

Psalm cxvi. 11. Having regard to the etymology of the Hebrew word translated A.V. "liars," and R.V. "a lie," and to the scope of the Psalm, does the author imply that he had temporarily fallen into a pessimist view of human life—that it was a sham and a deception? If so, we seem to have a key to the experience referred to.—J. F. L.

I hardly think that this can be the meaning of the verse. The Psalm is a thanksgiving for deliverance from imminent peril; whether personal (as I prefer to think) or national, it is unnecessary for our present purpose to inquire. The Psalmist recalls his feelings in that moment of hopelessness and helplessness. *I said in my perplexity*; in my alarm and restless anxiety, when I knew not

whither to turn for help—for this is what he means by the word rendered *haste*, and not that his thoughts were rash and ill-considered—*all men disappoint*; all human aids prove false and disappointing, they are but a broken reed to those who lean upon them. Convinced of the futility of relying on human aid, he turned in faith to God, and was delivered. So we must supply the link of connection with ver. 12, which assumes the fact of deliverance, and eagerly inquires what return he can offer to God for all His benefits.

With the first half of ver. 11, cf. Ps. xxxi. 22; with the second, Ps. lxii. 9.

A. F. KIRKPATRICK.

Sowing and Reaping.

A SERMON TO CHILDREN.

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"Whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap."—GAL. vi. 7.

I DARESAY we that have all heard people discussing which of the four seasons of the year is the best. "I like spring," says one, "with its young buds and its fresh green leaves." "No, give me summer," says a second, "with its lovely flowers and warm days and long light evenings." "Ah! but what of autumn," strikes in a third. "What can be more beautiful than the golden corn fields or the hill-sides all purple with heather?" "Well," rejoins a fourth, "though all that is true—winter is my favourite. I like the clear frosty days and the pure white snow, and then how cosy the evenings are round a roaring fire." And so they go on discussing which season is best, quite forgetting that each in its own place is best, and that we need all to make up the fulness and richness of God's year. And not only that, but forgetting also that the four seasons are dependent upon each other, each preparing for the one that follows. The snow and frost of winter make ready the ground to receive the seeds in spring; the seeds in spring blossom into the flowers of summer and the fruit of autumn. Now, it is this relation between two of the seasons of the year, spring and autumn, that St. Paul makes use of in our text. Sowing in spring is necessary if there is to be reaping in autumn, and the kind of sowing determines the kind of reaping. So it is, the apostle tells us, in our own lives, "Whatsoever a

man soweth, that shall he also reap." Let us look at these words a little more closely, and see what they may teach us all. And the first lesson they remind us of is a very simple one.

1. WE ARE SOWERS.—Just as in spring the sower goes forth and passing up and down the bleak dark field scatters on all sides seeds from the bag which he holds in his hands, so day by day in our lives, as in a great field, we are sowing seeds of which some day we shall reap the harvest. The thoughts, the words, the deeds, which make up our everyday lives, and about which we usually think so little, are all seeds, taking root within us, and determining what kind of men and women we are to be. I am afraid that this is a truth which we often forget. We talk as if it did not really matter very much what we were as children, so long as we determined to be good and useful when we were grown up. And we think that somehow we have only got to wish it, and we can become good and useful all at once, whatever our past characters may have been. But that is as absurd as if a farmer were to go to a field which he had quite neglected, and in which he had sowed no seed, and expect it all of a sudden to bear a rich harvest. No, we must sow first if we are ever to reap. Our character, the place we make for ourselves in the world, the reputation we bear—all, like

the corn, are a matter of growth. And before there can be growth there must be seed. Let me tell you a story of three boys, which may help you in understanding this. They were at the same school, sat on the same benches, and learned the same lessons; but they had all different aims and hopes in life. One was a dull, heavy-looking boy, but he was plodding and industrious, and resolved to work hard that some day he might be a great man. The second was a bright, clever boy, a great favourite with every one. He did not care much about learning; he only wished to become rich. While the third was ambitious neither about being great or rich. All he cared for was to lead a retired, useful life. Years passed. The first boy became Lord Chancellor, one of the greatest men in the Kingdom. The second went to India, and there amassed great riches. While the third went down to a quiet, country village, living a quiet life, and writing many beautiful songs and hymns. Now, I do not say anything just now about which of these three boys had the noblest and best aim. You can judge that for yourselves. All I wish you in the meantime to notice is, that they reached their different goals; and that, if we want to understand their characters as men, we must go back to what they were when boys at school. The seed they sowed there was the beginning and cause of the harvest they afterwards reaped. And not only that, it also determined the *kind* of harvest. And this brings us to our second lesson, the *kind* of harvest. For—

