

Before receiving this communication I had come upon another passage in the same gospel in which the contrast is brought out, though not by any means so strikingly, between the two kinds of believing. In John ii. 11, it is said that the effect of our Lord's miracle at Cana upon the "disciples" who witnessed that manifestation of his glory, was that "they believed on him ( $\pi. \epsilon\iota\varsigma$ )."

There is no direct use in the immediate context of the other construction of the verb, as in the passage above referred to, but in the previous chapter (see verses 41, 45), these same disciples are represented as having already acknowledged him to be the Messiah; and not only so, but Nathanael, who was almost certainly one of them, is addressed by our Lord (ver. 50) as one who had already "believed." They had "believed"—with an intellectual conviction; but now they "believed *on him*"—with the deeper faith of the heart, accepting and committing themselves to him as their personal Lord and Saviour. They advanced "from faith to faith."

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### THE PEARL OF GREAT PRICE.

MATTHEW xiii. 44-46.

It is long since any article in the EXPOSITOR has provoked so many suggestions and rejoinders as that of Mr. Metcalfe, on "The Twin Parables," which appeared in the July No. (pp. 54 ff.). They have reached me, not only from Ireland, Scotland, England, but also from America and the islands of the West. It was obviously impossible that I should insert them all, or indeed many of them; but I have just received one from the Incumbent of Holy Trinity, the pro-cathedral of Bermuda, which, partly because it has come so far, but mainly because I think it points in the right direction, I gladly submit to the judgment of our readers.

EDITOR.

IN venturing to criticise the explanation of this Parable advocated by Mr. Metcalfe a few numbers back, I must confess to a feeling of

considerable reluctance. The key he offers is one that has sometimes suggested itself to my own mind, and I have tried hard to make it fit all the wards of the lock ; but without success. He does not advance any fresh argument in favour of this fascinating theory ; on the contrary, his elaborate argument is to me a convincing proof that the theory he broaches is not the true interpretation.

The last paragraph in Mr. Metcalfe's paper furnishes my principal objection to his view. He is there obliged to admit that the phrase in the Parable, "and sold all that he had," tells against him, pleading at the same time that it does not seem to form an insuperable objection. This opinion he supports rather by evasion than argument ; for he tries to surmount the difficulty by refusing to interpret the words in a literal and natural sense, though the main object of his article is to find a meaning for the Parable which will explain the actual words, "the kingdom of heaven is like unto a merchantman seeking goodly pearls," in *their* literal and natural sense.

It appears to me that the true understanding of this parable in conjunction with its companion—the Twin Parables, as they have been well named—depends a good deal upon two important considerations which have often been over-looked. Let me try to recall attention to them, and we shall perhaps see that the old interpretation is, after all, better than the new.

1. No one can fail to notice that there is a striking similarity in the phraseology employed by our Lord at the end of each of these Parables. In the one case, the man "goeth and selleth all that he hath, and buyeth that field"; in the other, the man "went and sold all that he had, and bought it." Now I take it these are not mere detached sayings, which happen to correspond in some particulars, as might be said of many favourite phrases which our Lord repeated over and over again, and which might be collected together from different parts of the holy Gospel. No; the seven parables of the Kingdom are all intimately related one to another as individuals in a series ; the first six of them, indeed, may be said to pair off as they stand. At any rate, the two in question are admittedly twins. It is allowed that the one is the complement of the other, and we are asked to believe that this relationship is sustained by a contrast. But, is it possible to suppose that the very similar clauses I have quoted refer to totally distinct persons or things, standing (as they do) side by side, in companion sentences? Can we imagine the Saviour, in the midst of parabolic representations of important truths, deliberately confusing the minds of his disciples by using almost identical language to sym-

bolize, at one time the action of a human being, and in the very next breath the mighty energy of the Kingdom of heaven? I cannot think so. Surely the two phrases must correspond to one another in sense as closely as they do in wording. In each instance it is a "man" who sells all that he has; and in each instance that "man," I conceive, represents none other than the human soul.

The only admissible alternative is to identify in a sense the Kingdom of heaven with the man himself, and to interpret the search for goodly pearls to mean such further efforts after complete sanctity and self-surrender as even the most saintly need to make. The pearl of great price would then be that perfection in likeness to the Master, that oneness with Christ, which St. Paul pursued so earnestly, desiring to apprehend that for which he was apprehended by Jesus. This, however, is a less simple and therefore a less likely interpretation than the one I have stated above.

