

PARABLE V.

THE HID TREASURE.

MATTHEW xiii. 44.

THE kingdom of God is not merely a general, it is also an individual and personal, thing. It is not merely a tree overshadowing the earth, or leaven leavening the world, but each man must have it for himself, and make it his own by a distinct act of his own will. He cannot be a Christian without knowing it. He may indeed come under the shadow of this great tree, and partake of many blessings of its shelter; he may dwell in a Christendom which has been leavened with the leaven of the truth, and so in a degree himself share in the universal leavening. But more than this is needed, and more than this for every elect soul will find place. There will be a personal appropriation of the benefit; and we have the history of this in these two parables¹ which follow. They were spoken, not to the multitude, not to those 'without,' but in the house (ver. 36), and to the inner circle of disciples; who are addressed as having lighted on the hid treasure, having found the pearl of price; and are now warned of the surpassing worth of these, and that, for their sakes, all which would hinder from making them securely their own, must be joyfully renounced.²

¹ Origen (*Comm. in Matt.*) observes that these would more fitly be called *similitudes* (*ὁμοιώσεις*) than parables, which name, he says, is not given to them in the Scripture: yet see ver. 53.—For a series of these briefer parables as in use among the Jews, see Schoettgen, *Hor. Heb.* vol. i. pp. 83–85.

² Jackson (*Eternal Truth of Scriptures*, iv. 8. 5): 'After we come once to view the seam or vein wherein this hidden treasure lies, if we be

The second parable repeats what the first has said, but repeats it with a difference; they are each the complement of the other: so that under one or other, as finders either of the pearl or of the hid treasure, may be ranged all who become partakers of the blessings of the Gospel of Christ. Of these there are some who feel that there must be an absolute good for man, in the possessing of which he shall be blessed and find the satisfaction of all his longings; who are therefore seeking everywhere and inquiring for this good. Such are likened to the merchant that has distinctly set before himself the purpose of seeking goodly pearls, and making these his own. Such are the fewer in number, but are likely to prove the noblest servants of the truth. There are others, who do not discover that there is an aim and a purpose for man's life, or a truth for him at all, until the truth as it is in Jesus is revealed to them. Such are compared to the finder of the hid treasure, who stumbled upon it unawares, neither expecting nor looking for it. While the others felt that there was a good, and were looking for it, the discovery of the good itself for the first time reveals to these that there is such at all; whose joy, therefore, as greater,—being the joy at the discovery of an unlooked-for treasure,—is expressed; that of the others, not. Thus Hammond, bringing out this distinction, paraphrases the two parables thus: 'The Gospel being by some not looked after, is yet sometimes met with by them, and becomes matter of infinite joy and desire to them: and so is likened fitly to a treasure, which a man finding casually in a field, hid again, or concealed it, and then, designing to get into his possession, accounts no price he can pay too dear for it. Others there are which have followed the study of wisdom, and thirsted after some instruction: and

merchantly minded, and not of peddling dispositions, we account all we possess besides as dross, or (as the Apostle speaks) dung, in respect of our proffered title to it; for whose further assurance we alienate all our interest in the world, the flesh, with all their appurtenances, with as great willingness as good husbands do base tenements or hard-rented leases, to compass some goodly royalty offered them more than half for nothing.'

then the Gospel of Christ comes as a rich prize doth to a merchant, who is in pursuit of rich merchandize, and meeting with a jewel for his turn, lays out all his estate upon it.'

