Do any ask: "But what does the parable mean? Put it into plain prose."

It means that, if we are wise and seek to please God, we shall cherish a meek and gentle spirit, instead of an angry spirit, quick to take and give offence. It means that, instead of seating ourselves in the chair of authority, and "dealing damnation round" the Church, we shall sit at the feet of Christ, and learn of Him who was meek and lowly of heart. It means that, instead of thrusting ourselves into forms of service for which we are not qualified, we shall be happy to fill well a lowly place. It means that, in lieu of rushing in where angels fear to tread, and being quick and sudden of quarrel with those who differ from our conclusions, we shall be eager to learn of any who can teach us, and give credit to as many as differ from us for a sincerity and a love of truth equal to our own.

S. Cox.

CANDIDATES FOR DISCIPLESHIP.

(Luke ix. 57–62.)

The circumstance which called out these sudden protestations of discipleship was simple enough. Wearied with His forenoon of miracle-working, followed by an afternoon of loud speaking from the boat to the crowds on shore in an atmosphere close and thundery, portending the storm that followed, our Lord proposed to cross over to the wild eastern shore of the lake, and so for a time get quiet from the pressure of the busy western shore. It was the collection of parables regarding the kingdom of heaven, which Matthew has grouped in his thirteenth chapter, which our Lord had uttered during the afternoon. He then went for a little into the house, and it was when He came out in the

evening to cross the lake, that this scribe, apparently a man of warm, impulsive nature, who had been much moved by the grand revelation of truth made in the parables, avowed his inability to stay away from Jesus, and his purpose to follow Him.

The scribe's ardent protestation our Lord met with a sedative if not chilling rejoinder: "Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests; but the Son of man hath not where to lay His head." Whether this ominous utterance quenched the zeal of the scribe or not, we are not told. If he persisted in following, then during the next two hours, when the heavy sea was thundering into the half-decked boat, possibly he wished himself well back among his books in his quiet room at Capernaum, and might steal round by land back to his own home as soon as they touched the shore. But it may have been quite otherwise, and this unnamed disciple may have had not only impulse to prompt profession, but courage, steadfastness, and devotion to carry through his resolve. The incident is told, not for the sake of any special interest attaching to the individual, but because our Lord's treatment of him was typical, representative of His treatment of a class of people.

Here then was a man who was sincere but somewhat hasty. He was the kind of man who leaps before he looks —by no means the worst kind of man, and very decidedly better than the man who neither leaps nor looks. He was a man of impulse. Now impulse has a most important function in life to discharge.

"Moments there are in life—alas! how few!—
When, casting cold, prudential doubts aside,
We take a generous impulse for our guide,
And, following promptly what the heart thinks best,
Commit to providence the rest;
Sure that no after-reckoning will arise
Of shame or sorrow, for the heart is wise.

And happy they who thus in faith obey
Their better nature: err sometimes they may,
And some sad thoughts lie heavy in the heart,
Such as by hope deceived are left behind;
But like a shadow these will pass away
From the pure sunshine of the peaceful mind."

But there is also a danger in acting on impulse. And the danger, as every one knows, of acting on impulse is that we commit ourselves to a kind of conduct we cannot maintain, to positions in life that become thoroughly distasteful to us. It is a very frequent mistake among men; and indeed it is a very great part of wisdom to know for what we are fit, to know our own mind, and to anticipate the future we make for ourselves by taking certain steps. The misery and failure which men bring into their own lives and the lives of others in great part arise from acting on impulse without any consideration proportioned to the serious nature of the issues. Young men choose professions so, and great talents are often lost by the idle predilection of a youthful way of looking at things. We swear eternal friendship to persons whom we would, without regret, ten or twenty years after, pass on the street without recognition. Persons who are attracted to a cause by anything which tells on their merely superficial likings are apt to prove most dangerous to it in the long run. They are like bad bolts in a ship; when the storm comes they are no good, but give way at once and bring disaster on the whole.

