

repentance of Caracalla only prompted him to remove from the world whatever could remind him of his guilt.'

'In the time of his distress did he trespass yet more against the Lord: this is that king Ahaz' (2 Ch 28²²).

Vol. i. p. 152. 'At the proper hours, Alexander's palace was open to all his subjects, but the voice of a crier was heard, as in the Eleusinian

mysteries, pronouncing the same salutary admonition, 'Let none enter these holy walls, unless he is conscious of a pure and innocent mind.'

'Who shall ascend into the hill of the Lord? or who shall stand in his holy place? He that hath clean hands and a pure heart. (Ps 24^{3, 4}).

(To be continued.)

The Great Text Commentary.

MARK iv. 26-29.

'And he said, So is the kingdom of God, as if a man should cast seed upon the earth; and should sleep and rise night and day, and the seed should spring up and grow, he knoweth not how. The earth beareth fruit of herself; first the blade, then the ear, then the full corn in the ear. But when the fruit is ripe, straightway he putteth forth the sickle, because the harvest is come.'—R.V.

This parable is found only in St. Mark. It seems to be somewhat neglected. 'We take, I think, less notice of it,' says the Rev. Henry Harris, 'than of any parable in the Gospels.' 'I have never before preached from this parable,' says the Rev. R. H. Lovell, 'and in twenty-five years I have never heard it preached from.' The case is not quite so bad as these writers imagine. At least thirty sermons on this text have been published in recent volumes. Still it is, comparatively speaking, neglected. And the neglect is due not merely to its isolated position in St. Mark's Gospel, nor to its superficial resemblance to the Parable of the Sower, which are the reasons given by Mr. Harris, but much more to the difficulty of its interpretation. Of the thirty sermons referred to, there is only one that takes the parable in its natural meaning and offers a consistent interpretation throughout. That sermon is contained in a volume entitled *Waiting upon God*, by Professor A. B. Davidson.

What, then, is the meaning of the parable? Its meaning in the sphere of nature is evident enough. First, the husbandman sows his seed. Next, when he has done this he can for some time do no more. He sleeps and rises night and day. That is to say, he sleeps by night and rises by day. He leads an

ordinary life. Having committed his seed to the soil, it is out of his hands; the earth will do the rest with it until the corn is ripe. Thirdly, when the corn is ripe the husbandman again comes upon the scene. He puts in the sickle and reaps the harvest.

The spiritual interpretation follows the natural. Our Lord is the Husbandman. He comes to the earth as the husbandman comes to his field. The seed He sows is the gospel. That is the first thing. Next, having flung His seed on the soil of the mind of man, having thrown it as a useful germ into man's life and thought, His work is done, He departs from the earth. The scene of operation is now the earth itself, the bosom of mankind. It has to put forth its powers. Having received the seed it must nourish it. As the husbandman, having committed the seed to the soil, *can* do no more, but must leave nature to do it; so the Lord *will* do nothing more, but will leave the powers of the human mind, the forces of the human heart, the capabilities of the soul of man, and all the expanding activities of human society and life, with its ideal inspiration and its practical operation, to do the rest. Finally, when the whole process of growth has been gone through, the blade, the ear, and the full corn in the ear, the Lord the Husbandman will once more come upon the scene, He will put in His sickle and reap the harvest which so long ago He had sown.

The parable may be dealt with in three parts—the Sowing, the Growth, and the Harvest—the main lesson being found in the second part.

I.

THE SOWING.

I. The Sower is Christ.—But the first thing to notice about the sowing is that it is something *new*. Nothing that He ever said suggests to us so directly that Jesus was something altogether new as this likening of Himself to a husbandman who enters a field to sow corn. The husbandman is wholly new to the field and distinct from it. In his operation and interposition characteristics appear which belong to a sphere much loftier than that to which the natural laws of the soil belong. He is free, conscious, above the laws of nature in his great act of sowing. He brings in among them a new force which does not belong to them. He does not contradict or supersede the laws of nature; but he does interfere among them, giving them a new direction. If we could suppose the earth endowed with an understanding of the nature of its own operations and how it deals with the seed committed to it, mysterious and effectual as its operations are, we cannot doubt that it would regard the interposition of the husbandman as, from its point of view, miraculous and altogether transcending the sphere to which its own powers belong; and without any doubt our Lord Himself regards, and desires us to regard, His appearance and work upon the earth as a thing out of the course of mankind's natural development. It is as much beyond and above the natural progress of human life as the husbandman's work in sowing the seed is above the natural laws of the soil.

