

WINTER AFORE HARVEST
or
THE SOUL'S GROWTH IN GRACE

*A sermon preached at
Providence Chapel, Oakham,
on Lord's Day morning, 20th August, 1837*

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PREFACE

THE interval that has elapsed between the preaching of the following sermon and its publication may seem to demand some explanation. I have, however, a very simple one to offer—that I have brought it out as early as I could.

I could not write it whenever I pleased. Sometimes I let down the bucket, and there was no water in the well. Sometimes the bucket dipped into the wrong place, and brought up stagnant instead of running water; and as this stunk in my nostrils, I knew full well that it would do the same in the nostrils of God's people. So I was fain to throw it away. Sometimes I had not the heart to touch it for weeks together; and if at such seasons I attempted it, the thoughts froze in my mind, and the feeling in my heart, so that I was glad to throw back my manuscript into my writing case. Usually it is only at distant intervals that "God makes my heart soft" (Job 23:16), and I know well that when the heart is hard, every sentence that the pen writes is cased in ribs of iron. A dry heart is the cause of so many dry pens as well as dry tongues in the land; if the breasts that should feed them be dry, what marvel is there that "the children faint for hunger at the top of every street?" (Lam. 2:19).

I have made no attempt to preserve the words of the discourse as originally preached, and for this simply

reason—that I have forgotten them. I believe, however, the drift is the same, and of that I can honestly say, that it has neither been begged, borrowed nor stolen. The text was opened up to me as I was reading the chapter in my bedroom; and its explanation was neither pilfered from Dr. Gill, nor plundered from Dr. Hawker.

Such as it is, and I am fully conscious of its many, many defects, I cast it upon the waters; and should the Lord vouchsafe it His blessing, may He give me a heart to ascribe to Him all the glory.

J. C. P.

January 25, 1838.

WINTER AFORE HARVEST

“For afore the harvest, when the bud is perfect, and the sour grape is ripening in the flower, he shall both cut off the sprigs with pruning hooks, and take away and cut down the branches. They shall be left together unto the fowls of the mountains, and to the beasts of the earth: and the fowls shall summer upon them, and all the beasts of the earth shall winter upon them.”

Isaiah 18:5, 6.

No one, I think, who reads the Word of God with an enlightened eye can deny that there is contained in it such a doctrine as growth in grace. Peter says expressly, “Grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ” (2 Pet. 3:18). The faith of the Thessalonians was said “to grow exceedingly” 2 (Thess. 1:3). And thus we read of degrees of faith, from “little faith” (Matt. 6:30), “weak faith” (Rom. 14:1), faith “as a grain of mustard seed” (Matt. 17:20), to “great faith” (Matt 15:28), “strong faith” (Rom. 4:20), “fulness of faith” (Acts 6:8), and “full assurance of faith” (Heb. 10:22).

Figures also and comparisons are made use of in the Word of truth which clearly point to the same doctrine. Thus the divine life is compared sometimes to the course of the sun: “The path of the just is as the shining light, that shineth more and more unto the perfect day” (Prov. 4:18); sometimes to the growth of corn, “first the blade, then the ear, after that, the full corn in the ear” (Mark 4:28); sometimes to the increase of the human body, as commencing with “new-born babes” (1 Pet. 2:2), and advancing on to “little children”, “young men” and “fathers” (1 John 2:12-14); sometimes to a race, where the runner “forgets those things which are behind, and reaches forth unto those things which are before” (Phil. 3:13). The very idea indeed of life implies advance, growth, progress, increase. Lambs grow up into sheep, vine buds into vine branches (John 15:5), slips into trees (Isa. 17:10; 61:3), sons into fathers (1 Tim. 1:18; 5:1). Christians are not gate-posts, but palm trees and cedars (Psa. 92:12); not loungers on half-pay, but soldiers warring a good warfare (1 Tim. 1:18); not idlers at home on armchairs and sofas, but travellers and pilgrims seeking a country; not careless, and at ease, like Laish and Moab (Judg. 18:7; Jer. 48:11), but pressed out of measure by trials and

temptations, so as at times to despair even of life (2 Cor. 1:8). Their grand distinguishing mark then is, that they grow; and, therefore, absence of growth implies absence of life. Hypocrites, indeed, may grow in hypocrisy, Pharisees in self-righteousness, Arminians in fleshly perfection, dead Calvinists in head-knowledge, proud professors in presumption, self-deceivers in delusion, and the untried and unexercised in vain confidence. But the dead never grow in the divine life, for “the root of the matter” is not in them (Job 19:28).

But the question at once arises: “What is growth in grace? What is its nature, and in what does it consist? Is it the same thing as what is usually called *‘progressive sanctification’*? and is it meant thereby that our nature grows holier and holier, and our heart purer and purer? Does growth in grace imply that besetting sins gradually become weaker, temptations less powerful, the lust of the flesh less seducing; and that our Adam nature, our old man, is improved and transmuted into grace, as the crab tree of the hedge has, by long and patient cultivation, become changed into the apple tree of the garden?” No, by no means. Painful experience has taught me the contrary, and