

Sunday Reading.

What is the Best?

We do not know! Thou knowest!
As children in the dark
We lift our hearts, our hands to thee,
And find a rest, an ark;
We trust thee in our ignorance,
O Wise, O Good, O Strong;
And though the shades encompass us
We find thee with our song.

We think we know, Thou knowest.
We dream and hope and plan,
And make mistakes, and sigh to know.
How frail and weak is man:
But thou, from the beginning,
Canst see the end of all,
We rest upon thy knowledge,
Father, on whom we call.

We do not know the best for us,
And so we strive in vain;
And for our sowing often reap
A harvest dire of pain;
We fall and fall, and then at last
We cry to thee for aid,
And only rest when thou dost say,
"Tis I, be not afraid."

O God, we would be wiser yet,
And only pray: "Choose Thou."
Lead as one leads the little ones,
We are thy children now;
And day by day, and step by step,
We need thy guiding hand;
Oh, let us cling to thee, until
We reach the safe home-land.

And then let days be fair or dark,
The journey short or long,
Our hearts will rest in comfort,
And we will sing our song;
Since thou dost know, our ignorance
And weakness matter not,
We trust in thy great love, O God
And thou dost choose our lot.
Marianne Farningham.

Mealtime in the Cornfields.

FROM "FARM SERMONS" BY C. H. SPURGEON.

"And Boaz said unto her, at mealtime come thou hither, and eat of the bread, and dip thy morsel in the vinegar. And she sat beside the reapers: and he reached her parched corn, and she did eat, and was sufficed, and left."—Ruth. ii. 14.

We are going to the cornfields, not so much to glean, as to rest with the reapers and the gleaners, when under some wide-spreading oak they sit down to take refreshment. We hope some timid gleaner will accept our invitation to come and eat with us, and will have confidence enough to dip her morsel in the vinegar. May all of us have courage to feast to the full on our own account, and kindness enough to carry home a portion to our needy friends at home.

Our first point of remark is this—THAT GOD'S REAPERS HAVE THEIR MEALTIMES.

Those who work for God will find him a good master. He cares for oxen, and he has commanded Israel, "Thou shalt not muzzle the ox when he treadeth out the corn." Much more doth he care for his servants who serve him. "He hath given meat unto them that fear him; he will ever be mindful of his covenant." The reapers in Jesus' fields shall not only receive a blessed reward at the last, but they shall have plentiful comforts by the way. He is pleased to pay his servants twice; first in the labor itself, and a second time in the labor's sweet results. He gives them such joy and consolation in the service of their Master that it is a sweet employ, and they cry, "We delight to do thy will, O Lord." Heaven is made up of serving God day and night, and a foretaste of heaven is enjoyed in serving God on earth with earnest perseverance.

God has ordained certain mealtimes for his reapers; and he has appointed that one of these shall be when they come together to listen to the Word preached. If God be with the ministers they act as the disciples did of old, for they received the leaves and the fishes from the Lord Jesus, and then they handed them to the people. We, of ourselves, cannot feed one soul, much less thousands; but when the Lord is with us we can keep as good a table as Solomon himself, with all his fine flour and fat oxen, and roebucks, and fallow deer. When the Lord blesses the provisions of His house, no matter how many thousands there may be, all his poor, shall be filled with bread. I hope, beloved, you know what it is to sit under the shadow of the Word with great

delight, and find the fruit thereof sweet unto your taste. Where the doctrines of grace are boldly and plainly delivered to you in connection with the other truths of revelation; where Jesus Christ upon his cross is always lifted up; where the work of the Spirit is not forgotten; where the glorious purpose of the Father is never despised, there is sure to be rich provision for the children of God. * * * * *

Here is a very sweet point in the narrative—BOAZ REACHED HER THE PARCHED CORN. She did "come and eat." Where did she sit? Note well that she "sat beside the reapers." She did not feel that she was one of them, but she "sat beside" them. Just like some of you who do not come to the Lord's Supper, but sit and look on. You are sitting "beside the reapers." You fear that you are not the people of God; still you love them, and therefore sit beside them. If there is a good thing to be had, and you cannot get it, you will sit as near as you can to those who do get it. "She sat beside the reapers."

