

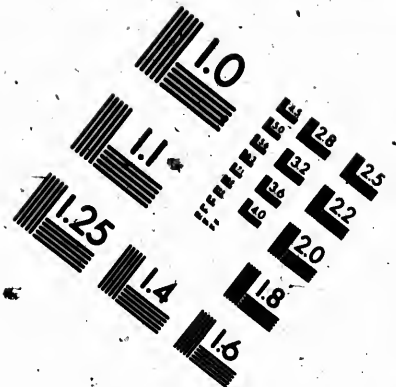
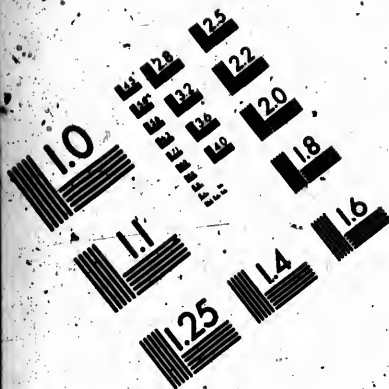


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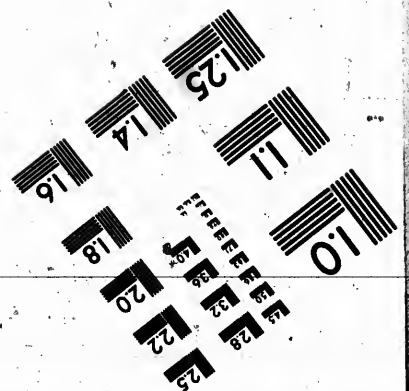
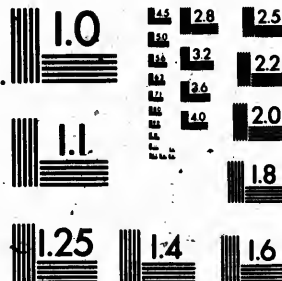
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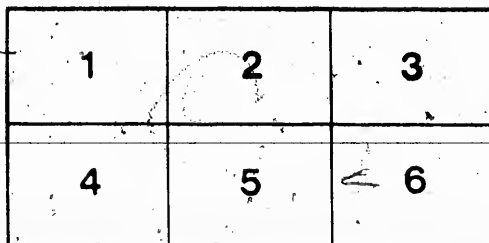
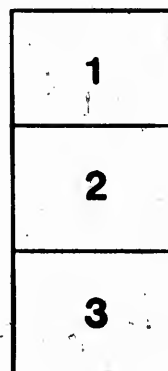
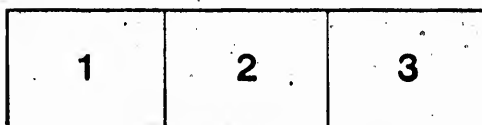
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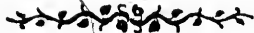
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THE TARES AND THE WHEAT. \*

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A SERMON

Preached July 20th, 1865,

BY THE

REV. JAMES CARMICHAEL,

Incumbent St. Paul's Church, Clinton, C. W.

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# THE TARES AND THE WHEAT.

## MATTHEW, CHAPTER XIII.

37.—“ He answered and said unto them : he that soweth the good seed is the Son of Man.

38.—“ The field is the world ; the good seed are the children of the kingdom ; but the tares are the children of the wicked one.

39.—“ The enemy that sowed them is the Devil. The harvest is the end of the world, and the reapers are the angels.

40.—“ As therefore, the tares are gathered and burned in the fire, so shall it be in the end of this world.

41.—“ The Son of Man shall send forth his angels, and they shall gather out of his kingdom all things that offend, and them which do iniquity,

42.—“ And shall cast them into a furnace of fire : there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth.

43.—“ Then shall the righteous shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father.”

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The parable of the tares and the wheat is perhaps as striking and as important a parable as we have in the Bible. There is a solemnity about it apt to awe the reader, and it is of that short and pithy character that you would fancy few could find scope in it for disagreement.

And yet, perhaps, there is no parable that has been cited and quoted more constantly in opposition to its plain meaning, or no portion of Scripture more openly wrested from its original uses. Thank God for His mercy in enabling us to read Scripture in the light of Scripture rather than of man. Man will do anything to enforce his own views, and few have seldom set themselves in opposition to the teaching of the Church that they have not bent Scripture to their views, instead of bending their views to Scripture. I have chosen this parable, then, to-day in order to explain it Scripturally, for I feel that you may come in contact with some who from my heart I believe (however good they may be) are but poor hands at a logical exposition of the Word, but none the less dangerous for their lack of reasoning. May the Lord, then, be with us as we seek after the truth in God's own way, comparing Scripture with Scripture as He would have us compare it.

