

Divine Husbandry

Preached at Zoar Chapel, Great Alie Street, London, on Thursday Evening, August 14, 1845

"Thou visiteth the earth, and waterest it: thou greatly enrichest it with the river of God, which is full of water: thou preparest them 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." Psalm 45:9, 10, 11

The text contains a very sweet description of the way in which God fertilizes the earth, and causes it to produce food for the use of man. But I should fall very far short of the mind of the blessed Spirit here, if I limited the meaning of the words merely to the natural productions of the earth, and to the way in which God causes those productions to spring forth. There is doubtless an experimental meaning in the words, a vein of spiritual truth couched beneath the figure. I always have been, and always hope to be, an enemy to what I may call "a false spiritualization" of God's word; for as there is a true spiritualization, there is also a false one. But if we observe three rules of interpretation, I think that a false spiritualization will not easily be put on any text. *First*, the spiritual interpretation must be strictly based upon, and closely coincide with, the *literal* one. *Secondly*, the interpretation must be in every point agreeable to the analogy of faith, and consistent with the teachings of the Spirit in the hearts of God's children. *Thirdly*, there must be a savour, more or less, connected with, and flowing forth from it into the heart of the preacher, and thence into the heart also of the hearer. I hope, in endeavouring to explain the

mind and meaning of the Spirit here, I may not fail in any one of these three rules; in other words, that my interpretation may be *true*, may be *consistent*, and may be *experimental*. The Lord only, I know, can give the blessing.

In speaking upon these words, I shall make no formal divisions; but viewing the text as an experimental description of the work of God upon the soul, I shall take the points as they lie before me, beginning with the first process, and going on to the consummation. But we must bear in mind that the Holy Spirit, in speaking here of the work of grace upon the hearts of God's children, follows out that mode of cultivation which is adopted in, and is suitable to, Eastern countries. We must discard from our minds the system of agriculture in this country, and keep before us the mode pursued in the East, in order to see the analogy between the process described in the text, and the work of grace upon the hearts of God's people.

I.—The first point to which I would call your attention is, the *subject* of the operations, set forth in the text under the word *earth*—"Thou visitest the *earth*." The earth naturally is but the mere soil in which all its productions grow; and in itself is utterly unable to produce anything suitable for the food of man, except it undergo special operation. The dull, brutish earth can never without cultivation produce out of its bosom food for the use of man. So it is with respect to man's heart by nature; it is as incapable of producing anything gracious, heavenly, spiritual, and acceptable to God, as the natural earth is unable spontaneously to bring forth those fruits and crops which are for man's sustenance.

The earth is in more than one Scripture set forth as typical of the soul of man. For instance: "Ye are God's husbandry;" that is, your soul stands in the same relation to God the

spiritual husbandman, as the earth stands in relation to the natural cultivator. Again: "O earth, earth, earth, hear the word of the Lord." Has the earth ears to hear? Does God address himself to the natural soil? No; he speaks to the inhabitants of the earth—to man, whose body he formed out of the dust of the ground. So that we have Scriptural warrant to interpret the word "earth" as typical of the soul of man.

1. But what is the first word in the text, introducing the whole process, so to speak, of divine agriculture? "Thou *visitest* the earth." The earth, man's soul by nature, lies waste and void, overrun with briars, thorns, and thistles, and naturally incapable of striking forth spiritual culture. "Thou visitest the earth;" 'thou lookest upon it in its desert state; thou beholdest it utterly devoid of life; thou seest what it is naturally, incapable of producing anything spiritually good.'

2. But God does not merely visit the earth with his eye, so as to *mark it out* for future culture, but he also visits it by the *communication* of his precious grace. He visits the soul by regenerating it through the operation of the Holy Ghost; by making it a partaker of a new and heavenly nature. And the first touch of the divine finger upon the conscience, the first entrance of spiritual light, the first communication of heavenly life, is summed up in the expression, "Thou visitest." What a gracious expression it is! Here is the earth, utterly unable to raise up in itself anything acceptable to God. But in mercy he visits it, looks down from the height of his sanctuary upon the elect soul, dead in sin; and in his own mercy and grace, unasked for (for the Lord is unsought when the earth bears nothing but that which is fit for the fire), he visits the soul with the light and life of the Spirit.

