

THE SOUTHERN PRESBYTERIAN REVIEW.

VOL. XXXI.—NO. 4.

OCTOBER, MDCCCLXXX.

ARTICLE I.

THE FREEDOM OF THE WILL IN ITS THEOLOGICAL RELATIONS.

The question which we considered in our last article in this REVIEW (April, 1880), was, whether our position that the first sin was not necessitated by an efficacious decree of God is uncalvinistic and untrue. We showed that the Supralapsarians themselves maintain the distinction between efficacious and permissive decree in relation to the first sin, and hold that God did not effect that sin, considered as sin, but permitted it. We next showed that Calvin was a Sublapsarian, so far as the order of the divine decrees and the object of predestination are concerned. But the question occurred, whether he held the view that God necessitated the first sin by an efficacious decree, and, more particularly, whether he decreed to effect, and therefore actually effected, the first sin, regarded as an act or an historical event, while he permitted man to infuse the evil quality into the act, or, to fail in producing the good quality which ought to have existed. That was the particular question under discussion when we were compelled to bring the article to a close, and we now proceed with its consideration. Having remarked that we proposed to adduce and examine the most prominent passages in the writings of the Reformer which seem to place him on the affirmative of

ARTICLE VI.

THE PARABLE OF THE TARES IN THE FIELD.

The interpretation of the parable of the tares in the field, and the closely allied one of the draw-net, has been the subject of more controversy in the Church than any other of our Lord's parables. "It was a special battle ground," says Drummond, "in the controversy which raged between the Donatists and Augustine"; and Trench writes, respecting the words—"the field is the world"—"words few and slight, and seemingly of little import, a great battle has been fought over them; greater perhaps than over any single phrase in the Scriptures, if we except the consecrating words at the Holy Eucharist;" and adds, "these disputes, though seemingly gone by, yet are not in fact out of date, since in one shape or another they continually reappear in the progress of the Church's development, and in every heart of man"; and all this will appear the more strange when we call to mind the fact that this is one of the few parables of which our Lord himself has given us an explicit exposition.

The great difficulty in the interpretation of this parable arises out of the seeming prohibition of church discipline contained in the words, "The servants said unto him, Wilt thou that we go and gather them" (the tares after their true character had become evident by their fruit) "up? But he said, Nay, lest while ye gather up the tares, ye root up also the wheat with them. Let both grow together until the harvest; and in the time of harvest"—which our Lord afterwards defines by "the end of the world"—"I will say to the reapers (the angels, verse 41) gather ye together first the tares, and bind them in bundles to burn them: but gather the wheat into my barn"; and the corresponding declaration in the parable of the draw-net. How are such declarations as these to be made to harmonise with the authority given to the Church of "binding and loosing" (see Matt. xviii. 15-18), and "trying the spirits whether they are of God" (see 1 John iv. 1), and the duty enjoined upon the Church of exercising this

authority? It is around this point that the difficulties of interpretation gather.

That the reader may see more distinctly the nature of these difficulties, we will ask his attention to the different ways in which different writers have attempted to remove them.

"The Romish expositors, and those who in earlier times wrote in the interest of Rome, in the words, '*lest ye root up the wheat with them,*' find a loop-hole whereby they may escape the prohibition itself. Thus, Aquinas says, the prohibition is only binding, when there exists this danger of plucking up the wheat together with the tares; and Maldonatus, that in each particular case the householder is to judge whether there be such danger or no. The Pope, he adds, is now the representative of the householder, and to him the question is to 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, have need to have their eagerness restrained than to require to be urged on to the task of rooting out heresies and heretics." (*Trench on the Parables*, pp. 84, 85.)

This exposition every Protestant will at once reject, if on no other ground, on this, that it places the crown which belongs to Christ alone, upon the head of the Pope; and authorises him to do through the agency of a "bloody Mary" or an ignorant bigot such as Philip of Spain, a work which Christ will intrust to none but the "holy angels."

