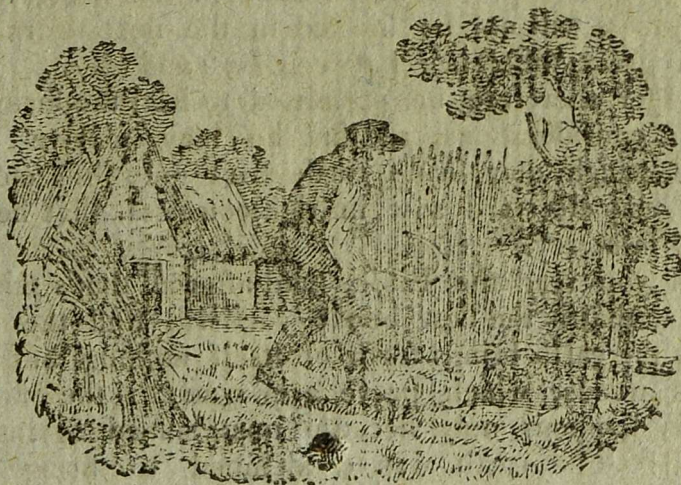


THE
BEST HUSBANDRY,
OR THE
FARMER'S SPIRITUAL GUIDE.

BY A CLERGYMAN.



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THE
BEST HUSBANDRY.

IT is a blessing to the world that God sendeth rain upon the fields of the wicked, as well as of the good; for it is to be feared there are many Farmers, as well as others, who blaspheme their God and profane his sabbath, and will not consider, that it is by the goodness of Him they offend, that they enjoy seed time and harvest. But let not such think that because their crops are not blasted in this world, their happiness will not be blasted in the next—for there is a great difference between *here* and *there*. Let a stranger therefore be permitted to lead the farmer to such considerations, as that he may receive some seed which may bring forth fruit unto life eternal; and henceforward sow in righteousness, that he may reap in mercy.

If you read the Bible, (and after all that's said and done, that is the best book) you will find the cause why the earth brings forth of itself nothing but noxious weeds, which prove a plague to the farmer. This happens only because man sinned against his God! The earth was condemned to bring forth thorns and thistles, and man is not to expect it to produce food, without fatigue, and labour, and sorrow. What God created was very good, but our wickedness is the cause of our troubles. Think how you have offended him. Think of the lies, oaths, lewdness, sabbath-breaking, of which men are guilty; and then you may admire the goodness that does not cut you down as a cumberer of the ground, and standing in the way of others, you might better improve his mercies. You are naturally unfruitful,

except in sin; and you must pray that God would work in you to will, and to do, of his good pleasure. Without this, you may often resolve to amend, but sin will always overcome, and destruction must follow!

Whenever therefore you see a person wounded by briars, or stung by nettles, or bitten by an adder,—or crops injured by thistles, or blighted by storms, or destroyed by vermin; think of our offences against God as the only cause of such evils continuing. Except the Bible had told us that sin has produced and continues these evils, for our correction, as much as punishment, we could account for them in no other way. Now my sin and yours are known to God; and no trouble befalls us, but what he appoints for our good. Perhaps you have lived long in the habit of profaning the Sabbath, or of blasphemy, or drunkenness, and when we are deaf to God's voice he does not cast us off, but calls louder to us by sickness—death of a friend—or some trouble in our family. Worldly troubles are intended by our heavenly Father to make us watch against sin, and to pray that God would forgive us, for the sake, and through the merits of his dear Son, Jesus Christ. Think then of that blessed rest that remains for the people of God. Begin to think seriously about your soul. Your conscience will tell you, if you have not hardened it, whether or not you are now living in a sinful-course.

Every body knows, that waste land does not naturally produce grain. Some people who have gone to America to better themselves, have become beggars, before they could bring their land to produce any crop. I am sure, if you examine, you will find, that naturally out of your heart proceeds nothing but evil—nothing well pleasing to God, because without any love to him, any abhorrence of sin, or any faith in the Lord Jesus.

How much good instruction you have slighted, or

despised—good sabbaths you have idled away—good sermons you have disregarded. Often has conscience said, “for all these things God will bring thee into judgment! God will not be mocked, for whatever a man soweth, that he shall also reap.” You have turned a deaf ear to such remonstrances, because without the gracious work of God on your soul, you are dead in trespasses and sins.

Learn hence the reason of our Saviour’s words, “Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God—Ye will not come unto me that ye may have life—If ye believe not in me ye shall die in your sins, and whither I go, ye cannot come.”

