

The Parable of

THE WHEAT AND THE TARES

Matthew 13:24-30, and 36-43

by

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'ANOTHER parable put he forth unto them,'--or better, 'set he before them,'¹--'saying, *The kingdom of heaven is likened unto a man which sowed good seed in his field: but while men slept, his enemy came and sowed² tares³ among the wheat, and went his way.*' Our Lord did not imagine here a form of malice without example, but adduced one which may have been familiar enough to his hearers, one so easy of execution, involving so little risk, and yet effecting so great and lasting a mischief, that it is not strange, if where cowardice and malice met, they should have often displayed themselves in this shape. We meet traces of it in various quarters. In Roman law the possibility of this form of injury is contemplated; and a modern writer, illustrating Scripture from the manners and habits of the East, with which he had become familiar through a lengthened sojourn there, affirms the same to be now practised in India. 'See,' he says, 'that lurking villain watching for the time when his neighbour shall plough his field: he carefully marks the period when the work has been finished, and goes in the night following, and casts in what the natives call *pandinellu*, i.e. pig-paddy; this being of rapid growth, springs up before the good seed, and scatters itself before the other can be reaped, so that the poor owner of the field will be for years before he can get rid of the troublesome weed. But there is another noisome plant which these wretches cast into the ground of those they hate, called *perum-pirandi*, which is more destructive to vegetation than any other plant. Has a man purchased a field out of the hands of another, the offended person says, "I will plant the *perum-pirandi* in his grounds."⁴

1 Παρέθηκεν αυτοις. Some expositors have found more in these words than the Evangelist probably intended; thus Jerome, who explains them thus: 'Like a rich master of a household refreshing his guests with different kinds of food.' But see Exod. 19:7 (LXX).

2 In the Vulgate *superseminavit*, as in the Rhemish "oversowed," according to the reading, ἐπέσειρεν, which Lachmann retains; but which has hardly sufficient authority to warrant a finding of room for it in the text.

3 Ζιζάνιον nowhere occurs but here, and in the Greek and Latin Fathers who have drawn it from hence. The derivation, παρὰ το σιτος καὶ ἰζάνω, that which grows side by side with the wheat, is absurd; the word is no doubt oriental, Persian (see Pott, *Etym. Forschungen*, vol. ii. pt. 1, p. 810) or Arabic. The plant itself is identical, as there can be little doubt, with our own bearded darnel, the αἰρα or *lolium temulentum* (in German tollkorn, in French ivroie), so named to distinguish it from the *lolium* proper, and to indicate the vertigo which it causes, when mingled with and eaten in bread; as in the East will sometimes happen. See the *Dictionary of the Bible*, s.v. *Tares*, and Tristram, *Natural History of the Bible*, p. 486.

4 Roberts, *Oriental Illustrations*, p. 541. A friend, who has occupied a judicial

Of this parable also we have an authentic interpretation from the lips which uttered it. And this is well: for on its interpretation much has turned before now. References or allusions to it occur at every turn of the controversy which the Church maintained with the Donatists; and its whole exposition will need to be carried out with an eye to questions which may seem out of date, but which, in one shape or another, continually reappear, and demand to receive their solution. There can be no question who is the Sower of the good seed here. *'He that sowed the good seed is the Son of man.'* This title, by which our Lord most often designates Himself, is only in a single instance given to Him by another (Acts 7:56), and then can hardly indicate more than that the glorified Saviour appeared, wearing still a human shape, to the eyes of Stephen. To the Jews this name, though drawn from the Old Testament, from the great apocalyptic vision of Daniel (7:13), was so strange, that when they heard it, they asked, 'Who is this Son of man?' (John 12:34); not 'Son of man,' but 'Son of David,' being the popular name for the expected Messiah (Matt. 9:27; 12:23; 15:22; 20:31, &c.) He claimed by this title a true participation in our human nature; this, and much more than this. He was 'Son of man,' as alone realizing all which in the idea of man was contained,--as the second Adam, the head and representative of the race,--the one true and perfect flower which had ever unfolded itself out of the root and stalk of humanity. Claiming this title for his own, He witnessed against opposite poles of error concerning his person--the Ebionite, to which the exclusive use of the title 'Son of David' might have led, and the Gnostic, which denied the reality of the human nature that He bore.

But if Christ is the Sower in this, exactly in the same sense as in the preceding parable, the seed here receives an interpretation different from that which it there obtained. There 'the seed is the word of God' (Luke 8:11), or 'the word of the kingdom;' here *'the good seed are the children of the kingdom.'* And yet there is no real disagreement; only a *progress* from that parable to this. In that, the word of God is the instrument by which men are born anew and become children of the kingdom (Jam. 1:18; 1 Pet. 1:23); in this that word has done its work; has been received into hearts; is incorporated with living men; is so vitally united with them who through it have been made children of the kingdom, that the two cannot any more be contemplated asunder (cf. Jer. 31:27; Hos. 2:23; Zech. 10:9).

