

PARABLE XXIII.

THE LOST PIECE OF MONEY.

LUKE xv. 8-10.

THE preceding parable has anticipated much that might have been said upon this; yet it would be against all analogy of other twin parables, to assume that the two did no more than say the same thing twice over. In the Pearl and the Hid Treasure, in the Leaven and the Mustard-seed, the second may seem at first sight only a repetition of the first; while yet on closer inspection important differences will reveal themselves; and so is it both here and elsewhere. Thus compare Matt. ix. 16, 17, and Luke xiv. 28-32. If the shepherd in the last parable was Christ, the woman in this may be the Church.¹ Or should we understand by her that Divine Wisdom,² so often magnified in Proverbs as seeking the salvation of men, and here set forth as a person and not an attribute (cf. Matt. xi. 19), this will be no different view. The two explanations flow into one, if only we contemplate the Church as the organ by which the Holy Spirit seeks for the lost; and which, being quickened by the Divine Spirit, is stirred up to active ministries of love for the seeking of souls (Rev. xxii. 17). That the Church should be personified as a woman is natural; and the thought of the Holy Ghost as a

¹ Ambrose: 'Who are these, the father, the shepherd, and the woman? Is not God the father, Christ the shepherd, the Church the woman?'

² Gregory the Great (*Hom. 34 in Evang.*): 'For He himself is God, and He also is the Wisdom of God.'

mother has at different times been near to the minds of men.¹

'Either what woman having ten pieces of silver, if she lose one piece, doth not light a candle, and sweep² the house, and seek diligently till she find it?' In this piece of money expositors, both ancient and modern, have delighted to trace a resemblance to the human soul, originally stamped with the image and superscription of the great King³ ('God created man in his own image,' Gen. i. 27), and still retaining traces of the mint from which it proceeded; however by sin that image has been nearly effaced, and the superscription become well-nigh illegible. One clings with pleasure to so instructive a suggestion; but it must not be forgotten that the Greek drachma, the coin here named, had not, like the Latin denarius (Matt. xxii. 20), the emperor's image and superscription upon it, but some device, as of an owl, a tortoise, or a head of

¹ See some interesting remarks in Jerome (*Comm. in Esai.* xl. 3, p. 303), justifying this language; while at the same time he guards it, saying: 'In divinity there is no sex.' Christ claims too for himself the mother's heart in his affecting words, Luke xiii. 34.

² An erroneous reading, *evertit*, for *everrit*, had possession of the Vulgate during the Middle Ages. Thus Gregory the Great (*Hom. 34 in Evang.*): 'The house is turned upside down when the human conscience is troubled by the thought of its guilt.' Thauler: God searches for man, and turns his house upside down, even as we are wont in seeking for anything to turn everything over and move it from its place, until we happen to find that which we seek.' Wiclif: 'Turneth up so down the house.' There is an allusion to this erroneous reading in Jeremy Taylor's great *Sermon to the University of Dublin*: 'We talk much of reformation, and (blessed be God) once we have felt the good of it; but of late we have smarted under the name and pretension. The woman that had lost her groat *everrit domum*, not *evertit*, she swept the house, she did not turn the house out of doors. That was but an ill reformation that untiled the roof, and broke the walls, and was digging down the foundation.'

³ Thus Augustine (*Enarr. in Ps. cxxxviii.*): 'The Wisdom of God had lost a piece of silver. What was the piece of silver? It was a coin upon which was the image of our Emperor.' Compare Ignatius (*Ad. Magn. 5*): 'There are two coinages, the one of God, the other of the world, and each of them has impressed upon it its proper stamp, the faithless the stamp of this world, the faithful and loving the stamp of God the Father through Jesus Christ.'

Minerva. As the woman seeks anxiously her piece of silver, even so the Lord, through the ministrations of his Church, gives diligence to recover the lost sinner, to bring back the money of God to his treasury, from which originally it issued.¹ The allusion often found in the lighting of the candle to the mystery of the Incarnation,—the divine glory which the Saviour has within, shining through the fleshly covering which only in part concealed it,²—must of course give way, if we interpret the parable as is here proposed. Rather it must be explained by the help of such hints as Matt. v. 14, 15; Phil. ii. 15, 16; Ephes. v. 13, supply. The ‘*candle*’ is the Word of God; which candle the Church holds forth, as it has and exercises a ministry of this Word. It is by the light of this candle that sinners are found, that they find themselves, that the Church finds them.³ With this to aid her, she ‘*sweeps the house* ;’ which sweeping is not effected without dust.⁴ What an unsettling of the house for a time! how does the dust which had been suffered to settle down and to accumulate begin to rise and fly about; how unwelcome all which is going forward to any, who have no interest in what is doing, whose only interest is that their selfish ease should not be disturbed. The charge against the Gospel is still the same,

¹ H. de Sto. Victore: ‘The piece of silver is found when the likeness of his creator is renewed in a man;’ and Bernard (*De Grat. et Lib. Arb.* 10): ‘To this day the image would have lain foul and disfigured had not that evangelical woman lighted her candle, that is had not Wisdom appeared in the flesh, had she not swept the house, the house that is of vice, and sought the piece which she had lost, even her own image, which, robbed of its native splendour, and besmirched beneath its coat of sin, was lying hid as in the dust; had she not wiped it when found, and taking it from the region of unlikeness, restored it to its pristine appearance, and made it like in the glory of the saints, nay had she not rendered it conformable in all respects to herself, in plain fulfilment of that Scripture: For we know that when He shall appear we shall be like unto him; for we shall see him as He is.’

