

CRITICISM AND THE PARABLES.

I.

THE TRANSMISSION OF THE PARABLES.

IT is seventy years now since Trench issued his *Notes on the Parables*, and all but thirty since Bruce published his exhaustive study of the *Parabolic Teaching of Christ*. Both are valuable works, and Dr. Plummer in an article in Hastings' Dictionary has expressed the opinion that for English readers Trench is likely to remain the chief authority on the whole subject. But the parables are an integral part of the gospel tradition, and it is hardly to be expected that the immense expenditure of labour in this field should have left them quite unaffected. In point of fact it has not. The work of scholars like Weiss and Jülicher, Fiebig and Weinel, and in other directions Bugge, has thrown new light on the parables also. It has made clearer both the nature of the process by which they have come to us, and the laws by which they have to be interpreted and applied. It is these two subjects—the transmission or tradition of the parables, and their interpretation—that are discussed in this and a following paper.

It is unnecessary to trouble ourselves with defining the term parable, or even with distinguishing parables proper from parabolic germs which might easily have developed into such. We can put our finger on the parables whether we can define them or not. We are all aware that they must have made a peculiarly vivid impression when they were first delivered; and although it has been shown that the use of parables, and even of the formulæ by which they are sometimes introduced in the gospels, was common in the Rabbinical schools, the comparison of the parables actually extracted from Jewish literature by Fiebig and others does nothing to lessen the impression produced

by those of Jesus. Further, Jesus is the only speaker in the New Testament who uses parable. The mere fact that it is restricted to Him might seem to offer a guarantee for the accuracy of the tradition: Christian teachers would not readily take liberties with a mode of thought or speech which was peculiar to the Master. I believe this reflection is so far sound, and that the parables have in the main been transmitted in a thoroughly reliable way. The very peculiarity of them, indeed, is that once heard they can never be forgotten. Who *could* tell the story of the Sower, or of the Prodigal Son, except in the sense in which it was originally told? The originality and inner life of these fragments of Jesus' teaching is so strong that it defies misapprehension or perversion. They are what they are unchangeably, and what they are is what they were from the beginning. But not everything in the tradition of the parables is self-evident, and we must look more closely at the facts.

It is clear, when we think of it, that the parables must often have been repeated by those who heard them. They would not be able to help trying to convey to others what had come to them with such startling freshness and power. But this, it is just as clear, could be no literal reproduction. Within the Christian society, when it was once established, the parables, like the rest of Jesus' teaching, would be preserved to a large extent by being preached. In the nature of the case there could be no sacrosanct text for them, and the preacher would involuntarily and even unconsciously reproduce them in what for his purpose was the most impressive or effective form. I do not mean that he would deliberately make changes, but that he would insensibly present the parable with the modifications which come when one is preaching with a view to impress, and not making a deposition in a court of law. Two very

simple illustrations of this may be given. All the synoptic gospels preserve a parabolic word of Jesus in which He makes use of His power over evil spirits to prove that He has already vanquished Satan. In Mark it is given quite simply. "No one can enter into the strong man's house and pillage his goods, unless he has first bound the strong man, and then he will pillage his house." In Matthew it is virtually identical. But in Luke, while the sense is unaffected, the form is totally changed. "When the strong man in armour guards his palace, his property is safe. But when a stronger than he comes upon him and defeats him, he takes his panoply on which he relied, and distributes his spoils." It can hardly be doubted that the simple form given in Matthew and Mark is closest to the words of Jesus, and that Luke is a preacher's reproduction of the saying, in which an impressive effect is aimed at, and by somewhat rhetorical means is secured. A precisely similar phenomenon—and this is the second illustration—may be seen at the close of the sermon on the mount. Both Matthew and Luke record the parable of the wise and foolish builders. Matthew again does it quite simply. "Every one who hears these words of mine and does them shall be likened to a prudent man who built his house upon the rock. And the rain descended, and the rivers came, and the winds blew and beat upon that house, and it did not fall, for it had been founded upon the rock." But in Luke we have once more a reproduction which aims at rhetorical impressiveness—a reproduction the motive to which, I have no doubt, was not originally literary, but homiletic, yet so thorough-going that it has hardly a word in common with the simpler and more historical form in Matthew. "Every one who comes to me and hears my words and does them, I will show you to whom he is like. He is like a man building a house,

