compelled, after a brief space, to resign all our right to, and all our enjoyment of those productions; liable to be called upon, at a moment's warning, to give up and to give an account of our stewardship.

Being, then, but temporary possessors of these earthly goods,—mere stewards entrusted with their present management, let us remember that "it is required in stewards that a man be found faithful,"—let us take warning from the unjust steward in the parable, not to "waste our Master's goods." For it is a false palliation of the sin of profligate expenditure, to use this presumptuous reasoning, "Is it not lawful for me to do what I will with mine own?" Strictly speaking, those worldly possessions are not our own: they are a trust, of which, we are solemnly warned, we must one day give an account of the management. To squander them away unprofitably,—to convert them to ill or dishonest uses,—or with avaricious cupidity to make no use of them at all, is, therefore, incompatible with the terms upon which we have received them.

But not only is it the "mammon of unrighteousness,"—the perishable and often seductive treasures of the world, which we are required to use with faithfulness and zeal. There are other goods to manage,—there are other "talents" entrusted in our charge, which we must neither misapply nor "bury in the earth." Every advantage of nature or of grace, as well as of fortune, which we possess, are constituents of this great property, and are included in this comprehensive stewardship. Our health, our strength, our life; every mental and personal endowment; our natural abilities and our acquired knowledge; our time, our leisure, our opportunities, our inclinations to do well; every dispensation of Providence, whether it be a change from good to ill, from abundance to poverty, from joy to affliction, or the reverse;—all these are our heavenly "Master's goods" entrusted to our temporary charge: all these we are required to manage as faithful stewards: of all these we must one day give an account.

Sooner or later, the summons to render an account of this stewardship, must arrive to us all. Death must speedily relieve us of that charge, to appear before the tribunal of our Master and Judge.

Yet sometimes, even during life, our stewardships are to a certain extent taken from us through the interposition of God's Providence, when reverses in our fortune or condition befall us. A mismanagement of our trust,—in other words, a neglect of our opportunities, or an abuse of our talents may have caused an all-wise God to "let out his vineyard to other husbandmen, who will render unto him the fruits in their season." It is well to consider that such are the causes of many of the reverses and misfortunes we meet with;—and when they arrive, it is right to believe that, for wise and good reasons, this language accompanies the deprivation, "Thou mayest be no longer steward." We may have proved ourselves unfit for the charge or negligent in its management, and to prevent further abuse of it by us, it is committed to other hands; rather, therefore, than repine at such a dispensation from the hand of God, we ought to rejoice that the sin of negligence is visited upon us in this world, and that, by this timely manifestation of our heavenly Master's displeasure, we are warned and deterred from "laying up to ourselves wrath against the day of wrath."

But there is a destitution which may come upon us even worse and more severe. There are other "goods" committed to our trust by a gracious God, the waste of which may be attended with even more deplorable effects. As God, for the abuse of their natural reason, gave up the heathen to "vile affections and a reprobate mind;" so may Christians, by neglecting the gift of his grace, incur the fulfilment of this threat, "from him that hath not shall be taken away even that which he seemeth to have."

Ere then death shall displace us from our stewardship, and deprive us of the gracious opportunities we possess of employing our temporal and spiritual gifts as God directs, and as our own future happiness requires, let us imitate the wisdom of the steward in the parable: let us "make to ourselves friends of the mammon of unrighteousness, that when we fail,"—when death puts an end to our enjoyment of these goods and to our employment of these graces,—"they may receive us," they may be a means of our reception, "into everlasting habitations."

By a right use of the goods entrusted to our charge, we may make God our friend; by a right employment of our faculties and abilities, by the advancement of his truth and glory in this world, we may be admitted to his presence in the next. "Concerning spiritual gifts," St. Paul appropriately says, "let us work together with God—and take heed that we receive not his gift in vain, but minister to one another as good stewards." If thus employed, they will undoubtedly make such a friend to us of their heavenly Bestower as will ensure us a participation hereafter of the glory of Christ.

Thus may we "make to ourselves friends of the mammon of unrighteousness;" thus may the perishable dross of this world be improved into a "crown of glory that fadeth not away;" thus may our precarious and transient enjoyment of the goods of life be succeeded by the possession of "everlasting habitations."

B.

The great beauty and propriety of the ancient eastern salutation, "Peace be to thee," is very emphatical; inasmuch as the best blessings of life, and all the social affections depend upon peace!—Harman.

Apply yourself more to acquire knowledge than to show it. If every day have its pains and sorrows, so has it also its pleasures and joys.

THE CHURCH.

COBOURG, SATURDAY, JULY 15, 1837.

CHRISTIAN UNITY NECESSARY FOR THE CONVERSION OF THE WORLD:—A Sermon preached before the Board of Missions in St. Thomas's Church, New York, on Sunday June 26th 1836; By the Rev. Samuel Farner Jarvis, D. D. &c. &c.