The next words, *'The field is the world,'* at once bring us into the heart of that controversy referred to already. Over these few words, simple as they may seem, there has perhaps been more contention than over any single phrase in the Scripture, if we except the consecrating words at the Holy Eucharist. Apart from mere personal questions affecting the regularity of certain ordinations, the grounds on which the Donatists of Africa justified their separation from the Church Catholic were these: The idea of the Church, they said, is that of a perfectly holy body; holiness is not merely *one* of its essential predicates, but *the* essential, its exclusive note. They did not deny that hypocrites might

station in India, confirms this account. Neither are we without this form of malice nearer home. Thus in Ireland I have known an outgoing tenant, in spite at his eviction, to sow wild oats in the fields which he was leaving. These, like the tares of the parable, ripening and seeding before the crops in which they were mingled, it became next to impossible to extirpate them (inexpugnabile gramen, Ovid).

possibly lie concealed in its bosom; but where the evidently ungodly are suffered to remain in communion with it, not separated off by the exercise of godly discipline, there it forfeits the character of the true Church, and the faithful must come out from it, if they would not, by contact with these unholy, themselves be defiled. Such was their position, in support of which they urged Isai. 52:1, and all such Scriptures as spoke of the Church's future freedom from all evil. These were meant, they said, to apply to it in its present condition; and consequently, where they failed to apply, *there* could not be the Church.

On this, as on so many other points, the Church owes to Augustine, not the forming of her doctrine, for that she can owe to no man, but the bringing out into her own clear consciousness that which hitherto she had implicitly possessed, yet had not wrought out into a perfect clearness even for herself. He replied, not gainsaying [disputing] the truth which the Donatists proclaimed, namely, that holiness is an essential note of the Church; but only refusing to accept their definition of that holiness, and showing that in the Church which they had forsaken this note was to be found, and combined with other as essential ones--catholicity, for instance, to which *they* could make no claim. The Church Catholic [Universal], he replied, despite all appearances to the contrary, *is* a holy body, for they only are its members who are in true and living fellowship with Christ, and therefore partakers of his sanctifying Spirit. All others, however they may have the outward marks of belonging to it, are *in* it, but not *of* it: they *press* upon Christ, as the thronging multitude: they do not *touch* Him, as did that believing woman, on whom alone his virtue went forth (Luke 8:45). There are certain outward conditions without which one cannot belong to his Church, but with which one does not of necessity do so. And they who are thus in it, but not of it, whether hypocrites lying hid, or open offenders who from their numbers may not without worse inconveniences ensuing be expelled,⁵ do not defile the true members, so long as these neither share in their spirit, nor communicate with their evil deeds. They are like the unclean animals in the same ark as the clean (Gen. 7:2), goats in the same pastures with the sheep (Matt. 25:32), bad fish in the same net with the good (Matt. 13:47), chaff on the same barn-floor as the grain (Mat. 3:12), vessels to dishonour in the same great house with the vessels to honour (2 Tim. 2:20), or, as here, tares growing in the same field with the wheat, endured for a while, but in the end to be separated from it, and for ever.

5 On the extent to which discipline should be enforced, and the questions of prudence which should determine its enforcing, Augustine has the following remarks. Having referred to these parables, and to the separation of the sheep and goats (Matt. 25:31-46), he proceeds (*Ad Don. post Coll. 5*): 'By which parables and figures the Church is fore-announced as destined, even unto the end of the world, to contain both good and bad, but in such a manner that the bad cannot injure the good, since they are either unknown, or, for the sake of the peace and the tranquillity of the Church, are tolerated, if it be inexpedient for them to be publicly accused, or if they cannot be pointed out to the good among whom they live. Yet, for all this, the zeal for amendment is not to sleep, but must use reproof, degradation, excommunication, and all other lawful and allowed means of coercion, which are daily practised without disturbance to the peace of unity in the Church, and with undiminished love, . . . lest haply tolerance without discipline shall foster iniquity, or discipline without tolerance dissolve unity.' On all this matter see the admirable discussion by Field, *Of the Church*, i. 7-18.

The Donatists would have fain made the Church, in its visible form and historic manifestation, identical and coextensive with the true Church which the Lord knoweth and not man. Augustine also affirmed the *identity* of the Church now existing with the final and glorious Church; but denied that the two were coextensive. For now the Church is clogged with certain accretions, which shall hereafter be shown *not* to belong, and never to have belonged to it. He did not affirm, as his opponents charged him, two Churches, but two conditions of one Church; the present, in which evil is endured in it; the future, in which it shall be free from all evil;--not two bodies of Christ; but one body, wherein now are wicked men, but only as evil humours in the natural body, which in the day of perfect health will be expelled and rejected altogether, as never having more than accidentally belonged to it; and he laid especial stress upon this fact, that the Lord Himself had not contemplated his Church, in its present state, as perfectly free from evil.⁶ At this point of the controversy the present parable and that of the Draw-net came in. From these he concluded that, as tares are mingled with wheat, and bad fish with good, so the wicked shall be with the righteous, and shall remain so mingled to the end of the present age;⁷ and this not merely as an historic fact; but that all attempts to have it otherwise are, in this parable at least, expressly forbidden (ver. 29). The Donatists were acting as the servants would have done, if, in face of the householder's distinct prohibition, they had gone and sought to root out with violence the tares.

