

THE PARABLE OF THE DISHONEST STEWARD AFTER ORIENTAL CONCEPTIONS

PAUL GÄCHTER

This parable until now is still a *crux interpretum*,¹ and much more a *crux praedicantium*. It ought not to be so, because a solution of the main difficulty has been proffered, but unfortunately it has passed unnoticed, if we are to judge by the majority of modern interpreters. The difficulty is: How can Jesus make villainy an example for his followers? It is especially with regard to the preachers' pulpit that the following lines have been written.

The story is a parable, a piece of poetry with the purpose of making a point of moral doctrine clear to the hearers. Parables were a favorite means of teaching among the rabbis in Israel at the time of our Lord, so much so that it developed a stereotype form.² However, this form alone does not make a good parable. A good parable, if judged by the literary or esthetical standards has not only to be moulded after the standard form, but its metaphoric part has also to be true to life so as to be clearly distinguished from a fable. In this respect, as all commentators agree, the parables of Jesus are masterpieces. Seeing their general perfection, we shall not easily acquiesce in an interpretation of the parable of the Dishonest Steward which finds in it elements that run counter to life. We will admit them with reluctance, if no alternative is left, and then only should one be willing to subscribe to D. Buzy's explanation, that they are liberties which every poet of parables may take.³ Buzy is not quite consistent with himself, for he explains other features of the parable by having recourse to actual life as it was then.⁴ In so doing he simply applies that rule which is commonly applied to all parables, viz., to explain them as best can be from the conditions of life which prevailed at the time of Jesus. There is no reason whatever why any part of the parable of the Dishonest Steward should be an exception.

Here is the text of the parable:

1 L. Fonck, S. J., *Die Parabeln des Herrn, im Evangelium*, 4 ed. (1927), p. 679: "Die Parabel wird als eine der schwierigsten von allen betrachtet und gilt als wahre *crux interpretum*."

2 R. Pautrel, S. J., "Les canons du *mashal* rabbinique," in *Recherches de Science Religieuse*, 26 (1936), pp. 5-45.

3 D. Buzy, S. C. J., *Les Paraboles*, (*Verbum Salutis*, VI, 1932), p. 675f.

4 *Loc. cit.*, 679-81.

(1) He said to His disciples: There was a rich man who had a steward, and a report came to him that his steward was wasting his goods. (2) Whereupon he sent for him, and said to him: "What is this that I hear of you? return your stewardship, for you cannot be my steward any longer." (3) At this, the steward said to himself: "What am I to do, now that my master will take my stewardship away from me? I have no strength to dig, and I would be ashamed to beg for alms. (4) Oh, I see what I must do, so as to be welcomed into their homes when I am dismissed from my stewardship." (5) Then he summoned his master's debtors one by one; and he said to the first: "How much is it that you owe my master?"—(6) "A hundred firkins of oil," he said. And he told him: "Here is your bond; quick, sit down and write it as fifty." (7) Then he said to the second: "And you, how much do you owe?"—"A hundred quarters of wheat," he said. And he told him: "Here is your bond, write it as eighty." (8) Whereupon the master commended his dishonest steward: "He has acted wisely."—For, indeed, the children of this world are more prudent after their own fashion than the children of the light. (9) And my counsel to you is, make use of your base wealth to win yourselves friends, who, when you leave it behind, will welcome you into the eternal tabernacles.

For the understanding of the parable and its application, all depends on the nature of the steward's actions concerning the bonds of his master's debtors, the rest is of secondary importance. The prevailing view is that the steward who had already acted dishonestly towards his master, by turning part of the master's income to his own use, crowned his dishonesty by committing a crime of forgery, and of further alienation of his master's property. To quote more recent commentators: A. Jülicher⁵ speaks of "forgery," A. A. Bruce⁶ of "knavery"; F. Tillmann⁷ calls the steward a "rascal"; Th. Zahn⁸ sees in his action "a crime of forgery," Th. Innitzer⁹ "a last fraud," L. Fonck¹⁰ "an injustice (towards his master) of a particularly high degree." M.-J. Lagrange¹¹ daubs him with the epithet of a "rogue," and similar opinions are expressed by by C. G. Monte-

⁵ A. Jülicher, *Die Gleichnisreden Jesu*, II. (1899), p. 502 "Fälschung," 504 "fälschender Haushalter."