The sowing is not only new, it is also *necessary*. The end which He has now set before it, mankind could no more have reached apart from His coming, than the earth could of itself bring a harvest to ripeness, unless the seed were committed to it by one who was altogether above it. The husbandman commits to the earth the seed, without which it would have lain for ever fallow and barren; for however great the powers of the soil be, however infallibly it will give life to that which falls into its bosom, and carry it through all its stages of growth to maturity and to harvest, the soil cannot sow itself. Every seed which it quickens must be deposited on it by forces external to itself. It cannot spontaneously bring forth fruit unless it be sown. And the husbandman who sows belongs to a sphere high above it. So the mind of man cannot sow itself; it can only

bring to maturity what another deposits on it. And the Lord, who scatters His divine seed there, is not of mankind, but comes into it from on high.

It is possible, similarly, to limit, and even to frustrate the action of the Divine laws by human neglect; and this equally in the spiritual and in the natural world. Walk through the glades of a forest in the autumnal season, and mark the myriad acorns that lie scattered and useless on the earth's surface. There is not one of these, as they are annually torn from their leafy branches by the storms of winter, that does not contain within itself the potential growth of an oak. There is, in fact, the fruitage of a forest wrapped up in the capsule of each one of these acorns; and all that is needed for this outcome is a certain adjustment of outward conditions, in soil and air and sunshine and moisture, and nature then becomes sponsor for all the rest. It is not required of man that he go about to formulate the tree; to build for it a trunk, or to mark out a diagram for its branches, or to concern himself in any way about the mystery of growth. All that is required is just that he fit the acorn with the conditions demanded by the laws of its dependent life. But, then, it does require this: and getting this, it will, by the inscrutable methods of physical assimilation, build for itself an organization, and grow into the majesty of a tree; and missing just this, it will perish. How else did that Egyptian wheat lie alone and practically dormant in its mummy bed for those thousands of years? Its capacity for reproduction was complete: its power to produce was 'dead, being alone.' That capacity must be joined to something else, its co-factor, to become a cause. And it is for the want of this something that not one in ten thousand of those annually shed acorns ever becomes a live oak. They perish through failure of the outward conditions necessary to growth.¹

When that part of France which we now call Brittany was, in the ages past, inhabited by heathen, it happened, under God's providence, that a few monks came there to settle, in order that they might preach the gospel to the people, and attract them to the religion of Christ. These monks built a rude shed in which to dwell, and a chapel of stone in which to worship, and then began to think about cultivating the land, in order to gain them a better and more continuous livelihood than they could get by hunting and fishing. But, alas! they had no corn for seed. One of them, however, happened to espy a robin redbreast perched near, from whose beak there dangled a single ear of wheat. They drove the bird away, and secured the ear of wheat. This they sowed, and in due time got the increase; sowed again, and got more. If you go now to Brittany and ask the peasants whence came the waving crops of yellow corn, they will tell you from robin redbreast's ear of corn. Indeed, they have turned this ear of corn into a proverb. Perhaps a little child may begin to show signs of early piety; some laugh and scoff, but others, better-minded, say, 'Mock not, for this is robin redbreast's ear of corn.'

2. The Seed is His Word.—Although the parable does not refer to what the seed is, this is necessary

¹ J. Burton, *Christian Life and Truth*, 309.

in the interpretation. The word of His gospel, which comprehends all that He was and did, is the seed. Let Christ Himself be received into the mind as the great living Fact, and it will be found that He is as a seed; that in Him there is a germinating and living element which will grow into doctrines, and into purposes, and into the fruits of good living. But what is the gospel?

(1) It is the new thoughts of God which Christ taught men to entertain. Let us remember that it is through Him that we have learned to say 'Our Father in heaven.' It is the revelation of God as Love.

(2) It is also His own example. It is that life with God and toward God which He lived; it is the example which He left with us to grow in our minds and be the ideal to reach up to.

Follow me, Jesus said, and they uprose,
Peter and Andrew rose and followed Him,
Followed Him, even to Heaven, through death most
grim,

And through a long hard life without repose,
Save in the grand ideal of its close.

Take up your cross and follow Me, He said,
And the world answers still through all its dead,
And still would answer had we faith like those.

(3) It is the law of self-loss. 'He that loseth his life shall find it.' This was the law of His own life. It is the law that life is through death; that 'unless a corn of wheat die, it abideth alone, but if it die it bringeth forth much fruit.'