If you were this very night to be called to appear before God in an ungodly state, what could you reasonably expect? If the righteous scarcely be saved, where shall the ungodly and the sinner appear!! Look into the state of those who have sinned-away their day of grace. Their worm dieth not, and their fire is not quenched! Break up your fallow ground, for it is time to seek the Lord, that, instead of the works of darkness, you may even yet bring forth some fruits of righteousness. “For the earth which is made fruitful by the rain, receives blessing from God, but that which continues to bring forth only briars and thorns, is nigh unto cursing, and its end is to be burned!” In other words, “he that being often reproved, hardeneth his heart, shall suddenly be destroyed, and that without remedy!”

Pray to God, from whom all holy desires, all good counsels, and all just works do proceed, that he would henceforward incline you heart to love his name—to search the scriptures—and steadily to pursue the one thing needful for our souls. Our Saviour says, “Ask, and ye shall receive; seek, and ye shall find.”

The plough is necessary to cut and rend, turn up the earth and expose it to the air and sun: so are

convictions of conscience, and repentance for sin needful to lead us to say sincerely, "God be merciful to me a sinner!" This supplication can only be fervent, when you feel that the wages of sin are death. Some land only requires to be ploughed once; but most sorts require it much oftner. So some almost as soon as they feel the terrors of the law they have broken, are led by the Holy Spirit to Jesus Christ, as having made a full atonement for the sins of all that cast themselves on his mercy. Thus the Lord affected the heart of Lydia (Acts xvi.). Others may require severer, and more lasting terrors about their sins; but God does nothing in vain. Cherish therefore every serious thought. Do not go among your sinful companions to get it removed, for that is grieving the Spirit of God, and like casting pearls before swine, they will ridicule the holiness they hate, and the gospel they are ignorant of. Take the advice of those only who love our Lord Jesus Christ, and walk religiously. Pray earnestly to God that he would give you to will, and to do, of his good pleasure: and rest assured, that whatever way God bring you to repentance, it will be the best way to his eternal kingdom.

But beside waste land (which all England was two thousand years ago) requiring the plough and the harrow, the ground which is peculiarly the Farmer's own, and which bore fruit last year, needs his care and watchfulness, his plough and harrow to continue its fruitfulness. So also it is with the best of Christians, while in this sinful world. Their hearts are apt to grow languid; their faith, hope, love, joy, obedience, need quickning; and he whose they are, watches over them, and in mercy corrects them, to make them partakers of his holiness. When a Christian forgets his high calling, and his duty, God will visit him with some affliction, to make him bring forth more fruit. Such, by and by, will thank God for ploughing and harrowing dispensations.

But breaking the clods is not all that the Husbandman has to do. He commits much valuable seed to the earth; and if we never had seen the effects, we should think he threw it away. But he knows what he is doing. He ploughs and sows in hope, and at length receives a large increase. This hope is just, in proportion to his care and diligence. Oh how much good seed of God's word has been sown in the world, and in the church, and how small has been the increase! The Bible is good seed sown in every house—the godly advice of a friend—the prayers and sermons at church—the offers of salvation, and eternal happiness through Christ our Redeemer—the promise of the Holy Spirit to them who ask it—this little book, which by providence is put into your hand—all this is good seed, and intended to produce good fruit. And how valuable must it be in the sight of God, since it tends to glorify him, and to save mens' souls? Consider what the distribution of the word of life cost. It cost the humiliation, sufferings, agony, death, of the Son of God! God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son that whosoever believeth in him, should not perish, but have everlasting life. Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he first loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins." Let these words as good seed sink down into thy heart, O reader. Think of thy state if thou wert to be summoned this night to appear before God! Think how many years you have been spared, and how barren your hearts still are! Think, there is no salvation but in and through Jesus Christ, and how can you escape if you neglect so great salvation! Say,—Lord help me! Prepare my heart to receive thy grace! Enable me henceforward to bring forth the fruits of repentance! Give me grace to obey the calling of Jesus Christ, and to follow him without delay! O Lord prepare my heart, and bless all the good seed that is sown, so that I may die unto sin, and live

unto Righteousness; and bear the fruit of faith in, and love towards, thee, and of a chearful and steady obedience to thy will!

What a mystery is the growth of seed! Who can tell how the corn is produced from the seed that is sown? What wickedness then must it be to think, and much more to say, that the affairs of men are not directed and controuled by God, because we know not how he does it? He is able to make poor, and to make rich—to instruct the gentleman, and to make the labourer good and happy, as we see he is to make the earth fruitful.