⁶ A. B. Bruce, *The Parabolic Teaching of Christ* (1900), p. 363: "It involves knavery as towards the creditor, but it involves beneficence as towards his debtors."

⁷ Fr. Tillmann, *Biblische Zeitschrift*, 9 (1911), p. 178 "Schuft."

⁸ Th. Zahn, *Das Evangelium des Lucas*, (Kommentar zum N.T., III, 1913), p. 572 "Verbrechen (der) Urkundenfälschung."

⁹ Th. Innitzer, *Kommentar zum Evangelium des hl. Lukas mit Ausschluss der Leidensgeschichte*, 3 ed., (Kurzgefasster Komm., zu den Vier hl. Evangelien, II/2, 1922), p. 348.

¹⁰ L. Fonck, *Die Parabeln des Herrn*, 4 ed. (1927), p. 685.

¹¹ M.-J. Lagrange, O.P., *Évangile selon Saint Luc*, 3 ed. (1927), p. 435ff., the steward is a "fripon" who makes the tenants "ses complices."

fiore,¹² E. Klostermann,¹³ J. Sickenberger,¹⁴ D. Buzy,¹⁵ P. Dausch,¹⁶ J.-M. Vosté,¹⁷ F. Hauck,¹⁸ K. Rengstorf,¹⁹ L. Fendt,²⁰ F. Prat,²¹ J. Schmid,²² L. Marchal.²³

If this is the meaning of our Lord's parable, it is indeed difficult to see how the master could commend the steward, and how Jesus could draw any suitable conclusion from his action except in contrast to what he had done, as He does, e.g., in Luke 22:25-26: "The kings of the Gentiles lord it over them . . . but with you it is not to be so." Instead, the steward is recommended for his prudence. No doubt, by means of logical distinctions we can cut out foresight and prudence from his complex action and dismiss the rest, forgery, cheating, and seducing the debtors to complicity in a dishonest dealing with their common master. But a glance at any of the commentators referred to reveals that psychologically this distinction is ill applied, because it does not reach the mind of the unsophisticated; they simply remain puzzled at the positive parallel drawn between the steward and Christ's disciples. Did Jesus, who otherwise knew so well how to speak to the hearts of men, really propose a parable which necessarily strikes one as touching on what according to all standards of morals is wrong?

Apart from that difficulty, there is the inner unreality of the action as ascribed to the steward. Whether we assume that he had pocketed for himself a portion of the high taxes while they by right belonged to his lord, or that he had cheated him in some other way, the reduction which he now granted to the debtors—if it was his master's property—could only aggravate his already precarious position. He could not reasonably

¹² C. G. Montefiore, *The Synoptic Gospels*, II, (1927), p. 528.

¹³ Erich Klostermann, *Das Lukasevangelium*, 2 ed., (*Handbuch zum N.T.* 5, 1929), p. 162.

¹⁴ Jos. Sickenberger, *Leben Jesu nach den vier Evangelien*, 5. Lieferung, (1929), p. 81.

¹⁵ D. Buzy, *Les Paraboles*, (*Verbum Salutis* VI, 1932), p. 677ff.

¹⁶ Petrus Dausch, *Die drei älteren Evangelien*, 4 ed., (*Bonner Bibel*, II, 1932), p. 521.

¹⁷ J.-M. Vosté, O.P., *Parabola selectae D.N.J. Christi*, II, 2 ed. (1933), p. 723.

¹⁸ Friedrich Hauck, *Das Evangelium des Lukas*, (*Theologischer Handkommentar zum N.T.*, III, 1934), p. 204.