In his exposition of this parable, Drummond writes:

"The householder in possession of the good field in which he has sowed good seed has his farm servants. When these are first introduced they are merely asking a question—they are not actually engaged in farm work, and so they are only called *servants*. At the close of the parable, however, they are engaged in field work; and so they are called '*the reapers*.' They are obviously the same parties as are spoken of at first, but are now named '*the reapers*' from the employment in which they appear at last engaged. And as our Lord says '*the reapers are the angels,*' we cannot come with propriety to any other conclusion than that these '*servants of the householder*' are *angels* too. This double reference, indeed, to these beings in the parable, is in exact accordance with what Scripture says regarding them. They are, on the one hand, '*ministers* (or *servants*) of God who do his pleasure'—that is their general designation. They are likewise '*a flame of fire*'—that is their particular designation when they are specially sent forth by him to execute his wrath. The '*servants of the householder*' were made the '*reapers*.' The angelic ministers are made '*a flame of fire*.'

“It is no matter of surprise, when such an interpretation of the ‘*servants*’ in the parable is given, that it should be followed up by certain views of other parts very cognate to it. Thus, it has been said, that the field is the visible Church; and that the coming of *the servants* to the householder is the surprise and anxiety which ministers of that Church feel when they behold such noxious things as they are compelled to do, growing up within the outward fold, as show plainly that they came from the evil one. Moreover, it is added, that when the servants ask, ‘*Will thou, then, that we go and gather them up?*’ this is the language of those who have authority to exercise discipline in the Church of Christ, and who, if left to themselves, would with unsparing and probably indiscriminate zeal, seek to cast out, or, in other words, excommunicate from the fold all that offends.

“It is hardly possible to conceive anything more alien to the whole bearing of the parable than these matters. ‘*The field*’ is not the visible Church. Our Lord expressly says it is ‘*the world*’; and yet, with this clear and emphatic statement, so entirely irreconcilable with the view just referred to, many fanciful theories have been propounded as deducible from this parable about the extent and limitation of church-discipline, and so forth. This parable, indeed, was a special battle-ground in the early history of the Church, and is frequently introduced in the controversy which raged between the Donatists and Augustine, who opposed them on the orthodox side. That controversy was very similar to some modern ones—whether it is or is not the duty of the members of the visible Church to exclude every one from their communion who does not bring forth the fruits of righteousness? The Donatists said it was; Augustine said it was not. The latter adduced this parable in support of his views. The former evaded the force of it by affirming what is in itself true, that the field is ‘*the world*,’ not the Church. But the truth is, the parable does not help either side. It does, indeed, indirectly prove the Donatists to have been in error, because it sets forth the state of the Christian Church during the whole of this dispensation as mingled wheat and tares; but it says not a word about the discipline, more or less, which may or ought to be used in order to purify the visible Church from corrupt membership, or whether all such discipline should, indeed, be let alone. It is the attempt to make the ‘*servants*’ in the parable ministers of the Church on earth which has introduced such confusion into the explanation, and brought in matters entirely irrelevant to the figure employed.” (*Drummond on the Parables*, pp. 374–376.)

On the two points which Drummond makes, viz., (1) That *the field* is the world and not the Church, and (2) That *the servants* in the first part of the parable are the same with *the reapers* in the latter part, *i. e.*, *the angels*, we remark—

Drummond himself cannot carry out consistently the idea that “*the field is the world, not the Church,*” *i. e.*, the world as contradistinguished from the Church—for in the very same paragraph in which he writes, “The field is not the visible Church . . . it is the world,” he writes, the parable “does, indeed, prove the Donatists to have been in error, because it sets forth the state of Christ’s Church during the whole of this dispensation as mingled wheat and tares.” How, we ask, can a field of mingled wheat and tares, which represents the world and not the visible Church, set forth the condition of Christ’s Church during the whole of this dispensation, or during any other period of time? And again, if the field is the world as contradistinguished from the Church, what shall we say of the draw-net? Does that represent the world also? If so, then the only truth taught in these two parables is that the world shall continue to embrace the evil along with the good through this present dispensation—a truth, indeed, but not the truth intended to be set forth in these parables.

