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NOTE.

'The Rich Pearl' forms the second of the four 'Sermons' appended to 'The Saint's Comforts' (see Note, Vol. VI. page 160). Its separate title-page is given below.

G.

THE RICH PEARLE.

In a Sermon upon the
Parable of a Merchant
man seeking good
pearles.

MATTH. 13. 45.

Shewing what that Pearle
is, how we may get it, how
we may know we have
it, how to improve
it, &c.

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verend Divine, R. SIBBES,
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THE RICH PEARL.

And again, the kingdom of heaven is like unto a merchantman seeking goodly pearls, &c.—MAT. XIII. 45, 46.

ST PAUL expresseth in the Epistle to the Philippians what this parable typifies. There he teaches all is 'dung in comparison of Christ,' Philip. iii. 8. Here the Spirit teaches that all must be parted with to gain this pearl spoken of in this place; and as St Paul, so Christ, his thoughts were all heavenly. He came from heaven; and while he was on earth, his thoughts and speeches shewed whence he was. All his discourse is of heaven, sometime in plain doctrine, other whiles in parables; as in this chapter is manifested, comparing the kingdom of heaven to a sower, ver. 24; to a grain of mustard seed, ver. 31; to leaven, ver. 33; to an hidden treasure, ver. 44; and in these two verses to a merchant of pearls, beginning the verse with the word 'again,' to shew that he insisted upon the former matter. His love to mankind admits of no weariness in repetitions, and often inculcating the same things, thereby to work a strong impression in our minds, as knowing that they are above our understanding, and that we are indisposed to them naturally. And it should teach us *not to be weary of hearing the same things*; as also St Paul admonisheth us, in telling us it is safe for us: Philip. iii. 1, 'Though in itself it be tedious to the minister.* And indeed it is the unhappiness of ministers to be often pressing the same thing; and yet they must not neglect it, seeing Christ stooped so low to take up this duty, for the benefit of our souls.

In the next place observe, *Christ teacheth by parables*, helping the soul by the body, the understanding by the sense; teaching us, out of objects of our sense, to raise up our souls to divine meditations, so as the soul is beholden to the body as well as the body to the soul, though not in so eminent a measure. But it may be questioned, Are not parables hard to be understood? I answer, It is true, if they be not unfolded they are hard; but if they be once manifested, they are of excellent use; and like the cloud, lightsome towards the Israelites, to give to them light, but towards the Egyptians a cloud of darkness. And carnal men are earthly in heavenly matters; and, on the contrary, those that are spiritually-minded are heavenly disposed in earthly matters. And it teacheth us our duty, viz., *to be of a holy disposition in the use of these outward things*; for the

* He says just the opposite, 'To me it is not grievous.'—ED.

creatures have a double use, one for the good of the body, another for the good of the soul, as Rom. i. 20, *seq.* The Godhead is so manifest in the creature, as it alone is sufficient to leave us without excuse; and therefore as we daily use them, so should our souls, by way of meditation, make them as a ladder to ascend on high. But for the parable itself, in it first we will expound the terms, and then pass to the observations. And, first, by the 'kingdom of heaven' is meant sometime the company of men that are under Christ's regiment,* that acknowledge him for their king; as we say it is not the walls that make the city, but the body of men united and governed by one law, custom, and privilege. But here it may be well taken for the blessed estate that doth belong to such, together with the means that bring them to this estate, and the prerogatives annexed to it, as peace, joy, grace, and the like; but most especially for the glorious estate of a Christian, begun here and perfected hereafter, for where this is supposed, it doth suppose the means and prerogatives also formerly spoken of. And therefore if we ever think to come to heaven, *it must be begun here in this kingdom of grace.* And hence it is that the word is sometimes called the 'kingdom of heaven;' for Christ will rule in those here by his Spirit that think to reign with him hereafter. And it should also comfort those that find in them the first-fruits of this kingdom, for they shall assuredly have the harvest at length. Fear not trials nor troubles; grace once begun, though as a grain 'of mustard seed,' will not leave growing till it ends in glory. And yet it must be supposed that our carriage here must be as if we were in heaven; our thoughts must suit with our estates. We are kings, our thoughts must be high; and take heed how we disesteem the gospel. If we neglect it, we neglect the kingdom of heaven; if we contemn it, we refuse also, and contemn grace, and so disclaim all title to heaven. It is further said that it is with this 'kingdom' as with a merchantman that seeks pearls. This merchant *is every Christian.* Our life is a continual merchandising of something, and taking other in exchange, *and taking such as are better than the things we part with,* else will our trade be soon at an end, and we never a whit the better. And therefore the Christian, like a good merchant, trades for pearls. A Christian life therefore is a life of trading, a venturing life; and therefore a life of danger, being ever as it were in danger of death, as the merchant is at sea, yet ever sure that his God will not forsake him, but assist and defend him off from the rocks of Satan's temptations, and accusations, and terror of conscience, and despair on the one side, and from the alluring waves of the world, that he falls not into that dangerous whirlpool on the other side.