And while she was sitting there, what happened? Did she stretch forth her hand and take the food herself? No, it is written, "He reached her the parched corn." Ah! that is it. None but the Lord of the harvest can hand out the choicest refreshments of spiritual minds. I give the invitation in my Master's name, and I hope I give it earnestly, affectionately, sincerely; but I know very well that at my poor bidding none will come till the Spirit draws. No trembling heart will accept divine refreshing at my hand; unless the King himself comes near, and reaches the parched corn to each chosen guest, none will receive it. How does he do this? By his gracious Spirit, he first of all inspires your faith. You are afraid to think that it can be true that such a sinner as you can ever be "accepted in the Beloved"; he breathes upon you, and your faint hope becomes an expectancy, and that expectation buds and blossoms into an appropriating faith, which says, "Yes, my beloved is mine, and his desire is turned toward me."

Having done this, the Saviour does more; he sheds abroad the love of God in your heart. The love of Christ is like sweet perfume in a box. Now he who put the perfume in the box is the only person that knows how to take off the lid. He, with his own skillful hand, opens the secret blessing, and sheds abroad the love of God in the soul.

But Jesus does more than this. He reaches the parched corn with his own hand, when he gives us close communion with himself. Do not think that this is a dream; I tell you there is such a thing as speaking with Christ to-day. As certainly as I can talk with my dearest friend, or find solace in the company of my beloved wife so surely may I speak with Jesus, and find intense delight in the company of Immanuel. It is not a fiction. We do not worship a far-off Saviour; he is a God nigh at hand. His word is in our mouth and in our heart, and we do to-day walk with him as the elect did of old, and commune with him as his apostles did on earth; not after the flesh, it is true, but after a real and spiritual fashion.

Yet once more let me add, the Lord Jesus is pleased to reach the parched corn, in the best sense, when the Spirit gives us the infallible witness within, that we are "born of God." A man may know that he is a Christian beyond all question. Philip de Moray, who lived in the time of Prince Henry of Navarre, was wont to say that the Holy Spirit had made his own salvation to him as clear a point as a problem demonstrated in Euclid. You know with what mathematical precision the scholar of geometry solves a problem or proves a proposition, and with as absolute a precision, as certainly as twice two are four, we may "know that we have passed from death unto life." The sun in the heavens is not more clear to the eye than his present salvation to an assured believer; such a man could as soon doubt his own existence as suspect his possession of eternal life.

Now let the prayer be breathed by poor Ruth, who is trembling yonder. Lord, reach me the parched corn! "Show me a token for good." "Deal bountifully with thy servant." "Draw me, we will run after thee." "Lord send thy love into my heart." "Come Holy Spirit, heavenly Dove, With all thy quickening powers, Come, shed abroad a Saviour's love, And that shall kindle ours."

There is no getting at Christ except by Christ revealing himself to us.

And now the last point. After Boaz had reached the parched corn we are told that "SHE DID EAT, AND WAS SUFFICED, AND LEFT." So it shall be with every Ruth. Sooner or later every penitent shall become a believer every mourner a singer. There may be a space of deep conviction, and a period of much hesitation; but there shall come a season when the soul decides for the Lord, and cries, "If I perish, I perish. I will go as I am to Jesus. I will not play the fool any longer with my buts and ifs, but since he bids me believe that he died for me, I will believe it, and will trust his cross for my salvation." Whenever you shall be privileged to do this, you shall be "satisfied." "She did eat and was sufficed: Your head shall be satisfied with the precious truth which Christ reveals; your heart shall be content with Jesus, as the altogether lovely object of affection; your hope shall be filled, for whom have you in heaven but Christ? Your desire shall be satiated for what can even your desire hunger for more, than "to know Christ, and to be found in him." You shall find Jesus charm your conscience, till it is at perfect peace; he shall content your judgment, till you know the certainty of his teachings; he shall supply your memory with recollections of what he did, and gratify your imagination with the prospects of what he is yet to do.