On his second point, that *the servants* and *the reapers* are the same, *viz.*, *the angels*, we remark, if this interpretation be admitted, then the great lesson of the parable is, that God’s permission of the existence of the evil mingled with the good in this world, is something so strange that it provokes surprise, if not dissatisfaction among the angels; as implied in their proposal to go and gather up the tares: and it involves the inconsistency, that they who at one time cannot be trusted “to gather up the tares lest they root up the wheat with them,” are the very ones who are afterwards sent forth to do this very thing.

As an example of the exposition of this parable adopted by the older Protestant commentators, we give that of Pool:

“The design that Christ had in this parable was to show them, that though he laid a good foundation of a Church in the world, calling some home to himself, and making them partakers of his effectual grace, laying the foundation of his gospel Church in such as took his yoke upon them; yet in process of time, while those that should succeed him in the ministry slept (not being as diligent and watchful as they ought to be), the devil (who is full of envy and malice to men’s souls, and is continually going about seeking whom he may devour) would sow erroneous opinions, and find a party, even in the bosom of the Church, who would

hearken to him, and through their lusts comply with his temptations, both to errors in doctrine and errors in practice; and it was his will that there should be in his visible Church a mixture of good and bad, such bad ones especially as men could not purge out without a danger of putting out such as were true and sincere; but there would be a time in the end of the world, when he would come with his fan, and thoroughly purge his floor, and take to heaven all true and sincere souls, but turn all hypocrites into hell." In his exposition "our Saviour saith nothing to that part of the parable where the tares are said to be sown *while men slept*; that was plain and intelligible enough. The devil hath a power to seduce, persuade, and allure, none to force. If particular persons kept their watch, as they might, the devil could not by his temptation force them. If magistrates and ministers kept their watches according to God's prescription, there could not be so much open wickedness in the world as there is. Neither does our Saviour give us any particular explication of that part of the parable, verses 28, 29, where the servants say to the master, '*Wilt thou then that we go and gather them up? And he said unto them, Nay, lest while ye gather up the tares, ye root up also the wheat with them.*' The Saviour by this teaches us, that every passage in a parable is not to be fitted by something in the explication. It was not the point that he designed in this parable to instruct them in, how far church officers might or ought to act in purging the Church; but only, 1. That in the visible Church they must expect a mixture, till the day of judgment. 2. That in that day he would make a perfect separation. So as those that would from this passage in the parable conclude, that all erroneous and loose persons ought to be tolerated in the Church till the day of judgment, forget the common rule in divinity, that parabolic divinity is not argumentative." (*Pool's Annotations, in loc.*)

Here. Pool, admitting that the field of mingled wheat and tares of this parable, like the draw-net of the other, represents the visible Church, seeks to get rid of this apparent prohibition of church discipline: (1) By understanding the fact that our Lord in his exposition of the parable takes no special notice of verses 28, 29, "The servants said unto him, Wilt thou then that we go and gather them up? But he said, Nay; lest while ye gather up the tares, ye root up also the wheat with them," to imply that these verses are not to be regarded as a significant part of the parable; that they form "a passage in the parable which is not to be fitted by something in the explication." And yet, with a strange inconsistency, he makes the words, "But while men slept," confessedly treated by our Lord in the same way, signifi-

cant; and on the strength of this significance, traces the state of things in the Church, represented by the growing together of the tares and the wheat, to unfaithfulness on the part of the officers of the Church—forgetting that under the perfect ministry of our Lord himself this state of things existed: there was a Judas among the twelve apostles. And (2) by making the words, “Nay, lest while ye gather up the tares ye root up also the wheat with them,” simply a limitation upon the extent of discipline; and not, as they evidently are, a reason given for prohibiting altogether the separation which the servants had proposed to make—for letting “both grow together until the harvest.”

Of recent Protestant expositions of this parable, that of Trench is the most carefully prepared we have seen. On the words, “*But while men slept, his enemy came and sowed tares.*” he writes:

“Many suppose that these words indicate negligence and lack of watchfulness on the part of rulers in the Church, whereby ungodly men creep in unawares, introducing errors in doctrine and in practice. But seeing that it is thus indefinitely put, and the servants who should have watched, if any should have done so, are first designated at a later stage of the history, and then without anything to mark a past omission on their part, it would seem that the men who slept are not such as should have done otherwise, but the phrase is equivalent to *at night*, and means nothing further (Job xxiii. 15). 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.”