who digged and went deep and laid a foundation upon the rock. And when a flood came, the river dashed against that house and was not able to shake it because it had been well built." This kind of homiletic modification of the words of Jesus is not, of course, limited to the parables: we have to allow for it everywhere in the gospels. But the pictorial character of the parables, which would lead to their more frequent repetition, and the greater ease with which a pictorial as opposed to a sententious gnomic utterance could be expanded, requires us to allow more for it in the case of parables than of the teaching of Jesus in general. It is particularly true in them that we must be content with the spirit of the whole, and not try to press the letter from point to point: they can hardly fail to convey the word of the Lord, but they are not so likely to convey it in His very words.

But there are influences of another kind which might operate more strongly in modifying the form in which the parables have come down to us. A good preacher—and I assume still that the parables were to a great extent transmitted by being preached, or taught with a moral in view—is always concerned most about the application of his sermon. A preacher proceeding on the basis of a parable will be particularly anxious that the bearing of the various points in it should not be missed by his audience. But unless he is very careful, or unless he has an instinctive artistic sympathy with the author of the parable, this will bring with it a temptation to introduce the application prematurely—in other words, to let the thing pointed at by means of the parable break through the pictorial veil, and intrude into the parable itself. There is a striking instance of this in Matthew xxii. 7, in the parable of the marriage of the King's son, or as it might perhaps be better designated, the parable of the contemptuous guests. Mat-

thew has no doubt that the parable refers to the way in which the Jews treated the grace of God, and especially His grace in the gospel; and he is so anxious that the point should not be missed that after telling how the King's messengers were insulted and slain, he adds, "But the King was angry, and sent his armies and destroyed those murderers and burned up their city." That this is a reference to the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans seems to me unquestionable; and while it is intelligible enough that an evangelist or a preacher, reproducing the parable of Jesus after that event, should have allowed the actual judgment of God upon disbelieving Israel to find a place in the story, it is surely inconceivable that Jesus, who conceived the parable as a parable, should have destroyed its beauty and consistency by allowing this entirely incompatible feature to intrude. A great feast which is standing ready cannot be delayed till these military operations are completed, and then gone on with as if nothing had happened. It is not Jesus to whom we owe this trait in the story, but some interpreter of Jesus—whether the evangelist himself, or another whom he had heard narrate and expound the parable; an interpreter who had no doubt that the destruction of Jerusalem was God's judgment on the Jews' scorn of His grace, and who was so anxious to have others see and feel this that he brought it into the parable itself without seeing that he was confusing the story with its application in a way which would have been impossible for the original author. To recognise this is the only sound way to deal with the difficulties raised by Matthew xxii. 7, and we have only to look at the artificial treatment of them by Trench to welcome it.

One result of admitting the freedom with which the parables were transmitted is that it is hardly possible now to argue that parables in which all the main features

are alike were nevertheless originally independent because there are subsidiary points in which they are distinct. For example, Trench treats as two distinct parables *The Marriage of the King's Son* in Matthew xxii. 1-14 and *The Great Supper* in Luke xiv. 16-24. Bruce not only does the same, but actually classifies them under different heads as a parable of judgment and a parable of grace. His alternative title to *The Great Supper* is the *Kingdom for the Hungry : The Marriage of the King's Son* he entitles *The Wedding Feast and the Wedding Robe, or The Doom of Despisers and Abusers of Grace*. I venture to think that all these distinctions are themselves due to practical and homiletic interests of their authors, and not to a critical or historical examination of the texts, and that it was a sound instinct for the facts which led earlier scholars like Calvin and Maldonatus to see that the two parables were not two independent treatments of the same theme by Jesus, but two divergent forms in which the same parable of Jesus had been transmitted to us. So far as the two parables agree, their agreement is far closer than that, for example, of the two reports of the builders on the rock and the sand; and so far as they diverge, their divergences are easily explained by the respective interests of the narrators. It is worth while to refer to the details in proof of this—the common heading under which both parables would stand, and which brings out the essential feature in both, being *The contemptuous guests*.

