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SUNDAY READING.

THE
HARVEST HOME.



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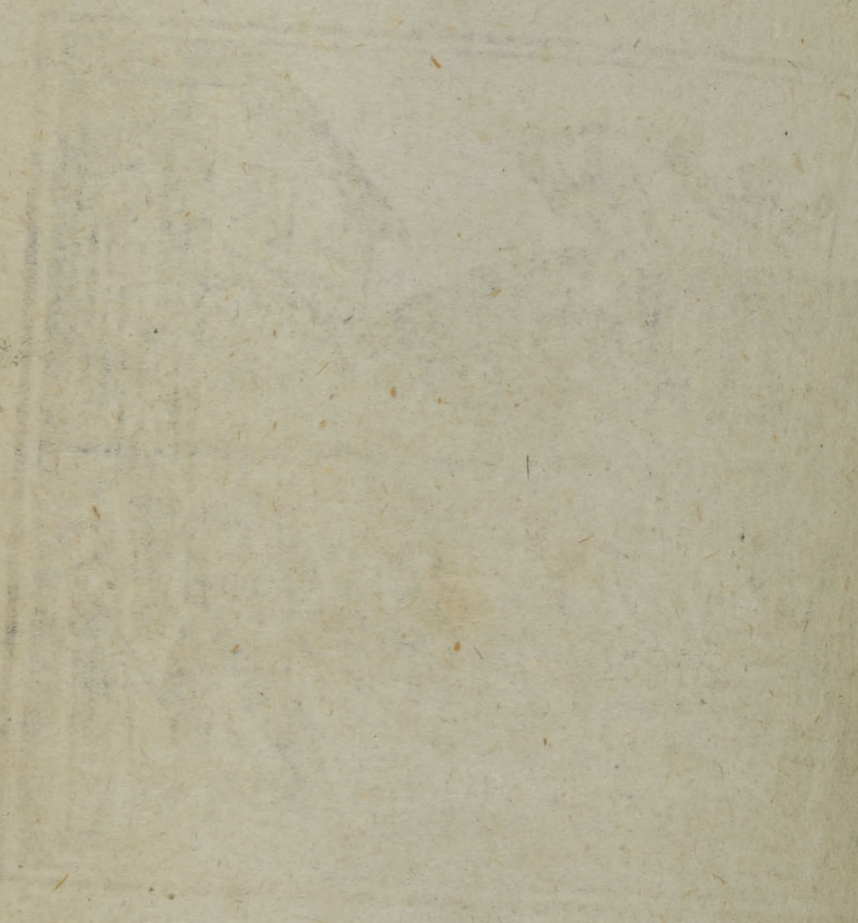
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How quickly does joy often succeed to sorrow ; the day of cheerful hope to that of gloomy fear, and the season of plenty and abundance to that of want and scarcity ! Not long since the dearth of bread in this land was such, that every countenance seemed to gather blackness ; the very heavens also appeared to frown upon us ; for the weather during a long time was so dismal, that it threatened to blast the approaching harvest ; we were made to feel that we were in the hands of God, and totally dependant on his mercy ; having enjoyed many years of plenty, without interruption, we had learnt to count upon the continuance of the same blessing ; and because God's goodness had been so common, we were so much the less thankful for it. How calamitous would a general blight upon our corn have proved at this season ! every mind must shudder at such a thought ; such a blight was threatened indeed, but suddenly, and at the very point when it was most needed, the weather changed, and a season

unusual favourable for getting in the fruits of the earth has succeeded.

Man, it may be remarked, is more ready to pray to God to help him out of his distress, than to thank him when he has been delivered; for we are often merely selfish in such prayers; we feel a pressing want of the blessing, and we therefore cry to God for it; but when it is obtained, our whole end is answered, we now are satisfied; we grow careless about the matter, and forget to think of our Benefactor.

But let us here endevour to prevent this forgetfulness of our present mercies from taking place in the mind of our readers, and let us invite them to come and contemplate with us that greatness and goodness of our Creator which are so observable at the time of harvest.

There is indeed no part of the creation to which we can turn our eyes without meeting with some proofs of the divine power and mercy. Shall we lift up our eyes to the heavens? There shines the brightness of the sun, which God has placed in the firmament to give light and heat to the world.— Shall we wait till the sun is set? Then the moon and the stars take up the same language of praise, and tell of their maker's power and goodness.