On verses 28, 29, he writes:

“No doubt in the further question, ‘*Will thou then that we go and gather them up?*’ the temptation to use outward power for the suppression of error, a temptation which the Church itself has sometimes found it difficult to resist, finds its voice and utterance. But they were unfit to be trusted here. Their zeal was but an Elias zeal at the best (Luke ix. 54). They who thus speak have often no better than a Jehu’s zeal for the Lord. And therefore he said ‘Nay.’ By this prohibition are doubtless forbidden all such measures for the excision of heretics and other offenders as shall leave them no possibility for after repentance or amendment; indeed the prohibition is so clear, so express, so plain, that whenever we meet in Church history with something that looks like the carrying into execution this proposal of the servants, we may suspect, as Bengel says, 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; or it might happen through the mistake of the servants, who, with the best intentions, should fail to distinguish between these and those, leaving the tares and uprooting the wheat. It is only the Lord himself, the Searcher of hearts, who with absolute certainty 'knoweth them that are his.'"

And in another place Trench adds:

"There are some, in fear 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 cogency of the arguments drawn from it, observing that in our Lord's explanation no notice is taken of the proposal made by the servants (verse 28), nor yet of the householder's reply to this proposal (verse 29). They argue, therefore, that this parable is not instructive of what the conduct of the servants of a heavenly Lord ought to be, but merely prophetic of what generally will be the case in the Church—that this offer of the servants is merely brought in to afford an opportunity for the master's reply, and that the latter is the only significant portion. But it is clear that 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 attempt to anticipate the final irrevocable separation, of which he has reserved the execution to himself. That shall not take place till the end of the present dispensation; not till the time of the harvest will the householder command—and then he will give the command not to the servants, but to the reapers—that the tares be gathered out from among the wheat. Not till the end of the world will the Son of Man send forth his servants—nor even then his earthly ministering servants, but '*his angels, and they shall gather out of his kingdom all things that offend, and all which do iniquity*'—in the words of Zephaniah (i. 3), '*the stumbling-blocks of the wicked.*'" (*Trench on the Parables*, pp. 78, 79, 84, 87, 88.)

With this exposition of Trench most of our best modern commentators, such as Alford, Stier, and Brown, substantially agree; and, if we mistake not, it comes much nearer to the truth than the older expositions do, especially on two points, viz.:

1. In interpreting the expression, "while men slept," as simply equivalent to "in the night time." On this expression Alford writes: "Not *the men* belonging to the owner of the field, but

men generally; and the expression is used only to designate *in the night time*, not to charge the servants with any want of watchfulness." (Alford's New Testament, *in loc.*) And Stier: "What is decisive as regards the true meaning of our Lord is this, that it is by no means said: *the servants* slept—these rather show themselves as watching and guarding with all laudable zeal. As indeed in that period of the Church to which the parable chiefly points, the *apostles* certainly did not sleep, but watched and were zealous for the purity of the Church. . . . By this feature of the parable nothing else is expressed than *by night* (as Job xxxiii. 15) in darkness and secrecy. This is the way of the evil one in all that he does." (Stier's Words of Jesus, Vol. II., p. 233.)

2. In understanding the prohibition contained in the household-er's reply to the question, "Wilt thou then that we go and gather them up?" as "a prohibition forbidding all such measures for the excision of heretics and other offenders, as shall leave them no possibility for after repentance or amendment; as a prohibition of any attempt to anticipate the final, irrevocable separation, of which he has reserved the execution to himself." But in what way this is the teaching of the parable he does not attempt to show; and so, does nothing towards removing the grand difficulty in the way of interpreting the parable.

If we mistake not, the difficulties in the exposition of this parable arise mainly from not adhering strictly to the scriptural idea of the visible Church, as distinct from the communion of the Church; and of excommunication, the severest "censure" which the Church is authorised to inflict as a part of "godly discipline."

THE VISIBLE CHURCH, as defined in our Larger Catechism, is "a society made up of all such as in all ages and places of the world do profess the true religion, and of their children" (Ans. 62). From the beginning, the visible Church, like the State, has been made up of families. Such was unquestionably its constitution in our Lord's day, organised as it was under the covenant with Abraham; and into this Church our Lord and his apostles were introduced by circumcision when eight days old. And this constitution of the Church is to continue to the end of the present dispensation. This, we believe, is the true scriptural idea of the

visible Church, and the only idea of it which finds countenance in the word of God.