The first point at which Matthew diverges from Luke is that the feast is made, not by a certain man, but by a King. Probably here, at the very beginning, Matthew allows the parable to be influenced by its interpretation. The contempt of the guests for the invitation to the feast is to represent the contempt of the Jews for the grace of God; and the man who made the feast would change almost

unconsciously under the evangelist's hand, as he thought of the application, into the great King who had prepared the marriage supper for his son. Luke, it may be said, is truer to the parabolic form; it is harder for Matthew than for him to keep apart the symbol and the thing signified. Discounting this, however, it is evident that the two chief points in which the parables diverge correspond to the two distinctive interests of the evangelists. Matthew is much concerned everywhere with the guilt of the Jews in rejecting Jesus, and with the certainty with which God's judgment would overtake them. His sense of this comes out over and over again in the gospel, and culminates in the terrible cry with which the Jews accept the responsibility for the crucifixion of Jesus—"His blood be on us and on our children." It is his pre-occupation with this which explains the introduction of the verse on which I have already commented: the King was wroth and sent his armies and destroyed those murderers and burned up their city. The one thing Matthew is concerned with is that his hearers shall not miss the fact that judgment overtook these contemners of grace, and at the cost of wrecking the parable as a work of art he introduces the judgment not in symbolical but in literal terms. The grace of the parable, on the other hand—which is surely not to be overlooked in Matthew any more than in Luke—is conveyed by what follows: "The wedding is ready, but they that were bidden were not worthy. Go ye therefore unto the partings of the highways, and as many as ye shall find bid to the marriage feast." The thing to be noticed here is that there is only *one* mission of the servants after the judgment on the contemptuous guests, and that there is no indication that it went to foreign parts. The moral is the one so frequent in Matthew: the publicans and the harlots go into the Kingdom of God before the

scribes and the Pharisees—the babes and sucklings before the wise and prudent—the outcasts before their betters. The only peculiarity in Luke is of a different sort. He has nothing corresponding to Matthew's historical judgment on Jerusalem. But the man who makes the feast, and who like Matthew's King is angry when it is rejected—the *ὄργισθεις* in Luke xiv. 21 (cf. Matt. xxii. 7) is another indication that we are dealing with the same story—sends out his servant *twice* afterwards. First, he sends him to the streets and squares of the city, to bring in the poor, the maimed, the blind and the lame. This is what corresponds to Matthew's mission: the outcast among the Jews obtain what is rejected with contempt by the higher classes. But when the servant who has had this commission says to his master after executing it, "Sir, what you ordered is done, and there is still room," he is sent out a second time, beyond the city altogether. "Go out to the highways and hedges and compel them to come in that my house may be filled." It can hardly be doubted, I think, that here we have an allusion to one of Luke's peculiar interests, the carrying of the gospel to the Gentiles. He was as much preoccupied with this as Matthew was with the divine judgment on Israel, and in reproducing the parable of Jesus he finds the means, perhaps almost unconsciously, of putting his interest into Jesus' lips. It is not therefore two independent parables we have here—two employments of the same theme by Jesus for different purposes: but two independent reproductions of the same parable in which new lights which have been thrown upon its meaning, or rather upon its possible applications, by the course of events, are allowed to modify the presentation of the parable itself. Just as the events of the year 70 are needed to explain Matthew xxii. 7, the events of the Gentile mission are needed to explain Luke xiv. 23. Jesus, we must infer, did not in set terms

say either the one or the other. Both, in the light of history, are thoroughly legitimate expansions or applications of what He did say; the evangelists, if they had been conscious, as they probably were not, of modifying or enlarging the words of Jesus, could have justified themselves by saying with St. Paul, "We have *the mind* of Christ."