II.—But the text goes on to say, "*Thou visitest the earth, and watered it: thou greatly enrichest it with the river of God,*

which is full of water: thou preparest them corn, when thou hast so provided for it." that is to say, everything fit. The first grand process in the East, indispensable to all cultivation, is to irrigate the soil. In this moist climate, the chief feature is humidity; but in those burning climes, the chief feature is dryness. We, in our humid climate, are obliged to drain the land to make it bear fruitful crops; but in those hot countries, they are obliged to irrigate it and cause streams to pass over it, in order to make it fit for the plough. It is so hard, so dry, so burnt up with drought, that unless it is irrigated and watered the plough cannot pierce the soil. Thus we see the necessary process pointed out by the Spirit of God here by watering it. "Thou visitest the earth, and waterest it." Before, then, it is ploughed up, before the seed is committed to the bed, it is irrigated and watered. But how? It is explained in the text. "Thou greatly enrichest it *with the river of God*, which is full of water." This "river of God" is the river of mercy and grace that flows out of the bosom of a Three-one Jehovah. It is the same river which Ezekiel saw in his vision, that came from the temple, flowing by the altar, and entering into the salt sea to heal the waters, and make them sweet. It is added, "And it shall come to pass, that every thing that liveth, which moveth, whithersoever the rivers shall come, shall live: and there shall be a very great multitude of fish, because these waters shall come thither: for they shall be healed; and every thing shall live whither the river cometh." (Ezek. 47:9.) It is the same river of which the Psalmist elsewhere speaks, "There is a river, the streams whereof shall make glad the city of God, the holy place of the tabernacles of the Most High." (46:4.) It is the same river that John saw in vision, and which he describes: "And he shewed me a pure river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding out of the throne of God and of the Lamb." (Rev. 22:1.)

This "river," then, "full of water," is the eternal flowing forth of mercy, grace, truth, and love out of the bosom of a Three-one God. And this mighty river irrigates and waters every soul that God visits. I do not mean to say that the first communications of grace to the soul are *manifestations* of pardoning mercy; but the very first watering and enriching of the soul by the river that is full of water, flows out of the hidden mercy and grace that lie stored up in the bosom of God for his elect family. Until the soil of the human heart is moistened and softened by the flowings-in of the flood-tide of grace; until some measure of this overflowing and ever-flowing fountain of mercy gushes out of the Redeemer's heart into the sinner's conscience, there is no breaking down of his soul before God, no preparing and fitting it to receive the truth in the love of it, no seed-bed in which the word of truth may germinate. Therefore, after the Lord has visited it, then comes the watering and irrigation by this "river that maketh glad the city of God," so as to prepare it for the reception of the word of life; as we read, "Thou preparest them corn, when thou hast so provided for it."

But previous to preparing and sowing it with corn, after it is irrigated, there must be *the ploughing*: the irrigating is to prepare it for the plough. In its dry, hard state, the plough could not pass through. There must be a softening of the heart, a breaking down of prejudices, a humbling of the soul, a melting of the spirit, proceeding from the divine watering, so as to soak into the depth of a man's soul, before the divine plough can rightly enter into his conscience and plough it up, so that the seed may find a bed in which to germinate. Do we not find it so? Is not the law often preached in all its curses, without reaching the sinner's heart? But when the sinner's heart has been visited by God's grace, and when it has been humbled, broken down, and prepared, then the plough is put in to break up the soil, and to draw a furrow in

which the seed may find a bed, and germinate. It is thus the heart becomes fit and prepared for the word of life. The object of the ploughing, as we shall see when we get further into the text, is to make a ridge, and a furrow; as it says lower down, "Thou settlest the furrows thereof." Now, if there is no plough passed through the conscience, there can be no ridge, and no furrow. A furrow implies a ridge; and a ridge implies a furrow. A ridge and a furrow are both produced by the plough passing through the conscience. This breaking up of a man's heart, this bringing to light the worms and maggots and black soil that lie underneath, this tearing up of whole crops of weeds, this driving of the plough through all the briars and thistles that cover the human heart, prepare the soil for the seed which God has provided for it.

This "corn," or seed, is the word of life. The Lord himself, in the parable of the sower, explained that the seed sown was the word of God; sown instrumentally by the undersowers, and made effectual unto salvation by God the Spirit.

