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A table of contents for *The Expository Times* can be found here:

https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_expository-times_01.php

pdfs are named: [Volume]_[Issue]_[1st page of article].pdf

A few years ago the Rev. Archibald Chisholm, D.Litt., won his spurs by a valuable book on 'Labour's Magna Charta,' and he has increased our debt to him by his new volume on *The Healing of the Nations* (S.C.M. ; 2s. 6d. paper, 4s. cloth). It is essentially a plea for Christian brotherhood, and for the recognition of *all* that is involved in the fact that 'ultimately the whole world is one market' ; but the value of the book lies in the fact that it does not indulge in hazy generalities but deals vividly, if briefly, with the actual concrete economic and political problems that beset the world to-day, due to the interrelation, for example, of East and West, to the control of rubber and oil, the attitude of the Great Powers to China, etc. It is a courageous book ; its writer does not hesitate to speak of the damaging effects (in certain directions) of the Peace Treaties, of the unwisdom of permitting France to raise troops for the French army in her African mandates ; and 'the world,' he frankly says, 'cannot long remain in the anomalous position of one-third of its population controlling eight-ninths of its territory.' The method of Jesus, as Dr. Chisholm says, is the one method which we have not discovered impracticable, and this book will help us to apply it intelligently.

A thoroughly useful book on the Psalms has been written by Mr. George W. Thorn (S.C.M. ; 2s. 6d. paper, 4s. cloth). It is called *The Heart of Israel*, and, while not indifferent to the literary values of the Psalter, it deals chiefly, in successive chapters, with its religious values, expounding, for example, The Divine Purpose in History, The Sacrament of Nature, The Nature and Need of Man, Personal and Corporate Religion. The view throughout is modern : Mr. Thorn does not believe, for example, that the Psalter contains predictions of incidents in the earthly career of Jesus, but rather that it expresses the hope

which He fulfilled and the ideals which He realized. The emphasis is always placed upon the things that matter. Mr. Thorn rightly points out the comparative unimportance of the question whether the voice that is heard in the Psalter is that of the individual or the Church, for the individual owes his religious stimulus to the Church, and when he utters his own faith he is also uttering hers. Mr. Thorn is also in line with much modern criticism in urging that the discovery of the historical background (which is often quite undiscoverable !) is not of supreme importance for interpretation : the modern analogies he adduces of hymns whose power over us does not in the least depend on our knowledge of their origin, are very convincing. This is an able and helpful little book, well fitted to promote an intelligent affection for the Psalter.

The Barrows Lectureship was founded in 1894 to present the truths and claims of Christianity 'in a friendly, temperate, and conciliatory way' to the English-speaking students and thinkers of India. Under its auspices some notable courses of lectures have been delivered in the great cities of India. The sixth course, given by the Rev. C. W. Gilkey, D.D., of Chicago, has now been published under the title of *Jesus and our Generation* (University of Chicago Press ; \$2.00). The lectures form an excellent, popular presentation of the central truths of the Christian faith. They give evidence of wide reading and solid thinking, while they are lit up with a variety of apt illustrations. The writer does not take much account of Indian thought, but, on the other hand, he assumes on the part of his readers an intimate knowledge of the thinkers of Europe and America. On this account the lectures are likely to prove of more value to the students of the West than to those in the East, to whom they were originally delivered.

The Parable of the Marriage Feast (Matt. xxii. 1-14).

BY THE REVEREND W. B. SELBIE, D.D., PRINCIPAL OF MANSFIELD COLLEGE, OXFORD.

THE parables of Jesus afford the finest possible illustration of the way in which truth can be 'embodied in a tale.' As a method of teaching they were familiar to His contemporaries, and they have many parallels in Jewish literature. But in

the mouth of Jesus there is something about them that makes them differ from all others of their kind. This is not merely due to their homely wisdom and to their aptness to the needs of His hearers, or to their lack of puerile and adventitious material,

but rather to the wealth of religious instruction which they convey. Even the elaboration which some of them have undergone at the hands of the Evangelists has not been able to obscure the originality and pertinence of the message which the parables convey. They bring us very near to the mind of Christ, and show more clearly than some of His more direct teaching what He would have men understand by the Kingdom of God.

The Parable of the Marriage Feast would seem to be a later and more elaborate version of the Parable of the Great Supper in Lk 14¹⁶. Both are parables of the Kingdom, and both arise from and are directed against the attitude of the Pharisees to our Lord and His mission. They probably come from different sources, and the Matthew version would appear to be later than the destruction of Jerusalem. The reference to the persecution of the messengers and the vengeance of the king is generally regarded as foreshadowing the catastrophe of Judaism and the punishment visited upon the Jews for their persecution of Christians. There is nothing of this in Luke's story, which is simpler and less severe. The general lesson, however, is practically the same in both cases. We may, therefore, confine ourselves to Matthew's story with its very interesting addendum of the account of the man without a wedding garment.