The Donatists were put to hard shifts to escape these conclusions. They did, however, make answer thus: 'By Christ's own showing, "*the field*" is not the Church, but "*the world*" (ver. 38); the parable, therefore, does not bear on the dispute betwixt us and you; for that is not whether ungodly men should be endured *in the world* (which we all allow), but whether they should be suffered *in the Church*.⁸ It must, however, be evident to every one

6 Augustine (*Serm. cccli. 4*): 'Many, like Peter, are corrected; many, like Judas, are tolerated; many are unknown until the Lord shall come to light up the secrets of darkness, and make manifest the counsels of hearts.' Again: 'I am a man and live among men, nor do I dare to claim for myself a better dwelling-place than was the ark of Noah.' He often rebukes the Donatists for their low Pharisaical views concerning what the separation from sinners meant. Thus (*Serm. lxxxviii. 20*): 'If it displeased thee that a man sinned, thou didst not touch the unclean. If thou didst confute, reprove and admonish him, and, if need was, didst administer to him such fitting discipline as does not violate unity, thou didst, indeed, come out from him.' Elsewhere he asks, Did the prophet of old, who said, 'Go ye out of the midst of her' (Isai. 52:11) himself separate from the Jewish church?--'By withholding from consent he touched not the unclean: by his reproofs he went forth free in the sight of God: not unto him does God impute these sins, neither as his own, for he did not do them, neither as of others, for he did not approve them, nor yet as negligence, for he kept not silence, nor yet as pride, for he abode in unity.' See also *Ad Dom. post Coll. 20*. Once more: 'An angel fell; did he pollute heaven? Adam fell; did he pollute Paradise? One of the sons of Noah fell; did he pollute the house of the just? Judas fell; did he pollute the choirs of the Apostles?'

7 Augustine: 'The condition of a field is one thing, the quiet of a barn another.'

8 See how Augustine answers this argument, *Ad Don. post Coll. 8*. As the Donatists professed to make much of Cyprian's authority, Augustine quotes often from him (as *Con. Gaudent. ii. 4*), words which show that he understood the parable as one relating to the Church: 'For although there seem to be tares *in the Church*, yet this must not so hamper either our faith or our love as to make our perception that there are tares *in the Church* a reason for falling away from the Church.'

not warped by a previous dogmatic interest,⁹ that the parable is, as the Lord announces, concerning 'the kingdom of heaven,' or the Church. It required no special teaching to acquaint the disciples that *in the world* there would ever be a mixture of good and bad; while they could have so little anticipated the same in the Church, that it behoved to warn them beforehand, both that they might not be offended, counting the promises of God to have failed, and also that they might know how to behave themselves, when that mystery of iniquity, now foretold, should begin manifestly to work. Nor need the term '*world*' here used perplex us in the least. No narrower term would have sufficed for Him, in whose prophetic eye the word of the Gospel was contemplated as going forth into all lands, as seed scattered in every quarter of the great outfield of the nations.

It was '*while men slept*' that the enemy sowed his tares among the wheat. Many have found this statement significant, have understood it to suggest negligence and lack of watchfulness on the part of the rulers in the Church, whereby ungodly men creep into it unawares, introducing errors in doctrine and in practice¹⁰ (Acts 20:29, 30; Jude 4; 2 Pet. 2:1, 2, 19); even as the sleeping of the wise virgins no less than the foolish has been sometimes urged in the same sense (Matt. 25:5). There is, alas! always more or less of this negligence; yet I cannot think that it was meant to be noted here; and as little there. If any should have watched, it is '*the servants*;' but they first appear in a later period in the story; nor is any want of due vigilance laid to their charge. The men therefore who slept are not, as I take it, those who should or could have done otherwise, but the phrase is equivalent to 'at night,' and must not be further urged (Job 33:15; Mark 4:27). This enemy seized his opportunity, when all eyes were closed in sleep, and wrought the secret mischief upon which he was intent, and having wrought it undetected, withdrew.

*'The enemy that sowed them is the devil.'*¹¹ We behold Satan here, not as he works beyond

It is our part only to labour that we may be corn, so that when the corn shall begin to be garnered in the barns of the Lord, we may receive fruit for our work and for our labour.'

9 Commentators who have interpreted the parable, irrespectively of that controversy one way or the other, acknowledge this. Thus Calvin: 'Although Christ afterwards adds that the field is the world, it yet cannot be doubted that He intended a special reference to the Church, the original subject of his discourse. Inasmuch, however, as He was about to guide his plough in all directions through all quarters of the world, so that He might till fields for himself in all the world, and scatter the seed of life, by a synecdoche He transferred to the world that which accorded better with only a part.'

10 So Augustine (*Quaest. ex Matt. qu. 9*): 'When the overseers of the Church were somewhat negligent;' and Chrysostom. H. deSto. Victore (*Annott. in Matth.*): 'He points to the death of the Apostles, or the sloth of prelates.' But Grotius more rightly: 'The word men is here used indefinitely, not of a class: as were you to say, in the time of sleep: and thus we have nothing more than a description of the occasion;' and Cajetan's remark has value: 'When *men* slept: He does not say when the *watchers* slept. If He had said *watchers*, we should understand that the carelessness of the *watchers* was to blame. But He says *men*, that we may understand blameless persons, taking their natural rest.' Jerome's '*while the master of the house slept*' (*Adv. Lucif.*) can only be explained on this view.

11 Zizaniator, as there he has been called; see Du Cange, s.v. zizanium: and by Tertullian (*De Anima*, 16), 'He that cometh after and soweth weeds, the midnight spoiler of the corn.' When Ignatius exhorts the Ephesians (c. 10) that no one