Now I would first give you the generally received opinion of the parable. Our Lord speaks in it of the Visible Church of God under the title Kingdom of God. It is in fact an epitome of the spiritual aspect of the Church in all ages and for all time. Under the figure of Good Seed Jesus represents the children of God. Under the figure of Tares he represents the children of the world. This seed



sown on the earth, for it is on the earth that God erects His Visible Church or Kingdom. The Church Visible is represented as composed of this mixed multitude until the end of the world; and at the end of the world the good are separated from the bad, and the righteous remnant shine forth as the sun in the Kingdom of the Father. The lesson, therefore, that most readers learn from the parable is this: That whilst God has a spiritual Church unseen, composed *altogether* of believers, His visible Church is not of this pure character but is composed of some who are really His children and of some who are not. This mixture God allows. He says it is not to be interfered with; the good are to be warned to avoid the wicked and live unlike the wicked, but no government or no body of men are ever to take on themselves the visible separation of the wicked from the good or the formation of any congregation composed altogether of Christian people. This separation will be made by the *angels* when Christ appears, and not before. For says the parable, "The harvest is the end of the world and the reapers are the angels, and at the end of the world the Son of Man shall send forth his *angels*, and *they* shall gather out of his kingdom all things that offend, and them which do iniquity and shall cast them into a furnace of fire. There shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth."

In the fourth century a body of men called Donatists left the African Church and endeavoured to form a perfectly pure body. Of course this parable stood in their way, and they disposed of it after this fashion. They stated that it had nothing to say to the Church visible or invisible; that it simply had reference to the world; that in the world God allowed good and bad men to live, and that no separation would be made between them until the second appearance of Jesus Christ. Like most schismatics, the career of the Donatists was short-lived, for although they only arose in the fourth century they died out about the commencement of the sixth.

Strange, is it not, that their failure has not acted as a warning to others? and yet such is not the case. The Plymouth Brethren of the present day hold precisely the same views as the Donatists on the subject of the constitution of the Church. Every religious body, they say, is in error, for every body *permits* a certain amount of evil in its midst—good and bad congregate together. The good and bad sometimes kneel at the Lord's Table side by side, and until this is remedied God cannot bless His Word. "What has divided the Church?" says Mr. Darby, the founder of the body. "The allowance of evil in the *assembly*, so that the spirit of God could not dwell there," and then he adds: "But I speak not of gross evil, such as the world can take notice of; evil of *any kind* in the assembly, if sanctioned, will quench the spirit."

Of course such views clash with the parable of the Tares, and the Brethren have been forced to adopt the Donatist mode of explanation. They explain it thus: "The parable of the tares is so often brought forward as a defence of promiscuous communions that we cannot avoid noticing its obvious mis-application which pre-supposes the field to

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be the Church, although our Lord expressly explains it to be the world. The whole parable shows the impropriety of anticipating by persecution the award of final judgment."

Now I wish to show you that the parable has reference to the Church and not to the world, and I will not ask to go very far outside of the parable to prove it.

The Brethren base their explanation of the parable on the expression, "The field is the world." I reply, I admit it; but you have no right to make your argument turn on the *field*, but on an expression used four times by our Saviour—once in the parable and three times in his explanation of it. That expression is the "*kingdom of God*," or "*kingdom*." The field is the world; in that world there are good and bad people who profess to be children of God. They form the kingdom of God on earth. It is this *kingdom* that has to be cleansed and purified by the angels at the second coming, and not the *world*; and it is out of this *kingdom* that the wicked will be cast, and it is in this *kingdom* (purified by the absence of the ungodly) that the holy will remain.

Now give me your attention on this point. The *kingdom of Heaven*, says Christ, is likened unto a man which sowed good seed in his field. What does this mean? The erection of God's kingdom, or Church, or whatever you like to call it *on the earth*, through the teaching of the Gospel. The field, says Christ, is the world; the seed are the children of the kingdom, (of course in the world) but the tares are the children of the wicked one (that have crept in amongst the children of the kingdom.) Then he adds: The Son of Man shall send forth his angels and they shall gather out of—what? out of the world? nay—they shall gather out of *his kingdom* all things that offend and they that do iniquity and shall cast them into a furnace of fire; there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth. Then shall the righteous shine forth as the sun in the *kingdom* of their Father. That is after the expulsion of the wicked from the Church—after its final purification. Then shall it appear as a bride adorned for her husband, pure and spotless. Then, and not till then.

That the kingdom does not mean the *world* is plain, for it is the "kingdom of the Son." "Then shall the Son send forth his angels and they shall gather out of *his kingdom*." My kingdom, says Christ, is not of this world. Nay, brethren, Christ's kingdom now on earth—his visible kingdom—is composed of those who acknowledge His name. That thousands do so from irreligious motives I know; but they are the tares that shall yet be sundered. They are now in the visible kingdom and in that kingdom they will remain; but when we reach the restoration of all things then the kingdom itself will be cleansed and purified, and the true seed of the Lord shall bear fruit to his glory.