His life is also *a life of labour,* labouring in his particular calling with faithfulness, having ever an eye on his other calling; and thus by an holy use of the things here below, his mind is ever climbing up the hill, to see the end of all his labour, and to aim at it in all his thoughts, words, and deeds. And as it is a life of labour, so it is not fruitless. It is† for pearls of honour, pleasure, or profit; but the Scripture counts these but dirt and thorns, although in our childish esteem we count them goodly jewels, being indeed but counterfeit glass. Yet there is a sort of higher spirit, that do indeed seek a pearl, having purposes to serve God; but they in seeking meet with counterfeits, with false teachers, that make glorious shows, yet indeed are but mountebanks, who shew and sell them much counterfeit pearl, and thereby seduce them from the right way. But such as God intends good unto, he informs them by his Spirit that this is not the right

* That is, 'government.'—G.

† Qu. 'is not'?—ED.

orient pearl; and this they find by experience. It quiets not their hearts nor their consciences; it gives them no comfort. Briefly, it stands them in no stead; nay, it hinders them. And this makes them cast about anew for other treasure, as the woman of Samaria, a 'Messiah that will shew them all things,' John iv. 25; and at length they meet with this rich and precious pearl. And thus Augustine, a Manichee at the first, fell to doubting of his estate, and at length met with God indeed, which he formerly sought in vain.* To proceed: this merchant seeks, then finds, then sells all, to get the pearl that he thus found, wherein we will shew what this pearl is.

First, therefore, by this pearl is meant *Christ Jesus, with all his graces and prerogatives derived† to us, by the means of his ordinances.* Christ is the great pearl; all the rest are pearls, but no otherwise than as they lead us to Christ, the peerless pearl. Now, we know that pearls are bred in shell-fishes, of a celestial humour or dew; and like hereto was Christ, by heavenly influence formed in the womb of the Virgin. And as pearls, though formed in the water, yet originally are from the heavens, so the graces of God's Spirit are from heaven, though placed in earthly hearts. And again, as pearls, though here below, yet are like the heavens in clearness, so Christians by this gracious influence from this pearl Christ Jesus, though they live here on earth, are more like heaven than earth, wherein they are bred; and thus is Christ also. Though he took the flesh of man upon him, yet he hath the lustre of the Godhead, in whom all the attributes of God do plentifully shine. Again, a pearl is of great value and worth; and so Christ, one Christ of infinite value, and therefore became a ransom for many millions that were in bondage, so as all the whole church hath interest in him, and every particular Christian hath such a part in him, as if one only man had been in the world to have been saved by him, Christ must have died for him. He was given by God to purchase our redemption; and not only to purchase our deliverance, but also to make us acceptable, and to fill us with other things that are good in him. We have all that we stand in need of here and hereafter; all our grace and comfort ariseth from him. In him are the treasures of wisdom and counsel hid; 'and from his fulness we all receive grace for grace,' John i. 16. Furthermore, it is such a pearl as frees us from all ill; nay, it is powerful to turn all ill to the greatest good. It makes life out of death; it makes joy out of affliction; it makes the devil, our enemy, to be a means of hastening us to heaven. Lastly, this pearl makes us good. Like the philosopher's stone, it turns everything into gold. So this makes us God's jewels; and our High Priest doth now in heaven bear us in his breast, as the precious stones that were in Aaron's breastplate. It makes us kings and priests to God, and a spouse fitting for him our Husband. It adorneth us with all graces, it makes all ours, and entitles us to heaven, which we lost in our fall. Christ then is this pearl.

But now, in the second place, *let us see how we may come by this pearl.* We must therefore know that this pearl may be had; and we must have hope thereof, else there is no venturing for it; and therefore God, to prevent all excuse, he offers this pearl in his word. The pearl is sent from heaven to come to us. The ministry layeth open the riches of Christ, to make us long after him. He desires us to be good to our own souls, to receive the pearl thus offered. He entreats us to be reconciled to God,

* Cf. 'Confessions,' Introduction and throughout.—G.

† That is, 'communicated'.—G.

2 Cor. v. 20: 'Oh that my people would hear,' Deut. v. 29; 'O Jerusalem, how oft would I have gathered thee, as a hen gathereth her chickens!' Luke xiii. 31. What can we have more? We see it is no desperate matter, therefore it may be had. The ministry, though never so vile in account of men, yet hath made men rich: 2 Cor. vi. 10, 'Yet making many rich.'