This seed, then, is *truth*, received into the heart; the truth concerning the Person of Jesus, as the God-Man Mediator, "God over all, blessed for ever;" the truth as respects his atoning blood, as shed to put away sin; the truth as regards his glorious righteousness, which is "unto all and upon all them that believe;" the truth as it respects the internal operations of God the Spirit upon the hearts of God's family. It therefore comprehends all that in Scripture is called, "the truth as it is in Jesus." And to have it sown in the heart is called "a receiving of the love of the truth, that we may be saved;" (2 Thess. 2:10); and a receiving Christ especially, who is "the way, the truth, and the life." (Col. 2:6; John 14:6.)

Now, until God in mercy has visited the heart; until he has irrigated it with this "river of the water of life," which greatly enriches it by communicating its fertilizing properties; and until it has been ploughed up and broken, and the ridge and furrow traced for a seed-bed for the corn, there can be no reception of the truth in love. In the parable of the sower, the seed was cast forth, and fell upon different sorts of soil; but it only found a seed-bed in the good and honest heart. Some fell by the way-side, and the fowls of the air devoured it up. Some fell on stony ground, where there was no depth of earth, for the plough had not passed through it. Some fell among thorns, where the stream had not passed to soften and irrigate it, and so make a seed-bed. The good and honest heart, made so by God's grace, alone had a seed-bed for the corn to germinate in and grow.

Any other reception of truth than this will never profit the soul. If we have never had God's grace visiting the soul, never had any communication of life and light out of the fulness of Jesus; in other words, if this river has never shed its sacred streams over our souls, and if the plough of conviction has not passed into our conscience, so as to turn up our deep corruptions to view, and prepare the heart for the reception of the word, whatever be our knowledge, whatever our profession, whatever our consistency, we have not yet received the love of the truth. And here lies all the difference betwixt a honest-hearted child of God, taught of the Spirit, and a conscience-seared professor. They receive the same doctrine; but the one receives it into a honest and good heart, made such by the grace of God; and the other receives it into his natural understanding, without any divine life or power in the conscience.

III.—But after the seed has been safely committed to the furrow, there is another process pointed out in the text:

"Thou waterest the ridges thereof abundantly; thou settest the furrows thereof." Irrigation takes place on two occasions. The earth is first irrigated to make it soft to receive the plough; the plough is then passed through it to make the furrow; and after the seed has been committed to the soil, then there is another watering, "to settle the furrows thereof," and "to water the ridges abundantly;" a second irrigation, after the seed has been committed to the furrows, to make it germinate and grow.

This is carried out experimentally in the hearts of God's people. When we first receive the love of the truth, it is through the blessed Spirit putting that truth into our heart. But is there not a further pouring out of his gracious influences and divine operations, so as to water the ridges and settle the furrows of the heart, in order to cover the seed, and make it moist and tender to germinate? Unless this tide of the same pure river flows over the ridges and furrows, the seed is not properly buried, nor is it in a fit state to germinate downward, and bring forth fruit upward. When we first receive the love of the truth, we receive it in power. "Our gospel," says the Apostle, "came not unto you in word only, but in power, and in the Holy Ghost, and in much assurance." (1 Thess. 1:5.) But do we not need the same Spirit again and again to water that truth which has been implanted, and settle the furrows of the soul; so that it becomes settled down into an enjoyment of, and a firm adherence to, the truth as it is in Jesus?

IV.—But we pass on to what takes place after the second irrigation, *"Thou makest it soft with showers."* We have had two irrigations; we have had two copious waterings; we have seen how, by the river of God, the soil has been fully saturated. But in those burning climes the effect would soon pass away; the Lord therefore not merely speaks of the

water of the river, but he speaks also of the showers from on high. The bottles of heaven have to do their work, as well as the river of God.