¹⁹ K. H. Rengstorf, *Das Evangelium nach Lukas*, (*Das N.T. Deutsch*, 3, 1937), p. 173.

²⁰ Leonhard Fendt, *Der Christus der Gemeinde*, (*Die urchristliche Botschaft* III, 1937), pp. 178ff.

²¹ Ferdinand Prat, S.J., *Jésus-Christ*, II, 7 ed. (1938), p. 134.

²² Josef Schmid, *Das Evangelium nach Lukas*, (Regensburg, 1940), p. 192.

²³ L. Marchal, *La Sainte Bible*, ed. L. Pirot-A. Clamer, tome X, 1946) p. 196ff.

hope to keep it a secret, as he would soon have to present all the bonds and bills to his employer, who, according to the parable, learned at once what had happened. It is hard to see how this action of the steward deserves praise for his prudence; it was not true to life at all. Nor would it be to the credit of Jesus, as the author of the parable, to have invented such an unreasonable action.

We must not overlook that Jesus does not qualify the morality of the steward's doing except that He calls it prudent. Even v. 8 ("Whereupon the master praised his dishonest steward") does not necessarily imply that this man was dishonest in the action referred to; his dishonesty has been proved to evidence before he performed his last measure.

The scholars mentioned above, interpreted the parable out of their Western way of thinking, which in many points differs so greatly from Oriental ways. That a parable, coming from an Oriental (Jesus) and being addressed to Orientals (Jews) should be understood in the light of Oriental customs, is a truism. M. Evers²⁴ came near the truth by supposing that the higher amount of wheat, oil, etc. had been unjust, but "in accordance with the system of extortion of those days." That was a good guess, but Evers lost his advantage by interposing "double bookkeeping."

A new solution of the problem of the Dishonest Steward is not offered here, but the intention is to bring to light again a solution which had been put forward almost half a century ago, and which in all likelihood is the one true answer. It seems to have been overlooked by nearly all exegetes, an exception being W. F. Howard who referred to it in 1938, unfortunately in a review only. In 1903 Miss Margaret D(unlop) Gibson wrote in the *Expository Times*:²⁵

²⁴ M. Evers, *Das Gleichnis vom Ungerechten Haushalter*, Lk. 16, 1-13, (1901), pp. 50ff.

²⁵ Margaret (Dunlop) Gibson, "On the Parable of the Unjust Steward," in *Expository Times*, XIV (1902/3), p. 334. W. F. Howard quotes this text in full in his review on B. T. D. Smith, *The Parables of the Synoptic Gospels*, which proves that even in English exegetical literature Miss Gibson's explanation went unnoticed. Howard calls it "the best clue to the obvious difficulty," and adds: "Dr. Oesterley (in his book, *The Gospel Parables*, 1936) dismisses this line of interpretation by saying that it presupposes a Roman, and not a Jewish, *mise en scène*. Dr. B. T. D. Smith ignores the entire discussion. Nevertheless, Lk. XVI, 8a tells powerfully in favour of the view that the steward voluntarily relinquished his legitimate, if excessive, commission, recognizing in this crisis when unemployment stared him in the face that friendship was worth more than hard cash. His invisible assets would be his security." *Journal of Theological Studies*, 39 (1938), p. 408.

"It has been a puzzle to many to know why, for remitting on his own authority a portion of the debts that were due to his master, the steward should have been commended by him. It seems to me that the difficulty lies simply in our not being sufficiently familiar with Eastern customs. . . . I know that at the present time, wherever Orientals are left to their own methods, uncontrolled by any protectorate of Europeans, the plan is to farm out taxes or property of any description. The steward would therefore demand from the cultivators much more than he would pay to the overlord, perhaps even double, and pocket the difference himself. This is so usual in the East that those who were listening to our Lord, many of whom were themselves publicans, i.e., farmers of taxes, would understand the situation intuitively, and would not need any explanation. They would know that the steward, in telling the cultivators to write less in their bills than he had originally demanded from them, was simply renouncing his own exorbitant profits, without in any way defrauding his master." Miss Gibson had been in the Orient herself.