The local colour of the parable is vivid and characteristic. The preparations for the feast and the repeated invitations are quite in consonance with Jewish custom. The excuses made for declining the summons reflect a familiar type of busy worldliness, while the impulsive and arbitrary action of the king has about it a real touch of Oriental despotism. In interpreting it, too much stress must not be laid on the details. These belong rather to the framework of the story, and any attempt to discover a cryptic significance in each or all of them would only serve to blur its main outlines and to draw attention off from the greater lessons it is intended to enforce.

In the first place, then, we note that the breadth and universality of the appeal of the Kingdom is a direct consequence of its rejection by those to whom it was first addressed and for whom it was originally intended. Jesus Christ was sent in the first instance to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. 'He came unto His own, but His own received Him not.' This mission to the Jews is no casual and incidental thing. It is pressed with

urgency and iteration. It represents an essential element in God's plan of salvation. That the Jews should receive the full force of the challenge of the Kingdom first is one of the privileges of their election. Their rejection of it justifies God's rejection of them. The parable is one of judgment, but the severity of the judgment is but the shadow cast by the fullness and graciousness of the unheeded invitation.

This, then, is the first point which calls for comment. In the repeated and urgent invitation to 'them that were bidden' and its subsequent extension to all and sundry, we have a striking illustration of the breadth and insistence of the gospel appeal. May we discover here at least two suggestions for modern preachers of the gospel of the Kingdom? They are the bearers of an invitation which they will do well to press on an indifferent world. If it is true, as is so often said, that preaching has lost the note of unctio and urgency, then it is no wonder that it has lost power. It may not be an easy thing to preach 'as a dying man to dying men,' but it is the only way to carry conviction and bring the message home. In the Lukan version of the parable we have the words 'Compel them to come in.' This is not, as has often been supposed, a sanction for persecution, but it does justify the note of passion and constraint in delivering the message of the king. Without this the world will hardly be persuaded that we are in earnest or that we believe ourselves in the vital issues of our message. This idea is further emphasized by the description of the Kingdom in terms of a marriage feast. The older commentators outdid each other in enlarging on this theme. The Kingdom to them was a feast of fat things, with 'banners, trumpetings, delights, raptures, satisfactions infinite.' We cannot follow them in the use of these sensuous terms, but we can lay a like stress on the glory and beauty of those spiritual values for which the Kingdom stands and without which life for all men is vain indeed. As Jesus Himself called men to a larger and fuller life, a life of higher pursuits and purer enjoyments than those of this world, so His followers may well urge on men the greatness and value of the life that is hid with Christ in God. There is a radiance and rapture about the Christian faith that cannot be mistaken, and that, once realized, is the best evidence of its truth and power.

But men are strangely slow to realize their good fortune, and this brings us to the second main point

or lesson in the parable. The unanimous rejection of the king's invitation for reasons which, because they might have been foreseen, were certainly inadequate, and the bitter hostility shown towards the king's messengers, all serve to illustrate in the most vivid way the preoccupation of men with their own concerns and the resulting alienation from the things of God. The excuses given by the rank and file simply show that they are too much concerned with their own affairs. Such concern is legitimate enough. The work of the world has to be carried on. But other things are important too, and the parable suggests a lack of perspective and a mistaken sense of values such as are only too common and always tend to make men deaf to the religious appeal. The story throws into strong relief the folly and one-sidedness of religious indifference. But it does more. There were some who received the king's messengers with hatred and cruelty, and even put them to death. It is generally supposed that this is an allusion to the priests and elders who compassed the death of Jesus and persecuted His followers. But we need not confine it to them, for they are themselves only types of the bitter persecuting spirit which has too often issued from religious zeal. That such conduct can only recoil on the heads of those who practise it is a lesson brought home to us by the whole history of religious intolerance and persecution. The parable puts in a sentence what it has taken the Church many years of bitter experience to learn.

The wrath of the king and the doom visited on the despisers of His grace was indeed severe, but it only serves to illustrate the moral stringency of the teaching of the Kingdom. This is an aspect of God's dealing with men that is too easily overlooked, but it always stands out stark and bare in the teaching of Jesus. The love of God is something far removed from mere sloppy sentimentalities. There is a moral order in the universe, and men's actions are subject to a moral catharsis which works inexorably, bringing eternal life to well-doers and tribulation and anguish to them that do evil.

This, however, is only one side of the picture. The parable goes on to emphasize grace in judgment. Its third main lesson is given in the command to the king's servants to go out into 'the partings of the highways,' and bid all and sundry to the marriage feast, now scorned by those for whom it was first intended. This is the reason for opening the Kingdom of Heaven to Gentiles.

The privileged guests have shown themselves unworthy, but the king's tables must be filled, and the invitation is now sent out to all, good and bad alike. This wide extension of the gospel appeal is in full accord with the attitude of Jesus to the outcasts of His time. When He ate and drank with publicans and sinners, He was giving practical expression to the teaching of this parable. One of the greatest things in Christianity is the new valuation of human nature which it involves. That God loves all men irrespective of race, class, or social status, that He cares for lost sheep, and that in Jesus Christ there is neither Jew nor Gentile, bond nor free, rich nor poor, male nor female, is a truth to the full height of which the Christian Church has not yet attained. Even where the obligation to preach the gospel to all alike is clearly recognized, it is sometimes carried out with such discriminations as destroy its real freedom. We may instance the way in which women are treated by some Churches, as though their souls were less precious than those of men, and the sharp distinction drawn between whites and blacks in some countries. The freedom of God's grace and the broad universality of His appeal to a needy world suggested in this parable are integral to the mind and teaching of Jesus Christ.