Thus after the Lord's people have received the love of the truth, and after they have received a clear testimony in their conscience, they may never perhaps all their lives long have such sweet enjoyment; they may never again have the river pouring into their hearts its copious streams; they may never be moistened and saturated in every ridge so completely and fully as when they first knew the Lord. But are they unwatered because that tide does not pour forth an equally copious stream? No; the Lord has another method of watering the soul after its receiving the love of the truth. "Thou makest it soft with showers." Every now and then communications of grace descend in still showers upon the heart, which is thus kept moist, tender, and soft by the dews and rains that fall from on high. Have not you, that know the Lord by divine teaching, found this in your experience? You have come parched to hear the word; your soul has been dry, barren, and dead; but the Lord has opened the word with life and feeling to your soul. Then there was a shower. It did not come with all that overflowing sweetness which you had in days past; still there was a softness communicated, and your parched soul was refreshed, just as the dry chapped soil is refreshed by the droppings down of the rain from above.

V.—But "He also blesses the springing thereof." He not merely makes the ground soft with showers, but also blesses the springing, after the seed has been committed to the furrow. The first operation in nature is to send forth a root, and the root buries itself downward in the soil. So it is with the word of God received in the heart. It does not lie there, as a pebble in the soil; as torpid and as inert as a stone in

the street. It is a living thing, just as the seed-corn in the earth is a living thing. As the seed-corn puts forth a root, so the truth received in the love of it puts forth a root in the souls of God's people; it strikes its tender yet strong fibres into the heart and conscience, and penetrates into a man's very being, so as to take firm and fast hold of his conscience and affections. And thus the springing thereof is connected with, and depends upon, the shooting of the root downwards.

But besides this, there is the *springing of it upwards*; the springing up of the soul toward God; the going forth of heavenly affections; the mounting up of living faith to its Author; the budding forth of hope towards its Giver; and the springing up of love and affection towards its Shedder abroad. And how sweet it is to experience something of the springing up of divine life in the soul; to feel the power of the truth we have received into our understanding, and believed on in our conscience! And though we often seem to have no religion worth the name, and to be utterly destitute of vital godliness, yet how sweet it is, now and then, to experience the springing up of divine life in the soul! If we have never experienced this springing up in the soul, what right have we to think ourselves Christians?

Have we, for instance, any springing up of *godly fear*? As we read, "the fear of the Lord is a fountain of life to depart from the snares of death." (Prov. 14:27.) The property of a fountain we know is to gush forth. When sin then comes before us, when temptations present themselves, when Satan is laying some snare to entangle our feet, the fear of the Lord will at times spring up in the soul. "How can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?"

There is also sometimes a springing up of *faith*. There is a looking unto Jesus; a viewing by the eye of faith his glorious

Person, his atoning blood, and justifying righteousness; there is a casting of a longing, languishing look towards his dying love.

Sometimes there is a springing up of *hope*—"a good hope through grace;" that when body and soul part company, we shall be with the Lord; that we shall not perish in the waste howling wilderness; but that when death comes we shall depart to be with Jesus. How sweet it is at times to feel this springing up of hope, this blessed anchor, that enters into the very presence of God!

How sweet also, at times, to feel the springing up of *love* towards the Lord of life and glory, and in secret moments, when no eye sees, no ear hears, to experience the secret risings up of tender affection towards him!

There is also the secret springings up of *tender affections* towards God's people. When we come into their company, and our hearts become knit together in tender sympathy, we feel a measure of love and affection, and union and communion with them spring up spontaneously in our souls.

There is a springing up likewise of *reverence towards God's great majesty*; a springing up of *humility*, so as to fall down at his footstool; a springing up of a *teachable broken spirit*, to sit at Jesus' feet, and hear his words, with the temper and feelings of a little child: a springing up of *heavenly-mindedness*, so as to set the affections upon Jesus at the right hand of God; a springing up of *faithfulness*, so as to be zealous and contend earnestly for the faith once delivered to the saints; a springing up of a *single eye to the glory of God*, so that what we say or do may be said or done more or less to the honour of God. Now all this is the springing up of truth in the heart, of that seed which God has committed to the

soul, and which he waters with his grace, in order that it may bear fruit to his glory.

The Lord blesses this springing. There are some perhaps of God's people who can scarcely trace out in their hearts anything of this springing up. They have been deeply exercised and tried by sin and guilt upon their conscience; but they cannot honestly say that they have had clear communications of grace and mercy, and received the love of the truth. They hardly dare call themselves the children of God. Yet when we look at that which takes place in the secret chambers of their heart before God, we find the springings up of a living faith, hope, and love, and of every other grace of the Spirit that God himself has planted in the soul. The Lord blesses the springing thereof. If the Lord did not bless the springing, no sooner did the tender plant rise out of the soil, than it would be nipped by the cutting winds, or devoured by the caterpillar; it never could live out half its time, much less rise up to bear solid fruit. But the Lord graciously keeps alive and blesses the springing up of everything good and gracious which his own hand has planted in the heart.