the limits of the Church, deceiving the world, but in his far deeper malignity, as he at once mimics and counterworks the work of Christ: in the words of Chrysostom, 'after the prophets, the false prophets; after the Apostles, the false apostles; after Christ, Antichrist.'¹² Most worthy of notice is the plainness with which the doctrine concerning Satan and his agency, his active hostility to the blessedness of man, of which there is so little in the Old Testament, comes out in the New; as in the parable of the Sower, and again in this. As the lights become brighter, the shadows become deeper. Not till the mightier power of good had been revealed, were men suffered to know how mighty was the power of evil; and even now it is only to the innermost circle of disciples that the explanation concerning Satan is given.¹³ Nor is it less observable that Satan is spoken of as *his* enemy, the enemy of the Son of man; for here, as so often, the general conflict is set forth as rather between Satan and the Son of man, than between Satan and God. It was essential to the scheme of redemption, that the victory over evil should be a *moral* triumph, not one obtained by a mere putting forth of superior strength.¹⁴ For this end it was most important that man, who lost the battle, should also win it (1 Cor. 15:21); and therefore as by and through man the kingdom of darkness was to be overthrown, so the enmity of the Serpent was specially directed against the seed of the woman, the Son of man. In the title '*the wicked one,*' which he bears, the article is emphatic, and points him out as the absolutely evil, the very *ground* of whose being is evil. For as God is light, and in Him is no darkness at all (1 John 1:5; Jam. 1:17), so Satan is darkness, and in him is no light at all; 'there is *no* truth in him' (John 8:44). Man is in a middle position; he detains the truth in unrighteousness (Rom. 1:18); light and darkness in him are struggling; but, whichever may predominate, the other is there, kept down indeed, but still with the possibility of manifesting itself. And thus a redemption is possible for man, for his will is only *perverted*; but Satan's is *inverted*. He has said what no man could ever fully say, or, at least, act on to the full: 'Evil, be thou my good;' and therefore, so far as we can see, a redemption and restoration are impossible for him.

The mischief done, the enemy '*went his way*;' and thus the work did not evidently and at once appear to be his. How often, in the Church, the beginnings of evil have been scarcely discernible; and that which bore the worst fruit in the end, will have shown at first like a higher form of good. St. Paul, indeed, could detect a mystery of iniquity as yet in its obscure beginnings, could detect the *punctum saliens* out of which it would unfold itself; but to many evil would not appear as evil till it had grown to more ungodliness. '*But when the blade was sprung up, and brought forth fruit, then appeared the tares also;*' appeared, that is, for what they were, showed themselves in their true nature. Many have noted the remarkable similarity which exists between the wheat and this *lolium* or tare, as long as they are yet in the blade.¹⁵ Being only distinguishable when the ear is formed,

be found among them του διαβόλου βοτάνη, 'the devil's fodder,' there is probably an allusion to this parable.

12 Cf. Tertullian, *De Praescr. Hoeret.* 31.

13 Bengel (on Ephes. vi. 12) has observed this: 'The more openly a book of Scripture deals with the economy and glory of Christ, the more openly it treats of the opposite kingdom of darkness.'

14 In Augustine's memorable words: 'The devil was to be conquered not by the power of God, but by justice.'

15 The testimony of Jerome, himself resident in Palestine, may here be adduced: 'Between wheat and the weeds which we call tares, so long as they are green, and

they fulfil literally the Lord's words, '*by their fruits ye shall know them.*' Augustine, upon this that only when the blade began to ripen and bring forth fruit, the tares showed themselves as such indeed, most truly remarks, that it is the opposition of good which first makes evil to appear; 'None appear evil in the Church, except to him who is good;' and again, 'When any shall have begun to be a spiritual man, judging all things, then errors begin to appear to him;'¹⁶ and elsewhere, drawing from the depths of his Christian experience: 'It is a great labour of the good, to bear the contrary manners of the wicked; by which he who is not offended has profited little: for the righteous, in proportion as he recedes from his own wickedness, is grieved at that of others.'¹⁷ As there must be light with which to contrast the darkness, height wherewith to measure depth, so there must be holiness to be grieved at unholiness; only the new man in us is grieved at the old either in ourselves or in others.

'So the servants of the householder came and said unto him, Sir, didst not thou sow good seed in thy field? from whence then hath it tares?' These servants are not, as Theophylact suggests, the angels (they are '*the reapers;*' ver. 30, 41); but rather men, zealous for the Lord's honour, but not knowing what spirit they are of, any more than James and John, who would fain have called fire from heaven on the inhospitable Samaritan village (Luke 9:54). The question which they ask, '*Didst not thou sow good seed in thy field?'*' expresses well the perplexity, the surprise, the inward questionings which must often be felt, which in the first ages, before long custom had too much reconciled to the mournful fact, must have been felt very strongly by all who were zealous for God, at the woeful and unlooked-for spectacle which the visible Church presented. Where was the 'glorious Church, not having spot or wrinkle, or any such thing?' Well, indeed, might the faithful have questioned their own spirits, have poured out their hearts in prayer, of which the burden should have been exactly this, '*Didst not thou sow good seed in thy field? from whence then hath it tares?--didst not Thou constitute thy Church to be a pure and holy communion?--is not the doctrine such as should only produce fruits of righteousness?--whence then is it that even within the holy precincts themselves there should be so many who themselves openly sin and cause others to sin?'*¹⁸ In the householder's reply, '*An enemy hath done*

the blade has not yet come to an ear, the resemblance is great, and the difference to the eye either nothing at all or very difficult to make out.' See also Thomson (*The Land and the Book*, p. 420): 'The grain is just in the proper stage to illustrate the parable. In those parts where the grain has *headed out*, the tares have done the same, and then a child cannot mistake them for wheat or barley; but where both are less developed, the closest scrutiny will often fail to detect them. Even the farmers, who in this country generally *weed* their fields, do not attempt to separate the one from the other.'

¹⁶ *Quaest. ex Matt.* qu. 13: an admirable exposition of the whole parable.