(4) Above all it is reconciliation with God. Christ's manifestation on the earth not only told us the nature of God, that He is love, and not only revealed to us the law of human life, even self-forgetfulness, but solved the problem that pressed in all previous ages on the hearts of men—the problem of our relation to that heaven which is above us. The best of men in all ages and in every nation have felt that they were not altogether right, and have been haunted with strange terrors of a vengeance before them that was only slumbering. They have looked into the future with dread, and with anxious painfulness have sought to avert that evil which lay on them with a dark presentiment. And the smoke of altars has gone up for ever to heaven, and the dearest blood they knew has been shed by them in the agony of their fear. The evil that they knew lay on them—their own evil—they knew not how to be relieved from. The Lord has solved

the problem for men. He has done so, not by denying the evil, and telling us that what haunted us was only a phantom of our own imagination; not by extenuating the evil, as if it were inevitable in frail creatures such as we. He recognized the evil, and showed it to be tenfold greater than men's worst fears ever pictured it. And the way of relief from it was this: that God had resolved to take our evil upon Himself and invalidate it. 'He was made sin for us, who knew no sin; in whom we have redemption through His blood, even the forgiveness of sins.'

There is a legend of the American Indians which the poet Longfellow has set to the magic of his musical verse. It paints the condition of the people before the gift from heaven of the maize, or American corn, and describes the first appearance of that life-giving plant. Hiawatha prayed and fasted in the forest for the profit of his people. As he roamed beneath its shade, the deer started from the thicket, the pheasant and pigeon whirred far away, the wild rice and berries filled the air with fragrance, the fish leapt from the still, transparent water. He saw how uncertain these means of support were, and cried desponding, 'Master of Life, must our lives depend on these things?' And then on the fourth day of his fasting he saw a youth 'coming through the purple twilight,' who told him that he had come from the Master of Life, and said that by struggling and wrestling with him, he should gain what he had prayed for. Three days they wrestled at the sunset, until at last the unearthly visitant lay lifeless on the earth before him. Then he made the grave as he had been commanded, and laid the earth 'soft and loose and light above him,' and day by day he went to wait and watch beside it—

Till at length a small green feather
From the earth shot slowly upward,
Then another and another,
And before the summer ended
Stood the maize in all its beauty,
With its shining robes about it,
And its long, soft, yellow tresses.

And still later, when the autumn
Changed the long green leaves to yellow,
And the soft and juicy kernels
Grew like wampum hard and yellow,
Then the ripened ears he gathered,
Stripped the withered husks from off them,
As he once had stripped the wrestler,
Gave the first Feast of Mondamin,
And made known unto the people
This new gift of the Great Spirit.

II.

THE GROWTH.

This is the main thought of the parable, and, says Davidson, it is one of the most remarkable

thoughts ever expressed by our Lord. At first sight His words seem to be clean in the face of all that Scripture had hitherto taught. For no idea pervades the Old Testament so completely as the idea that the kingdom of God is brought into the world all at once by a direct act of God's interposition; it is not a growth but a creation, the almost instantaneous act of immediate divine operation, where men are not agents but spectators. But our Lord says, 'The earth bringeth forth fruit of itself.' Mankind has powers of its own, and the kingdom of God in its fulness is the effect of the operation of these powers. And they operate slowly, first the blade, then the ear, after that the full corn in the ear. The kingdom of God in its perfection is not an immediate creation of God apart from men; it is not a great miraculous interference and exhibition of divine power; it is a slow growth of the mind of mankind, through generation after generation of its life, and cycle after cycle of its history. Our Lord transfers the kingdom of God from heaven into the mind of mankind; and He translates it out of a sudden divine operation into a growth and progress of the human mind.

1. The husbandman is inactive so far as the growth of the corn is concerned, but he is not uninterested in it. His mind may be active enough though his hands are tied. He may anxiously watch the progress of his field, as the delicate blade rises above the ground, as it passes into stalk and ear with the advancing months, and as the leaf drops and the yellow tinge shows itself here and there, finally, all is one blaze of gold. He will anxiously scan the heavens when they seem like brass, and the field cracks and gapes with thirst for the refreshing shower; and will rejoice when the cloud, like a man's hand, rises from the sea, giving promise of rain. By day and night his thoughts will be occupied with the prospects of his harvest. Not only through the week, but even on the day of rest, his mind will fall at times upon his fields; and, after returning from the house of God, he will sometimes in the still evening, when the sun sends his slanting rays across the earth, and the voices of the flocks are heard answering one another from hillside to hillside, saunter along by the edge of his fields, and, as he surveys them, be filled with thankfulness or with concern. He is far from indifferent, though he knows that he is helpless.

And so Christ is with us always, even unto the end of the world, watching over the progress of His kingdom; watching over the progress of grace in the heart of every member of the kingdom, working, waiting.