What a mercy it is to be able to trace out any springing up of these blessed things within! for we know that we are utterly unable to create them in ourselves.

VI.—But it adds: "*Thou crownest the year with thy goodness.*" As though he would say, "Let us take the whole circle of the seasons. Let us not merely look at the spring-time, when the corn is in the blade. Let us not look merely at the summer, when the corn begins to ripen. Let us look at the autumn, at the harvest time, when the corn is gathered in. Yea, let us look at winter, when we eat the fruits of the earth." Thus we find the Lord going round in a gracious

circle. "Thou crownest the year with thy goodness." Then if the Lord has blessed the springing thereof, he will bless its subsequent stages; he will bless the ripening of the corn, as well as the first committal of it to the seed-bed; he will bless the gathering of it in, as well as the waterings, and the springings up of it; and thus will crown the whole revolving circle with a gracious harvest.

After the seed has sprung up, is there not a long series of months before it is matured? "First the blade," as the Lord speaks, "then the ear, then the full corn in the ear." After the Lord has watered the soul abundantly with his mercy and grace, and after he has blessed the springing thereof, we should expect that all things would go on smoothly. But we see it is not so in nature, and I am sure it is not so in grace. We read (Psa. 74:16, 17), "The day is thine, the night also is thine; thou hast prepared the light and the sun: thou hast set all the borders of the earth; thou hast made summer and winter." Now, night in nature is as indispensable for the ripening of the fruits of the earth as day. The earth is so constituted, and the seasons are so adapted to it in their beautiful variation, that every change is indispensable for the maturation of the seed. The alternation of night and day is particularly indispensable to its growth. So spiritually. After the Lord has committed the seed of truth to the soul, and after he has blessed the springing thereof, is that all? Is there not something more to be done? Does it now bring forth fruit? Is there not some further process necessary? Surely. In order that there may be maturity, there must be an alternation of seasons.

1. For instance, there must be *night*. How painful it is for the living soul, after he has enjoyed some of the beams of day, to have to pass through a dreary night! But I believe all the Lord's people know more or less what it is to walk in

darkness. They do not feel in their souls those sweet in-shinings that they long to experience. They have not those gracious breakings in of the Sun of righteousness that their hearts earnestly long after. They have "to walk in darkness, and have no light." In this state, we often call in question all that the Lord has done for our souls. We actually cannot believe that the Lord has done what we in time past believed he had done. The work of grace is so obscured, the evidences so beclouded, the mind so perplexed and confused, that however clear our experience may have been at the time, now that darkness covers the soul, we feel unable to form a right judgment even upon our own experience. But this night is necessary for the strength of the soul. Were it all day, the plant would spring up rapidly, and grow so flaccid, so luxuriant, and so tender, that it would break down by its own luxuriousness. There is a certain stage in which it needs to be strengthened; and this strength is given in the night season, by withdrawing those influences of the sun which would draw it up too luxuriantly. So spiritually. We need to be strengthened. Did not the Apostle learn this lesson? How did he learn it? Was it by basking in the beams of the Sun of righteousness? Was it by enjoying sweet manifestations of the Lord of life and glory? Was it by having all his evidences brightened and made conspicuous? Not so; but by having a thorn in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to buffet him. He thus learnt his weakness, and when he learnt his weakness, he also learnt the strength of Christ made perfect in his weakness; so that he could glory in his infirmities, not as infirmities, but because the glory of Christ rested upon his soul in his infirmities. So these spiritual night seasons, though all things seem then to be against us, yet strengthen the soul. We begin in the night season to look out for the work of God more conspicuously. We begin to feel more clearly the difference between the teaching of God and the teaching of man. We come to this point, that in these dark

seasons God alone can give us light, and in these cold dead seasons God alone can give us life. Now, this is real strength—real strength, because we learn it in our weakness, and learn by that where our real strength lies. The work of grace upon the heart must be tried. If it be a feeble work, it must be tried feebly; if it be a strong work, it must be tried strongly. But whatever the depth of the work of grace upon the heart, it must have trials in order to prove it genuine. These night seasons, then, prove whether the work upon our heart be genuine or not. We can travel on very comfortably by day; but when night comes, and we are unable to see our way, we must lean upon our heavenly Conductor, or most assuredly go astray. While we can see our evidences, we can go cheerily forward; but when darkness covers them, we begin to look out for help, and want the everlasting arms spread forth for our support, lest we fall into pitfalls and quagmires. Thus we learn the secret of our strength in these night seasons.

