

**PRACTICAL STUDIES
ON THE PARABLES
OF OUR LORD**

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Practical Studies on the Parables of Our Lord by B. W. Maturin

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BY

B. W. MATURIN

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P R E F A C E

THE object of this book is best explained by its title. It consists of 'practical studies on the Parables.' There is no attempt made at a careful exegesis, or at a detailed commentary on the text. I have merely tried to draw out the leading practical thought, as I conceived it, in each of the Parables, and to apply it. If what has been written should prove of any practical help to those who read it, I shall be more than satisfied.

B. W. M.

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THE SOWER

'Behold, a sower went forth to sow; And when he sowed some seeds fell by the wayside, and the fowls came and devoured them up: Some fell upon stony places, where they had not much earth: and forthwith they sprung up because they had no deepness of earth: And when the sun was up, they were scorched; and because they had no root, they withered away. And some fell among thorns, and the thorns sprung up and choked them: But other fell into good ground, and brought forth fruit, some an hundred-fold, some sixty-fold, some thirty-fold. Who hath ears to hear, let him hear.' . . . 'Hear ye therefore the parable of the sower. When anyone heareth the word of the kingdom, and understandeth it not, then cometh the wicked one, and catcheth away that which was sown in his heart. This is he which received seed by the wayside. But he that received the seed into stony places, the same is he that heareth the word, and anon with joy receiveth it: Yet hath he not root in himself, but dureth for a while: for when tribulation or persecution ariseth because of the word, by and by he is offended. He also that received seed among the thorns is he that heareth the word, and the care of this world, and the deceitfulness of riches, choke the word, and he becometh unfruitful. But he that received seed into the good ground is he that heareth the word, and understandeth it, which also beareth fruit, and bringeth forth, some an hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty.'—S. Matt. xiii. 3-9, 18-23.

I

THE SOWER.

THE seven Parables in the 13th chapter of S. Matthew are called the Parables of the Kingdom ; they follow one another in a close sequence of thought, showing us, under various simple images, the mysteries of the working of grace. The first two Parables tell us the causes of the failure of grace ; the natural causes and the supernatural. The third and fourth show, under two different images, the workings of grace, its transforming and fertilising power ; the fifth and sixth describe how different types of men awaken to the life of grace ; and the last, the final separation, between good and bad, when the time of probation is over, and the work of grace here below has ceased.

In the first Parable our Lord speaks of the natural hindrances, in the second of the supernatural hindrances to the workings of grace in the soul. In the second Parable of the Wheat and Tares, we hear of an Enemy following in the footsteps of the Sower ; another sower who plants evil seed in the soil. Here in the first Parable we read of but one sower, one seed, yet of great failures ; in many cases the seed cannot grow, but the hindrance lies, not in any external causes, but in the soil ; there has been no preparation for the seed, or the preparation has been insufficient.

But this Parable throws a special light first of all

give was not a gift of nature, but a supernatural gift. No doubt too in a Christian land, under the influences of Christian training and in the presence of the Church, we do see in many who are not Christians virtues that closely resemble Christian virtues, but if we were to transplant such persons into a heathen land and deprive them of all that comes through the presence of the Church, we should find such virtues would soon fail. Men may have by nature all that belongs to nature, and some of the gifts of nature are very noble and very great, but they cannot have aught but what belongs to nature. The soil may be good soil and most productive, but it cannot bear fruit except the seed be sown. When we find one who is naturally proud, and censorious, and passionate, become humble, and gentle, and self-controlled, we ask whence comes this fruit so contrary to nature? and we answer, 'the Sower has sown His Seed;' it cannot be traced to any natural cause; it is the fruit of the Divine Seed of Grace.

The gift of the Christian life is described in the Parable as a seed. It is a germ of life; it has the power of vast development; but it is also capable of being easily hindered in its growth. There is great vitality in the seed, but it is very delicate. The seed has the life within it, but the moment it is placed in the soil, the undeveloped life of the seed is dependent upon the soil. The soil, according to its character, has the power to develop or destroy the germ of life within the seed: it must find its nourishment there.

And so it is with the gift of grace. It is not a magical power that can make us good in spite of

ourselves: it is a *seed* to which the earth of our nature must lay open its bosom and yield up its powers. The seed of grace feeds itself upon, and takes root in the soil of nature.

Thus the Sacraments are not charms: we can place hindrances in the way of their action. Though they convey to us the very life of God Himself, yet the moment they are received they become dependent upon the soil that has received them, whether they are to be fruitful or barren. There is room left for the full exercise of free-will, notwithstanding the mightiness of the gift which is received. Our Lord has thus devised a means whereby the work of our sanctification is, looked at from one point of view, all His, from another, all our own. He gives us the power, but the development of that power depends upon our own will:—'Behold I stand at the door and knock,'¹ the opening of the door must be our own act. He gives, but we must yield our nature to receive, and respond to His inspirations. We might receive the Sacraments every day, and be none the better, if between the seed and the soil there is no correspondence. In the Blessed Sacrament we receive the full gift of Our Lord's own Presence; yet no sooner have we received that mighty gift, than it becomes dependent upon the action of our own will: indeed the extent or the limit of the grace of our communion is dependent upon ourselves, though the gift itself is infinite. If the soil of our nature be like the beaten path, or the rocky ground, or the thorny ground, there will be no perfect fruit from our communion.

¹ Rev. iii. 20.