2. Again, the earth brings forth fruit of itself, spontaneously; yet, as Bengel remarks, the action of the sun and the rain is not to be left out of account. It is the earth wrapped round with heaven, swaddled in the clouds, or clad in the light of the sun, that is fertile. It is the earth subject to all the moods, acted on by all the influences of the skies, daylight and darkness, shadow and sun, the dark and cloudy day, and the clear shining after rain. It is the earth thus quickened, warmed, vitalized by the heavens, that brings forth fruit of herself. Without these influences she would be as barren as the sands. It is the heavens that evoke her powers, that might even seem to confer them. It is under all these sweet influences from above that she ripens her harvest.

3. But while all this is true, it is to the earth that the husbandman commits his seed; and it is to us that Christ commits His gospel. He has entrusted us with the word of His grace. His dearest wishes He leaves us to fulfil. The fruit of the travail of His soul depends on us, and He is confident we will not fail Him; that we will enter into the spirit of His work; that we will fill up, if need be, that which remains of His sufferings, for His body's sake, which is the Church.

There are three collateral thoughts concerning the growth of the Kingdom as of the corn—(1) that it grows mysteriously, (2) that it grows slowly, and (3) that it grows by regular stages.

I. The Mystery of the Growth.—'The seed should spring up and grow, he knoweth not how' (4²⁷). Although Christ's purpose was not to proclaim the general truth that the beginnings and progress of life in the Kingdom of God are *mysterious*, yet it is quite legitimate in treating of this parable to make that truth a topic of discourse. We do well at times to meditate on the mysterious miraculous character of all life, and especially of the Divine life in the soul of man, and more particularly of the beginning of that life in the new birth. Christ Himself invites us to such meditation in His saying to the Jewish ruler—'The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof,

but canst not tell whence it cometh and whither it goeth; so is every one that is born of the Spirit.'

What a mystery Life is! The seed is put into the ground, apparently a lifeless thing, and up springs a quite different looking thing—'first the blade.' What has brought this forth? Life. There in the sprouting corn is the mystery of birth all the world over. And thereupon there follows the second mystery, Growth. Who is the magician who brings from the tender leaf the tall stalk and opens the head of ears, and swells the corn? Again we must answer, Life. But what is Life? May we not say with reverence that Life is the will and the breath of Almighty God working in and through His creatures?

Because of this mystery in the springing of the seed many genuine believers hold themselves in doubt, and often fear that God has not caused the truth to take root within them. They forget that in its inception all life is weak and unconscious. The babe comes plain into the world, seeing nothing, having no conscious enjoyment of its powers—most of its powers as yet lying dormant. The seed puts forth its first tender germ, escaping the bondage of the husk only to meet the cold hard clods; not till it reach the light can it clothe itself in beauty, and wave freely in the free air of heaven. And it is thus with the beginning of the spiritual life, with the germination of the Divine seed. For a time it lies beneath the surface of consciousness. After the first faint joy of escape from the husk of sinful habit there comes the sense of darkness and obstruction. Hindering clods gather round it, seeming to thwart and oppress the rising life. Not till it has reached the light of day can we be sure that it has begun to live. If any of us know what this means, let us take heart. That we cannot tell when the seed fell, or how it sprang, what the truth was which first impressed us, or how it gathered force, need not disturb our peace. *Mystery* is a law of growth. The obstructions which seem to thwart our growth will not really thwart it; they are there only that the energies of our life may be concentrated, may gather new vigour from resistance. So soon as we are strong enough to pierce them, the hindering clods will not hinder, but feed, our growth; they will yield us the very discipline and nutriment we need.¹

2. The Gradualness of the Growth.—The earth matures the seed committed to it, and it does so very gradually, stage after stage, till at last comes the harvest. And thus will it be with mankind, and the seed sown on its soil by Christ. It has received the seed, and beyond all doubt it will mature it, not speedily or at once, but gradually, through the epochs of its history, according to the laws of its progress, stage by stage, each following the other, not by chance, and not by necessity, but according to the law of the free activity of the

human mind, till the harvest is ripe. If there is any lesson for the individual contained in this parable, it is the lesson of the gradualness of the growth of the kingdom of God. The harvest is to be looked for not at once, but after patient waiting; because the seed, flung upon the mind of man, enters into a sphere where the principle of progress or advance operates. This may allay our bitterness against ourselves, or rouse us again out of the despair with ourselves into which we have sunk. But above all it gives us patience, and teaches us consideration and hopefulness in regard to others.