As the children of believing parents, as well as others, are "conceived in sin and shapen in iniquity," the visible Church must embrace in its numbers many who, for a time at the least, are unbelievers, are destitute of that personal faith in Christ which is characteristic of the true children of God. They may be of the number of the elect, to be afterwards "effectually called" by the Spirit, but for the time being they do not differ in personal character from other unbelievers.

Besides the visible Church, and within it, our standards acknowledge the existence of a body we are accustomed to speak of as the communion of the Church, consisting of those alone who make credible profession of a personal faith in Christ.

"The Church of God, as a visible external institute, is made up of two classes of members. This results from the very nature of its organisation through families. One class consists of true believers, or those who profess to be such; the other of their children who are to be trained for God, and for that purpose are blessed with pre-eminent advantages. They are to be retained as pupils until they are converted. If they should continue impenitent, the Church does not revoke their privileges, but bears with them as patiently as their Master. They are beloved for the father's sake. This host of baptized children is, however, the source from which her strength is continually recruited. The Church contains a sanctuary and an outer court, and the sanctuary is continually filled from the outer court." (*Thornewell's Works, Vol. IV., p. 333.*)

In the administration of a "godly discipline," the highest "censure" which may be inflicted upon an offender is *excommunication*, which is defined in our Book of Discipline, Ch. IV., §4, as "the excision of an offender from the communion of the Church." Having in mind the Romish distinction between the *excommunicatio major*, or *anathema*, which cast the offender out of the Church, and devoted him to destruction; and the *excommunicatio minor*, which simply excluded from the communion of the Church, and this for the purpose and with the hope of the reclamation of the offender, the Presbyterian Church, in common with most Protestant Churches, disclaims the right to anathematise, or inflict the *excommunicatio major*.

On this subject Calvin writes :

“Excommunication differs from anathema in this, that the latter, completely excluding pardon, dooms and devotes the individual to eternal destruction ; whereas, the former rebukes and animadverts upon his manners ; and although it also punishes, it is to bring him to salvation by forewarning him of his future doom. If it succeeds, reconciliation and restoration to communion are ready to be given. Moreover, anathema is rarely, if ever, to be used. Hence, though ecclesiastical discipline does not allow us to be on familiar and intimate terms with excommunicated persons, still we ought to strive, by all possible means, to bring them to a better mind, and to recover them to the fellowship and unity of the Church ; as the Apostle also says, ‘Yet count him not as an enemy, but admonish him as a brother’ (2 Thess. iii. 15). If this humanity be not observed, in private as well as public, the danger is that our discipline shall degenerate into destruction.” (*Calvin's Institutes, Book IV., Ch. XII., §10.*)

Dr. Thornwell writes :

“The difference between suspension and excommunication is a difference in degree and not in kind. Excommunication is more solemn in form, and more permanent and stringent in operation. But in the Protestant Church it never amounts to anathema ; it never dissolves the *vinculum* by which the person is, through baptism, related to the Church and the covenant of grace. It never consigns him to hopeless and eternal perdition. The only case in which the Church would be at liberty to denounce such a censure would be one in which the party had notoriously sinned the sin unto death. That is the only crime which cuts off from the hope of mercy and the possibility of repentance, and is consequently the only crime of which the Church, in the exercise of her declarative power, is competent to say that by it the man is excluded from all the benefits symbolised in baptism, and has become an alien and an outcast. But as God has furnished us with no means of knowing when this sin has been committed, he has virtually debarred us from this species of excommunication. The highest censure left us is that of permanent exclusion from the sacraments.” (*Thornwell's Works, Vol. IV., p. 343.*)

With this distinction between the visible Church and the communion of that Church in mind, and with the scriptural idea of excommunication—that it is, as the word imports, an exclusion from the communion of the Church, and not from the Church itself, let us turn to the study of the parable.