² Cajetan: ‘The candle which she lights is the mystery of the Incarnation, the Word in the flesh, even, as light in a pitcher.’

³ Tertullian (*De Pudic.* 7): ‘The piece of silver is found by the light of a candle, as if by the word of God.’

⁴ ‘It is not brought about without dust,’ as Bengel well remarks.

that it turns the world upside down (Acts xvii. 6). And in a sense so it does ; for only let its message be proclaimed in earnest, and how much of latent aversion to the truth reveals itself now as open enmity ; how much of torpid estrangement from God is changed into active hostility ; what indignation is there against the troublers of Israel, the witnesses in sack-cloth who torment the dwellers upon earth (Rev. xi. 10). She meanwhile who bears the candle of the Lord, amid all this uproar and outcry is diligently looking for and finding her own again.

In the preceding parable the shepherd sought his strayed sheep *in the wilderness* ; but *in the house* this piece of money is lost, and in the house therefore it is sought and found.¹ This is scarcely accidental. In that other there was the returning of the Son to the heavenly places, but in this there

¹ The stopped wells of Gen. xxi. 18 are for Origen the springs of eternal life, which the Philistines, that is Satan and sin, had choked, but which our Isaac, the Son of gladness, opened anew for us. Such choked wells, he observes, are within every one of us (cf. John iv. 14), and he bids us note that in this parable the lost money was not found *without* the house, but *within* : for at the bottom of every man's soul there is this image of God, mislaid indeed and overlaid with a thousand other images, covered with dust and defilement, but which still may be found, and, in his hands from whom it came, may recover its first brightness, and distinct outline (*In Gen. Hom.* 13) : ' The woman who had lost the piece of silver did not find it out of doors, but in her house, after that she had lit a candle, and purified the house from the filth and impurities, which long-continued idleness and sluggardy had accumulated ; and there she found the silver. So also then if thou lightest a candle, if thou bringest to thyself the illumination of the Holy Spirit, and in his light wilt see the light, thou too shalt find the piece of silver within thee. For when at the beginning God was making man, He made him after his own image and likeness : and this image he placed not outside of but within him. But this could not be seen in thee so long as thy house was dirty, filled with impurities and rubbish. The fountain of knowledge was placed within thee, but it could not flow, because the Philistines had choked it with earth, and had made in thee an image of the earthly. Then thou didst carry within thee the image of the earthly, but now that thou hast heard these things and by the Word of God art purged from all that earthly weight and oppression, see that thou make the image of the heavenly that is in thee to shine forth in splendour.'

is the hint of a visible Church which has been founded upon earth, and to which sinners are restored. And there are other slighter variations, intelligible at once when we see there the more personal and immediate ministry of Christ, and here the secondary ministry of his Church. The shepherd says, '*I have found my sheep*;' but the woman, '*I have found the piece of money*;' not '*my piece of money*,' for it is in no sense *hers*, as the sheep was *his*. He says, '*which was lost*;' but she, '*which I had lost*,' acknowledging a fault of her own as having contributed to the loss; for a sheep strays of itself, but a piece of money could only be missing by a certain negligence on the part of such as should have kept it.

This woman, if we are right in our interpretation, is the Church, the bride, that is, of the Good Shepherd. What wonder that in the hour of her joy she does and speaks, almost as He has done and spoken before? And first, '*she calleth her friends and neighbours together*;'—they are *female* friends and neighbours, although this nicety in the keeping of the parts (Ruth iv. 14, 17)¹ escapes us in English²—that these may be sharers in her joy. Yet this need not prevent us from understanding by them the angels,—we have the Lord's warrant for this,—whose place, it will be observed, is not 'in heaven' in this parable, as it was in the preceding; for this is the rejoicing together of the redeemed and elect creation *upon earth* at the repentance of a sinner. Among the angels who walk up and down the earth, who are present in the assemblies of the faithful (1 Cor. xi. 10), joying to behold their order, but most of all rejoicing when a sinner is converted, there shall be joy, when the Church of the redeemed, quickened by the Holy Spirit, summons them to join with it in consenting hymns of thanksgiving to God for the recovery of a lost soul. For indeed if the 'sons of God'

¹ With the same nice observance of proprieties, Wisdom, a female personification, sends forth not her servants, but her maidens (Prov. ix. 3).

² Wiclif has, but he does not here use, the words 'friendess' (Prov. vii. 4); and 'neighbourness' (Exod. iii. 22).

shouted for joy and sang together at the first creation (Job xxxviii. 7), by how much better right when 'a new creation' had found place, in the birth of a soul into the light of everlasting life (Ephes. iii. 10; 1 Pet. i. 12); for according to that exquisite word of St. Bernard, the tears of penitents are the wine of angels.¹

¹ 'The tears of penitents make angels' wine;' and Prudentius:

Amissa drachma regio	Et gemma, deterso luto,
Recondita est ærario,	Nitore vincit sidera.

'The coin, once lost, henceforth shall lie
 Stored in the royal treasury;
 The jewel, from its stains washed clean,
 Shines with a more than heavenly sheen.'