She found support from W. D. Miller,²⁶ who added another genuinely Oriental touch to her explanation. The steward not only had to collect the revenues of his master, but he had to "hand over what he could to the master without giving him trouble." In fact, "the Eastern reluctance to be troubled," possibly more ingrained in the Near East than in the Far East, is an element not to be neglected. By it the wide scope of action given to the steward becomes intelligible. Provided he handed over to his lord annually a fixed sum of money, or fixed quantities of wheat, oil, etc., the landlord would not bother at all how the steward had hired out the farm land, nor how he got the revenues. As long as he got what he expected, he would exercise absolutely no control over the management of the steward, so that there was no need at all of "double bookkeeping." In all probability he did not pay him for his work, but took for granted that the steward would not forget his own interests. No matter how much he overtaxed the tenants in his personal interest, it was no concern to the master, nor would he mind in the least, if his steward, for one reason or another, gave up his personal emoluments.

These conditions granted, the steward, when threatened with losing his stewardship could follow various courses, e.g., he might hand over to his employer the bonds as they were, turning to him even his personal gains in order to appease him. Or he might continue to "squeeze" out of the debtors every penny possible so as to have some money or goods to fall back upon when the fatal hour of his dismissal struck. Instead,

²⁶ *Expository Times*, XV, (1903/4), p. 333.

“the steward does a generous thing to the tenants, a just thing to the master, a thing which is a complete sacrifice to himself.”²⁷ This last point does not lose all its significance, by the supposition that the motives of the steward were far from altruistic.

After W. D. Miller, E. Campden-Cook endorsed Miss Gibson’s explanation,²⁸ he added an interesting statement: “A gentleman who was once a missionary in India tells me that the parable viewed thus is constantly being illustrated by similar conduct in the East today.” It was in India where the writer of this article learned about the ways of the Zemindars of the North and the Marvaris or money-lenders of Maharashtra where he lived. It suggested to him the very solution which Miss Gibson, as was found out later, had printed years ago. Indians to whom he explained the parable in that way considered it the most natural thing. Extortion, “squeeze,” is the key-word all over the East, and so it must have been from time immemorable although we have little direct evidence except in the New Testament.²⁹ Seeing that M. Gibson’s explanation restores to the parable its vital background and fills it with the life of the East, and seeing how little attention had been given to that explanation, it was thought worth while to bring it to public attention once more.

Having established the main point we shall briefly consider its application to the details of the parable.

(1) “There was a rich man that had a steward.” An Oriental would think of a man who was living comfortably in the luxuries he could find in some bigger town or city. For so doing he needed a good sum of money which he drew of course from his estates which lay at considerable distance from where he lived. Shunning the interminable worries which the management of an estate invariably involves, he had put up a steward³⁰ whose only duty as regards his master was to provide

²⁷ *Loc. cit.*

²⁸ *Expository Times*, XVI, (1904-5), p. 44

²⁹ Flavius Josephus records that when Herod Agrippa, about 33-34 A.D., was practically bankrupt, he borrowed money through an agent of his, from a banker in the East. The agent received 17,500 drachmas, but had to sign a receipt of 20,000 dr. *Ant. Jud.*, XVIII, 6. 3.—See also note 31.

³⁰ The term *oikonomos* in Egypt at the times of the Ptolemys meant an official, whose power, however, diminished as the time went on; see L. Mitteis-U. Wilcken, *Grundzüge und Chrestomathie der Papyrskunde*, I/1, pp. 158-61. Papyri of 2.-4. cent. A.D. speak of the *oikonomos* as manager of an estate, as does the Gospel of Luke: see J. P. Moulton-G. Milligan, *The Vocabulary of the Greek Testament*, (1914-29) *s.v.*—P. Billerbeck, *Kommentar zum N.T. aus Talmud und Midrasch*, II (1924) p. 217, classes him with the *gizbar*, Aram. *gizbara*. The Mishnah, by that

him at fixed times with fixed sums of money, or with various kinds of produce, or of both. He did not pay the steward for his services, for the steward was supposed to be in a position to gain his livelihood from those who were under him. He hired out the different portions of the master's property to cultivators. They had to pay revenues from which one part would go to the master, one part to the steward. These revenues were fixed by written documents which the tenants had to write and give to the steward. These are the suppositions upon which our parable seems to be based.⁸¹