In the next place, *what must we part with?* We see in this text the merchant parts with all, so must we give all that we have; and if we have nothing, then we must give ourselves, and God will give us ourselves again, but far better than we were when we gave ourselves to him. But what! may some say, doth God require we should forsake all indeed? I answer, not as the papists do, that vow wilful beggary,

1. But, in the first place, *we should part with the estimation of all.* We may keep them and use them, for God gave us these things to that end; but yet let us so use them as though we did not use them. Let them not have our chief affections, nor chief seats in our hearts.

2. Secondly, So we are to part with all things, *that we must have a heart prepared to part with all, if we cannot enjoy them, and this pearl too.* If the question be whether we had rather have this world than Christ, we must resolve to part with father, mother, lands, yea, with a man's own self, rather than with Christ. Without him honour shall be no honour, pleasure no pleasure. To us all things should be dung and dross in comparison of Christ; nay, 'the sufferings of this world are not worthy to be compared with that glory we shall have,' Rom. viii. 18. So as there is no proportion between them.

3. Thirdly, We must so part with these things as we must be ready *to sell all without constraint, to honour Christ in his poor members; sell all for ointment for Christ's feet, part with anything that we may stand for Christ.* Especially *we must part with all sins.* He that retains any one sin can never get this pearl; he that keeps in his heart but one beloved pleasure or profit of this life, let him read, pray, hear, profess never so much, the devil hath him sure by the leg or by the wing, and as sure as if the whole man were in his hands; for he will willingly suffer a man to go to, and use any good exercises, knowing they add to a man's damnation, so long as he retains a secret delight and liking to any lust, let it be never so small. And further, we must not part with sin only—for every sin hath some one good or other for its object, as covetousness of riches, ambition of honour, and such like; we must therefore 'sell all,' part with our affections, with all their branches and objects, if they will not stand with Christ; part with honour, riches, yea, our own lives, for they are far inferior to this precious pearl. Take heed of reservations of this one thing, this Zoar or that Rimmon, as Ananias and Sapphira. For who would not have Christ, if he might have pleasure, or profit, or honour with him? No, Christ will have all; and therefore this is the first lesson in Christ's school, deny ourselves, our reputation, the conceit of our own wisdom.

In the next place, let us see *what the gain of this trade will be.* We shall think ourselves no losers. We shall have Christ, and with him all things. What we give to him, he will return back, if they be fitting for us, and with them he will give us grace to use them, teaching us to want and to abound; and when we are come to give all for this pearl,—though indeed we have nothing here at all but only in our own esteem,—Christ will be worth all to us. Witness Moses, that chose to suffer affliction with the people of God before the pleasures of Pharaoh's court, Heb. xi. 25, *seq.*

And therefore Christ in this life promiseth a return of a hundred fold, which consisteth in abundance of comfort to our full satisfaction and content, which all the world cannot give, and that makes all things here to be 'vexation of spirit;' and therefore David, when he was a king, counted the testimonies of God better than gold, Ps. xix. 10; and St Paul counted these things here, notwithstanding his many privileges, to be 'dross, and dung, and loss in comparison of Christ,' Philip. iii. 8. *And it stands on God's honour not to make us losers when we trade with him.* If we part with riches, pleasures, and honours, life, world, we shall have better riches, better and more enduring pleasures and honours, eternal life, and 'a new heaven and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness,' if we part with these for conscience' sake; whence we may learn *who are the true rich men*, even the Christian, that hath abiding riches, that will continue with him so long as his soul continueth, and such riches as make us good and acceptable in God's esteem, that in our extremities will stand us in stead, supporting and commending us to God, and in death doth not forsake us, but goes with us to heaven. But a worldling 'walks in a vain shadow, and disquiets himself in vain,' Ps. xxxix. 6, in heaping to himself riches and pleasures which he must part with, for he can carry nothing with him when he dies but a load of sins, which he commits in gathering this worldly pelf. All this gay clothing he must put off when he goes to his long home.

See, in the next place, *who is the right fool*. Is not he that in his judgment preferreth counters* before gold, and the baubles of this present life before that enduring substance in the heavens. We condemn Adam, Esau, and Judas for their foolish choice, when, alas! there is no worldling but is as ill as the worst of them, if not worse, if worse may be. Are there not many that sell Christ for less than thirty pieces? Are there not many that cast him away for nothing? What doth the common swearer and blasphemer but sell Christ, nay, cast away him, and all hope of happiness, for a mere presumptuous daring of God? And the best worldling sells Christ for a very thing of nought, a toy, a pleasure of sin, or a little profit. Such strongholds hath the king of this world in the hearts of the children thereof. But how shall we know when we have this pearl? *We should examine our hearts, what we could part with for Christ.* Many that make profession of Christ in this life shew that they affect† nothing but a bare title of profession; for their hearts tell them they never yet could find in their heart to deny pleasure or profit, no, not anything for Christ's sake; and yet are fully persuaded they must needs have this pearl. No, no! Christ is not to be had, neither is he to be kept upon such poor easy terms. Men 'cannot serve God and Mammon,' Mat. vi. 24.