'I chanced upon this in my reading only last night. "Nothing great," says Epictetus, "is produced suddenly, not even a grape or a fig. If you say to me that you want a grape or a fig *now*, I will answer you that you cannot have it; a grape takes time. Let it flower first, then it will put forth its fruit, and then ripen. And would you have the fruit of a man's life and character all in a moment? Do not expect it." And again, "Fruit grows in this way, and in this way only. If the seed produces the fruit before the jointed stem, it is a product of the garden of Adonis. That is to say, the thing is for show only; it has no root in itself. You have shot up too soon, my man. You have snatched at fame before your season. You think you are something, but you will come to nothing. Let the root grow, then the first joint, then the second, and then the third, and then the fruit will come forth of itself." So Epictetus taught the young men in his Greek lecture-room, God never leaving Himself without a witness.'²

But the great lesson is undoubtedly the encouragement of faith in the progress of the Kingdom of God in the world. Imperfect as such progress may be in comparison with the ideal to which it points, it is enough to support a faith in the divine destiny of man, to deliver us from the feeling of the futility of life, and to make us sure that it is not for nought we are striving, when we seek to wash our hands in innocency and to serve some good cause with which the welfare of our nation or our race is identified. For, though in the immediate present we may often seem to be making no way against evil, a wider and more comprehensive view enables us to recognize that there are silent and irresistible forces which are working out the triumph of good as surely as the seed, through all the changes of the year, is steadily ripening to the harvest.

Say not the struggle nought availeth;
The labour and the wounds are vain,
The enemy faints not, nor faileth,
And as things have been, they remain;

¹ S. Cox, *An Expositor's Note Book*, 260.

² A. Whyte, *Bible Characters: Our Lord's Characters*, 54.

For while the tired waves, vainly breaking,
Seem here no painful inch to gain,
Far back, through creeks and inlets making,
Comes silent, flooding in, the main.

It should be noticed, however, that sometimes the slow process is interrupted by a new start or a rapid advance. The coming of spring in New England, says Professor Peabody, is an extraordinary mingling of patience and abruptness, of delay and expectancy, of gradualness and precipitancy, of the imperceptible processes of growth and the sudden burst of foliage and flowers. It is a parable of human life. Life, like nature, is often very slow in its ways and often very sudden. A great part of it is made up of routine, drudgery, education, habit, prayer, when nothing seems to happen. The days are overcast, sterile and insignificant, and the fundamental virtue appears to be that of patience. Then, of a sudden, life is met by some terrific surprise; temptations leap out of ambush; opportunities approach in an instant, decisions must be made in a moment. Routine, detail, study, prayer are the storing up of energy for the sudden summons and the moment's need. A man has been accumulating strength by imperceptible increments, a self-denial here, a little act of courage or fairness or kindness there, in the long course of the unnoticed days, till, when the hour of a great decision arrives, he finds within him a large reserve of moral energy.

If he be called upon to face
Some awful moment to which heaven hath joined
Great issues, good or bad for human kind,
Is happy as a lover; and attired
With sudden brightness, like a man inspired;
And, through the heat of conflict, keeps the law
In calmness made, and sees what he foresaw.

The processes of nature are for the most part gradual; so much so, indeed, that at any one point you can scarcely detect that there is a difference from that which immediately preceded. Thus, if one were to lie down day by day beside a field of growing grain, he would not be able to mark distinctly the progress made in any one particular hour. It is doubtful if in such circumstances he would be able to tell when precisely the blade began to pass into the ear, or when the first yellow tinge began to make its appearance, and the ear began to fill. The fact that there has been progress is apparent, but the growth itself has been so gradual as to be almost imperceptible. There are times, indeed, when there seems to be a great start taken. These are the fine 'growing days' of which the farmer speaks, when, after refreshing rain, there comes genial warmth,

and one thinks he can almost see the stalks pushing themselves up. But, generally speaking, the growth from day to day is all but imperceptible. Now, it is so also with the growth of a holy character in a man, from the upspringing of the good seed of the word in his heart. There are times when it appears as if a great start were taken, and it develops more rapidly than at others. Such, for example, are seasons of trial and affliction, when, after the tears of genuine repentance, there comes the warmth of deep, fervent love to Christ. Oh, these are 'growing days' indeed, and those who have passed through them can bear testimony to this fact. But commonly, the growth from day to day is all but imperceptible, like that of the child at your feet who seems no bigger to-day than he was yesterday, and will appear no bigger to-morrow than he is to-day. 'The path of the just is as the shining light, that shineth more and more unto the perfect day.'