2. Again. In all climates there are *cold* days to be endured, as well as hot days. We, in our folly, sometimes think we could manage the seasons better than the Lord. Sometimes we would not have these wet days, and at other times these dry days, or these cold nights. We think, in the vanity of our hearts, that we could arrange these things better than God. But when harvest is gathered in, and the crops laid up in the barn, then we see how much more wisely God has ordered these matters than we could have done. The very cold has an effect upon the goodness of the fruit. If the Lord "crowns the year with his goodness," then every chilly night, every stormy day, must have a ripening effect upon the corn, just as much as the warm beams of the glorious sun. Do we not often painfully feel the coldness of our heart Godward? Have we not often mourned and sighed on account of the hardness, barrenness, and leanness of our heart in spiritual

things? And can we think this is really for our good? But "all things work together for good;" and therefore these cold, dry, barren seasons must be among the things that work together for our good. What good, then, do I get by passing through these cold, dead, insipid seasons? I get emptied of fleshly religion. If I did not know by painful experience the coldness and deadness of my heart Godward, I should make an idol of self, be filled with false zeal, think I could do something in my own unassisted strength, talk and act as an unemptied, unhumiliated pharisee, and wear a fancied crown of creature holiness. But when I feel as cold towards God as though I had not one spark of grace, as dead in my feelings as though the light and life of God had never come into my conscience, as utterly unable to move my soul Godward as the earth in the frost of December is unable to clothe itself with the verdure of July, then I learn this great lesson—to distinguish between the teachings of God in the heart, and the mere zeal and activity of nature. Is not this real strength? Is not this necessary for maturing and ripening the fruits and graces of the Spirit in the heart? By enduring these nipping blasts, I learn whence "all my fruit is found," all my strength proceeds, all my faith flows. Yes: by passing through these cold seasons, I learn to prize the feeblest ray of warmth, as well as to be thankful for the smallest mark of favour. I learn, too, that if I have heavenly affections and spiritual desires, God is their author and giver. I learn also, having no righteousness of my own, to receive with a thankful heart communications of grace and mercy out of the fulness of Jesus: and I learn that they are free and sovereign, because they are undeserved, and because I am utterly unable to raise them up in my own soul.

3. But there are *storms* also, as well as cold nights and wintry days. We see the storm sometimes beats down the tender blade; but we do not see that at the same time it

washes off the vermin that drink up the juices and would eat out the heart of the young corn. The thunderstorm and the hail all do their part in killing those things that would prevent the maturation of the crop. So spiritually. If I am a Christian, I have to pass through storms, to have fierce trials from the devil and persecutions from the world—many hard blows from sinners, and many much more cutting blows from saints; I have to endure the unkindness of enemies, and what is more painful, the unkindness of friends. I am not to be a coddled up child, whom its mother takes such tender care of as to keep it ever by the fire-side corner, if I am to be a hardy, vigorous man. I must go forth into the storm—I must endure the winter's piercing cold, and the summer's burning heat—I must endure till the vicissitudes of seasons, if I am to bear them uninjured. So spiritually. Am I to be matured in the Christian life? Then all luxuriant growth must be checked. It is like a youth shooting up rapidly, while a fatal disease is about to cut him down in the bloom of life, and hurry him to an early grave. A really hardy and vigorous growth will deepen and widen, as well as heighten the plant. Then we must pass through these storms that are necessary for the due maturation of the fruits of the Spirit. The stormy seasons that we may have to endure will do our souls good, because they come from the Lord, and execute certain purposes. Say, for instance, I am leaning too much upon the arm of a friend. Well, a storm shall come, and separate me from that friend. Does that do me harm? Not if it bring me to lean more upon the arm of Jesus, and make me follow more closely after him. The storm, in passing over my head, has *then* done me no harm, but real good. It may perhaps have beaten down my religion, and obscured my evidences. There may even be the flashing lightning of God's anger, and the lowering clouds of vengeance, and heavy showers of hailstones. But if these storms wash away and beat down those lusts that creep round my soul, and would insinuate