"And a report came to him that his steward was wasting his goods." Here again we are left with the task of applying the *communiter contingentia* to the tale. The steward, instead of delivering the revenues as far as stipulated to his master, turned at least part of them to his own use. He seems to have indulged in revelling, for in the end he had neither money nor property to fall back on.

(2) "What is this that I hear of you? Return your stewardship, for you cannot be my steward any longer." With masterly terseness Jesus gives his hearers to understand that the guilt of the steward had been proved beyond question. There was no room left for excuses no matter how hard the man, in Oriental fashion, would try to save his face by pleading innocent or by promising to reimburse his lord at once. The master verdict was absolute.⁸²

(3) "At this the steward said to himself. . . ." Even while defending himself he realized what his situation was, wherefore he did some hard thinking as to his future. He had no physical strength for bodily labor, and his former way of high living had so much exposed him to the public

term as a rule, means a treasurer of the temple, but occasionally seems to know it in the sense which we have to suppose in Lk. 16:1-9, e.g., if he is forbidden to acquire a plot of land by prescription: *Baba Bathra* III, 3.

⁸¹ Exact parallels in ancient sources could not be found; the nearest is subletting of land which was common in Palestine (*Baba Bathra* 46b) and Egypt (Mitteis-Wilcken, *loc. cit.*, I/1, pp. 275 and 292). It seems, however, most likely that the rich people who formed the lay nobility of Jerusalem, not to mention the high-priestly aristocracy, employed stewards for the management of their estates. For all, or most, of them had landed property all over Judea and possibly Palestine. Cf. Joachim Jeremias, *Jerusalem zur Zeit Jesu*, II, B. 1. (Leipzig, 1929), pp. 90-94. The same may be true of Rabban Gamaliel II, (*Baba Mesia*, V. 8).

⁸² *Apodos ton logon tes oikonomias sou* cannot, therefore, mean "Give an account of your stewardship." If used in that sense *logos* has no article (Mt 12:36: Acts 19:40: Rom 15:12: Hb 13:17: 1 Pt 4:5). In Lk. 16:2 we better translate "the affair of your stewardship," or "the business of your st.," or, best, leave it untranslated. Our translation above is in the main that of R. A. Knox, *The N.T. of our Lord Jesus Christ* (New York, 1944).

eye that he could not endure the humiliation of publicly begging for alms. D. Buzy³³ illustrates the steward's feeling by the great social distance which exists between an overseer and his workman. The overseer enhances it in every way possible, by his bearing, his attire, his parasol, his miens, words, curses, and particularly by his ambition never to lay hand to any manual work. The steward of the parable betrays exactly the same frame of mind.

(4) "Oh, I see what I must do, so as to be welcomed into their homes when I am dismissed from my stewardship." Here again we have an indication that the debtors were tenants. The steward wanted a refuge where he could live honorably until such a time when he would again find a suitable occupation. This might take him a year or longer. If "they"—meaning those of whom the parable speaks in the next verse, and who were now foremost in the mind of the steward—were cultivators, who were going to benefit through him not only once, but for a number of years, his hope was well founded, as they would be willing to extend their hospitality over a good period. The scheme, on the other hand, would not work so well, if the "debtors," as some commentators prefer, were people who had received a loan from the master which they had to return in kind. They would immediately benefit from the steward, and consequently would not be so disposed as to grant him indefinite hospitality. Besides, cultivators of the soil would be more inclined to show mercy than merchants.

