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THE HIDDEN TREASURE AND THE PRECIOUS PEARL

On 31st October, about one hundred members of the British and Swiss Congregations of St. Mary Woolnoth in the City assembled for their annual United Service. The Liturgy was taken by the Anglican Minister, the Rev. B. Allam; the sermon was preached by the Swiss Minister, the Rev. M. Dietler. The text was the parable of the Hidden Treasure and the Precious Pearl (Matth. 13, 44-46).

When I was Assistant Minister in the Bernese Oberland I quite often visited a man in hospital who was called "Wicked Old Roth" by doctors, nurses, patients and visitors — he hated God and his fellow-men. He threatened the hospital-staff with a stick and almost knocked the Bible out of my hand, hissing: "Away with this book of fairy-tales!" How should it be possible to plant a small grain into the stony heart of this old man!? One day the parson of his village made a renewed attempt to break through this wall of bitterness and senile decay, and this time what nobody expected happened. Wicked old Roth looked mildly at his visitor, stammering: "I am looking at you; you are like a bright star beaming at me." A week later the bed was empty. Like the Wise Men from the East, Old Roth had seen the Star of Bethlehem and had set out on his way there!

Old Roth is personified in the parable by the farm labourer. This is the type of man who has not got a clue about God. It isn't that he necessarily has to be embittered — usually he is not even a disbeliever. Men who have no idea about God need neither be wicked nor disbelieving. We find them among the average likeable baptised Christians, dear people who certainly *know* about God, but whose knowledge is sterile. The farm labourer in the parable *knew* of the existence of gold and silver but this knowledge didn't especially affect him as long as his own hands remained empty. It was only when in the soil which he was turning over, there was a sparkle and a treasure came within reach before his very eyes that his heart began to beat, that for sheer joy he went and sold everything that he had and bought that field.

The farm labourer type with his general knowledge, before he finds the treasure, is simply the man who likes a little bit of God for his life, at least for the marriage, baby's christening and the funeral. Everybody likes a bit of everything, a little bit of music, a little bit of culture, a little bit of sport, so also a little bit of God.

If I am not mistaken we have in our United Congregation, in our Swiss and English, Reformed and Anglican Service which has brought so many here, quite a number of average Christians of the farm labourer type.

The second type which the parable refers to is personified by the merchant. The farm labourer finds *by chance*, the merchant finds because he *seeks*. The merchant is the type of the Seeking Soul. One can only seek that which one knows about. This type is not without some deep experience with God. Without Him he is out in the cold. He could not bear the thought of being without Him. And yet he has not grasped the full meaning. Still he is steadfastly reaching out. He has already found some pearls, he possesses some expert knowledge, he knows what he is looking for and he finds.

Can one ponder these facts without being moved? — Here someone is seeking God and realizes: He who seeks, finds. (Matth. 7, 7.) If you are in the throes of facing vital questions and problems, if you are seeking God, if you have been waiting, perhaps for years, for the *one* Word from Heaven, which is for none other than

you, if you are tired of the struggle, realizing that the goal is so far away, then look at this merchant, who did not give up. How many pairs of shoes had he worn through, walking from shop to shop, how many journeys undertaken, how many experts consulted until he found the precious pearl! — But, dear friends, he found it! This is encouraging. Seeking is worth while.

If the merchant's find strengthens those who seek, the farm labourer's find strengthens God's "groundstaff", those who make propaganda for Him without getting visible results. God alone knows the sighs of so many parsons who have the feeling of showing a collection of pearls to a crowd of blind people, one pearl more beautiful than the next, but nobody reaches out for them, as blind eyes cannot see at all.

If a person like wicked old Roth in his senile decay saw the Star, how much more chance is there for the eyes of the average likeable crowd to be opened. Perhaps the earth has to crunch below the plough. How the labourer must have cursed about the imagined stone! . . . There was the sound of crunching — an obstacle lay across the course of life — there was a dive into the depth, into the depth of despair, the depth of passion, the depth of fear, the depth from where you could find no way out. But deep down in the soil something began to sparkle: the labourer's find, the experience of the man in the Negro Spiritual, who sings: "Sometimes I'm up, sometimes I'm down, oh yes, Lord. Sometimes I'm almost to the ground, oh yes, Lord." Or expressed in the words of the Psalmist: "Out of the *depth* have I cried unto Thee, O Lord." (Ps. 130, 1) God is *hidden* in the depth. Do take note that it says:

The Kingdom of Heaven is like a treasure
Lying buried in a field.