At first sight it would seem as though a serious limitation were put upon this freedom by the sequel to the parable concerning the man without a wedding garment. Taking the story as it stands, it would seem hardly fair to blame a man for not coming to the marriage suitably clad, when he had been hastily summoned from the street as an afterthought. It has, therefore, been suggested that it was sometimes the custom on these occasions for the host to supply wedding robes for his guests, and that the man in question showed a culpable negligence and disrespect in not putting one on. Another suggestion is that we have here a second and different parable. If we repeat v.² before v.¹¹, the story would be complete, and this would avoid the difficulty mentioned above. In any case, however, the lesson of the parable stands out clearly and is quite pertinent. It conveys a solemn warning against abuse of the Divine Grace. The fact that God's invitation is given to all without discrimination does not warrant careless acceptance of it. The Kingdom of Heaven is no idle boon, nor are its privileges to be easily won or lightly esteemed. The wedding garment may be taken to represent

that spirit of humility, penitence, and faith which alone can fit a man for the life of the Kingdom and guarantee a right perseverance in it. It is not without significance that in all His teaching on the Kingdom Jesus dwelt more on the conditions of entrance to it than on the nature of the Kingdom itself. The really important thing was that men should enter the Kingdom in a state of penitence and childlike trust. Only so could they appreciate its spirit and share its life. It is not that the benefits of the Kingdom are reserved only for those who are fit for it. If that were so, why the invitation to good and bad alike, and why the constant assurance on the part of Jesus that He was come not to call the righteous but sinners to repentance? This free call, however, is quite compatible with the suggestion in the parable that it must be responded to in the right spirit. Only the humble, penitent, and childlike temper can 'see' the Kingdom of God, and the wedding garment probably means no more than this. The old familiar interpretation that the man came forward clothed in his own righteousness rather than trusting in the imputed righteousness of Jesus Christ, reads into the parable a theological meaning which it will hardly bear. There is a great truth in John Wesley's adaptation of Zinzendorf:

Jesus, Thy robe of righteousness
My beauty is, my glorious dress;
'Midst flaming worlds, in this arrayed,
With joy shall I lift up my head;

but it is not necessarily contained in this parable. The simplest and most obvious interpretation is here, as always, the best.

This appears pretty plainly in the words, 'For many are called but few chosen.' The appeal of God's free grace is a responsibility as well as a privilege. It is open to all, but not all realize the force of it or respond to it in the right spirit. A gospel, however freely offered, is no true gospel, and availeth nothing, unless it is accepted. A boon is best accepted, as men say, in the spirit in which it is offered, *i.e.* freely, whole-heartedly, and with a full recognition of the obligations which it involves. Many people hear the gospel message, and that with a more or less perfunctory agreement; but very few receive it in the sense of making it theirs and living up to its requirements. We cannot now hold the doctrine of election in the old sense of election to privilege, but we may hold it in the sense of an election to responsibility. Few

are chosen because few are capable of choosing and of carrying out the implications of the choice. The business of the Kingdom is not to be lightly undertaken or carried through. In a very real sense it belongs to the elect.

The parable, which closes on this note, is essentially one of warning and judgment. Though it presents on the surface some difficulties of interpretation, the main lessons, as we have seen, stand out clearly enough, and are as timely to-day as when they were first set forth. It is always well to be reminded that the free love of God gives no excuse for carelessness on the part of men, but only increases their responsibility. To sin against love is a far more heinous thing than to break law. The grace of God, so far from involving moral flabbiness and indifference, only brings men face to face with a severer standard of judgment. To continue in sin that grace may abound, is an utterly mistaken course. 'The goodness of God leadeth men to repentance,' and the wider its appeal the greater the sin of those who reject it. Thus an obvious lesson of the parable is that, in the preaching of the gospel, emphasis should be laid not merely on the width and freedom of its appeal, but on the dire consequences of indifference to or rejection of its claims. This is a note which modern preaching has almost entirely lost. No doubt it is right that we should not unduly appeal to the motive of fear, but at the same time it is hardly fair to conceal the darker side of the picture and leave men in ignorance of the fate of those who wilfully neglect the obligations of the gospel of grace. We shall never restore the note of urgency to preaching until we realize that there is something to be urgent about, and that to be outside the Christian pale involves irreparable loss and disaster. This parable and others like it should serve to warn us of the necessity of revising our sense of spiritual values and of rediscovering and reasserting the exceeding sinfulness of sin. Apart from this, there can be none of that reality about our religion which the modern mind seems to crave. So too with regard to the absence of a wedding garment. Men must be taught to bring forth fruit meet for repentance. As has been said, 'we are all pragmatists now,' and no religion is likely to meet men's needs or appeal to their higher nature unless it can bring its own credentials with it in a robe of righteousness. 'By their fruits ye shall know them' is a stringent test, and fully accounts for the fact that 'many are called but few chosen.'