2. WHAT WE SOW THAT WE REAP.—How clear this is in the natural world! If a farmer wishes to reap oats in a certain field, then he sows oats; or barley, then he sows barley. He would be a very foolish man who expected to have a barley harvest from oat-seed, or a wheat harvest from rye. Of course he would. But are we never guilty of something quite as foolish? Do we never sow the seeds of idleness, or carelessness, or sin, and then are astonished when we have only a harvest of the same? But there is no reason for astonishment. The law is universal. As the seed, so the harvest. What we sow, *that*, and nothing else, we reap. How many examples of this we have in the Bible! Think of Cain beginning to sow little seeds of anger and jealousy in his heart towards Abel his brother. He thought little of them at the time,

certainly not of the harvest they would yield. And yet what a terrible harvest that was! The little seeds grew until they ended in death—Abel's death. Or, again, think of Esau. There is so much to like in Esau. He was so kind, so generous, so affectionate. Ah! but then he was so careless, so selfish. Remember him as a youth, for a mess of pottage parting with his birthright, his privileges as elder son. He did it so light-heartedly, and then went his way, eating and drinking and hunting as if nothing had happened. Yes, but then remember him again, as a man forty years old, standing by his father's bedside, and finding that because he had sold the birthright he had lost the blessing. That was the harvest. Not all his cries and bitter tears could win the blessing back for him. He must reap as he had sowed. It is a solemn, an awful truth. Would that I could burn it in upon your minds and hearts. You cannot sin without reaping the consequences. Each sin is a seed which some day and somehow will bear its own fruit. But, thank God! this truth has also its bright side. If seeds of sin are thus punished, seeds of well-doing have their corresponding reward. They grow, making our characters ever stronger and better—more able to resist what is evil, more inclined to follow after what is good. The happiest man or woman is the man or woman who has had the happiest and best childhood, whose years are "bound each to each by natural piety." And the same is true of the good we can do others. A great tree can spring from a little seed. The beginnings of much good may be laid in the simplest ways. Have you ever heard of Count Zinzendorf? When he was still a lad at school he united, we are told, his companions in a little Guild, which he called "The Order of the Grain of Mustard Seed," of which the badge was a ring with this motto, "No man liveth unto himself." It was very little, of course, that these boys could do to help others. But they planted a seed, and the seedling grew into the great Moravian Missionary Brotherhood, with branches extending throughout the world. And so with all other great efforts. They must have a beginning; they must have a seed. And if only the seed is there, sown in good ground, it will, like the seed in our Lord's parable, bring forth fruit, some an hundred-fold, some sixty-fold, some thirty-fold, for our reaping in after days. For it is—

3. IN DUE SEASON WE SHALL REAP. The harvest does not appear immediately. It is in spring that the seeds are sown; not till autumn can the harvest be gathered in. Only after "long patience" does the farmer see the fruit of all his toil. And we, too, need patience. Not all at once can we become very strong or very wise; not all at once can we become very good or very useful. Our characters, like the corn-fields, must have time to grow. Do not be discouraged then if you do not see the fruits of your efforts so quickly as perhaps you would like. The great thing is to be continually sowing good seed, knowing that just because it is seed, it must grow. When some of the mummy cases in which the old Egyptians had buried their dead hundreds and thousands of years ago were opened, there were discovered in them a few grains of corn. And these grains, though so old, so long hidden from sight, when planted in the earth, sprouted and grew and bore fruit. The same life is in every kind word and every loving deed. We may think that they are dead, buried, and forgotten. But some day the sun shines upon

them, and we see them once more; no longer solitary words or deeds, but bringing with them, under God's blessing, rich harvests for ourselves and for others. I say, we know not how. I say, under God's blessing, for lastly-

4. GOD GIVETH THE INCREASE.—The farmer may prepare the field and plant the seed, but he cannot make it grow. God alone can do that. He causes the sun to shine, and sends the refreshing dew and rain. Without Him there would be no fruitful trees or rich golden harvests. And it is in the same God that we too "live and move and have our being." We are dependent upon Him not only for the air we breathe, but for the grace and strength by which alone we can please Him, and become what He would have us to be. Ask Him then for His gift of the Holy Spirit. Pray to Him to guide and direct you in all your ways, and then indeed you shall be like to those sowers who go forth "bearing precious seed," and who come again with rejoicing, "bringing their sheaves with them."

The Expository Times Guild of Bible Study.

MEMBERSHIP IN THE GUILD.—The Guild will now be more formally constituted through the enrolment of Members. The sole condition of membership will be the promise to study (that is, not merely to read, but to study with the aid of some reliable commentary) the proposed portion of Scripture between the months of November and June.

This promise is not to be held in any respect binding should unforeseen circumstances prevent its being carried out.

Church dignitaries, Professors of Theology, and those who are to be engaged upon the *study* of any other portion of Scripture, will not be expected to make the promise, but will be enrolled as Honorary Members.

PROPOSALS FOR STUDY, 1891-92.—It is proposed that the Members of the Guild should study, with the aid of some commentary, either the first twelve chapters of Isaiah, or the Epistle to the Hebrews, or both.

The results of this study may be sent to the Editor

from month to month, in the shape of Notes, exegetical, expository, or critical, or Notes of Sermons or Addresses, or short illustrative paragraphs. The best of these papers will be published every month in THE EXPOSITORY TIMES, and the writers, seeing them there, may send to the Publishers for the book they select out of a list which will be given.

Members may also test their progress at the end of the session by answering questions which will be found in THE EXPOSITORY TIMES for June. For the best answers, modern books of value will be given.

These competitions are not compulsory. Those engaging in them who have not received a theological training at some college will not be expected to compete with those who have. Their contributions, though printed alike, will be judged separately. There is no fee.

Papers intended for December must be received by the 1st of November, and so on for each succeeding month.