¹⁷ 'The just man is tormented by the wickedness of another in proportion as he departs from his own.' Cf. *Enarr. in Ps.* cxix. 4, and *in Ps.* cxl.: 'I am not yet wholly restored to the image of my Maker; I have begun to be shaped anew, and on that side on which I am reformed, I am grieved by that which is unlovely.'

¹⁸ Menken: 'This question, "*Whence then hath it tares?*" is the result of our first study of Church history, and remains afterwards the motto of Church history, and the riddle which should be solved by help of a faithful history; instead of which, many so-called Church historians, ignorant of the purpose and of the hidden glory of the Church, have their pleasure in the tares, and imagine themselves wonderfully wise and useful, when out of Church history, which ought

this, the mischief is traced up to its source; and that not the imperfection, ignorance, weakness, which cling to everything human, and which would prevent even a Divine idea from being more than very imperfectly realized by men; but the distinct counterworking of the great spiritual enemy; *'the tares are the children of the wicked one; the enemy that sowed them is the devil.'*

In the question which follows, *'Wilt thou then that we go and gather them up?'* the temptation to use violent means for the suppression of error, a temptation which the Church itself has sometimes failed to resist, finds its voice and utterance.¹⁹ But they who thus speak are unfit to be trusted in this matter. They have often no better than a Jehu's 'zeal for the Lord' (2 Kin. 10:16); it is but an Elias-zeal at the best (Luke 9:54). And therefore *'he said, Nay.'* By this prohibition are forbidden all such measures for the excision of heretics, as shall leave them no room for after repentance or amendment; indeed the prohibition is so clear, so express, that whenever we meet in Church history with aught which looks like a carrying out of this proposal, we may be tolerably sure that it is not wheat making war on tares, but tares seeking to root out wheat. The reason of the prohibition is given: *'Lest while ye gather up the tares, ye root up also the wheat with them.'* This might be, either by rooting up what were now tares, but hereafter should become wheat--*'children of the wicked one,'* who, by faith and repentance, should become *'children of the kingdom;'*²⁰ or through the servants' error, who, with the best intentions, should fail to distinguish between these and those, and involve good and bad in a common doom; or who perhaps, leaving tares, might pluck up wheat. It is only the Lord Himself, the Searcher of hearts, who with absolute certainty *'knoweth them that are his.'* The later Roman Catholic expositors, and as many as in the middle ages wrote in the interests of Rome, in these words, *'lest ye root up also the wheat with them,'* find a loophole whereby they may escape the prohibition itself. Thus Aquinas will have it to be only then binding, when this danger exists of plucking up the wheat together with the tares.²¹ To which Maldonatus adds, that in each particular case the householder is to judge whether there be such danger or not; and the Pope being now the representative of the household, to him the question should be put, *'Wilt thou that we go and gather up the tares?'* and he concludes his exposition with an exhortation to all Catholic princes, that they imitate the zeal of these servants, and rather, like them, need to have their eagerness restrained, than require, as did so many, to be stimulated to the task of rooting out heresies and heretics.

to be the history of the Light and the Truth, they have made a shameful history of error and wickedness. They have no desire to edify, to further holiness or the knowledge of the truth; but at the expense of the Church would gratify a proud and ignorant world.'

19 Augustine (*Quaest. ex Matt. qu. 12*): 'She may feel the wish arise to remove such men from human dealings, if occasion will allow; but, as to whether she ought to do this, she consults the justice of God, to know if He gives her this commandment or permission, and whether He wishes this to be the work of men.'

20 Jerome: 'We are warned not hastily to cut off our brother from us, since it may be that he who is to-day corrupted by hurtful doctrine, tomorrow may return to wisdom and begin to defend the truth.'

21 *Summa Theol. 2^a 2^e, qu. 10*: 'Where there is no such danger...let not the severity of discipline slumber.'

At the same time this 'Nay' does not imply that the tares shall never be plucked up, but only that this is not the time, and they not the doers;²² for the householder adds, '*Let both grow together until the harvest.*' Pregnant words, which tell us that evil is not, as so many dream, gradually to wane and disappear before good, the world to find itself in the Church, but each to unfold itself more fully, out of its own root, after its own kind: till at last they stand face to face, each in its highest manifestation, in the persons of Christ and of Antichrist; on the one hand, an incarnate God, on the other the man in whom the fulness of all Satanic power will dwell bodily. Both must grow '*until the harvest,*' till they are ripe, one for destruction, and the other for full salvation.

And they are to grow '*together;*' the visible Church is to have its intermixture of good and bad until the end of time; and, by consequence, the fact of bad being found mingled with good will in nowise justify a separation from it, or an attempt to set up a little Church of our own.²³ Where men will attempt this, besides the guilt of transgressing a plain command, it is not difficult to see what darkness it must bring upon them, into what a snare of pride it must cast them. For while, even in the best of men, there is the same intermixture of good and evil as in the visible Church, such a course will inevitably lead a man to a wilful shutting of his eyes alike to the evil in himself, and in that little schismatical body which he will then call the Church, since only so the attempt will even seem to be attended with success. Thus Augustine often appeals to the fact that the Donatists had not succeeded--they would not themselves dare to assert that they had succeeded--in forming what should even externally appear a pure communion: and since by their own acknowledgment there might be, and probably were, hypocrites and undetected ungodly livers among them, this of itself rendered all such passages as Isai. 52:1, as inapplicable to them as to the Catholic Church in its present condition: while yet, on the strength of this freedom from evil gratuitously assumed by them, they displayed a spirit of intolerable pride and presumptuous uncharitableness towards the Church from which they had separated. And the same sins cleave more or less to all schismatical bodies, which, under plea of a purer communion, have divided from the Church Catholic:²⁴ the smallest of these, from its very smallness persuading itself that it is the most select and purest, being generally the guiltiest here. None will deny that the temptation to this lies very close to us all. Every young Christian, in the time of his first zeal, is tempted to be somewhat of a Donatist in spirit. It would argue little love or holy earnestness in him, if he had not this longing to see the Church of his Saviour a glorious Church without spot or wrinkle. But he must learn that the desire, righteous and holy as in itself it is, yet is