2. Mr. Metcalfe's suggestion owes its birth, I rather suspect, mainly to a supposed lingual difficulty in the Parable, from which he sees no way of escape save the very questionable expedient of reversing his engines. "If the usual interpretation were correct," says he, "we should read in the second parable—The Kingdom of heaven is like unto a Pearl of great price; but as a matter of fact we read, not that the Kingdom of heaven is like unto a Pearl, but that it is like unto a merchantman seeking goodly pearls." And here Mr. Metcalfe pauses to wonder that the manifest and complete contrast between this Parable and that which precedes it has been so long ignored. But he stops short just where he ought to go on. The comparison which our Lord makes is, not between the Kingdom of heaven and a merchantman seeking goodly pearls, but between the Kingdom of heaven and all the remaining context to the end of the Parable. The merchantman seeking goodly pearls is only a part, not the whole, of the similitude. The same criticism applies to the parable of the Hid Treasure, the Tares, the Leaven, the Mustard; also to that of the Net, which immediately follows. In short, in every instance where our Lord makes use of the expression, "The kingdom of heaven is like unto," we must understand the likeness to run through all that follows, and not to be practically confined to the first few words. Mr. McClellan, in his note on the Parable of the Sower, has a remark which equally applies in the present instance: "By reason of the compendiousness of the exposition, or record, there is caused here and there a seeming confusion of metaphor; . . . but this is only a form of speech which the common sense and intelligence of the

hearers are expected to penetrate." If this principle be adopted, we shall have no occasion to stumble at the threshold of the Parable, and ask how the kingdom of heaven is like unto a merchantman seeking goodly pearls. When we read the Parable, its meaning will be self-evident. For, consider what the Saviour designed to teach his hearers by these "Parables of the Kingdom." Was not his object plainly this,—to set forth the working of his Church on the world and in the heart of individuals? Christ wished to prepare his disciples for the various phenomena which would accompany the establishment of his Kingdom upon earth. They knew not, at the time, how these different phases of the Kingdom were about to be manifested; but, after their Lord's departure, the Paraclete opened their eyes to comprehend the spiritual application of truths which hitherto they had but imperfectly understood. Yet, even though ignorant of their deepest meaning, no one could miss gathering from these parables some notion of the all-embracing character of the Kingdom which Christ came to set up among men. This was a hard lesson for those to learn who had been trained in the exclusive schools of traditional Judaism. We need not wonder that Christ exhibits the truth He wanted to impress upon them in a great variety of lights. It would have been surprising if He had not supplemented the Parable of the Hid Treasure with that of the Pearl; for the four parables which precede these are arranged in pairs. First, we have the action of Christ upon the Church, in the Parable of the Sower, supplemented by the Field and the Tares; then the expansive and permeating power of the Christian society, in the Mustard and the Leaven; and now, in this third pair, we are shown the attitude of the individual in relation to the saving grace of God. The King, the Kingdom, the Subjects,—under each of these aspects two illustrations are given to enforce important verities and to exhibit, in more than one light, the manifold Wisdom of God.

The real teaching of the third pair in this set of Parables is not limited to the commonplace lesson that the Kingdom of heaven is manifested sometimes to those who are seeking it, and sometimes to those who have not sought it. This of itself would, I maintain, be sufficient to differentiate the two, if we had no indication of further truths underlying it, for this is the very doctrine enunciated by St. Paul in Chapters x. and xi. of his Epistle to the Romans. But, though this is doubtless part of the lesson, it does not exhaust the deep meaning in our Lord's words. The Parables cannot be fully understood unless allowed to remain in the setting He gave them. They are distinctly Parables of the Kingdom, and, as such,

they had a definite part to play in conveying to the minds of the disciples certain facts which it concerned them to know respecting the operation of Divine Grace on the human soul.

The paramount mystery of the Kingdom of God is union with Christ. We must become bone of his bone, and flesh of his flesh. To this end the stewards of God's mysteries are sent to preach the evangel of the Kingdom throughout the world. Otherwise, how should men hear the glad tidings, or know the good that He has purposed for them in his Son? But, through the agency of the Church, the whole earth will eventually be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea. Still, although the Church thus becomes in a manner co-extensive with the world, overshadowing and permeating it (as in the Parables of the Mustard and the Leaven), and although the Kingdom of Christ is visibly set up in our midst, that which constitutes its real value and treasure may remain hidden, and must remain hidden until discovered for himself by every child of man. God reveals it to each soul through his Spirit, and that Divine Spirit breathes where He wills. Let no one attempt to limit or to check the mysterious freedom of his movements. At one time He "lightens with celestial fire" the dark chambers of a heart which has been only cold and numb—one *in* the Church but not *of* the Church—a mere nominal professor of Christianity; and, at another time, He bestows his "blessed unction" upon one who hitherto has "not so much as heard whether there be any Holy Ghost," but who has been seeking higher and nobler things in the sphere of his own occupation.

Such I conceive to be the drift of these Parables, and I believe the last of the series bears out my general interpretation. A net was cast into the sea, and gathered of every kind. Both good and bad were found in it. This state of things was taken for granted in the Parable of the Hid Treasure, where our Lord shewed how one who had been among the "bad" in the "field" of the Church became "good." He now emphasizes the fact that in this world the same "net" is to inclose both,—one Church is to gather all within its embrace. The separation into good and bad will take place hereafter, when the angels shall come forth, and sever the wicked from among the just. Meanwhile there is an opportunity vouchsafed to all, so that both those who are diligently seeking valuable pearls may find the Pearl of great price, and even the wanderers in the field of the Church may discover and possess themselves of the Hid Treasure.

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