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THE GROWTH OF THE MUSTARD SEED, AN EMBLEM OF INCREASE OF THE CHURCH.

[MATTHEW, XII., 3. 32.]

The two preceding parables present to us rather a discouraging view of the Christian Church. The first,—the parable of the sower, shows us how the Church originates in the world. The kingdom of heaven is established in the hearts of men by the truth being presented to them. The sower scatters the seed seasonably, skillfully, and plentifully, but three-parts—though we do not suppose three-fourths, of it are represented as fruitless. The fault, however, is in the soil, neither in the seed nor the sower. The truth prominently brought before us in the picture is, that a great many in every congregation are unprofitable hearers. The seeds of truth fall upon their hearts, but never grow to perfection. It is only here and there that the good soil can be found.

We need scarcely expect the time in this dispensation when the whole world will be a fertile field for gospel seed. We may expect that much of the seed we sow will fall on the way-side to be caught away by Satan, or on the stony ground to be withered by the sun of temptation or trial, or among the thorns to be choked with the cares of the world.

The second parable—that of the tares among the wheat, is even still more discouraging than the first. It presents to us the actual condition of the visible Church on earth. Christ's visible kingdom in the world is one in which good and evil will mingle. Where Christ sows wheat, Satan

will sow tares. Even the good soil will be partially injured by the presence of weeds. The good seed even there is threatened with suffocation by the tares, and extermination by officious servants. The field is the world where Christ's visible Church exists. It is, however, that part of the world which he claims as his kingdom, and has sown with good seed. It is not to wheat sown in a field of tares, but to tares in a wheat field that we are pointed. These tares mingle in the wheat, grow on the same soil, drink in the same moisture, bask in the same sunshine, and are gathered and separated by the same hands. We need not expect perfection either in Christians or Churches. The tares and wheat will mingle their stalks and interlace their roots together. We may expect that Satan will introduce inconsistent members, hypocrites and self-deceivers into the Church. The Lord's garden down here will never be thoroughly weeded. The odours from some plants will be offensive. The beauty of some flowers will be deceptive, the fruits of some trees will be bitter or poisonous. We may expect to find the children of the wicked one among the children of the kingdom. That is the actual condition of the Church on earth. When then we see so much of the seed wasted by falling on bad soil, and even that which does grow threatened to be choked by a luxuriant crop of vile tares, is it not a wonder that any fruit at all is brought forth to perfection? This discouraging picture is before us in the experience of the Church to-day. So much seed apparently wasted; efforts made in