22 Bengel: 'The zeal which the righteous have against the tares is not blamed, but only reduced to rule.'

23 Calvin's words are excellent: 'There is this dangerous temptation, that we should think that there is no Church wherever perfect purity is not apparent. When a man is a prey to this temptation, it must needs come to this: that either he will secede from every one else, and think himself the only holy person in the world, or he will join with a few hypocrites in setting up a peculiar Church. What reason, then, had Paul for the acknowledging a Church of God at Corinth? Plainly because he recognized among them Gospel teaching, baptism, and the Lord's Supper, and these are the signs by which a Church ought to be recognized.'

24 See Augustine (*Coll. Carth.* iii. 9) for an extraordinary instance of this pride on the part of the Donatist adversaries of the Church.

not to find its fulfilment in this present evil time; that, on the contrary, the suffering from false brethren is one of the pressures upon him, which shall wring out from him a more earnest prayer that the Kingdom of God may appear.²⁵ He must learn that all self-willed and impatient attempts, such as have been repeated again and again, to anticipate that perfect communion of saints, are works of the flesh; that, however fairly they may promise, no blessing will rest upon them, nor will they for long even *appear* to be crowned with success.²⁶

Some in modern times, fearing lest arguments should be drawn from this parable to the prejudice of attempts to revive stricter discipline in the Church, have sought to escape the dangers which they feared,²⁷ by urging that in our Lord's explanation no notice is taken of the proposal made by the servants (ver. 28), nor yet of the householder's reply to that proposal (ver. 29). They conclude from this that the parable is not to teach us what the conduct of the servants of a heavenly Lord *ought* to be, but merely prophetic of what generally it *will* be,--that this proposal of the servants is merely brought in to afford an opportunity for the master's reply, and that of this reply the latter is the only significant portion. But, assuredly, when Christ asserts that it is his purpose to make a complete and solemn separation at the end, He implicitly forbids,--not the exercise in the meantime of a godly discipline, not, where that has become necessary, absolute exclusion from Church fellowship--but any attempts to anticipate the final irrevocable separation, of which He has reserved the execution to himself.²⁸ *In the time of harvest I will say to the*

²⁵ Fuller (*Holy State*, v. 2) enumerates six reasons why in the kingdom of grace wicked men should be inseparably mingled with godly: 'First, because hypocrites can never be severed but by Him that can search the heart; secondly, because if men should make the separation, weak Christians would be counted no Christians, and those who have a grain of grace under a load of imperfections would be counted reprobates; thirdly, because God's vessels of honour for all eternity, not as yet appearing, but wallowing in sin, would be made castaways; fourthly, because God by the mixture of the wicked with the godly will try the watchfulness and patience of his servants; fifthly, because thereby He will bestow many favours on the wicked, to clear his justice and render them the more inexcusable; lastly, because the mixture of the wicked grieving the godly will make them the more heartily pray for the day of judgment.'

²⁶ Augustine (*Enarr. in Ps. xcix. 1*): 'Whither is the Christian to separate himself that he may not groan amid false brothers? Should he seek the wilderness, scandals follow him. Is he who has made good progress to separate himself, so that he may have no man to tolerate? But what if, before he make progress, he himself find tolerance from none? If, therefore, because he progresses he is willing to tolerate no man, by this very intolerance he is convicted of not having progressed. Because thou seemest to thyself to have had swift feet for the passage, art thou therefore to cut off the bridge?'--The whole passage excellently sets forth the vanity of the attempt to found a Church on a subjective instead of an objective basis, on the personal holiness of the members, instead of recognizing one there to be founded for us, where the pure Word of God is preached, and the Sacraments administered, by those duly commissioned thereto. How admirable are his words elsewhere (*Con. Cresc. iii. 35*): 'I shun the chaff, lest I become chaff; I shun not the threshing-floor, lest I become nothing': cf. *Serm. clxiv. 7, 8*.

²⁷ Steiger, in the *Evang. Kirch. Zeit.* 1833, and an able writer in the *British Critic*, No. lii. p. 385.

²⁸ Tertullian (*Apol. 41*): 'He who has once appointed an eternal judgment after the end of the world, does not hasten that separation which is the condition of judgment, before the end of the world.'

reapers, Gather ye together first the tares, and bind them in bundles to burn them: but gather the wheat into my barn.' Not now, but 'in the time of harvest,'²⁹ shall this separation find place; and even then, not they, but 'the reapers,' shall carry it through.³⁰ This 'time of harvest,' as the Lord presently explains, is 'the end of the world,'³¹ and 'the reapers are the angels;' who are here, as everywhere else, set forth as accompanying their Lord and ours at his coming again to judgment (Matt. 16:27; 24:31; 2 Thess. 1:7; Rev. 19:14), and fulfilling his will both in respect of those who have served (Matt. 24:31) and those who have served Him not (Matt. 13:49; 22:13).