Now a person who is naturally impulsive will be so in his religious actings as elsewhere. He will fail to weigh the tremendous issues of becoming a disciple of Christ. He will run into the matter heedlessly. He will not anticipate and make quite present to his mind the kind of life he is committing himself to. He will not look at the matter all round, in every light, from every point of view. He never reflects, never says, *Why* am I doing this? What does it

involve? What will come of it? He does not give as much resultful thought to this matter as a serious-minded man will give to the question whether he should send his son to a day-school or a boarding school. Nay, some men are less considerate about religion than they are about secular matters, so that it comes to pass that a person will sometimes give less earnest, eager, business-like consideration to the matter of professing Christ, than he gives to the question whether he will accept some situation that has turned up, or some offer that has been made him.

But the man here spoken of was not inconsiderate from indifference, but because the whole matter was settled with him out of hand. He had real, warm feelings towards Christ, an ardour that is much to be desired in these days. The man, at all events for the time, felt that his happiness lay in maintaining an acquaintance, friendship, connexion with Jesus Christ. He could not let Him out of his sight. "If you go across the sea, I must go too." It is painful to throw cold water on the ardent. One would gladly leave to any other the task of abruptly pulling up such a person in the midst of his zealous professions; and it must have been especially painful for our Lord to seem to discourage one who was professing so warm an attachment to Himself. But there was that in the man which showed our Lord that he needed a test, needed something laid before his mind which would shed clearer light on the results of his profession. He proposes the test suitable to his position in life. To the fishermen, used to spend nights in an open boat on the treacherous Sea of Galilee, the want of shelter of which our Lord here speaks might not have seemed the hardest part of Christ's lot; but the scribe was accustomed to softer living.

The homelessness of the follower of Christ is therefore but one side of the more general truth, that whoever becomes Christ's friend must share in His experience. This

is the thought He desires to introduce into the mind of every one who, with too little consideration of consequences, approaches Him with a profession of discipleship. Attachment to Christ must result and does result in sharing His experience. This is as much a law of the Christian life now as ever it was. Christ is the same person still, of the same mind and spirit, with the same disregard of outward and earthly comforts, the same magnanimous superiority to everything, however delightful, which hinders God's service and the attainment of high spirituality. And if we mean anything rational in attaching ourselves to Him, we mean that we desire to become of one mind with Him, to have the same comparative estimate of spiritual and fleshly pleasures, of this world's gains and of things eternal.

And there is no genuine Christian who cannot show in detail how his attachment to Christ has made his experience in this world to resemble the experience of Christ. They can point to passsges at least in their life, if not to some long-continued thread running all through it, in which their experience in the world has borne a striking resemblance to that of Christ, and has done so because of their conscious and deliberate cleaving to Christ and His will. There is not a man who has lived for ten years in the spirit of Christ who cannot tell you with perfect distinctness of several things he has abandoned which he would otherwise have most dearly liked to possess—things, some of them, which once seemed quite as necessary to him as a fixed and well-roofed house.

But everybody knows that many persons take upon them to say that they are the deeply attached friends of Christ, who have not considered where this friendship may carry them. They have thought more of the claims they may make on Christ than of the claims He may make on them. They look at this friendship as a one-sided thing, and forget that all friendship involves sacrifice of self, and the deeper

the friendship the more influential on the life it is. And because men thus deceive themselves, therefore does Christ here state the case so plainly. Here are the terms of discipleship, which no one need misunderstand. In following Christ we become partners with one whose aims are all spiritual, who holds in abhorrence all that thwarts these aims, all self-indulgence, all such absorption in the world's interests as blinds to the true uses of the world. In proposing to follow Christ we propose to share the experience of One who despises comforts and ease, who has a great work in hand, for which He sacrifices everything. We propose to share the fortunes of One whose treasure was in heaven, and who had no sympathy with the usual objects on which men spend themselves.

2. Our Lord has a fresh method for each individual. One man He retards, another He quickens. There is no mechanical form of appeal, no urging the same action on every one.