"She was sufficed, and left." Some of us have had deep draughts of love: we have thought that we could take in all of Christ, but when we have done our best, we have had to leave a vast remainder. We have sat down with a ravenous appetite at the table of the Lord's love, and said, "Nothing but the infinite can ever satisfy me, and that infinite has been granted us. I have felt that I am such a great sinner that nothing short of an infinite atonement could wash my sin away, and no doubt you have felt the same, but we have had our sin removed, and found merit enough and to spare in Jesus; we have had our hunger relieved, and found a redundancy remaining for others who are in a similar case. There are certain sweet things in the word of God which you and I have not enjoyed yet, and which we cannot enjoy yet; and these we are obliged to leave for a while, till we are better prepared to receive them. Did not our Lord say, "I have yet many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now?" There is a special knowledge to which we have not attained, a place of intimate fellowship with Christ which we have not yet occupied. There are heights of communion which as yet our feet have not climbed—virgin snows of the mountain of God untrodden by the foot of man. There is yet a beyond, and there will be for ever.

A verse or two further on we are told what Ruth did with her leaveings. It is very wrong, I believe, at least to carry any thing home with you; but she was not under any such regulation, for that which was left she took home and gave to Naomi. So it shall be even with you, poor tremblers, who think you have no right to a morsel for yourselves; you shall be allowed to eat, and when you are quite sufficed you shall have courage to bear away a portion to others who are lingering at home. I am always pleased to find the young believer beginning to pocket something for others. When you hear a sermon you think, "My poor mother cannot get out to-day; how I wish she could have been here, for that sentence would have comforted her. If I forget everything else, I will tell her that." Cultivate an unselfish spirit. Seek to love as you have been loved. Remember that "the law and the prophets" are fulfilled in this, to love the Lord your God with all your heart, and your neighbor as yourself. How can you love your neighbor as yourself if you do not love his soul? You have loved your own soul; through grace you have been led to lay hold on Jesus; love your neighbor's soul, and never be satisfied till you see him in the enjoyment of those things which are the charm of your life, and the joy of your spirit. Take home your gleanings for those you love who can not glean for themselves.

I do not know how to give you an invitation to Christ more plainly, but I would with my whole heart cry, "Come and welcome to Jesus." pray my Lord and Master to reach a handful of parched corn of comfort to you; you are a trembling sinner, and I also beg him to make you eat till you are fully sufficed.

Fundamental Truths of Christianity.

LUTHER'S APOLOGETICAL DISCOURSES.

Eighth Discourse, translated from the German by Prof. D. M. Welton.

THE HISTORY OF REVELATION.

HEATHENISM AND JUDAISM.

III.

The stoical philosophy was pantheistic and represented the world as God; and the Epicurean philosophy, especially influential among the cultivated classes, recognized the existence of the gods at first, but as not concerning themselves with human affairs, and finally banished them from the faith and thoughts of men. The poet Lucretius undertook to set aside faith in the gods by a natural explanation of religion. But man must have some religion. And though he persuades himself to the contrary a hundred times, he is yet not able to satisfy himself. The necessary consequence of this unbelief was a widespread power of superstition, which Plutarch has painted in living colors for us. Magician-priests passed through the kingdom, and the more the ceremonies savored of superstition, the more approbation they received. This was the end of the history of the ancient spirit in the sphere of religion. And still it hereby served the future. For out of the general decay of the old, that individual need asserted itself which, freed from the powers of the old world, sought for itself the satisfaction which religion and philosophy denied it, but which only revelation could give.

The morality of the old world took a similar course. For morality and religion are interdependently related to each other. Morality stands and falls with religion. Many a noble and earnest form, which extorts from us a high moral regard, comes before us in the history of the old world. What the moral spirit of antiquity could accomplish, we see realized in the heroes of Leonidas or in the noble men of Athens and Rome, whose names history has preserved to us. Especially is old Rome distinguished above many other peoples and states, by a great moral earnestness, which we may point to as the fruit of the religious spirit which reigned there. But it is everywhere the morality of the citizen, not the morality of the man, much less the morality of the renewed heart, which we perceive. The ancient morality had its limitation here. When this limitation gave way, the moral force which depended on it declined. In vain philosophy sought from its own resources to produce an ethics which should prove to be efficacious. It yielded only beautiful theories, not a profound virtue, and it never became a universal power. "And even its theories are to be regarded with the gravest suspicion."

