

The Open Court

A MONTHLY MAGAZINE

Devoted to the Science of Religion, the Religion of Science, and the
Extension of the Religious Parliament Idea

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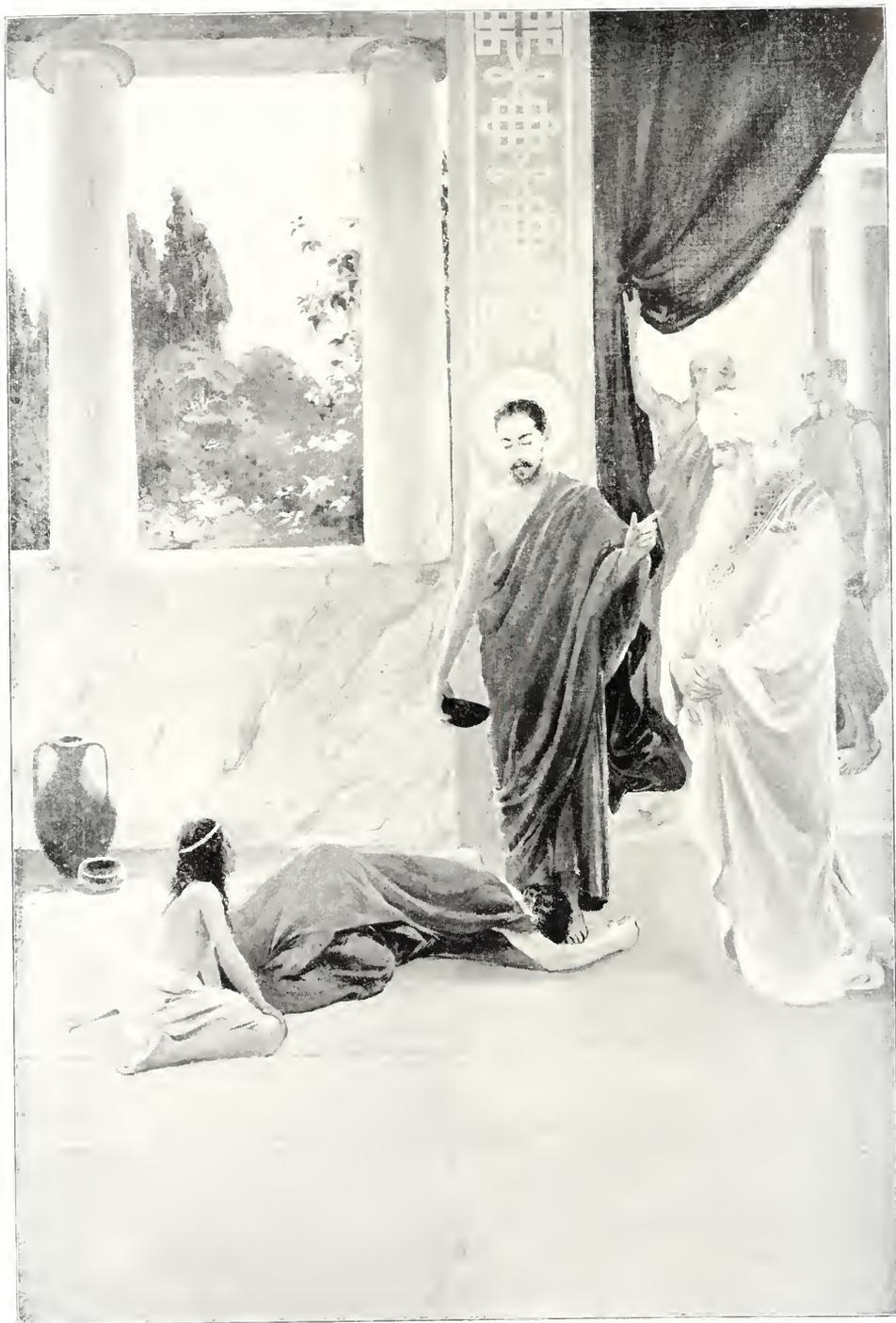
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YASHODHARA.

BY EDUARD BIEDERMANN.

Frontispiece to The Open Court.

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THE PARABLE OF THE TALENTS.

BY THE EDITOR.

IN the *Uttarâdhyayana*, one of the sacred books of the Jain sect, which in its ethics is very similar to Buddhism, we read the following parable (Lecture VII, 14 ff.):¹

“Three merchants set out on their travels, each with his capital; one of them gained much, the second returned with his capital, and the third merchant came home after having lost his capital.

“This parable, taken from common life, applies to religion.

“The capital is human life, the gain is heaven, through the loss of that capital man must be born as a denizen of hell or as a brute animal. (These two courses are open to the sinner.

“Bear in mind what is at stake, and consider the lot of the sinner against that of the virtuous man.

“He who brings back his capital, is like unto one who is born again as a man. Those who through the exercise of various virtues become pious householders, will be born again as men, for all beings will reap the fruit of their actions. But he who increases his capital, is like unto one who practises eminent virtues. The virtuous, excellent man attains to the glorious state of the gods.”

The similarity of this ancient Jain story to the parable of the talents in the Christian Gospels is undeniable and a historical connection between the two is more than probable.

Matthew (Chap. xxv, 14 ff.) mentions three servants to whom talents are entrusted “to every man according to his ability” and the one who hides his talents is punished. Luke (xix, 12 ff.) amplifies the story and speaks of ten servants to whom talents are entrusted.

¹*Sacred Books of the East*, Vol. XLV, pp. 29, 30. Translated by Hermann Jacobi.

but the Gospel According to the Hebrews, which may have preserved the most ancient form of the Christian parable, is more similar to the Jain version, not only because it mentions three servants, (viz., one who has devoured his substance with abandoned women, one who hid his talents, and one who multiplied it,) but also preserves the characteristic feature of the moral. He who multiplies his talents is accepted, i. e., goes to heaven; he who hides them is blamed but not punished; and the one who wastes them is imprisoned.²

Prof. Hermann Jacobi, the translator of the *Uttarâdhyayana*, believes that the story originated in India and not in Palestine. He says:

“Taking into consideration (1) that the Jaina version contains only the essential elements of the parable, which in the Gospels are developed into a full story; and (2) that it is expressly stated in the *Uttarâdhyayana* (VII, 15) that ‘this parable is taken from common life,’ I think it probable that the Parable of the Three Merchants was invented in India, and not in Palestine.”

² The parable of the talents according to the Gospel of Hebrews is quoted by Eusebius in his *Theophania*, translated by Nicholson in *The Gospel According to the Hebrews* (London: 1879). The references are made from Mr. Hermann Jacobi's note to his translation of the *Uttarâdhyayana*.

It would probably be unwise to study the parable of the talents in Matthew 25 without also considering a similar parable in Luke 19:11-27: 11 While the people were listening to these things, Jesus proceeded to tell a parable, because he was near to Jerusalem, and because they thought that the kingdom of God was going to appear immediately. 12 Therefore he said, "A nobleman went to a distant country to receive for himself a kingdom and then return." As I was teaching the parable of the virgins, I could not see how verse 13 served as any kind of conclusion to the first 12 verses. (2) Many of the commentaries acknowledge the abruptness of verse 14 as the first verse of a new paragraph. But none of them adequately explain it.