

THE REAL AND IDEAL CHURCH.

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THE Great Teacher once likened the kingdom of heaven to "a net that was cast into the sea and gathered of every kind; which, when it was full, they drew to shore, and sat down, and gathered the good into vessels, but cast the bad away." The net here spoken of is not of the kind in ordinary use, but one of those known among us by the specific name, "seine." This net is usually quite long; cork is attached to the top to make it float, and lead to the bottom to make it stretch, when in the water, to its full width. When a school of fishes makes its appearance, the fishermen attach one end of the seine to the shore, and then putting the rest in a boat, make a circuit of the water around the school, gradually letting out the seine as they go and enclosing everything between it and the shore. A visitor to our coast, during the summer season, will occasionally see the seine employed, and witness the excited fishermen capturing and assorting the multitudes of the finny tribe which it encloses.

This illustration and others which the Scriptures furnish, represent the visible Church as at present in an imperfect, undeveloped, unfinished state, holding within its pale a great diversity of moral character. And the Saviour contemplates this state of things as existing to a greater or less extent to the end of time; "so shall it be at the end of the world; the angels shall come forth and sever the wicked from among the good."

If we consider the work which the Church of God proposes to do, it will be seen that this imperfection is unavoidable. It takes men and women out of the world, as they voluntarily place themselves under its direction, and by the use of means and agencies, human and divine, seeks to encourage and promote in them a growing purity and likeness to Jesus Christ. These men and women are not exempt from temptation. As long as they are in the body, they are upon probation, and are consequently liable to stumble and fall through the stratagems of their foes. And though the abstract possibility be admitted, there is no pro-