The cases of Jew and Gentile will respectively exemplify the contrast between the Pearl and the Hid Treasure ; though in the case of the Jews, or the larger number of them, the illustration cannot be carried through, as they, though seeking pearls, having a zeal for righteousness, yet, when the pearl of great price was offered to them, were not willing to 'sell all,' to renounce their peculiar privileges, their self-righteousness, and all else which they held dear, that they might buy their pearl. The Gentiles, on the contrary, came upon the treasure unawares. Christ was found of them that sought Him not, and the blessings of his truth revealed to them who before had not divined that there were such blessings for man (Rom. ix. 30).¹ Or, again, we might instance Nathanael as an example of the more receptive nature, of one who has the truth found for him ; or a still more striking example,—the Samaritan woman (John iv.), who, when she came on that memorable day to draw water from the well, anticipated anything rather than lighting on the hid treasure. Yet in this character there cannot be a total absence of a seeking for the truth ; only it is a desire that has hitherto slumbered in the soul, and displays itself rather as a love of the truth when revealed, and at once a joyful and submissive acquiescence to

¹ Grotius : 'The teaching of the Gospel shone upon some who were taking no thought either of God, or of amendment of life, or of the hope of another life, such as were many in the nations of the Gentiles, to whom Paul applies the prophecy : I am found of those that do not seek me. There were also among the Jews and elsewhere those who sought after wisdom, who were moved with a desire for learning the truth, or who were eagerly awaiting some Prophet or even the Messiah Himself. The comparison of the treasure refers to the former class, that of the pearl of great price to the latter.' Bengel recognizes the same distinction : 'The discovery of the treasure does not presuppose an act of search in the same way as does that of the pearls which are discovered by diligent inquiry.' Alex. Knox (*Remains*, vol. i. p. 416, seq.) has very excellent remarks to the same effect.

it, than in any active previous quest. In both, there must be the same willingness to embrace it when known, and to hold it fast, at whatever costs and hazards. On the other hand, we have, perhaps, no such record of a noble nature, seeking for the pearl of price, and not resting till he had found it, as that which Augustine gives of himself in his *Confessions*; though others are not wanting, such as Justin Martyr's account of his own conversion, given in his first dialogue with Trypho, in which he tells how he had travelled through the whole circle of Greek philosophy, seeking everywhere for that which would satisfy the deepest needs of his soul, and ever seeking in vain, till he found it at length in the Gospel of Christ. We derive a further confirmation of this view of the parables, and that it is not a mere fancy, from the forms which they severally assume. In this the treasure is the prominent circumstance; '*The kingdom of heaven is like unto treasure.*' Now if the other had been cast in exactly the same mould, it would have been said, '*The kingdom of heaven is like unto a pearl;*' the words, however, run not so; but rather, '*The kingdom of heaven is like unto a merchant man;*' so that the person seeking is in that parable at the centre of the spiritual picture, the thing found, in this. The difference is scarcely accidental.

The circumstance which supplies the groundwork of this first parable, namely, the finding of a concealed treasure,¹ is of much more frequent occurrence in an insecure state of society, such as in almost all ages has prevailed in the East, than happily it can be with us. A writer on Oriental literature and customs mentions that in the East, on account of the frequent changes of dynasties, and the revolutions which accompany them, many rich men divide their goods into

¹ Θησαυρός, *i.e.* συναγωγή χρημάτων κεκρυμμένη, 'a hidden store of goods,' as an old Lexicon explains it. On the derivation of the word, and its possible relation to *αἶρον* = aurum, see Pott, *Etym. Forsch.* vol. ii. pt. iv. p. 334.—The Jurisconsult Paulus gives its legal definition: 'A treasure is a hoard of money buried so long ago that no memory of it survives, and it has now no owner.'