(5) "Then he summoned his master's debtors one by one." It was privacy, not secrecy which the steward wanted for his dealing with the tenants. That secrecy was not in question is shown by the parable: the master soon knows what has happened. Although the steward still acted in his official capacity, it was not so much an official act, as rather a personal affair that he wanted to transact. This caused him, probably for the first time, to act tactfully in order to give to his dealings with the tenants an air of personal intimacy. His purpose could not be better accomplished than by summoning one debtor at the time and by talking to him in a friendly tone.

(5-7) "How much is it that you owe my master?"—"A hundred firkins of oil."—"A hundred quarters of wheat." The farmers must have taken over comparatively large grounds for cultivation to pay such revenues.³⁴ They had to deliver them as if they were entirely due to their

³³ D. Buzy, *Les Paraboles*, 4 ed, (*Verbum Salutis* VI, 1932), pp. 676-7.

³⁴ In Mt. 21:33f the *georgoi* have to deliver part of their vintage. Similar conditions are attested for the cultivators of the time of Jesus as well as of our own

master, but they knew too well that a large amount was taken by the steward. It may well be, that in his unfairness he had extorted out of them considerably more than common usage would have entitled him to do, so that the farmers were greatly overcharged. But what could they do? The landowner would care about them as little as did the steward; even in court they could not hope to get a redress, because the steward, no doubt, had the ear of the judge.³⁵ If the tenants wanted to keep alive and prevent their families from starving, nothing else was left but to accept the conditions and shoulder the extravagant extortion. Therefore, when asked how much they owed their master, they sullenly quoted the amount which by force of circumstances they had written down on their bonds. That the steward made them speak it out was a clever move; he made them realize more vividly what he was going to grant them.

"Here is your bond; quick, sit down and write it as fifty"—"Write it as eighty." These bonds were the dreaded instruments of oppression.³⁶ Great must have been their surprise, when, as the parable goes, the steward invited his tenants to write out new documents with a substantially lesser amount to pay. If the majority of the interpreters were right that the reduction meant a new fraud which the steward committed against his employer, the procedure could hardly be praised for its wisdom.³⁷ As, according to the parable, the master soon knew about the proceeding, the new documents were of no avail to the tenants, seeing that the landlord had every facility to have them annulled in court. The very un wisdom which in the usual explanation is implied in the action, and the wide-spread and immemorable custom of the East entitle us

times, which is a strong argument in favor of the debtors being peasants, not merchants. Cf. G. Dalman, *Arbeit und Sitte in Palästina*, II, "Der Ackerbau," (1932), p. 158f; J. A. Jaussen, O.P., *Naplouse et son district* (Coutûmes Palestiniennes, I, 1927), p. 278f.

³⁵ When the British in India had handed over the administration of several provinces to the All-India Congress, that is, to the Indians themselves, a Hindu newspaper soon complained that, in consequence, the police had become open to bribes. This meant that no poor man would any more find redress for his complaints against oppression on the part of the rich, the land-owners and the money-lenders. So in 1939-40.

³⁶ Occasionally these documents were forged by the creditor in whose hands they were (cf. *Baba Bathra* X, 4), or would not be returned to the debtor when he had fulfilled his obligations (cf. A. Büchler, *Der galiläische Am-ha-ares des zweiten Jahrhunderts*, 1906, p. 247f.).

³⁷ D. Buzy, *op. cit.*, 675 says: "Si ces combinaisons (i.e., what the steward settled with the tenants, in Buzy's opinion a criminal affair) se passaient dans le réel, je craindrais pour leur fragilité ou leur inefficacité"—a poor testimony for the parable and its author.

to consider the reduction of the revenue as made, not at the expense of the master, but of the steward himself. He simply renounced all his claims, even inasmuch as they were just, so that the cultivators from then on had not to pay more than what the steward was supposed to hand over to the master.

The difficulty has been raised that simple farmers did not know reading and writing. Our answer is that the parable mentions writing as briefly as other features of the story, without bothering the hearers with details. This leaves us a certain freedom to conclude how the actual writing would have been done in case the tenants did not know writing. This difficulty, therefore, is not decisive against taking the debtors to be peasants.