Shall we turn our eyes to the earth? See how the surface of it is spread forth like a carpet, decked with every thing to charm the eye, to delight the sense, and to supply the wants of man. Shall we look upon the great and wide ocean? There go the ships; and behold, even the sea is filled with food for the use of man. “How many are thy
ord, in wisdom hast thou made them

The sight of these common objects of nature used often to carry out the holy men of old in prayer and adoration to God, of which we will mention an instance in the 65th psalm, because it is applicable to the present time—a psalm penned after a long drought, to which had succeeded some very plentiful and refreshing rains. The psalmist, while he walks abroad, and delights himself with the beautiful appearance of the harvest, and with the prospect of plenty, which is on every side, breaks out in the following thanksgiving to the bountiful giver of all things: “Praise waiteth for thee, O God! in Sion, and unto thee shall the vow be performed.—O thou that didst hear our prayer, unto thee shall all flesh come. Thou maketh the out-goings of the morning and evening to rejoice. Thou visits the earth and waterest it. Thou greatly enrichest it with the river of God,” for the clouds are compared to a river in the air, sustained by the hand of the Almighty. “Thou preparest corn when thou hast so provided for it: thou waterest the ridges thereof abundantly, thou settlest the furrows thereof, thou makest it soft with showers; thou blessest the springing thereof. Thou crownest the year with thy goodness, and thy paths drop fatness, the little hills rejoice on every side. The pastures are cloathed with flocks, the vallies also are covered over with corn; they shout for joy, they also sing.”

To every one who is of the same mind with the psalmist the same kind of meditation will be very apt to occur. Let us, however, here assist the reader, by naming a few subjects which he will do well to reflect upon while he takes his walk amidst the reapers, and admires the plenty that is in the fields.

First then, how naturally ought the season of harvest to send our thoughts to the great author of it! How clearly is his hand at this time seen! All the power and ingenuity of the whole world cannot frame so much as a single ear of corn. The part which man has in producing the corn is very small indeed. He in fact does nothing himself towards its growth—he only places the seed in a situation which from experience he has found to be favourable to it, and then “he goeth away and it springeth up he knoweth not how.” The seed which he plants was in the first place given by God, when the sower has put it into the ground, there is then a work, or operation, carried on in which man is not only unconcerned, but he does not even know how it is accomplished. The grain dies, and from that death a resurrection takes place, a fresh plant arises out of the ground and this plant is nourished by means of roots hidden within the earth, which then shoot forth without the aid of man; in this secret manner are the different juices collected and sent through the plant, by-and-by the flower blooms; the ear forms itself; and the corn takes the proper shape and substance, the rain in the mean time waters it, the dews descend, and the sun shines upon it, till at length it is fit for the use of man. In all this man can do nothing. It is during his absence even that this work is going on. If the grain is blighted, man cannot help it; if it grows too slowly he is not able to quicken it, he can only look on with hope and fear, and watch it in its different stages; he must ascribe all its growth to the unassisted power of the great Creator of all things.

Plain as the hand of the Creator is in the production of the corn, yet such is our natural stupidity

ility, that while we gather the corn, we often think no more of God in it, than the very cattle which draw it home. The farmers speaks of his own skill, and labour and pains. And when the grain is ripe, he lays it up in his barn, with much self applause, and begins to count his gains, not considering that all the praise in fact is due to God, and that every ear which is laid up is a proof of man's obligation to his Maker.

But let us here notice also the 'largeness' of the divine bounty. The works of god are upon a large scale; they are like himself, infinite. The works of man are little and insignificant; it is but a small spot which his strength can water, but the showers of heaven water a whole territory at once. It is but a few acres which the diligent labors of man can make productive; but God causes his sun to shine, and his dew to descend, and the whole earth is rendered fruitful. Look over that beautiful and extensive prospect: See as far as the eye can reach how the fields are crowned with plenty; extend the scene in your imagination, still the same rich view of the divine bounty presents itself. Cross the wide ocean, and survey the different countries of which the earth consists. In all the varied productions of these different climates, we only meet with more and more signs of the divine goodness. How are we then called upon to admire and adore that glorious Being who suffers no part of the earth to escape his kind and benignant notice.

With the extensiveness of this bounty let the 'continuance' of it be considered. No sooner is the harvest got in, than again the seed is committed to the ground, and again the same scene returns

upon us. Let us carry back our thoughts to the years that have been of old. How unwearied has been our Great Benefactor! How unceasing the exertions of his goodness! How many generations have been fed and supported by it! Seasons have changed, but they have only presented different views of the Lord's mercy; and the cold of winter, the bloom of spring, the heat of summer, and the fruits of autumn, have each in their seasons manifested the same bounty and care of our Creator.

Having indulged in these pleasing reflections upon the divine bounty, it seems proper in the next place to turn our attention to a more melancholy subject, I mean 'our unworthiness of it,' For whom does the Lord open his stores, and provide with so liberal a hand? For a race of creatures who are touched with the most lively sense of his goodness and love and honour him in proportion to these great obligations?