three parts: one they employ in commerce, or for their necessary support; one they turn into jewels, which, should it prove needful to fly, could be easily carried with them; a third part they bury.¹ But as they trust no one with the place where the treasure is buried, so is the same, should they not return to the spot before their death, as good as lost to the living² (Jer. xli. 8), until, by chance, a lucky peasant digging in his field, lights upon it.³ And thus, when we read in Eastern tales, how a man has found a buried treasure, and, in a moment, risen from poverty to great riches, this is, in fact, no strange or rare occurrence, but a natural consequence of the customs of these people.⁴ Modern books of travels bear witness to the almost universal belief in the existence of such hid treasures; so that the traveller often finds much difficulty in obtaining information about antiquities, is sometimes seriously inconvenienced, or even endangered, in his researches among ancient ruins, by the jealousy of the neighbouring inhabitants, who are persuaded that he is coming to carry away concealed hoards of wealth from among them, of which, by some means or other, he has got notice. And so also the skill of an Eastern magician in great part consists in being able to detect the places where these secreted treasures will successfully be looked for.⁵ Often, too, a man abandoning the regular pursuits of industry will devote himself to treasure-seeking, in the hope of growing, through some happy chance, rich of a sudden (Job iii. 21; Prov. ii. 4). The contrast, however, between this parable and the following, noticed already, will not allow us to assume the finder here to have been in search of the trea-

¹ Compare Virgil, *Georg.* ii. 507; *Æn.* vi. 610.

² Gregory of Nyssa (*Orat. con. Usurar.* vol. ii. p. 233, Paris, 1638) has a curious story of an avaricious and wealthy usurer of his day, all whose property was thus lost to his family.

³ The *Aulularia* of Plautus, *Prolog.* 6-12, turns on such an incident.

⁴ Richardson (*Dissert. on the Languages, &c., of Eastern Nations*, p. 180). Compare the strange story told by Tacitus, *Annal.* xvi. 1-3.

⁵ See Burder, *Oriental Literature*, vol. i. p. 275; and for evidence of the same in old time, Becker, *Charicles*, vol. i. p. 224.

sure ; he rather stumbles upon it, strikes it with plough or spade, unawares, and thinking of no such thing :¹ probably while engaged as a hireling in cultivating the field of another.

Some draw a distinction between '*the field*' and '*the treasure*.' The first is the Holy Scriptures ; the second, the hidden mystery of the knowledge of Christ contained in them,² which when a man has partly perceived,—discovered, that is, and got a glimpse of the treasure,—he is willing to renounce all meaner aims and objects ; that, having leisure to search more and more into those Scriptures, to make them his own, he may enrich himself for ever with the knowledge of Christ which therein is contained.³ Yet to me '*the field*' rather represents the outer visible Church, as contradistinguished from the inward spiritual, with which '*the treasure*' will then agree. As the man who before looked on the field with careless eyes, prized it but as another field, now sees in it a new worth, resolves that nothing shall separate him from it, so he who recognizes the Church, not as a human institute, but a divine, as a dispenser, not of earthly gifts, but of heavenly,—who has learned that God is in the midst of it,—sees now that it is something different from, and something more than, all earthly societies, with which hitherto he has confounded it : and henceforth it is precious in his sight, even to its outermost skirts, for the sake of that inward glory which

¹ Horace (*Sat.* i. 1. 42) : *O si urnam argenti fors qua mihi monstret !* 'Oh ! if some chance will show me an urn full of silver.' Persius : *O si Sub rastro crepet argenti mihi seria !* 'Oh ! if a pot of silver will chink beneath my plough.'

² So Jerome (*Comm. in Matt.* in loc.) : 'That treasure . . . is the holy Scriptures in which is stored up the knowledge of the Saviour ;' and Augustine (*Quæst. Evang.* i. qu. 13) : 'By the treasure hidden away in a field, He meant the two Testaments of the Law in the Church, which when a man has touched on his intellectual side he perceives that great things are there hid, and goes and sells all that he has and buys that field ; that is, by contempt of things temporal he procures for himself leisure, that he may become rich by the knowledge of God.'

³ Origen's view in a striking passage, *De Prin.* iv. 23, namely, that '*the field*' is the letter, and '*the hid treasure*' the spiritual or allegorical meaning, underlying this letter, is only a modification of the same.

is revealed to his eyes. And he sees, too, that blessedness is unalterably linked to communion with it. As the man cannot have the treasure and leave the field, but both or neither must be his, so he cannot have Christ except in his Church and in the ordinances of his Church; none but the golden pipes of the sanctuary are used for the conveyance of the golden oil (Zech. iv. 12); he cannot have Christ in his heart, and, at the same time, separate his fortunes from those of Christ's struggling, suffering, warring Church. The treasure and the field go together; both, or neither, must be his.