It is true, philosophy has produced particular characters which all times will behold with admiration. Socrates and Plato tower head and shoulders above the mass of their contemporaries. One might say: God has wished to show in these men how far the innate nobility of human nature could go through its own energy. But herewith the moral limitation of human nature should also at the same time be revealed. Socrates has often been compared with Christ. But there is a heaven-wide distinction between them. Socrates is intellectually and morally great, but his greatness is not that of humanity, but only of his nation and state. His fellow-citizens are his brethren, the others do not exist for him. Only Athens is a worthy world to him. It is with him as with antiquity generally, his virtue is a political governmental virtue. To obey the laws of the state is to him the sum of all duty. In other respects he does not go beyond the limits of his time: the virtue of man is to overcome his friend with well-doing, his enemy with evil-doing. He gathered young men around him in order to lead them in the way of wisdom, and Alcibiades could say that he scorned to be another man in Socrates' company. But he lifted them not above the moral limitations of his nation. He kept himself indeed free from the sins of sensuality, to which the best of his nation were devoted; but he could find it compatible with his vocation for the preservation and safety of youth, not only to permit

their intercourse with prostitutes, but also to recommend it. And when he heard the beauty of the courtesan Theodotia praised, he went with his pupils to her, and entered into conversation with her, in which he attempted to show her in what she could best win the men. We see here nothing of that holy compassion which proclaims atonement for sinners and announces to them the way of salvation. He battled indeed with crime, but he saw a remedy therefore in better knowledge and not in the renewal of the heart. His life was blameless according to the Grecian standard, and he earnestly sought the best thing for his nation; but the soul of true morality, love to God and his neighbor, he knew nothing of. And also his end—when he heartlessly sent his wife and children away, in order that his philosophical conversation with his pupils might not be hindered by their crying and lamentation—how can we place it by the side of the end of Jesus Christ! "What an illusion it is," exclaims Rousseau, "when one attempts to compare the son of Sophroniskus with the son of Mary!"

In moral nobility Plato vies with Socrates. A breath as from eternity sweeps through his philosophy. He has been called "divine" and sayings of a high, supernatural origin have been attributed to him. But he stands restricted also by the intellectual limitations of his nation. According to him the moral problem is: to introduce into this world the eternal ideas of the true, the good and the beautiful. But he himself virtually declares the realization of these ideas in life an impossibility. Nature opposes an insuperable barrier to this. In the realm of spirit the divine principle rules, but matter offers an opposing element. The contradiction between the idea and the reality remains unsolved, an unrealizable ideal. And what kind of an ideal is it? Plato also goes beyond the state. Humanity united with God is not his thought—he knows nothing of this—but the state of the reason, the state of philosophers. This, however, is the most unnatural that can be imagined: a state which, with its community of goods and women and its abstract reign of law, destroys all personal freedom and property and rests upon the most pronounced arrogance: only the ruling classes represent the reason, the remaining ranks represent the lower faculties of the soul down to the instincts and passions. There is a lack throughout of the true worth of man, the conception of free human personality: on this account Plato demands for his ideal state the exposure of weak children, the community of women, approves of slavery—as also Aristotle: for the slave is only a tool and not endowed with reason,—tolerates pederasty, &c. There is here nowhere the idea of humanity. And yet Augustine confesses: "No one has come so near to us as the Platonic philosophy!" When this is done in the green tree, what will happen in the dry?

Socrates and Plato did not prevent the fall of their nation, and could not breathe into it a new moral spirit. Neither could the philosophy of a later time do so. For they all sought the help of the moral power of man himself and wished to make him his own saviour. But no moral theory could renew man, which knew no deeper sources of moral life than those which originate in man.