Secondly, If we have this pearl, *we shall have a wonderful admiration at the excellency of the value thereof*: Ps. lxxxiv. 1, 'How beautiful are thy dwelling places;' Ps. cxix. 97, 'Oh how do I love thy law;' 1 Peter i. 8, 'Joy unspeakable;' and chap. ii. 9, 'Marvellous light.' What says the worldling? Oh, this or that marvellous rich man, goodly living, stately house, ancient family! Are these things for a Christian to wonder at, who entitles himself to glory in the highest heavens? No. Worldly respects fall down where heaven is advanced. When Paul is a convert, 'those things that were formerly gain to him, he counteth loss for Christ,' Philip. iii. 7.

Thirdly, Whosoever hath this pearl, *it works in him a wonderful joy above all worldly joy whatever*, 'above the joy of harvest,' Isa. ix. 3.

* Cf. Glossary, *sub voce*.—G.

† That is, 'desire.'—G.

Zaccheus and the eunuch rejoiced; yea, in adversities this joy forsakes us not. It made St Paul sing in prison. But men will say, Who are more heavy and dejected than Christians? I answer, that God's Spirit appeareth not always in joy, but sometimes in mourning; for the want of the assistance of God's Spirit, which is an evidence of a taste and interest in the blessed estate of regeneration.

In the last place, if we have this pearl, *our affections and speeches will be busied evermore about it*, and our whole course of life will shew that we have it. In the next place, if we have this pearl, how shall we improve it to our most advantage? First, therefore, let us be as laborious in keeping it as Satan is laborious in striving to deprive us of it; and to that end we are to *watch over our especial and particular corruptions, and then most especially when the devil proffers us a good*; for we may be sure it is to deprive us of a better good. He gives an apple, but he looks to deprive us of a paradise. There was never man yet escaped from him a gainer; and therefore in such temptations, examine his offers by the light of sanctified reason, and we shall find ever he offers us loss. In the next place, let us look that *we preserve the vessels of our souls in purity*, that we may be fit for the pearl that must be set in gold. And in the next place, let us *make use of Christ and our interest in him*. If we be in bonds under sin, offer Christ to God. O Lord! Christ which thou gavest me is the righteousness which thou canst not but accept, seeing his righteousness is infinite, and thou hast made it mine. I am a beggar of myself, but thou hast made Christ all in all to me, to that end that thou mayest esteem of us all in all to thee. Oh how quiet and peaceable is that soul that is in this estate! 'How goodly are thy tents, O Jacob? who is like to thee, O Israel!' Num. xxiv. 5. Saved by the Lord, happy art thou! In less temptations, as afflictions, or death, that king of terrors, if that should seize on us, then consider, What do we lose? Nothing but that which we must one day leave of necessity. If we then have laboured formerly for this invaluable jewel, we are then most near it; our salvation then is most near even at that instant while we are labouring. Are we enjoying our treasure? shall not we be as desirous of the rich things that grace affordeth us as we are of the riches of this life? If the promises of such things do quicken us, how much more the things themselves. If we be troubled with losses, what lose we? Not our pearl, not grace, not our God, in whom is ever fulness of content. If he fills us with content, it is more than all this vain counterfeit world can afford us. What if we be robbed of pins, so long as we keep our jewels and hid treasure. Are we troubled with solicitations of Satan? are we subject to be drawn away of ill company? We should reject such things with scorn, and say, 'Avoid, Satan!' Your offers are loss to me; loss of peace, loss of comfort. The pleasures of sin are but for a season, godliness is profitable to all; nay, it is above all other riches. The time will come when nothing besides it will comfort us; nay, all other things will charge us with greater account, and load us with bitterness at the latter end. Let us therefore learn to be good husbands* for our souls. What is the glory of our nation? Is it not that we have mines of this invaluable riches, that we have ministers to draw out of this deep well, and to reveal this precious water of life to all, and that we may buy without money. Therefore let us take heed how we trifle away these privileges. The time will come when we shall want them, and then wisdom will laugh at us as if we have not been wise to lay up durable riches.

* That is, 'husbandmen.'—G.