This treasure '*when a man hath found, he hideth*;' having laid it open in discovering, he covers it up again, while he goes and effects the purchase of the field. This cannot mean that he who has discovered the treasures of wisdom and knowledge hidden in Christ Jesus, will desire to keep his knowledge to himself; since rather he will feel himself, as he never did before, a debtor to all men, to make all partakers of the benefit. He will go to his brother man, like Andrew to Peter, and saying to him, 'We have found the Messiah' (John i: 41), will seek to bring him to Jesus. If he hide the treasure, this hiding will be, not lest another should find, but lest he himself should lose it.¹ In the first moments that the truth is revealed to a soul, there may well be a tremulous fear lest the blessing found should, by some means or other, escape again. The anxiety that it may not do so, the jealous precautions for this end taken, would seem to be the truth signified by this re-concealment of the found treasure.

But having thus secured it for the moment, the finder,

¹ Maldonatus: 'Not lest another may find, but lest he himself may lose;' Jerome (*Comm. in Matt. in loc.*): 'Not that he does this out of jealousy, but that, with the fear of a man who keeps and is unwilling to lose, he hides away in his heart the treasure which he preferred to all his former riches.' H. de Sto. Victore differently (*De Arcâ Mor. iii. 6*): 'That man publishes abroad the treasures he has found, who bears the gift of wisdom he has received as a matter of boasting. But he hides away the treasure, who, when he has received the gift of Wisdom, seeks to make his boast therefrom not publicly in the eyes of men, but inwardly in the sight of God.'

'and for joy thereof goeth and selleth all that he hath, and buyeth that field.' The joy is expressly mentioned here, being that in the strength whereof the finder of the spiritual treasure is enabled to part with everything besides.¹ No compulsion, no command is necessary; 'for joy thereof' or 'in his joy,' both being possible renderings, he cannot do otherwise; all other things have now no glory, 'by reason of the glory which excelleth.' Augustine excellently illustrates from his own experience this part of the parable. Describing the crisis of his own conversion, and how easy he found it, through this joy, to give up all which he had long dreaded to be obliged to renounce, which had so long held him fast bound in the chains of evil custom; and which if he renounced, it had seemed to him as though life itself would not be worth living, he exclaims: 'How sweet did it at once become to me, to want the sweetnesses of those toys! and what I feared to be parted from was now a joy to part with. For Thou didst cast them forth from me, Thou true and highest sweetness. Thou castedst them forth, and in their stead enteredst in Thyself, sweeter than all pleasure.'² The parting with those sinful delights which had hitherto held him bound, was, in Augustine's case, the selling of all that he had, that he might buy the field. Compare Phil. iii. 4-11, where St. Paul declares how he too sold all that he had, renounced his trust in his own righteousness, in his spiritual and fleshly privileges, that he might 'win Christ, and be found in Him.' In each of these illustrious instances, the man parted with the dearest thing that he possessed, so to make the treasure his own: though, in each case, the thing parted with how different! So, too, whenever any man renounces what is closest to him, rather than that that should hinder his embracing and making

¹ Bengel: 'Spiritual joy, which is an incentive to the denial of the world.'

² *Confess.* ix. 1: 'How delightful did it suddenly become to me to lack all frivolous delights, and these which I had feared to lose it was now a joy to forego. For Thou didst cast them from me, Who art the true and highest delight, Thou didst cast them from me and didst enter in their place, Who art sweeter than every pleasure.'

his own all the blessings of Christ,—when the lover of money renounces his covetousness,—and the indolent man, his ease, and the lover of pleasure, his pleasure,—and the wise man, his confidence in the wisdom of this world, then each is selling what he has, that he may buy the field which contains the treasure. Yet this selling of all is no arbitrary condition, imposed from without, but rather a delightful constraint, acknowledged within: even as a man would willingly fling down pebbles and mosses with which he had been filling his hands, if pearls and precious stones were offered him in their stead;¹ or as the dead leaves of themselves fall off from the tree, when propelled by the new buds and blossoms which are forcing their way from behind.