The two philosophical schools, which contended for the supremacy at the conclusion of the old world, are the Stoical and Epicurean. The severest ethics are the Stoical. But what is true of ancient ethics generally, that they are grounded in self-esteem and are supported at bottom by the spirit of pride, is true in the highest degree of the ethics of the Stoics. Nowhere is the spirit of haughty arrogance and cold resignation so much at home as here. If Christian morality is rooted in humility, Stoical morality is rooted in pride. Humility is a Christian conception only. The lowliness, which antiquity also knew, has been ennobled only by Christianity and transformed into humility. The Stoical philosopher indeed avenges no insult, but only because he cannot be insulted: he thinks himself too great to be touched by an offence. It is not the sense of placability, but it is the spirit of a haughty contempt of others, from which this

principle proceeds. The Stoical philosopher must not entertain anger, must not be passionately excited, &c., not, however, because he is divinely constrained to be still and full of friendly mildness and peace, but because he thinks himself too high to have his divine rest disturbed by anything. He thinks this life altogether too contemptible to allow himself to be placed in disquietude by it. Neither shall the evil that is in the world call forth his zeal to war against it. Evil as well as good pertains to the entire course of the world, and the wicked also play their role as well as the others; the philosopher looks upon the play with calm indifference. And does it become too confused for him he takes his own life; for this world is not worthy of him—so he withdraws from it. Thus did the younger Cato on the fall of the Roman republic, thus did many in the time of the Emperors, in order to free themselves from despotism or get rid of the burden of a heavy crushing illness. It is only an external resemblance which this morality bears to that which is Christian. What is true in it has only become such in Christianity.

Correspondence.

For the Christian Messenger.

From England.

BY REV. JOHN BROWN.

The hay crops, as to quantity, have been the best for many years, but as to quality the worst. There are vast quantities rendered well nigh useless through the incessant bad weather, and the prospects for the corn harvest are at present very unfavorable, and unless a favorable change come soon, the farmers, and others as a consequence, will suffer. The last six or seven bad harvests have told disastrously against the agricultural interests of this country. I trust the Lord will yet be favorable to this land, and give us fruitful seasons. Christian farmers have need to be men of strong faith in God in order to see that all this is for their good. Happy is the farmer that can say like Habakkuk: "Although the fig-tree shall not blossom, neither shall fruit be in the vine; the labour of the olive shall fail and the fields shall yield no meat; the flocks shall be cut off from the fold, and there shall be no herd in the stalls; yet I shall rejoice in the Lord, I will joy in the God of my salvation." But a man needs more than common faith to say that.

Speaking of farmers, &c., reminds me of a new volume of sermons by that unwearied husbandman C. H. Spurgeon, entitled "Farm Sermons." In the preface he says: "While the earth abideth, with her seed time and harvest, some men will be tillers of the soil. The day may come when there will be no more sowers, but there will be sure to be farmers. Whether there be lords they shall cease; or tillers they shall vanish away; but farmers shall remain."

True religion in former generations found many of her sturdiest defenders among the farmers of England and Scotland. It is to be feared that things have sadly changed in many a homestead, and the world has the mastery where once there was a church in the house. Oh that the good old times might be repeated in grange and farm and lodge, till every village shall have in it a sanctified people who shall glorify the Lord." The sermons number nineteen, each with an illustration. Here are a few of the titles: "The Sluggard's Farm, The Broken Fence, In the Hayfield, The Loaded Waggon, Mealtime in the Cornfields, Frost and Thaw, Threshing, The Ploughman &c." The price is three and sixpence. As to quality, the name of the author is a sufficient guarantee for that. It will be an excellent book for N. S. farmers to read when shut in by the "beautiful snow" from attending church, or any other time, as to that. My advice to such and all other readers of the *Messenger* is this: if you don't want a book full of good things, rich in plain, old-fashioned gospel truths; if you don't want a feast of fat things, of new wine from royal stores, don't get "Farm Sermons!"

You have heard before this of the bombardment of Alexandria. Some fear it may lead to a general European war, but croakers are always on duty. War is an evil any