3. The Regularity of the Growth.—'First the blade, then the ear, then the full corn in the ear.' In growth, there are easily recognizable landmarks, like the landing-places in a stair, which are perfectly distinguishable from what goes before and from what follows. Thus, in the fruit-tree we have the bud, the blossom, and the fruit; and in human life we have infancy, childhood, youth, and manhood. We may not be able to discover just when the one of these passes into the other, but we can recognize each when we see it. Just so, in the Christian character, we have different stages indicated by different marks. One who has had any large experience in dealing with the disciples of Christ will ordinarily have no great difficulty in deciding whether a man be a recent convert, or a Christian of some standing, or a venerable and (as the old-fashioned phrase used to be) 'well-exercised' believer.

There is beauty in the grain at each separate stage of its growth. There is the delicacy and tender grace and sweet perfume of the early blade as it rises above the soil, fit emblem of the tenderness, the lovely lowliness, the delicate sensibility of the young Christian mind, with its freshness yet untarnished. Again, the sturdy stalks, the rank luxuriance, the healthy succulence, the rich resources, and the great promise of the corn in the ear, may be admired. And, last of all, the full corn, bending its head as if by the very weight of grace; its roots now loose in the soil as if feeling itself ready to be transported into the garner.

The stages suggest a comparison with 1 Jn 2¹²⁻¹⁴, where, in like manner, the Apostle distributes the faithful, according to their progress in the spiritual

life, into 'little children,' 'young men,' and 'fathers.'

1. 'First the blade.' When Christ speaks of the blade, the ear, and the full corn in the ear, He does not mean that the Kingdom of God or the individual life must go through stages exactly corresponding to these. That is but a general analogy. Still, these three stages are often to be discovered, and may be examined separately. Bruce finds it convenient to use the figure of a fruit tree, with its blossom, green fruit, ripe fruit, as well as the corn with its blade, green ear, ripe ear. The life of God in the soul, he says, appears sometimes as a corn-blade, and sometimes as a fruit-blossom. In the former case it attracts less notice than in the latter. When the Kingdom of God comes like the blossom on the fruit tree, there is greater emotional excitement, greater sorrow it may be at first, then great joy, the joy of the soul's espousal to the mystic Bridegroom, accompanied with a love full of rapture. And thus it is sometimes supposed that spiritual maturity may be reached without any process of growth, because the flower is perfect in its way, and the beginner has no means of knowing that this is not the kind of perfection he is called to reach as his goal. Then the mature Christian, looking back upon this stage after years of sobering experience, yearns for 'the blessedness I knew when first I saw the Lord.'

It may seem that there is scarcely any difference between the blade of wheat, the green blade, and the grass in the next field. But wait awhile and you will see the difference. Sometimes there is a young life that says nothing about what is taking place within, though perhaps there is just a chance word in a letter, or something said or something left unsaid; it is but the little green blade, touched by the breeze, but it means a great deal if the life is there.

There is a fable about a flower which grew in a wood in early May, and lifted up its beautiful blue blossom to the blue sky. Side by side with it, two round leaves on a stalk had cleft the soil and opened themselves to the sun, without charm of colour or grace of form to attract the eye. The flower, proud of its lovely blossom, looked down with disdain upon its humble neighbour, and asked the twin leaves why they dared to grow by its side. 'Tis but a month since my seed fell into the ground, and now I have grown to all this beauty; while you, lying here all the winter, have only managed to put forth these two poor leaves.' 'Yes,' said the twin leaves in reply, 'the sun

that called forth your beauty at a leap will wither it as quickly; but the sun that slowly unfolds my leaves will shine upon them a thousand years hence.' For the twin leaves were the first shoot of a royal oak, and the ministries of wind and sun and air were slowly preparing it by the discipline of its youth for the glories of its prime. It is the law of Nature that great and long-lived trees remain a long time in their young state, while annual plants shoot up at once. The aloë continues for years in the leafy condition, but when it flowers it is a tremendous effort, and sends up a great candelabrum of blossoms twenty feet high. The corn itself remains much longer in the blade than in the ear, or in the full corn in the ear. Moses was kept a long time in training before he was fitted to deliver Israel; and Jesus Himself was thirty-two years preparing in obscurity for His public ministry of three years. But in the case of Moses and Christ, what a glorious full corn in the ear came out of that long continuance in the blade!¹

2. 'Then the ear.' The second stage is that of the green ear or the green fruit. It is the time of *waiting*, of unfulfilled desire, of unrealized ideals, of green ears and crude, sour, unpalatable fruit. Its experiences are such as Bunyan's pilgrim had in his passage through the valley of humiliation and the valley of the shadow of death. The tendency is to regard the transition from the blossom to the green fruit as a falling away from grace; which in many cases is about as wise as if one were to say with regard to the apple tree, when the flowering stage is past, that it had fallen away from its first promise.