'As therefore the tares are gathered³² and burned in the fire; so shall it be in the end of this world. The Son of man shall send forth his angels, and they shall gather out of his kingdom all things that offend,³³ and them which do iniquity;' in the words of Zephaniah, 'the stumbling-blocks with the wicked' (1:3). The setting forth of the terrible doom of ungodly men under the image of the burning with fire of thorns, briars, weeds, offal, chaff,

²⁹ Bishop Horsey (Bibl. Crit. vol. iii. p. 344) distinguishes between the vintage and the harvest, the two images under which the consummation of the present age is commonly represented. 'The vintage is always an image of the season of judgment, but the harvest of the ingathering of the objects of God's final mercy. I am not aware that a single unexceptionable instance is to be found, in which the harvest is a type of judgment. In Rev. 14:15, 16, the sickle is thrust into the ripe harvest, and the earth is reaped, i.e. the elect are gathered from the four winds of heaven. The wheat of God is gathered into his barn (Matt. 13:30). After this reaping of the earth the sickle is applied to the clusters of the vine, and they are cast into the great winepress of the wrath of God (Rev. 14:18-20). This is judgment. In Joel 3:13 the ripe harvest is the harvest of the vine, i.e. the grapes fit for gathering, as appears by the context. In Jer. 51:33 the act of threshing the corn upon the floor, not the harvest, is the image of judgment. It is true the burning of the tares in our Saviour's parable (Matt. 13.) is a work of judgment, and of the time of harvest, previous to the binding of the sheaves; but it is an accidental adjunct of the business, not the harvest itself.'

³⁰ Augustine: 'Dost thou dare to usurp the office of another which even in the harvest shall not be thine?' And Cyprian (see 2 Tim. 2:20, 21): 'Let us take pains and, as far as we may, let us labour that we may be the vessel of gold and silver. But to break the vessels of clay is permitted to the Lord alone, to whom also the rod of iron has been given.' Jerome (Adv. Lucif.): 'No one can take to himself the ensign of Christ, or can judge of men before the day of judgment. If the Church has been already purified, what do we reserve for the Lord.'

³¹ The συντέλεια του αιωνος, or τον αιωνων (Heb. 9:26), the juncture of the two æras, see Job (24:20, μέχρι συντελειας φωτος και σκοτους), the present called αιων ενεστως (Gal. 1:4), αιων ουτος (Luke 20:34), or ο νυν αιων (Tit. 2:12), = κοσμος ουτος with the future termed αιων ερχομενος (Mark 10:30), αιωνες επερχομενοι (Ephes. 2:7), αιων ο μελλων (Heb. 6:5), = οικουμένη ή μελλουτα (Heb. 2:5). The phrase is equivalent to the τέλη των αιωνων (1 Cor. 10:11), the extremities the two æras, the end of the one and the beginning of the other.

³² Augustine: 'That is to say, the rapacious with the rapacious, adulterers with adulterers, homicides with homicides, thieves with thieves, scoffers with scoffers, like with like.' It is exactly so in the *Inferno* of Dante.

³³ Σκάνδαλον (in its classical form σκανδάληθρον) is that part of a trap or snare on which the bait is placed, and which, being touched, gives way, and causes the noose to draw suddenly tight; then generally a snare. In the New Testament it is transferred to spiritual things, and includes whatever, entangling as it were men's feet, might cause them to fall; it is therefore = προσκομμα, and allied closely in meaning to παγίς and θηρα, with which we find it joined, Rom. 11:9.

barren branches, dead trees, is frequent in Scripture; thus see 2 Sam. 23:6, 7; Matt. 3:10, 12; 7:19; John 15:6; Heb. 6:8; 10:26, 27; Isai. 5:24; 9:18, 19; 10:16, 17; 33:11, 12; 46:24; 2 Esd. 16:77, 78. But dare we speak of it as an image merely? The fire reappears in the interpretation of the parable; the angels *'shall cast them,'* those, namely, *'which do iniquity,'* *'into a furnace of fire.'* Fearful words indeed! and the image, if it be an image, at all events borrowed from the most dreadful and painful form of death in use among men. Something we read of it in Scripture. Judah would have fain made his daughter-in-law (Gen. 38:24), and David, alas! did make the children of Ammon (2 Sam. 12:31), taste the dreadfulness of it.³⁴ It was in use among the Chaldeans (Jer. 29:22; Dan. 3:6); and in the Jewish tradition, which is probably of great antiquity, Nimrod cast Abraham into a furnace of fire for refusing to worship his false gods.³⁵ It was one of the forms of cruel death with which Antiochus Epiphanes sought to overcome the heroic constancy of the Jewish confessors in the time of the Maccabees (2 Macc. 7; Dan. 11:33; 1 Cor. 13:3); while the *'tunica molesta'* with which Nero clothed the early Christian martyrs, when he desired to turn from himself upon them the odium of the burning of Rome, is well known.³⁶ In modern times, Chardin makes mention of penal furnaces in Persia;³⁷ while the fires of the Inquisition cast their baleful light over whole centuries of the Church's history. Whatever the *'furnace of fire'* may mean here, or *'the lake of fire'* (Rev. 19:20; 21:10), *'the fire that is not quenched'* (Mark 9:44), the *'everlasting fire'* (Matt. 25:41; cf. Luke 16:24; Mal. 4:1), elsewhere, this at all events is certain; that they point to some doom so intolerable that the Son of God came down from heaven and tasted all the bitterness of death, that He might deliver us from ever knowing the secrets of anguish, which, unless God be mocking men with empty threats, are shut up in these terrible words: *'There shall be wailing* (cf. Judith 16:17) *and gnashing of teeth'* (cf. Matt. 22:13; Luke 13:28). All which has just gone before makes very unlikely their explanation of the *'gnashing of teeth,'* who take it as a chattering from excessive cold;³⁸ who, in fact, imagine here a kind of Dantean Hell with alternations of heat and cold, alike unendurable. We take these rather as the utterances generally of rage and impatience (Acts 7:54; Job 16:9; Lam. 2:16; Ps. 35:16; 37:12), under the sense of intolerable pain and unutterable loss.³⁹