A difficulty has been sometimes found in the circumstance of the finder of the treasure purchasing the field, at the same time withholding, as plainly he does, from the owner the knowledge of a fact which enhanced its value so much; and which had the other known, either he would not have parted with it at all, or only at a much higher price. They argue that it is against the decorum of the divine teaching and of the Divine Teacher, that an action, morally questionable at least, if not absolutely unrighteous, should be used even for the outward setting forth of a spiritual action which is commended as worthy of imitation; that there is a certain approbation of the action conveyed even in the use of it for such ends; in fact, they find the same difficulty here as in the parables of the Unjust Steward and the Unjust Judge. Olshausen, so far from evading the difficulty, or seeking to rescue the present parable from lying under the same difficulty

¹ Augustine: 'Behold thou askest of the Lord, and sayest, Lord, give unto me. What shall He give unto thee, Who seeth thy hands filled with other matters? Behold the Lord would give to thee of his own, and seeth not where He may put it?' And again (*in 1 Ep. Joh. Tract. 4*): 'Thou must be filled with good, pour away therefore the bad. Be-think thee that God would fill thee with honey. If thou art filled with vinegar, where wilt thou find place for the honey? The vessel which contained the vinegar must be emptied. It must be cleansed, though it be with toil and rubbing, that so it may be made fit for use.'

as undoubtedly cleaves to one of those, himself urges the likeness which exists between the two, and affirms that, in both, *prudence* (klugheit) in respect of divine things is commended; so that they are parables of the same class, and in this aspect, at least, containing the same moral. But to the objection urged above it seems enough to reply, that not every part of his conduct who found the treasure is proposed for imitation,¹ but only his earnestness in securing the treasure found, his fixed purpose to make it at all costs and all hazards his own, and (which, I suppose, is Olshausen's meaning) his prudence, without any affirmation that the actual manner wherein that prudence showed itself was praiseworthy or not.²

¹ Augustine (*Enarr. in Ps. lvii. 6*): 'A similitude is not drawn by the Scriptures at all points; the thing itself is praised, but only in those points whence the similitude is drawn.' In books of casuistry, where they treat of the question, how far and where a finder has a right to appropriate things found, this parable is frequently adduced, as by Aquinas (*Summ. Theol. ii. qu. 69, art. 5*): 'Concerning things found we must draw a distinction. For there are some things which were never among any man's possessions, such as the stones and gems which are found on the seashore. Things like these are granted to the holder, and the same is the case with treasures hidden from ancient times beneath the earth, of which there is no possessor surviving: except indeed that according to the civil laws the finder is bound to give a moiety to the lord of the field, if he find it in the field of another. Wherefore in the parable (*Matt. xiii.*) it is said of the finder of the treasure that he buys the field, with the intent to secure the right of possessing the whole of the treasure.'

² Calderon has founded several of his *Autos* on parables of our Lord; thus *El Tesoro Escondido* (*Autos*, Madrid, 1759, vol. iii. p. 372), as its name sufficiently indicates, on this; *La Viña del Señor* (vol. iii. p. 162) on that of the Wicked Husbandmen; *La Semilla y la Zizaña* (vol. v. p. 316) on those of the Sower and the Tares combined; *A tu próximo como á ti* (vol. iv. p. 324) on the Good Samaritan. Any one of these, were there room for it, would be well worthy of analysis, both for its own sake, and as showing the capabilities of highest poetical treatment which, in a great poet's hands, the parables possess; the latent and as yet unfolded germs of beauty and grandeur which they contain.'