Do we then hear the reapers, while they cut down the corn, speaking good of the name of the Lord, and blessing him for his kindness to the children of men? Hark! is it hymns of praise, which they are chaunting in yonder field? Is the song they sing that song of the psalmist which has just been spoken of? Methinks, instead of it, some song full of prophaneness and obscenity is sung aloud. The name of God, indeed, is on many lips, but it is only that it may be trifled with or blasphemed. What then, are these men gathering God's bounty, and in the same moment profaning his name? But follow them to the harvest home; surely now at least they meet and offer up their prayer and thanksgiving, and while God is in the act of crowning the

year with his bounty, each tongue is loud in talking of his mercy, and each grateful heart is swelling with his praise. It is commonly reported, that there is no season in the year in which so much wickedness and drunkenness prevail among the farmers as in that of bringing the harvest home. Are these then the returns which in this year also we are making to the divine goodness? Is all our complaining of want, and our prayer to God for deliverance, to end in a drunken abuse of the mercies he so wonderfully bestows?

But not to dwell on vices which are so great, that we would willingly hope they must only be the vices of a few, let us little consider also the general unworthiness of mankind. Who are they that will be fed by this abundant harvest? Will no idle person be maintained by it? Will no sinners have their strength sustained, so as to continue their life in sin? Will there be no one who will eat with unthankfulness? None who, as the reapers have reaped it without thinking of the Author of the harvest, will in like manner feed upon it without thinking of the Author of their food? Again, will no discontented murmuring, repining people be fed by the goodness of the Lord? will all those, in short, whose life is prolonged by the bread now sent them, devote that life to the service of him who prolonged it? Surely, if we could remove ourselves to a distance from the earth, and become by any means impartial judges between God and man, we should stand astonished at the present rebellion of the creature. He who made man, He who supports him, sending him the very bread which he eats, has a right to his services; and hath made him no doubt for his own glory. Methinks if any of us

were endowed with power to create some little rational animal, inferior to ourselves, and if, after having breathed into him the breath of life, we also daily cloathed and nourished him, we should expect his obedience and constant service in return: and if, after all, such a being should presume to set up for himself, and pretend to have a will of his own, and break all the laws we had given him, we should be ready methinks to stamp our foot upon him, and to crush him to death at once, for not fulfilling the ends of his creation. We should have no patience with such a little insolent and rebellious animal.— And yet God has patience with us, notwithstanding all our forgetfulness of the ends for which we were born, and our unthankfulness for the daily returns of his bounty. Nay, though we go on abusing his mercies, he goes on cloathing the pastures with his flocks. The vallies also are again covered over with corn; again they shout for joy, they also sing. O let us be ashamed of the baseness of our ingratitude, and repent in the name of Christ, before the day of his vengeance is come upon us.

The season of harvest is also one which should lead us particularly to reflect on our 'dependance upon God.' God gave us life at first. He causes our blood to flow, our heart to beat, and our stomach to distribute the nourishment. He too supplies the food we eat, of whatever kind it be. We may combine together different meats; we may dress them in a variety of ways, but we can create nothing—God is the only giver of life and food, and all things—and happy is that man who lives in the lively remembrance of this, who accepts all his comforts as from the hand of the great God, ha-

virtually feeling that he has not of himself power to subsist for a single moment, or to procure, independent of God, one single drop of water, or grain of bread. And this sense of our dependance is not a duty only, it is a great comfort also: for how does it tend to relieve all that anxiety, which is so natural to us, about our subsistence in the time to come. The more we remember that we are the creatures of God, so much the more shall we trust to him to provide for his large family, even as a child trusts to the care and prudence of his parent, "Behold, the fowls of the air they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns, yet your heavenly Father feedeth them."

Next to the sense of our dependance, 'gratitude' to God may be mentioned as peculiarly becoming. Methinks at this time not only the heavens above, but the earth beneath, calls aloud upon us to be thankful. Every field, every ear of corn seems to bid us speak the praises of God. How do these glorify him, as it were, by an expressive, though dumb offering of praise!—But man has a tongue with which he can speak forth the praises of his Maker. It is for the sake of man also that the store-house of divine bounty is opened—it is for man that the pastures are cloathed with flocks, and the vallies covered with corn; it is for man that the sun shines and the showers descend. From him then should the offering of praise continually rise up.