When God *shows* himself, He does this always in *hiding* himself. Take as an example His Son: Never before in the whole history of the world was heaven nearer than in Christ. Jesus is a person of flesh and blood, visible and tangible, who eats and drinks and sleeps and acts — and how powerfully he acts! What eyes had never seen, what ears had never heard, men were able to see and to hear. Yet there were people who did not believe in Him. Jesus reveals and unveils God here, veils and hides Him there. Everyone understands that Jesus was a good *man*, even the best one that ever lived, but yet He is not recognized as *God* the Son, who together with the Father and the Holy Spirit is one — God is not revealed but hidden.

God is always ambiguous. What we should like would be a small — or better still — a large Christian "extra", a special divine manifestation, a supernatural experience.

There is indeed this total divine manifestation. What else than divine manifestations are there merely from your home on the way to this church! But they are no Christian extras, no special arrangements for Christians only, "for He makes His sun rise on good and bad alike, and sends the rain on the honest and the dishonest." (Mt. 5, 45.) Rich and poor are begotten and born in the same way. The same death snatches high and low. The same crucified and risen Lord speaks to intellectual and emotional people alike. To both, things happen which make them think. All walk over the same field, all touch the same pearls. All of them have got their life. Human life in its diversity and fullness is the mirror in which the invisible God is visibly reflected. That is where He does both: *reveals* Himself and is *hidden*. The same life is God for the one — not God for the other. For the one

it is blessing, for the other judgment. The one event is here divine manifestation, there nature. To the one, life is a field of labour and sorrow, pain and sweat, a sea of blood and tears, of afflictions, trials and temptations and sore anguish. The other finds in the same field the hidden treasure, in the same stormy sea the precious pearl. He is able to say with St. Paul: "O the depth of wealth, wisdom and knowledge in God! How unsearchable his judgments, how untraceable his ways!"

Dear friends, the farmer sold everything and bought the field, the merchant gave everything for this one pearl. You complain that you cannot believe. No one must be surprised if he consciously refuses to obey Christ's commandment at any point. You do not want to subject certain passions, hopes, enmities and plans to Christ's law? Don't be surprised that you don't receive the Holy Spirit, that you cannot pray effectively, that your prayer for faith is empty. You have walked over the field, but you have not sold everything. You have seen the treasure, but not unearthed it. You have touched the pearl but you have not wanted to pay the price. You want God at a cheap price. — The One who has paid dearly for you cannot be bought cheaply. Go and get reconciled to your brother, do what God wants you to do and you will be able to believe. If you refuse God's word of commandment, you will not receive His word of grace. His grace is in His commandment, His commandment is in His grace. His love is in His severity, His severity is in His love. A disobedient person cannot believe, only he who is obedient, believes.

And for sheer joy he went and sold everything he had and bought that field.

When the merchant had found a pearl of very special value, he went and sold everything he had, and bought it.

SWITZERLAND'S FIRST ENGLISH-LANGUAGE CHILDREN'S LIBRARY

A new library for all children who wish to read English books has just been opened in Zurich. Called "The Children's Library of Zurich", it has more than 1,000 volumes attractively displayed on low, convenient shelves, divided into three groups for beginners, intermediate and advanced readers. In its first five weeks, nearly 100 children have joined the library, which anticipates a membership of 500 in time. Although it is not known precisely how many English-speaking children live in the Zurich area, the organizers of the Children's Library are confident that it will meet the needs of very many youngsters. In addition to the many children of American, Canadian, British and Australian families, there are also those from homes in which English is the mother-tongue of at least one parent, as well as many Swiss children who have lived abroad in English-speaking countries with their families for several years. The Children's Library of Zurich is a non-profit-making organization located in the Community Centre of St. Andrew's Church on Zurich's Promenadengasse.

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