A closer comparison of these two parables raises another question as to the accuracy of the tradition. Luke's story of the man who made the great supper and bade many ends at the point at which the house is filled with guests. But the corresponding narrative in Matthew goes further. Its prolongation is prepared for by the remark, to which there is nothing parallel in Luke, and which certainly strikes one at first as irrelevant, that the people brought in from the streets were both bad and good. It is this mixed multitude which sits at the marriage supper of the King's son, and as the King and his son, in the mind of the evangelist at any rate, are God and His Christ, it is impossible that this mixture should represent the final state of affairs. Hence when the King comes in to see the guests, the guest who has not on a wedding garment—to put it in the broadest way, who is out of place in such a company—is bound hand and foot, and cast into the outer darkness, where is the weeping and the gnashing of teeth. The last words are a standing description of Gehenna, the final place of punishment, and they make it plain that here also, as in his introduction of the temporal punishment, the destruction of Jerusalem, at *v. 7*, the narrator has fallen through the parabolic veil on to the matter of fact which it signifies. But this is far more natural in one who is reciting a parable with the application of it in his mind, than it would be in the original author, and it may be questioned whether in such cases it is Jesus or the evangelist whom we hear. It is one of the characteristics of the First Gospel that it

is keenly interested in the church, the new society of disciples, and especially in the mixture in it of good and bad for the present, with an inevitable future separation. We see this in parables like that of the wheat and the tares which grow in the same field, and of the good and the bad fish which are caught in the same net; we see it again here in the section of this parable which treats of the guest without the wedding garment. This interest of the evangelist might of itself explain why he has an appendix, so to speak, to the story of the contemptuous guests, which is wanting in Luke. But we have to consider besides that the unity of idea in the parable is disturbed by this appendix. No doubt it is possible for practical and homiletical purposes to find a connexion between the two parts. Dr. Bruce does so, for example, when he expounds the whole parable under the heading, "The Doom of Despisers and Abusers of Grace." If, however, we try to realise the historical application, this connexion must seem very artificial. The first part of the parable contains the verdict of Jesus on the Jewish church, and its relation to God's gracious invitations in the past; the second part contains a warning of Jesus to the Christian church, and its possible abuses of God's grace in the future. Any combination of two things so independent in one parable is not natural, and we may be pretty confident is not original. There is no need to say, nor does it seem to me that there is any likelihood in saying, that the evangelist invented this appendix to the parable of the contemptuous guests. It is far more probable that like the Tares and the Drag Net it is an original word of Jesus; and that just as the evangelist often combined literal utterances of Jesus into one long discourse, so here he combined two independent parables into one more complex, though without being able to present the whole really on one plane.

Another illustration of the same thing may be given from the parable of the pounds in Luke xix. 11-27. This is often treated as an independent parable, using the same human relations as its material, but teaching quite different lessons from the parable of the talents in Matthew xxv. 14-30. It is quite legitimate for the preacher to treat of either without making reference to the other: the evangelists are reproducing as best they can the teaching of Jesus, and what they say can be trusted to make its own impression on the mind. But though the parables as they stand present considerable differences in form, and do not teach precisely the same lessons, that does not foreclose the question of their original relation to each other. A parable which is preserved, at least to some extent, by being preached, cannot but assume somewhat divergent forms, especially if there are different directions in which various points could be applied. The points of similarity in the present case far outweigh those of difference. It is true that Luke speaks of pounds (*minae*) and Matthew of talents, and that Luke mentions ten servants who got a pound a piece, while Matthew leaves the number indefinite, and in the case of the three whom he specifies gives one five talents, the second two, and the third one; but in Luke, when the reckoning comes, only three servants are brought forward, just as in Matthew, and the interest turns largely on the slothful one, with whom the master carries on precisely the same conversation as he does in Matthew, and on whom he passes the same sentence: "take away the pound (talent) from him, and give it to him that hath the ten pounds (talents)." Further, in both evangelists this surprising sentence is justified by the paradoxical reflexion, "To him that hath shall be given, and from him that hath not even what he hath shall be taken away." The conclusion from all this does not seem to me doubtful. It is that

