

tines. Those, therefore, who would urge this parable as an evidence of our Lord's approval of that practice everywhere else held forth in scripture as a vice, greatly mistake the purport of the parable itself and introduce a principle of interpretation which would reduce the Bible to the level of the Koran, and resolve its holy and beautiful precepts into a mass of palpable contradiction and meaningless absurdities. If such a construction could, by any process of reasoning, be put upon the parable, then we have the precepts of the new testament brought into direct collision with those of the old, and our Saviour commending to his people a practice destructive of their peace, because ever associated with debt, and in direct opposition to apostolic injunctions.

We may look at the subject from another though much less conclusive point of view. Let us admit, for the sake of argument, that our Lord does in reality commend the taking of usury. What follows? Plainly this—that the parable proves too much and places the usurer on the horns of a dilemma. For it commends the taking of usury, a practice which, according as they interpret the word, the advocates of the credit system loudly condemn.

It may not be out of place to take this opportunity to add a few additional reflections on the meaning and application of the term usury.

I have, in another place,* endeavoured to explain the meaning of the word *usury*. Modern expositors, generally, have put a false gloss upon the word, towards which they have probably been more influenced by the practice of the age than the spirit of the text. The Hebrew word *Neshech*, to bite, cut, or pierce with the teeth, is employed to denote usury or increase. It is repeatedly used in the same sense with the Hebrew words *Turbith* and *Marbith*, simple interest or increase. As, for example, in Leviticus xxv, 36, 37, "Take thou no usury of him or increase"—either of thy brother, the stranger, or the sojourner—where the words *Neshech* and *Marbith* are both used. Nothing could be plainer or more explicit than these anti-usury texts. *Neshech* is the word used figuratively to denote what is understood by the words *Turbith* and *Marbith*, both of which have the same meaning and are derived from a root signifying increase. It is a word used generally and figuratively to express lending on interest, and has no reference to any particular rate. Had it been lawful to take interest, it would have been as absurd to have fixed a limit as to have fixed a price for merchandise, for every one is, in that case, entitled to aim at the highest price. If the word usury denoted only an exorbitant rate, then the inference would be plain that a certain rate was permitted. But this notion cannot for a moment be entertained, for we are forbidden, in the same sentence, to take any increase at all for our loans; and here usury is not distinguished from increase, but placed in apposition with it to show that it denotes the same thing. The fact is, all loans imply necessity on the part of the borrower,—a necessity, in the circumstances, not to be compared with that which prompts a man to engage in barter—and accordingly all exactions of interest are hateful in the sight of God. No man will

* See Hunt's Merchants' Magazine, May, 1859.

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