'Then,' after it has been thus done with the wicked, *'shall the righteous shine forth'*⁴⁰ as the

34 For the use of this punishment by Herod the Great, see Josephus *B. J.* i. 33. 4.

35 Eisenmenger, *Entdeckt. Judenth.* vol. ii. p. 378.

36 Juvenal, viii. 235; cf. i. 155; Tacitus, *Annal.* xv. 44.; Seneca *E p* xiv. 4; Josephus, *B. J.* i. 33. 4.

37 *Voy, en Perse*, ed. Langles, vol. vi. p. 118.

38 See Suicer, s.v. βρυγμός, which some make = τρισμος οδόντων, but it is simpler to say with Bernard: 'Weeping from grief, gnashing of teeth from rage;' for in Cyprian's words (*Ad Demet.*): 'The grief of repentance shall then be without fruit, an empty wailing over punishment, and a vain cry for relief.' See Ambrose, *Exp. in Luc*, vii. 205, 206; and Gerhard, *Loc. Theoll.* xxxi. 6, 46.

39 The Revised Version, which renders these words, 'There shall be *the* weeping and gnashing of teeth,' that by comparison with which all other shall be slightly accounted of, has not missed the force of the article, which the Authorized has done.

40 Εκλάμψουσιν = *effulgebunt*, not as in the Vulgate, *fulgebunt*. Schleusner indeed: 'It differs little from the simple λάμπω,'--but Passow: 'To shine forth, to be manifested suddenly in perfect glory:' there is used the same word to express the same thing, Dan. 12:3, LXX; cf. *Wisd. of Solomon*, iii. 7, αναλάμψουσιν. Two beautiful similitudes in the *Shepherd* of Hermas (iii. sim. 3 and 4) set forth

sun in the kingdom of their Father.' As *fire* was the element of the dark and cruel kingdom of hell, so is *light* of the pure heavenly kingdom.⁴¹ 'Then,' when the dark hindering element has been removed, shall this element of light, which was before struggling with and obstructed by it, come forth in its full brightness (see Col. 3:4; Rom. 8:18; Prov. 4:18; 25:4, 5). A glory shall be revealed *in* the saints; not merely brought *to* them, and added from without; but rather a glory which they before had, but which did not before evidently appear, shall burst forth and show itself openly, as once in the days of his flesh, at the moment of his Transfiguration, did the hidden glory of their Lord (Matt. 17:2). That shall be the day of 'the manifestation of the sons of God;' they '*shall shine forth as the sun*' when the clouds are rolled away (Dan. 12:3); they shall evidently appear, and be acknowledged by all, as 'the children of light,' of that God who is 'the Father of Lights'⁴² (Jam. 1:17); who is Light, and in whom is no darkness at all (1 John 1:5). And then, but not till then, shall be accomplished those glorious prophecies so often repeated in the Old Testament; 'Henceforth there shall no more come into thee the uncircumcised and the unclean' (Isai. 52:1); 'In that day there shall be no more the Canaanite in the house of the Lord of hosts' (Zech. 14:21); 'Thy people also shall be all righteous' (Isai. 40:21; cf. Isai. 35:8; Joel 3:17; Ezek. 37:21-27; Zeph. 3:13).

the same truth under a different image. The Seer is shown in the first a number of trees in the winter-time; all leafless alike; all seeming alike dead; and he is told that as the dry and the green trees are not distinguishable in the winter, all being bare alike, so neither in the present age are the just from sinners. In the second, he is again shown the trees, but now some are putting forth leaves, while others still remain bare. Thus shall it be in the future age, which for the just shall be a summer, their life, which was hidden for a while, manifesting itself openly, but for sinners it shall still be winter, and they, remaining without leaf or fruit, shall as dry wood be cut down for burning. In some beautiful passages of Augustine (*Enarr. in Ps. xxxvi. 2; in Ps. cxlviii. 13*) the same image occurs. Of the Christian as he is now, he says (*In 1 Ep. Joh. Tract. 5*): 'His glory is hidden; when the Lord cometh, then shall his glory appear. For it thrives, but as yet as in winter; the root thrives, but the branches are as if withered. Within is the sap which thrives, within are the leaves of trees, within is the fruit: but they await the summer.' Cf. Minucius Felix (p. 329, ed. Ouzel.): 'The body is in the world like trees which in time of winter hide their verdure with a cloak of aridity. Why art thou in haste that, while winter is yet raw, it should blossom forth and revive? Of the body also we must await the spring.'

41 It is exactly thus that in the Mohammedan theology the good angels are compact of *light*, and the evil ones of *fire*.

42 Calvin: 'It is a notable consolation that the sons of God who now either lie covered with squalor, or are unnoticed and in small esteem, or even are overwhelmed with insults, shall then, as if in a clear sky from which all clouds have been chased away, once for all shine forth in true and conspicuous splendour. The Son of God shall raise his own aloft, and shall wipe from them every defilement by which now their brightness is concealed.'--It is the saying of a Jewish expositor of Ps. lxxii.: 'As the sun and moon are the lights of this world, even so shall it come to pass that the just shall be the lights of the world to come.'