CHRISTIAN UNITY, how many painful sensations do these words awaken! How melancholy a contrast do they lead the mind to draw betwixt the united, though persecuted, church of the Apostles' days, and the distracted church of the present age! Then, if the Christians had the opposition of Jews and Gentiles, of all classes and characters, to encounter; if there was a tempest of hostility without;—there was peace and serenity within. Leaguered armies assaulted the battlements of the Christian Zion; but, in those days at least, she was "a city at unity with herself." The delightful testimony borne by the sacred historian to the harmony which pervaded the household of the Christian Church, is, that "the multitude of them that believed were of one heart and of one soul." Alas! since those days, into how many shreds hath the "seamless coat of Christ" been torn! How many discordant opinions, how many bitter prejudices, how many deadly animosities now exist amongst the disciples of that religion which inculcates this, amongst its primary doctrines, "Love one another!"

And yet, with the spirit of hatred and the look of scorn against their fellow travellers through this earthly pilgrimage, all profess to bend their steps towards the same common heaven; all acknowledge one heavenly Father, and look to the healing blood of the same crucified Saviour. May Almighty God behold, with a pitying eye and a forbearing arm, these depraved inconscientious of his creatures! and may we, in throwing ourselves at the footstool of our common Parent, feel—as we ought to feel—the tie of brotherhood! May the motives to Christian love which every page in the Gospel preaches—the impulses of that heavenly Spirit which would waken up in the sanctified Christian that flame which is caught from the altar of the God of love,—all urge us to the realization of the lovely scene of the Christians' earlier days, when "the multitude of them that believed were of one heart and of one soul."—We are taught, indeed, to hope and believe that the present clouds of gloom which shade the purity of our religion's holy workings, will yet disperse; that the day is coming when the Spirit of our God will have its perfect work in the hearts of men; when the rejoicing earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord; when, from pole to pole, every temple shall resound with the praises of the one true God, and every voice unite in thanksgivings for Christ's salvation; and when—more than all—that love, which shall endure when tongues shall cease and knowledge shall vanish away, shall pervade every member of the vast household of faith, and cause them all, as well in the offerings of devotion as in the offices of Christian sympathy, to be "of one heart and of one soul."

For the achievement of the mighty conquest, for which every Christian should be labouring,—the CONVERSION OF THE WORLD,—the learned author before us well observes, that

"The church is appointed as the great instrument; and the success of its efforts must mainly depend on that unity of affection, will and purpose, by which alone it can resemble the ineffable union of the Holy Trinity." p. 6.

"It would seem indeed as if the Saviour had taken that occasion—in his valedictory prayer—to warn the members of his church, with his dying testimony, that their divisions would retard the operations of his mighty purposes. For so necessary did he consider the unity of the church, that three times in the course of this prayer does he mention it, and twice does he assert that *without it the world will not believe and be saved.*"—(St. John xvii. 20, 21, 23.) p. 6. 7.

These are strong expressions, but not less true; and the learned author goes on to show,

"That the ill success of missions is owing to the want of unity; and that those professing Christians have most reason to hope for success, who are the least guilty of violating that unity." p. 7.

One of the characteristics of this unity, he proceeds to show, "Includes an adherence to the ministers of apostolic succession.—The word itself, translated fellowship, and elsewhere communion, denotes that internal union in the members of one body which may be compared to the circulation of sap in the vegetable, or of blood in the animal kingdom. Christians are required to have communion or fellowship with the Father; with the Son; with the Holy Ghost; with the apostles as the sources of all ministerial authority." p.p. 7. 8.

We are next clearly informed that this important characteristic of unity, no less than others which are detailed, was preserved in the Christian church until about the middle of the fifth century; and the fact is happily adduced that during that period the progress made by the Church in the conversion of the world surpassed the results of every exertion made, in its more distracted state, in succeeding times. The author, however, reminds us of the existence of heresies even in the apostolic age, but

"In comparison with the great body of Christians, these were few and inconsiderable. They were the effervescence of human corruption, rising like bubbles to the surface, bursting there one after another, and each in its turn disappearing for ever." p. 9.

"During this period of unity, the progress made by the Christian faith is, perhaps, the most surprising fact recorded in history. If we may credit the most ancient historians, the Apostles went even beyond the bounds of the Roman empire. Not only was the Church extended through Asia Minor, Syria, Mesopotamia, Egypt, the principal islands of the Mediterranean, Greece, Thrace, Illyricum and Italy, but perhaps to Spain and the British islands on the west, to Scythia on the north, and Persia and India within the Ganges on the East. Certainly by the middle of the fifth century, in addition to the countries already enumerated, may be named Gaul and Germany in Europe, Ethiopia, Nubia, Lybia, Mauritania, and indeed all that was known of Africa, Arabia, the greater and lesser Armenia, the regions beyond the Caspian and the Euxine, and possibly even China itself." p.p. 9, 11, 12, 13.

These are clear and indisputable testimonies to the blessed effect of unity in the Christian Church;—the author goes on, with equal satisfaction, to prove that, as divisions increased and sects gained ground, so soon did vigour of action decay, and even the ground