Jesus spoke a parable about fidelity, in which He used the figure of a man going from home, leaving his servants in charge of his property, and holding a reckoning with them on his return. The diligent and faithful were rewarded; the slothful—and the case of the slothful was depicted with exceptional power—was punished. This was the material which the two evangelists reproduced as justly as they could. But it had been preserved in part by being preached, and the applications which had been made of it had deflected it into the somewhat different forms in which we find it in our two evangelists. Both of them must have understood Jesus to be the man who went abroad, and who at His return reckoned with His servants. The reckoning, in other words, corresponds to the last judgment at the Lord's return. But in Matthew it not only corresponds to it parabolically; it is actually turned into it: "Cast the unprofitable servant into the outer darkness; there shall be the weeping and the gnashing of teeth." This is not the language of a man examining the accounts of his servants: it is the language of the Judge at the last day; and therefore we can be sure it does not properly belong to the parable. There is nothing corresponding to it in Luke: it is, in fact, only another instance in which the evangelist's eagerness not to have the meaning missed leads him to sacrifice the artistic perfection of the parable as it no doubt came from its Author's lips to its practical purpose. No one need fear that in this way the mind of Christ may be lost. If we wish to see how the very point of a parable *could* be lost, we have only to compare the Pounds or the Talents of our canonical gospels with the form to which the same parable has sunk in the gospel according to the Hebrews. Here also there are three servants. One devours his master's substance with harlots and flute girls—he is shut up in prison. One multi-

plies it—he is welcomed. One hides his talent—he is only rebuked. This trivial and purblind commonplace, from which all that is solemn and tragic in the words of Jesus has evaporated, shows how much we owe to the evangelists, and how substantially we can trust them.

But there is another point in Luke's parable of the pounds which must not be overlooked. Matthew has nothing parallel to it, just as Luke in the contemptuous guests had nothing parallel to Matthew's incident of the guest without the wedding garment. In Luke the man who goes abroad is a nobleman, and he goes to get a Kingdom for himself and to return. Besides the servants to whom he entrusts his property, his fellow-citizens are mentioned, who hated him and sent an embassy after him, saying, "We will not have this man to reign over us." Then the story goes on as in Matthew, down to the judgment on the slothful servant, after which Luke has a verse to which again nothing in Matthew corresponds. It adds to the doom of the unprofitable servant the doom of the rebellious citizens. "But those enemies of mine that would not have me to rule over them bring here and slay before me." How did these extraordinary additions get into the simpler story which is otherwise common to Matthew and Luke? The only plausible answer is that Luke has done here what Matthew did in the former case—conflated two parables which were originally independent, and cannot have applied to the same subject. The servants to whom the man entrusts his property represent the disciples of Jesus, the members of the church, who will be judged according to their faithfulness or unfaithfulness when He comes again; His fellow-citizens who rejected His sovereignty are the unbelieving Jews to whom His return brings an irremediable doom. The one idea common to both cases is that of judgment; but the whole conception of the judgment

and its possibilities is so disparate in the two cases that it is hardly conceivable that they were combined under one parabolic representation by Jesus. There is no reason to suppose that Luke invented anything, but good reason to believe that what he presents as one parable must originally have been two, and that though both were connected with the return of Jesus and the accompanying judgment, they were in other respects quite distinct.

There are other parables with regard to the integrity of which similar questions have been raised, and I will refer to two important cases. The first is Luke's parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus. This is introduced quite abruptly, though, as we shall see in a subsequent paper it has a real connexion with what precedes, and it is not called a parable. But the point is that to many interpreters the story seems to fall into two parts which have no inner connexion with each other. The first deals with the rich man and the beggar, and with the reversal of their fortunes in the unseen world. There Lazarus is comforted and the rich man is in torment, and between them there is a great and impassable gulf fixed. This, it is said, is the proper end of the story; what comes after this has nothing to do with the rich man or Lazarus, but only with the conditions of faith or unbelief in the gospel. The last verse in particular—"If they hear not Moses and the prophets, not even if one rise from the dead will they be persuaded"—is often taken as if it were a censure of the Jewish attitude to Christianity which was proof alike against the raising of Lazarus and the resurrection of Jesus. The key to it, in short, is a saying like that of Jesus in John xx. : "Blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed." If this application of the last half of the story were correct, it would be a fair reason for doubting whether the whole had been correctly transmitted. But