It is very suggestive to notice the disproportion between the second and the other two stages, in reference to time. The blade or the blossom comes in the early spring, the ripeness comes in a few weeks of autumn; thus the greater part of the plant's or fruit's life is one of greenness, immaturity, and apparent uselessness. So after the freshness of young spiritual life and love comes life's practical business, its daily repeated duties, its burdens, losses, failures. Yet all this time the Divine Spirit is busily at work, moulding these experiences into sweet and luscious fruit.

Then he removed to the cave on the hillside which has become famous as the Cave of Manresa. Therein he went through his real interior preparation, with intervals when illness forced a temporary return to the town, that he might be tempted back to health. From the spiritual warfare of this cavern issued the memorable 'Spiritual Exercises'; the weapon which here he forged for himself and his Society. His experience in this solitude was an epitome of the psychology of the Saints; and it smote him all the more hardily and came home to him the more intimately, because he was

¹ Hugh Macmillan, *The Daisies of Nazareth*, 31.

utterly without foreknowledge of the spiritual life, and fought out his fight alone, like the first Fathers of the Desert. Everything was a surprise, joyful or more often terrible. He began, as begin all the Saints, with sweetness and ardent alacrity of divine service. Then came that grievous amazement which no less comes to all.¹

Ah, God, alas,

How soon it came to pass

The sweetness melted from Thy barbèd hook

Which I so simply took ;

And I lay bleeding on the bitter land,

Afraid to stir against Thy least command,

Yet losing all my pleasant life-blood, whence

Force should have been heart's frailty to withstand.²

3. 'Then the full corn in the ear.' The third stage of the Christian experience cannot be regarded as a mere return to the first. There is an affinity, but not an identity; for that which springs out of experience can never be identical with the stage which precedes experience.

The real object of the subsequent life as a struggle of experience is to produce in wisdom what is then begotten as a feeling, or a new love; and thus to make a fixed state of that which was initiated only as a love. It is to convert a heavenly impulse into a heavenly habit. It is to raise the Christian childhood into a Christian manhood—to make the first love a second or completed love; or, what is the same, to fulfil the first love and give it a pervading fulness in the soul; such that the whole man, as a thinking, self-knowing, acting, choosing, tempted, temptable creature, shall coalesce with it, and be for ever rested, immovably grounded in it.

In my younger years my trouble for sin was most about my actual failings in thought and deed, but now I am much more troubled for inward defects. I was once wont to meditate most on my own heart, and to dwell all at home and look little higher. I was still poring either on my sins or my wants, or examining my sincerity; but now, though I am greatly convinced of the need of heart acquaintance, yet I see more of a higher work; that I should look oftener upon Christ, and God, and heaven, than upon my own heart. I would have one thought at home upon myself and my sins, and many thoughts above upon the high, and amiable, and beautifying objects.³

The full corn is the reproduction of that which came to us as seed; that is, our lives yield a result which is a reproduction of the character of Jesus. This third stage is only partially produced in the best men in this life; but it *will* be perfectly attained. Much sun gives much wheat. Its warmth

swells out and ripens the grain. So does love in the heart perfect and ripen the practice of good. Those plans and purposes of forming our life after the idea of Christ, which He has developed within us, will not at once be filled out with practical realization any more than the ear at once becomes the full corn in the ear; but yet the time of ripe fruit will come. There is no Christ-given thought which shall not also become Christlike endeavour; and there is no Christlike endeavour which shall fail to become an attained practical result. All Christian truth is directed to Christian doing; and as the seed sown in suitable soil develops, by a necessary law, 'first the blade, then the ear, after that the full corn in the ear,' so also the Lord Jesus, being received into the heart duly prepared, grows, by the very law of things, under heaven's influence, into newness of understanding, newness of will, and newness of life.⁴

'What does one end by doing when all the best is taken away from one, . . . when the sun of one's happiness is set?' This is the question put by Lucas Malet's heroine in the *Wages of Sin* to her uncle, and he answers: 'After a time, Polly, not at once—that would be asking too much of poor human nature—but after a time, my dear, one lights a candle called Patience, and guides one's footsteps by that.' She asks whether he speaks of his own experience, and he tells her the story of a courtship which had gone forward and ended over thirty years before. 'To the best of my ability I lighted that candle the day your mother told me which of the two brothers who loved her she loved best. It burnt very badly at first, Polly, did my candle—guttered, had thieves in the wick; and meanwhile I stumbled pretty freely. But, by God's grace, it has burnt brighter as time has gone by—burns brightly enough now, as I humbly trust, to light me down the long hill of old age without any very discreditable tumbles.'⁵

III.