I. It is generally conceded that by the field of mingled wheat and tares of this parable, as by the draw-net of the other, we are

to understand the visible Church, as it ever has and ever will exist in the world. It is true that in his exposition our Lord says, "*The field is the world.*" This on the one hand. But on the other, in this same exposition he says, "The Son of Man shall send forth his angels, and they shall gather out of *his kingdom* all things that offend, and them which do iniquity" (verse 41); thus giving to the field the name of "his kingdom."

Besides this, in the opening sentence of the parable, his words are, "*The kingdom of heaven* is likened unto a man which sowed good seed in his field, but while men slept, his enemy came and sowed tares among the wheat, and went his way" (verses 24, 25). And in the corresponding parable, "*The kingdom of heaven* is like unto a net that was cast into the sea, and gathered of every kind" (verse 47). The expressions, "the kingdom of God" and "the kingdom of heaven," so often used by our Lord, are used to mean: (1.) The reign of Christ in the world; as in his charge to his disciples, "Preach, saying, The kingdom of heaven is at hand" (Matt. x. 7); (2.) The reign of Christ in the individual soul, as in the parables of the "hid treasure" and "the pearl" (verses 44-46); (3.) The true invisible Church in the world, as in the parables of "the mustard seed" and "the leaven" (verses 31-33); and (4.) The visible Church in the world, as is conceded on all hands to be the case in the parable of the draw-net; but never are they used to mean the world, as contradistinguished from the Church—there would be an obvious impropriety in so using them; nor are they ever used to mean the communicants of the Church, as distinct from the Church. Hence we conclude that the parable concerns the visible Church, as it exists in the world. In this visible Church, where God has given a birth-right membership to those "conceived in sin and shapen in iniquity," it must be the case that unbelievers will always be mingled with believers; since some of those thus introduced, as experience teaches, never become true Christians; and others, who eventually become very pillars in the temple of God, for a season, like Paul, labor to destroy the very doctrine which they afterwards preach.

II. "*The tares are the children of the wicked one; the enemy that sowed them is the devil*" (verses 38, 39). How this can be

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said of such as Simon Magus (see Acts viii. 5-24) is plain enough. Though he had been baptized by Philip, on a profession of personal faith in Christ (verse 13), and so received into the visible Church, he had been all the time "in the gall of bitterness and in the bond of iniquity." It was doubtless under a delusion, of which Satan was the author, he had sought a place in the Church; Satan's object in this being, not his personal destruction alone, but to bring reproach upon the Church by the subsequent ungodly deeds of Simon—deeds sure to be done, sooner or later, by one whose "heart was not right in the sight of God."

But how can such language be used concerning the children of believing parents, who, by divine appointment occupy a place in the Church? To this we reply: (1.) As to the title given them—"children of the wicked one"—it is a title given in Scripture to all who are not Christians. "In this the children of God are manifest, and the children of the devil: whosoever doeth not righteousness is not of God, neither he that loveth not his brother" (1 John iii. 10). And our Lord applies it to the wicked Jews, while expressly acknowledging them to be "Abraham's seed," *i. e.*, members of the visible Church: "Ye are of your father the devil, and the lusts of your father ye will do" (John viii. 37, 44).

(2.) In explanation of our Lord's words, "the enemy which sowed them is the devil," we ask the reader to remark: that the visible Church, in the wide sense of the term in which it corresponds to "the kingdom of heaven," has existed in the world from the creation of man: under the covenant of works, as it is called, before the fall; and under the covenant of grace ever after. This first covenant, or covenant of works, was "made with Adam as a public person, not for himself only, but for his posterity" (*Larger Catechism, Ans. 22*). And so, the Church under that covenant had the same constitution it has had ever since, in so far as the membership of children is concerned. Had Adam never sinned, all his posterity would have been born in that same image of God in which he was created, and so the Church would have contained none but "the children of the kingdom." The householder sowed good seed, and good seed only, in his field. Through the temptation of the devil, Adam sinned; and as a consequence, all his

descendants are "begotten in his own likeness"—his likeness as a fallen sinful creature. The original constitution of the Church, as made up of parents and their children, remains unchanged. And so it comes, that while it is true that children "conceived in sin and shapen in iniquity" are in the Church by divine appointment, it is at the same time true, that they, as sinners, are in the Church through the agency of Satan; and they may properly be represented as "tares" sowed at night, by God's great enemy, the devil.