"But why will you suppose mankind to be so unthankful?" Methinks I hear some one reply; "Do you think we do not know as well as you that we ought to praise God for a good harvest?—There

will always indeed be a few wicked people in the land, but in general we understand well enough that it is God who sends us bread, and all our mercies; nay, when any of us speak of having got a good crop, 'thank God' is the very phrase that is quite common in our lips." I admit it is so, and I hope indeed that many thousand hearts have already offered up the sincere tribute of thanksgiving for the present plentiful season. But we cannot help adding here, that there is a way far beyond that of simple praise, by which true gratitude will manifest itself. It will break out not in words only but in deeds, in deeds I mean of obedience to him towards whom the gratitude is felt. What would any father think of the gratitude of a child, or any husband of the gratitude of a wife, which never shewed itself in any thing else but a few warm expressions of obligation. No, it is by the readiness and activity in serving the person praised, and by the desire in all respects to please him, that the disposition to gratitude must be judged of. A man may say 'thank God twenty times a day, and yet never truly thank him in his heart. Words are cheap. Many men think to pay God off, as it were, by this sort of coin. Let it be remarked, also, that there is a satisfaction and self-complacency which are naturally felt on receiving abundance of wealth into our lap; we are put into good humor by it, and when we are reminded that God is the author of our prosperity, the truth of this is so plain that we cannot deny it, and since our understandings agree to the observation, we fancy that our hearts agree also; whereas, in fact, we only 'judge' that God 'ought' to be thanked, but we do not thank him,

and as to the good humor we are in, it arises merely from our being well pleased with ourselves, or with the enjoyments which God has given us, and not from our being well pleased with God. That we practice some such frauds as these on ourselves is but too plain; for mark now what follows. When the same person who has been thanking God so often for his mercies, is by-and-by called to do something, to suffer something, or to give up something for the sake of serving this gracious being to whom he professed such prodigious gratitude, he is then either too idle, or too selfish, or too much governed by the opinion of his fellow creatures, or some way or other too full of excuses to do what is wanted of him: on the other hand, when some temptation comes in his way, he yeilds to it, and sins against the same God as freely as if he were under no obligation to him. Let us then beware of this hypocritical sort of gratitude, by which we cannot deceive God, though we often delude ourselves by it. Let us shew forth his praise not only with our lips but with our lives. Let us shew our sense of his goodness by doing his will, by reading his word, by attending his worship, by readily denying ourselves for his sake, and in short, by laying out our lives in his service, and by standing forth to promote his cause in a disobedient and unthankful world.

Here let it be hinted also, that this may be a good time for laying down our plans for using the plenty which is flowing in to us. God has now given us provision for another year, but for what purpose has he given it? In order that we may eat and drink, and be merry? What, then have we

not immortal souls? The great end of our Creator is, that we may serve him in this world, and may be prepared to dwell with him for ever in heaven. His direction is, that we should employ our health and strength, and all our vigor of body and mind in fulfilling his will; that we should seek in the first place to know God and Jesus Christ, whom he has sent into the world, and having learnt to know him, that we should then act in our several stations from the motive of love to his name, imitating also his bounty, by ministering to the necessities of our fellow creatures. Are these then our ends of living? Is this what we propose to ourselves? Are these the views with which we reap the harvest? Are we determined that none of it, as far as in us lies, shall be wasted in riot or in luxury, or in improvident consumption? Do we look forward to it as to a treasure, with which the hungry shall be fed, and the poor be satisfied? Then indeed we may rejoice in the bounty of heaven, and we may reasonably trust that all the expressions of gratitude in our lips are sincere.

Again, let the consideration of the goodness of God, displayed in the fruits of the earth, raise our minds to the contemplation of those still greater mercies which he is able and willing to give us.—It is with him a small matter to provide the earth with food, or to take care of the body. See what a rich provision he has made for our souls—for them he has not spared his only begotten Son, but given him up to be the propitiation for our sins! For the sake of the soul he has sent his Holy Spirit into the world to guide men into the knowledge of truth. For the soul he has prepared an eternal

harvest of blessings, "an inheritance which is incorruptible, undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for us." We may learn to value spiritual mercies from what we see of temporal ones. Temporal ones strike the senses, and being suited to our present fallen nature, are more apt to fill our hearts with joy and gratitude. But we may rest assured, that the blessings which God has provided for the soul, are much superior to those provided for the body, as the soul is to the body, and as eternity is to time. Let us then turn from this earthly scene of abundance to still nobler and larger blessings. Let the fields not only preach to us the immense goodness of our Creator, but let them send our thoughts also to the "unsearchable riches that are in Christ."—Let the harvest serve to impress a thoughtless world with wonder, gratitude, reverence, and love to him who is the author, not of our earthly treasures only, but of all the blessings of eternity!—In short, let the goodness of God lead us all to repentance, and let each of us take care that the mercies of his Maker be not turned into a curse, by rendering our hearts only so much the more full of the world, and more indifferent to the blessings of the gospel.

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