The next man our Lord addressed was of quite a different type. He was standing listening to the Lord's conversation, but not making any profession. He was a man who needed encouragement and stimulus rather than checking. In him, whether by previous acquaintance or present discernment, our Lord sees the stuff of which disciples are made, and therefore utters the determining words, "Follow Me." But when thus abruptly summoned, the man hangs back, and pleads that he may first go and bury his father. That is to say, he wishes to live with his father till he dies, and then he will be free from family claims. Had his father been already dead, he could not have been in the crowd, for burial in the East takes place on the day of death. And our Lord could not have refused so natural a request had the father been already lying dead. The man, in fact, is a representative of a large class of people, who feel themselves good enough for business and family life, but

not good enough for the kingdom of God. When they hear Christ's call, they wish to yield to it, but they feel as if their place were rather in the ordinary ways and observances of life. They have Christian conviction, attachment to Christ, good impulses; but either from native shyness and modesty and fear of failure, or from a misconception of duty, they will not appear as promoters of Christ's kingdom, and prefer to abide in the domestic and social duties of their station.

What our Lord has to say, then, to such persons is, "Let the dead bury their dead." Let those who have no spiritual life attend to those duties that need none. Leave the common duties of life, as much as possible, to those who have no fitness as yet for the higher duties; but go thou, My follower, and preach the kingdom. You are urgently needed for this work; other things will be done whether you do them or not. The surgeon, short-handed on the field of battle, and with men bleeding their life away lying thick around him, will not suffer his assistants to spend their time carrying the dead to the rear while every skilled brain and hand is needed to save life. So our Lord lays His hand on this departing disciple, and claims him for higher work than anointing the dead and weeping over hopeless clay. And considering our Lord's tenderness of feeling and delicate sympathy with the sorrow of man, woman, and child, considering how often He stood in defence of those who were misunderstood, and how in pity for the bereaved He again and again restored to them their dead, no more striking proof could be given of His intense longing for the salvation of the living than this apparent undervaluing of filial affection and natural duty.

The principle underlying the Lord's words is obvious. He who follows Christ must abandon works that others can do as well as Christians, and must devote himself to such works as none but Christians can do or will do. No doubt

this is a hard saying for every man who accepts it candidly as spoken by His Lord to him. But can we make less of the words? It is Christ's law of economy. In His kingdom every man must be in his right place, and his gifts must be utilized to the utmost. There must be no "village Hampdens" or "mute, inglorious Miltons." The born statesman must not be left to follow the plough, nor the genius that can plan campaigns be buried in some base employment that a machine can do better than a man. Such an economy every man, as he grows into life, finds he must employ on his own account. He is pressed to do work which he knows will prevent him from doing what he thinks more needful. He is offered promotion that seems attractive, but he declines it, because he is sure it will prevent him from achieving the work to which he is devoted. And our Lord says, "If you are My follower, this consideration must always be in your calculations, how you can effect most for My kingdom, of which you are a part."

The honest heart will rightly interpret this principle and rightly apply it. It does not call every man to go and preach the kingdom and do nothing else. It does not summon us to abandon the ordinary customs and ways of life. But it does say to each of us, Consider well how you can be most useful. This that you are asked to do, will it not be quite as well done though you give yourself to other work? In your case you have not only to ask, "Must somebody do this thing?" you have also to ask, "Can my strength not be better spent in doing something else?" It is not a sufficient reason for your engaging in some enterprise or work, that some one must do it. There are many things which need to be done in the world, but on the doing of which you do not need to spend a Christian. Here is a case which often occurs. A man has given ten or twenty of the best years of his life to acquire scholarship or

familiarise himself with science or philosophy; but at length he finds that it is not with these instruments he can best serve Christ, and that if his conscience is to be clear and his life serviceable to its utmost, he must abandon all he has so laboured to acquire, and resign the pleasure, the respect, the hope these acquirements have won. He sees that there are things which will be done, if not by him, then by others: just as men will not leave a dead body lying in their streets, so will they not fail to pursue those branches of knowledge which attract natural taste or yield the fruit of new comforts to the community. And this fact must enter your calculations. You must not, with a false modesty which is really want of faith in Christ, confine yourself to employments which can be done quite as well by those who have no spiritual life; and you must not shirk employments which require spiritual life. In a word, you must be sure you are spending the life you receive from your connexion with Christ to the best account.