This language will appear the more appropriate, if we remark what Alford directs attention to, viz., that this parable refers "to the whole history of the world from beginning to end—the coming of sin into the world by the malice of the devil, the mixed state of mankind, notwithstanding the development of God's purposes by the dispensation of grace, and the final separation of the good and evil at the end. The very declaration, 'the harvest is the end of the world,' suggests the original sowing as the beginning of it. Yet this sowing is not in the fact, as in the parable, one only, but repeated again and again. In the parable the Lord gathers, as it were, the whole human family into *one life-time*, as they will be gathered into one harvest, and sets that forth as simultaneous, which has been scattered over ages of time." (*Alford's New Testament, in loc.*)

III. "The servants said unto him, Wilt thou then that we go and gather them up? But he said, Nay; lest while ye gather up the tares ye root up also the wheat with them. Let both grow together until the harvest." What the servants here propose to do—dropping the figure of the parable—is to make a final, irrevocable separation between the righteous and the wicked; such, in substance, as the angels shall make at the end of the world; such as the Church of Rome claims authority to make when she denounces the anathema against an offender, and delivers him over to the civil power to be put to death.

In this parable which our Lord spake, and afterwards expounded for the especial instruction of his disciples, he expressly denies such authority to his Church. And he does this for the reason that, incapable as mere men are of judging infallibly of

the human heart, and ignorant as they must be of God's purposes of mercy toward such as at any particular time are found in the ranks of unbelievers—his purposes of mercy, for example, toward a blood-stained Saul of Tarsus—in attempting “to gather up the tares, they should root up the wheat also with them. Let both grow together until the harvest,” says he. And then, when all God's purposes of mercy to individuals shall have been accomplished, and when, in the searching light of that day all shall appear in their true character, “the Son of Man shall send forth his angels, and they shall gather out of his kingdom all things that offend, and them which do iniquity.”

As thus interpreted, the parable contains no prohibition of the “binding and loosing,” and of the “trying the spirits whether they are of God,” enjoined in other scriptures. A “godly discipline,” in the judicial sense of that expression, concerns the communion and not the Church as such; whilst the parable concerns the visible Church, and not the communion as such.

The important practical lessons taught in the parable are :

1. That the condition of things in the visible Church on earth, till the “end of the world,” shall be such as is fitly represented by a field of mingled wheat and tares: it shall always contain “the children of the wicked one” along with “the children of the kingdom.” And this necessarily results from the fact that throughout all this time it is to be made up of families, children “conceived in sin and shapen in iniquity” entering along with their believing parents. God, for wise reasons, gave it such a constitution in the beginning, and he never has, and never will, change its constitution in this particular so long as it is a Church in the world. “It would argue little love or holy earnestness in the Christian, if he had not a longing desire 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 it is in itself, yet is 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 is meant to wring out from him a more earnest prayer that the kingdom of God may appear” (Trench).

2. “A godly church discipline,” such as the Scriptures author-

ise and enjoin, does not include authority to denounce the anathema against an offender. The Church may and ought to keep back and exclude from her communion all who make no credible profession of personal faith in Christ, or whose life is inconsistent with such a profession, even though they may have been born within her pale. But she may never cast them beyond the reach of her care, her efforts, and her prayers. The authority Christ has given her is "for edification and not for destruction" (2 Cor. x. 8). Her excommunication is, just what the term indicates, an exclusion from her communion, and not from the Church itself. Even in the days of miraculous judgments, and under the administration of Apostles, it reached no further than "to deliver such a one to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that the spirit might be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus" (1 Cor. v. 5). The darkest blood-stains on the pages of the Church's history are the result of her disregard of this limitation on her authority "to bind and loose"—thirty-two thousand persons are said, on good authority, to have suffered death, in various ways, under the direct sentence of the Inquisition—so terrible has been the result of fallible man's assuming to do the work which Christ has assigned to the angels; to do now the work which Christ has appointed to be done at "the end of the world."

GEORGE D. ARMSTRONG.