common as it is, I have no doubt it is wrong. The connecting link between the two parts is something like this. If inhumanity has such terrific consequences in the future as the earlier part of the story shows, surely (it may be argued) men ought to know distinctly about them. If the rich man had seen before his death all that he learned after his death he would have treated Lazarus very differently. The rich man is used to state this objection in the form of a request to Abraham to send Lazarus to warn his brothers not to follow him in the course which leads to the place of torment. But Abraham receives the request coldly. "They have Moses and the prophets," he says; "let them hear them." A man who has the revelation of God which was within reach of every Jew needs no more. "He hath showed thee, O man, what is good." When the rich man insists—"Nay, Father Abraham, but if one go to them from the dead, they will repent"—Abraham only becomes more peremptory in his refusal. If a man with the Old Testament in his hand and Lazarus at his door does not learn humanity, nothing will teach him. If considerations of humanity do not make him humane, no visitant from death, no revelation of the splendours of heaven or the torments of hell, will soften his hard heart. This, and not any lesson on the conditions of faith in the gospel, is what the second part of the parable teaches, and it is entirely congruous with the first. It is entirely in keeping also with all we know of the teaching of Jesus otherwise, so that we have no reason to question either the unity of this parable or the correctness of its transmission.

The most difficult and the most indecisively debated example remains—that raised by the mutual relation of the parable of the tares, which is found only in Matthew (xiii. 24 f.) and the parable of the seed growing secretly, which

is found only in Mark (iv. 26 ff.). At first sight, indeed, these parables appear to be quite distinct. The broad lesson which they respectively teach is quite different. That the good and evil which mingle in the present condition of things are not to be prematurely and violently separated is the lesson of the first. But in the other there is nothing about the mingling of good and evil, nor about the danger of trying to separate them before the time. What it reveals is apparently some law of growth which has reference to the Kingdom of God—a law which is inherent in the nature of things and which no action or eagerness of men can modify; spontaneously the earth brings forth—that is, without any interference of ours or the possibility of such—first the blade, then the ear, then the full corn in the ear. Why, it may be said, should we ask any question about the possible relation of these two parables to one another, and why, in particular, should we ask whether they are perhaps divergent growths from the same seed, a parable of Jesus which may have been more like the one than the other, but would possibly differ in some respects from both? The reasons alleged are such as these. In both Matthew and Mark there is a sequence of parables given, and in Matthew the Tares fills the place occupied in Mark by the spontaneously growing seed. Matthew has (1) the Sower, (2) the Tares, (3) the Mustard Seed; Mark has (1) the Sower, (2) the spontaneously growing seed, (3) the Mustard Seed. Now as it is certain on other grounds that the gospel of Matthew is dependent at this point for its structure on Mark, there is an *external* suggestion that Matthew's parable of the tares was regarded by him as equivalent to what we read in the same connexion in Mark. How the differences are to be explained is an ulterior question, but the connexion is not summarily to be denied. Then there is an *internal*

suggestion of a relation between the two which is of even greater importance. Amid all divergences, there is one feature, perhaps the most essential of all, common to the two parables: in both alike, between the sowing of the seed and the harvest, the farmer and his servants must let the seed alone. They can only do harm if they interfere. Now this is the thought which is applied in different ways in the parables as they stand. According to Mark, on what seems to me the obvious meaning, we must not interfere *in general* because the thing with which we are interfering grows spontaneously and according to inherent laws, the action of which we can neither accelerate nor reverse—all we can do is to wait on God for the harvest; according to Matthew, we must not interfere *for one particular purpose* in which the evangelist is interested—that of separating the good from the bad—because our interference would do more harm than good: all we can do is to wait on God till His time for the decisive separation comes. There is a way of putting the connexion between the two parables which only tempts to ridicule. When it is pointed out that there is seed in both, that there is sleeping in both, that there is ignorance in both, and so on, we can hardly help recalling Fluellen's comparison of Monmouth and Macedon; even Dr. Sanday has condescended to this, and I confess to having done it myself without the excuse of his example. But I am more inclined to believe now that unlike as they are the two parables are really divergent applications of an original parable of Jesus dealing with this idea of non-interference—the limit to the power of man to help on the Kingdom of God. Mark's reproduction of it is simpler, and if this suggestion is accepted at all, it will hardly be doubted that it is closer to the original. Jesus was surrounded by people who were impatient for the coming of the Kingdom, eager to organise