But to show you the utter folly of the explanation given by the Brethren I would refer you to the parable of the "Net cast into the sea," as recorded in the 47th and 50th verses of this chapter. It appears

almost identical with the parable of the tares and the wheat. "The kingdom of Heaven," says Christ, "is like unto a net that was cast into the sea." Now here there is nothing about the *world*. The net cannot be the world, for we are distinctly told it is meant to represent the Gospel of the kingdom of Heaven. This net, we are told, "*gathered of every kind*." The original word "signifies a draw net, one of the largest description, and typifies how that the kingdom of Heaven should henceforward be as a net not cast into a single stream, as under the Messianic dispensation, but unto the broad sea of the whole world, gathering or drawing together some out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation." Well, when the net was full, the fishermen drew it to shore and sat down and gathered the good into vessels, but cast the bad away. If the parable ended here, without note or comment, then indeed the Brethren might have argued that the spiritual fishers had a right to take on themselves the purification of the Church; but our Saviour's explanation of the parable gives a fearful deathblow to their theory. "So shall it be," (he says) when? "*at the end of the world* : the angels shall come forth and sever the wicked from among the just, and shall cast them into the furnace of fire : there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth."

Now I hold that it is impossible to get over the plain teaching of this parable. The net is plainly the visible Church of God cast into the waters of life. That net is to remain there till it is full—until the Gospel is preached to *all*—and never will it be drawn to shore till the close of the dispensation; but when it is drawn, then will that awful inquisition take place that every sinner should dread. No apology; no prayers; no tears will stay the angels' hands that must sever once and for ever between the evil and the good. The net cast and remaining in the sea for all time is a magnificent evidence of God's mercy; but the net drawn to shore and cleansed and purified is fully as awful an evidence of God's justice. But, blessed be God, it receives and takes all with a holy intention and will continue to do so till the rejection of many and the sins of many shall allow the time to be no longer in which God calls; but men will not hear.

But although, my brethren, these parables go to prove the mixture of good and evil in the Church till the end of time, let us remember that in both parables the good and bad, though mixed together, were in one sense *distinct*. The seed when sown was good, and good it remained. The tares when sown were bad, and remained bad till the hour of separation. The tare remained a tare; it was mixed, indeed, with the good seed, but it was as distinct from it at the end as it was at the beginning.

And so it should be with the servants of Jesus. We are not saved by the Church or by any system of human organization, whether composed altogether of good men, or mixed with evil. We are saved solely and alone through our connection with, and faith in, the merits of our Saviour's atonement. I would not gain the blessing of the Spirit because I might worship with none but Christians (as Mr.

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Darby would have us believe); but if I possess it at all it is because I am a child of God, and the indwelling of the Spirit is the consequence of my connection with Christ. "The Spirit of God cannot dwell," (says that writer) "where evil is tolerated." *I say it can.* That Comforter which abides with the child of God for ever will be with him just as much whether he kneels beside a drunkard or a saint. *It would be too hard to rob me of my heritage because my next door neighbour had nothing to say to it.* Nay, beloved, the indwelling of the Spirit is an individual thing—an increase of individual piety—brings with it an increase of the Spirit's influence, and thus it is that if, out of an assembly of many, even two or three meet in the name of Jesus, we have every reason to feel that the Spirit will be in that assembly, and be in it for good; it will be there with its children; it will follow its children; it will abide with its children; and although Mr Darby may not think so, I place my Saviour's promise against his unhappy views, that, "when the Comforter is come he will abide with me for ever."

But remember we can only claim this Comforter as children of God, and if we are children of God we must be as distinct from the children of the world as the good seed was ever distinct from the tares. We cannot help the tares being in the field, neither can, or ought, we prevent evil men entering our churches and kneeling with us on the same floor, in prayer; but it is no reason because we are liberal, and I believe, Christian, that we are to be inconsistent. We are to embrace no tare views, take part in no tare pleasure, or ever act in such a way as to lead people to suppose that because we are amongst the tares that therefore we are tares ourselves. We must never forget that, though we are living in darkness, we are children of the light; that we are the faint light of the world, and that our light is not to be hid. We must remember that we are to come out and be separate, not by destroying the tares and by standing alone, but by living in the midst of the wicked as children of God, just as the good seed lived in the midst of the tares, and yet had no immediate connection with them.

Let us be consistent Christians. Let us realize, first, the duty of a child of God and then perform it, and, believe me, we will keep the Spirit in our midst—yes; keep it for ever—keep it till that happy day, when the Church, being purified from all known evil, shall arise beautiful to meet its Lord, and so shall we, as members of that Church, be for ever with the Lord.