THE HARVEST.

Here is another novelty in the cornfield. As there came into it that new thing called life, now there comes into it that equally new thing called death. Death came in along with life: 'Except the corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone.' And as it did not come in opposition to life then, but in order to enable life to fulfil itself; so with the reaper's scythe, it comes again into the field, not to put an end to the life of the corn, but to open the way towards the full realization of its being.

1. *The harvest is sure.* The parable brings us into touch with the outlook of our Lord upon the future. And what we see is His surprising and generous faith in mankind, and in the final result of man's history: 'The earth bringeth forth fruit

¹ Francis Thompson, *Saint Ignatius Loyola*, 18.

² Coventry Patmore.

³ R. Baxter, *Reliquiæ Baxterianæ*, Part I.

⁴ R. Vaughan, *Stones from the Quarry*, 177.

⁵ W. Robertson Nicoll, *The Day Book of Claudius Clear*, p. 1.

of herself; first the blade, then the ear, after that the full corn in the ear,' and then comes harvest. The more we read of Christ, the more we are inclined to repose absolutely on His judgment; the more exactly we can place ourselves in His point of view, the surer we are that our point of view is right. It is not so much that we trust Him because He is God or the Son of God. Even before we have come that length, He seems to us trustworthy. Judging Him just by our ordinary standards, He impresses us as being the absolute truth. No mind ever was so well balanced as His; none so free from passion, prejudice, narrowness, one-sidedness. His judgment seemed like the going forth of rays of light. And when to this we add His perfect moral life, we are constrained to say, Here is the absolutely true life and thought. And we fall back upon Him in all things. We believe in God because He believed in God. And we believe in Him because He believed in Himself. And we believe in the destiny of mankind now that He has come into it, because He had great hopes of it, and looked forward to a great harvest of the seed which He sowed.

2. *And when is the harvest to be?* The answer is, when the fruit is ripe, when it offers itself as the full ripe corn in the ear. Not a moment is to be lost; from the time when the seed is sown it begins to grow; and as soon as it has done growing the sickle is put to it, and it is gathered in. And so, too, we each of us have been sent into the world to ripen for eternity; our whole life is but the time between sowing and ripening. And as soon as ever we are ripe, God puts in His sickle and gathers us.

Sometimes the young and tender plant shows all

its fruit, and He sees all its possibilities, accepts graciously unfulfilled intentions, and garners the bare promise of a glorious summer. But there are those who bring forth fruit in old age; and not till they have finished all their course does He take them into His arms and reap the shock of corn fully ripe. And we may rest assured that the great harvest of the world will be reaped by the same command, when the hour of its full fruitage shall have struck. He waits patiently. Henceforth He expects. He will see of the travail of His soul and be satisfied.

The harvest of the world may be yet far off, but in our own selves it is always near. And even the former can be hastened. Do not let us read this parable, when it speaks of the blade, the ear, and the full corn, as meaning that the growth of the kingdom is under fixed unalterable laws like those of nature, which we can do nothing to control, or vary, or hasten. Do not let us suppose that the parable is the first page in the literature of evolution. We begin to be afraid of what is called Law. Law threatens to push God from His throne, and the conscious freedom of the human mind from her seat. No; with God's help we have the harvest of the world in our own hands.

And youth and beauty die.
So be it, O my God, Thou God of Truth:
Better than beauty and than youth
Are Saints and Angels, a glad company;
And Thou, O Lord, our Rest and Ease,
Art better far than these.
Why should we shrink from our full harvest? why
Prefer to glean with Ruth?¹

¹ Christina G. Rossetti, *Sweet Death*.

Recent Foreign Theology.

The Fourth Gospel.¹

THIS elaborate work, extending over five hundred large octavo pages, is devoted to an investigation of the Fourth Gospel as a source of the history of Jesus. The conclusion is that the fourth is of great value for the history of Jesus, that in some respects it is

¹ *Das Johannes-Evangelium, als Quelle der Geschichte Jesu.* Von Friedrich Spitta. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht; Glasgow: P. Bauermeister. M.15.

of a higher value than the Synoptic tradition. This conclusion is the outcome of a prolonged, minute, and searching analysis of the phenomena presented by the Fourth Gospel as it stands in the N.T. It is a book of great learning and ingenuity, and is of the highest interest. At the outset, greatly to the convenience of the student, Dr. Spitta gives the concrete result of his analysis. There is a new translation of the whole Gospel. First in large type, and at the top of the page,