movements on its behalf, to carry it with a rush and a cry ; and it is one of the signal illustrations of His divine wisdom that He saw what was wrong in this mood. The true analogy of the coming of the Kingdom is the growth of the seed which a man drops in his field ; once the seed is sown, it is in the hands of God and nature and must be left there ; it does no good to shout or to shove ; “ the earth bringeth forth fruit of herself, first the blade, then the ear, then the full corn in the ear.” Be patient, and wait for God. The application of this same lesson—be patient and wait for God—to another though cognate subject, not the coming of the Kingdom as such, but the separation in it of the good from the bad, is probably secondary by comparison. We have seen already that this is a subject in which the first evangelist is particularly interested. He adds to Luke’s parable of the contemptuous guests the incident of the guest without the wedding garment, and his expulsion ; and in his early chapter of parables he has not only the tares and the wheat, but the companion picture of the drag net, in which were gathered fish of every kind, only to be separated when the net was brought to the shore. It is a natural if not a necessary inference that for a preacher with Matthew’s interest in the separation of good and bad, *this* application of the principle of non-interference would be of commanding importance. He was sure that the separation must take place some time, and would take place in God’s time ; but it is a signal illustration of *his* wisdom that he sees the harm it must do to attempt it prematurely. It may quite well be that in this application of the principle of non-interference he was prompted by some word of Jesus spoken on another occasion, his parable being in this case a conflation like that of the contemptuous guests, and the guest without the wedding garment : we cannot tell. If the

two parables are really different forms of one and the same utterance of Jesus, they represent, so far as the gospels enable us to form an opinion, an extreme case, and it would be quite illegitimate to generalise from it.

The incursion of Wellhausen into the field of New Testament criticism, which is sometimes stimulating and sometimes brutal, has been especially unkind to the parables. Wellhausen appreciates Mark so highly in comparison with any other authority for the life and teaching of Jesus that he disparages all the parables except the three or four to be found in the earliest evangelist. Almost all Matthew's, he holds, can be reduced to these three or four. Such as they are, too, he can think but little of them. They are products of reflection, not inspirations of the moment : under commonplace and constantly recurring figures they refer to situations which from the point of view of Jesus must have lain in the future, so that speech about them is not intelligible in Him, and could not have been understood by His hearers. Matthew's parables, in short, all apply to the Christian church. But there was no Christian church in Jesus' time, nor was there the idea of such a thing in any one's mind. Hence to the people round Jesus, parables like Matthew's would have been incomprehensible ; and hence, further, Jesus never spoke such parables. It is very easy to be trenchant : some people cannot help it. But the matter with which we are dealing hardly lends itself to such treatment. If Jesus thought of leaving the world and also of returning to it—and it is impossible to doubt that He did both—He can hardly have helped thinking of the interval. But if He thought of the interval, He thought of the future of His disciples—of the tests to which it would put them, of the temptations it would bring, of the need in it for watchfulness, for diligence, for patience, and so on ; and if there

is any evidence that He spoke of these things, such as the parables in Matthew provide, it is quite gratuitous to rule it out *a priori* on the ground that it refers to a future which His hearers could not realise. It is quite conceivable, no doubt, that when the parables were preached in any particular situation they might be modified, in such ways as we have seen, so as to bring out their special point at and for the moment ; but that is a totally different thing from saying that the evangelists made them out of their own heads. Men who called Jesus Lord, who tell us that parable was a conspicuous feature of His teaching, and who never put a parable into any lips but His, could not have acted so irresponsibly. In spite of the minor deflections and variations which have been illustrated, there is no part of the gospel tradition in which we can be surer of our contact with the mind of Jesus than the tradition of the parables.

JAMES DENNEY.

*THE EPISTLE TO THE "EPHESIANS" NOT A
SECONDARY PRODUCTION.*

THE resemblances between the Epistle to the "Ephesians" and that to the Colossians caused no trouble to students before the revolutionary period of the nineteenth century : they were merely a welcome excuse for commentators on the Epistles to abbreviate their comments on one or the other. The all-questioning attitude of the past generation or two did not, however, rest content with this, and a favourite explanation of the resemblances and differences was the view that "Ephesians" is the production of a second-century writer, who used the Epistle to the Colossians as a basis for his compilation. This view is still expressed in the recently published *Introduction to the Literature of the*