The parable thus interpreted must have caused the hearers to imagine the surprise and joy of the cultivators at the unexpected demand. The steward, as we have already mentioned, might have acted quite differently and left them in their plight. His action did not make up for his foregoing extortions, much as it looked like a confession of guilt. On his part, it was a personal gift, which the tenants could not misinterpret. Being Orientals, they at once felt obligated towards the steward, for the Orient, except for alms to the poor, does not know a gift pure and simple. Whatever is given calls for a return, be it in kind, or by way of a favor, an intercession etc. When accepting the gift, the tenants at once felt under obligation towards the steward, notwithstanding his former extortions.

The cultivators of the parable would also at once grasp an aspect of the deal which in the parable is not referred to. The one who had to pay the bill was not the master, nor, properly speaking the steward, although it remains true that he gave up even justified claims. As his dismissal was impending, he could not have earned his share from the revenues more than once, and this at most. It was rather his successor who, with the new bonds in hand, would find it rather difficult to obtain his share from the tenants, just or unjust. Not that he would be completely at a loss what to do. But for some time to come the tenants were safe against his extravagant grasping. This change in their situation would naturally strike their minds at once and render them inclined to do a good turn to the steward who had brought it about.

(8) "Whereupon the master praised his dishonest steward: 'He has acted wisely.'"³⁸ How much more natural is this praise from the lips of the master after the explanation given, than if the steward had added another fraud to his former crimes against his employer.

³⁸ That Luke knew the use of *hoti* recitativum is borne out by passages like Lk. 1:25, 61; 4:41a; 5:26; 15:27a. (W. Bauer, *Griechisch-Deutsches Wörterbuch zu den Schriften des N.T.*, 3 ed. 1937, s.v., no. 2)

"For indeed, the children of this world are more prudent after their own fashion than the children of the light." This word, together with v. 9, is best taken as the application Jesus made of the parable. The action of the steward, certainly, sprang from selfish motives and by no means from remorse or a feeling of pity with the oppressed farmers. Still, considered by itself it was not dishonest. It does not, therefore, call for the subtle and—from the viewpoint of psychology—so unsatisfactory distinction between the wickedness and the wisdom of his doing as the ordinary way of interpretation requires. There was here no new crime as of forgery and cheating.

(9) "And my counsel to you is, make use of your base wealth (mammon of iniquity) to win yourselves friends, who, when you leave it behind, will welcome you into the eternal tabernacles." It seems that the Jews, somehow, regarded "Abraham's bosom" (Luke (16:22) as an abode where the just departed enjoyed intercourse with one another, and which implied eternal happiness.³⁹ This verse is now perfectly intelligible. The steward, a worldlying, had in the end done something worth doing which did not run counter to the law of natural decency. By an argument known among the rabbis as "qal wachomer," the transition from the lesser to the greater, Jesus brings home to his disciples how they should detach themselves from riches, apply it to their brethren in need, and thus secure for themselves an eternal reward. This is the natural end to a perfect parable.⁴⁰

³⁹ R. Pautrel, S.J., "Aeterna Tabernacula," in *Recherches de Science Religieuse*, 30 (1940), pp. 307-27 missed this point. His explanation is too subtle to be convincing.

⁴⁰ Thaddaeus Soiron, O.F.M., *Die Logia Jesu* (Neutestamentliche Abhandlungen, VI/4, 1916), p. 104 remarks that in the parable, in vv. 10-12, and vv. 13 there are "völlig verschiedene Gedankengänge zusammengestellt ad vocem *mamonas* (Klugheit—Treue im Kleinen—Gegenüberstellung des Mammons—und Gottesdienstes)." He refers to Wellhausen, Bugge, Fiebig, Weizsäcker, Joh. Weiss, J. Holtzmann. We may add D. Buzy. St. Luke may have received the parable with this catchword composition from tradition; this is more likely than that he himself created the somewhat incongruous sequence of the *logia* of Jesus.