This principle has become extremely difficult to apply, because in one way or other we become so entangled in the net of society and are enslaved to the world. Young men are comparatively free, and, like this young man to whom our Lord spoke, they are standing at a critical point in life, where they may make the right or the wrong choice. A young man may be conscious of natural advantages which fit him to compete successfully for what are considered the prizes of life. He is however bound, before committing himself to an exhausting business or laborious career such as the world offers, to consider whether he cannot in some other, though less pleasant and more obscure walk, serve Christ's kingdom better. It is not attractive to look forward to the unrecognised life of a mediocre preacher or only moderately successful worker in Christ's kingdom; but a life that proceeds on an unselfish motive is sure to come to greater happiness than that which is formed by selfishness. And

what Christ said to this young man He says to all, "Throw in your lot with what is alive in the world and advancing: do not spend yourself on what will shortly be buried out of sight. You are living men: put your life into what will go on and endure."

3. The third candidate for discipleship was of still another type. When Elisha was called by Elijah, he made the same request as this man, "Let me, I pray thee, kiss my father and my mother, and then I will follow thee." This request was granted to Elisha, but not to this disciple; or, if granted, it was granted under warning that his home affections might prove too strong for the attractions of discipleship. From the terms in which this warning is couched, we must suppose that this disciple was of a somewhat soft and irresolute nature, easily moved, and not steady in his attachments. "No man, having put his hand to the plough, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God." Elisha was at the plough when called, and perhaps Christ had the scene in His mind's eye, and thence borrowed the figure. Its meaning is apparent. The plough needs undivided attention; foot, hand and eye are always on the strain. You cannot even walk straight for a few yards if you turn your head to look behind you, still less can you draw a straight furrow. So, says our Lord, the man who looks back to what he is leaving is not well-adapted, not the right kind of workman for the kingdom of God. Looking back with regret on anything from which we are sundered by attachment to Christ unfits us for following Him. Success in any work depends on our giving ourselves wholly and heartily to it; not revising our choice, not casting longing, lingering looks behind. The husband expects of his wife that she will leave father and mother and cleave to him, fonder of her parents than ever, but never regretting the choice she has made, nor showing by tears and listlessness that her heart is still in her old home. And as Christ

means to abide by His choice of us, He expects that we shall abide by our choice of Him.

And for some natures there is nothing for it but a complete and sudden severance from attachments, occupations, amusements in which other men may safely indulge. They must turn the back on many things without even a parting kiss. Old associations will ensnare and enthrall them if they do not put themselves beyond their reach by a sudden, dogged, and speedy departure. And certainly sin must be fled abruptly. The disposition we find in ourselves to treat it as an old friend must be crushed. If for Christ, this pearl of price, we have to sell many other pearls, let us count the cost; but having once made our bargain, let us stick to it.

How far then can we say that we have driven the plough for Christ? How many furrows can we show that we have drawn without once looking back? How is it with us? Are we so captivated by Christ and the work He gives us to do that we never dream of looking back? Are we so absorbed in the life of the kingdom that we have no room in our heart for regrets and longings for what we have left behind? Let us at least be sincere with ourselves, and understand whether we have so much as put our hand to the plough. Has the Christian aspect of life a charm for us? and do we give ourselves heartily to the future Christ guides us to, not sorry to leave behind us the pomps and vanities, the indulgences and pleasures, the sinful excitements and wicked satisfactions of the godless world? Is Christ enough? Is His friendship the sufficient compensation, the ceaseless inducement?

When we profess to be followers of Christ, we say to all whom it concerns, to ourselves and to Christ, that we mean to make something of our discipleship, to be His man; we put our hand to the plough as if intent on work, we stand forward as if we meant to take a new direction in life and make a different use of life. Does our life justify

this profession? Does our life show that the person of Christ truly draws us, that in His direction *all* our hope lies, that we are well rid of all He leads us away from?

If then we would be Christ's followers, we must be prepared to make His experience ours, His work our work, His person our all. In other words, we must be prepared to be unworldly, consecrated, devoted. In attaching ourselves to Christ, we attach ourselves to one who held the common prizes and gains of this world absolutely cheap, and who was scarcely conscious of hardship while absorbed in spiritual aims. This is the experience we propose to make our own. He bids us also economise our time, and spend ourselves on what belongs to the kingdom. And in His kingdom and Himself He would have us find our all.

MARCUS DODS.