When you sow the seed, think of that season when the bodies, committed to the grave, will revive and spring up. Should any say, how are the dead raised up, and with what body do they come? We may say, "Thou fool!" to doubt of God's power in this case, "That which thou sowest is not quickned, except it die."

Dare any to deny that God turns the heart of the disobedient to the wisdom of the just? There is no man so wicked, but God can change his heart, and make him useful in his house, and in his neighbourhood. How do we see God's power in converting great numbers in a village, by means of a conscientious and laborious Parish Minister. How has the report of salvation ran, and been glorified. Drunkards have been made sober, the lewd chaste, the profligate sincerely religious. This is no more wonderful than true. And such fruit is produced, in some degree or other, wherever a minister labours to be useful, and a people are attentive to his life, and doctrine. "Pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest, that he would send such labourers into his harvest." But God will make to prosper any endeavours of the poorest cottager who can read, and who desires to glorify God for enabling him to do so. I can put you into two methods recommended by two bishops, whereby, with God's blessing, you may

help your vicar or curate exceedingly in sowing the seed of God's word in the hearts of the ignorant. One plan is this—The Sunday is thought a dull day, only by those who do not know the proper mode of spending it. Propose therefore to such as cannot read, and, for want of knowledge or employment, are idling away their time at the alehouse, or on the green, to come to your cottage on Sunday evening, and read to them the word of God, which is able to make them wise to salvation, through faith in Christ Jesus, and a portion of some other religious book. Such, for instance, as the Village Sermons, the Cottage Library, the Evangelical Magazine, or the Sunday School Miscellany. The other plan to do good is—

Get together on Sunday a few poor children, whose parents cannot afford to pay for their schooling, and teach them to read. It is a disgrace that any in this country should be so ignorant as a slave in Africa. The way to sow the seed of instruction is not so difficult or expensive as may be at first imagined: and the pleasure in doing it is not to be described. Whether old or young, if you can but read, you have it in your power, to be a blessing to the children of your village, and when you are dead and gone, some of them will bless God for keeping you alive until he put it into your heart to teach them to read the Scriptures. I will now tell you, how easily this great work may be done.

In the first place, ask some person who can write, to copy the great and small letters of the alphabet, as large as he can. On another sheet of paper put some single syllables, which you will find in every spelling-book. Perhaps at the market-town you may beg some large coach bills. Place all these in the most convenient part of your room. Let the children come to you at 7 o'clock and between church time, on Sunday. Let them all stand so as easily to see the letters on one of the papers; and with a long sharp-pointed stick shew them every

letter, and let one by one express the sound of it. When they have made some progress, the minister, or the squire will doubtless notice and encourage this method of sowing the seed of instruction in young minds, which is a better mode of benefiting a country, than even by improving the breed of horses, and cows. The squire, or large farmers, may get Sunday-school spelling books from the Booksellers in London, at 14s. per 100, and Testaments about 18*d.* each. Occasionally a pair of shoes to the most attentive, would be a very charitable encouragement. A good man or woman, however poor, by only teaching the boys and girls to read, does a great service: and it may happen that some of the wealthy may soon regularly pay them for their trouble.

The farmer wishes for rain to make the sown seed spring up and grow. So whenever a good thought, or wish, or intention, comes to the mind: whenever a good hope, or a holy fear, rests upon the soul, consider it as the work of God, and bless him for it. Be it your care to cherish it. Pray that God would cause every good desire to encrease. Do not do as Pharaoh did. He hardened his own heart, and sinned yet more: and then God withheld his grace, and gave him up to a reprobate mind! God forbid that should be the case with any one that reads this! Dread to do any thing which may tend to grieve, or provoke, the Spirit of the Lord! You may never be more serious about your soul than while reading this. Desire that same God who so unexpectedly put it in your hands, to water it with his grace, that it may have an abiding effect on your heart, temper, and life. Do not go to the alehouse, or to drunken companions, to stifle the voice of conscience; for it may never more admonish!

Let this teach you to look to God, that he would bless and encrease the smallest grain of seriousness you may now have, that it may not have been sown in vain. Use the means of religious instruction. Watch and pray always, against the temptations of the world, and the devil; and that you may grow in grace, and in the

knowledge of God. Pray that the cares of this life, like thistles, may not choke the word you hear or read: nor pride, like the foot of a traveller, suppress its influence.