themselves so closely as to eat out the heart of vital godliness, I have reason to thank God for the storm that beats off these vermin. I have reason to be thankful even for the pelting hail and cutting rain, though it lacerate the feelings, as the hail wounds the plant, if it kill those caterpillars which would otherwise eat into the kidney of the wheat, and destroy the very heart of the crop.

4. And then, when the corn has been ripened by this succession of day and night, this circle of the seasons, comes the last stroke of all, *the gathering into the heavenly garner*. How the Lord's people shrink from this stroke! The Lord Jesus has taken away the sting and destroyed the power of death; and yet how often the fear of death brings God's children into bondage? But can the corn be harvested in any other way than by cutting it from the stalk? Or can our souls be taken to the bosom of God by any other way than cutting us from the earth? That stroke, when it comes, may be less cutting, perhaps, than we now think. But how cutting in prospect it is as to the families whom we leave behind, the relations whose tears we see in anticipation, the widow or husband for whom we feel more tenderly than for ourselves! Yet that last cutting stroke is indispensably necessary to gather the soul into the heavenly garner.

"Thou crownest the year with thy goodness, and thy paths drop fatness." All thy paths in providence, and all thy paths in grace, though they often be in the deep waters; yet thy paths all drop fatness into the soul, making it rich and fruitful, so as to bring forth fruit to the honour and glory of God.

Now, the real children of God may not be able always to trace out the spot in which they are, but they will be, if under divine teaching, in some one spot marked out in the text.

There are some, then, whom the Lord has but just "visited," whose hearts he is making tender, whose consciences he is dealing with and working upon, giving them an ear to hear the truth, bringing them out of self, knitting them to the people of God, and teaching them to enquire the way to Zion with their faces thitherward. They have many things to contend with—right eyes to pluck out, right arms to cut off; many thorns and briars still growing in their hearts; many worldly lusts entangling their feet; doubts and fears working in their mind, or infidelity perpetually striving within. Yet with all this, they set their faces Zionward; however cast down, they are not cast away; however falling, yet rising up again, with tears and cries asking the Lord to be merciful.

There are others perhaps who have had "waterings." They have felt the incomings of the divine tide. When hearing the word, when reading the Scriptures, when alone upon their knees, or when thinking upon divine things, they have felt a tide of indescribable sweetness, bearing all before it; tears have gushed from their eyes, and their hearts have been melted and dissolved. They cannot tell how it came, or whence it came; yet it has melted them down, and brought them completely out of the world and from dead professors.

Then, perhaps, there are others in this congregation passing through another part of the process, having the corruptions of their hearts turned up to view, and the secret lusts that sometimes get the better of them. There are, perhaps, others who are full of love to the truth, who are looking to Jesus, and to whom his name is as ointment poured forth. They have desires springing up and pantings after the knowledge of him and the power of his resurrection—secret breathings forth of ardent affection, and flowings forth of living faith. These have received the love of the truth, and from time to time feel the springings up of faith and hope in

the Lord of life and glory, of love towards his name, mingled with reverence, humility and, godly fear.

There may be others passing through dark seasons, in which there is no light; through cutting blasts, nipping nights, and cold days, that shake their faith to its very centre.

Yet the Lord crowns the year with goodness after all! And when he puts in the sickle, and gathers his saints into the garner above, each will bless the Lord with joyful voice, each will give the Lord the glory, that he has crowned the year with goodness; that superabounding grace has reigned through righteousness; that matchless love has triumphed over all; that in all his dealings, however painful, in all they have had to pass through, however seemingly adverse, yet goodness and mercy have followed them all their days, and they shall dwell in the house of God for ever. Happy is the soul that can find any of his experience in these words! The least is as safe as the greatest; the feeblest as secure, in the purpose of God, as the strongest. "Happy are the people that are in such a case! yea, happy the people whose God is the Lord."