We all are labourers in different ways. Some are working wickedness with such violence, as if they wished to be tormented before their time! Reader, be you diligent, that you may be found of the Judge in peace! Every one has much to learn, and to pray for, about his own soul. The kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and the violent take it by force. He has much to do in the family to which he belongs. Persecution for righteousness' sake he may be called to suffer. But remember this—"If God be for us, who can be against us? and who is he that shall harm us, if we be followers of that which is good?" View this life as the seed time, and Eternity as the harvest. He that now goeth on his way weeping, bearing forth good seed, shall doubtless come again with joy, and bring his sheaves with him. Every day the harvest draws nearer, and it will soon become necessary to cut down both corn and weeds. Both are now suffered to grow together: but soon they will be separated for ever. The corn will be housed—the weeds will be burned. So will it be very soon with us. Soon we shall be cut down by death! Have you yet besought the Lord that you may be growing up for glory? Or have you no dread of your immortal soul being cast into the fire that never shall be quenched? Or are you stupid and careless about your souls? God forbid. A separation is always making. Every fifty years the inhabitants of the world are almost wholly changed; and the place that knows us now, will soon know us no more for ever! Reader, prepare for thy change!

The corn ripens by degrees; so the work of God in the souls of men is usually progressive. The earth brings forth first the blade, then the ear, and last of all the full corn in the ear. Then and not before, the farmer carries it away to a safer place. So some reader may

at first only determine to look over this again. At the second reading he will understand it better. By the grace of God he will see by the scriptures that he is a sinner, and that Christ Jesus came to save such as he is, from the love of sin here and from condemnation hereafter. By prayer to God, and constant attendance at his house, scriptural knowledge and faith will encrease. Hope of the mercy, and dependence upon the goodness, of God, arise from faith. Where these are implanted in the soul, there will be a growth in religion and some fruit of holiness, to the praise of God. At first you will be in danger from wicked companions, or former vicious habits, as the corn when it first springs up, is in danger from blights. Ah, how many serious thoughts are choaked by the cares, fears, or vices, of the world! Pray to God, O reader, that nothing may keep you from embracing the Gospel, as a message from Heaven to you. If the Spirit of God has changed your heart, you will go forward in reliance upon Christ, and establishment in the faith. If the root of the matter be in you, the scorn of a whole village cannot prevent your growth in grace. Commit yourselves to God, whatever may be the trials of any man for conscience sake, the Lord will stand by him, and save him, because he putteth his trust in him. Every thing that is permitted to happen, has respect to the harvest. Nothing occurs which may not be useful to fit us for death, and Judgment. All should prepare us to meet our God. Oh how awful, if it should be said of any reader, after despising these and other warnings, and going on in his old sinful courses, "Cut him down, why cumbereth he the ground." Then the harvest will be past, the summer will be ended, and you will not be saved. If you find not mercy of the Lord in that day, when he makes the final separation between the godly and the sinner, good would it have been, had you never been born! Who can dwell with everlasting burnings? They can, they must, who in this life refuse everlasting glories.

Let us regard what is commanded us while it is called

to-day; for the night cometh, when no man can work. Soon every one must give an account of his stewardship to God. Soon the evening of death will come. Then it will be said, "Call the labourer, and give him his hire." The godly one is weary: or the ungodly one hath been long enough born with! Then the wages of sin will be death, but the gift of God everlasting life, through Jesus Christ.

When the threshing time arrive, the grain and the husk and the straw, all which grow up together, are to be separated for ever! So will the righteous be separated from the profane, and the sincere from the hypocrite, and the formalist from the converted person. The Judge will soon appear, "whose fan is in his hand, and he will thoroughly purge his floor; he will gather his wheat into his barn, but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire!" That is the time which will try men's souls!

If the awful end of the wicked do not alarm, let the happiness of the christian, in this world, and the next, allure you to cry "Let me live the life, and die the death of the righteous, and let my last end be blessed like his!"

As great increase is expected from a little seed, so, though this little book is, in itself, but a trifling thing, yet if by the many given away *one* person is savingly converted to God, the benefits to himself, and others, will be great beyond calculation. If the manner of its coming into your hand should induce you to read it, and keep it clean, and read it again, and lend it to a neighbour to read attentively, and seriously learn, and daily on your knees offer up prayer to God, you will be taught of him, and attain to everlasting salvation. If this little book is useful to you, it will make you more useful at home: and, when you are dead and gone, a plentiful harvest of godly people may become followers of you, as you are of Christ. On the other hand, should you trifle with these hints, or prejudice others against them, yourself must answer for it before God.