

Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit.

KING'S GARDENS.

A Sermon

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"The king's garden."—Nehemiah iii. 15.

THERE have been many very famous king's gardens, such as those "hanging gardens" in Nineveh, wherein Sardanapalus delighted himself, and that remarkable garden of Cyrus, in which he took such great interest, because, as he said, every tree and every plant in it had been both planted and tended by his own royal hand. Imagination might bid you wander among the beauties of the celebrated villas and gardens of the Roman emperors, or make you linger amid the roses and lilies of the voluptuous gardens of the Persian caliphs, but we have nobler work in hand. I call you to come with me to the orchard of pomegranates, to beds of spices, camphire with spikenard, calamus and cinnamon, myrrh and aloes, with trees of frankincense. I am not about to speak of the gardens of any earthly monarch, for we can find far fairer flowers and rarer fruits in the gardens of the King of kings, the resorts of his Son, the Prince Immanuel.

There are six of these "king's gardens" to which I shall conduct you, but we shall not have time to tarry in more than one of them.

I. The first of these king's gardens was THE GARDEN OF PARADISE, which was situate in the midst of Eden.

You will read of it in the book of Genesis. It was doubtless a fairer place than we have ever seen, and much more marvellous for beauty than we can imagine. It was full of all manner of delights, a fruitful spot wherein the man who was set to keep it would have no need to toil, but would find it a happy and refreshing exercise to train the luxurious plants. No sweat was ever seen upon his happy brow, for he cultivated a virgin soil. Abundance of luscious fruits ministered to his necessities. He could stretch himself upon soft couches of moss, and no inclemencies of weather disturbed his repose. No winter's wind scattered the leaves of Eden, no summer's heat burned up its flowers. There were sweet alternations of day and night, but the day brought no sorrow, and the night no danger. The beasts were there; yet not as beasts of prey, but as the obedient servants of that happy man whom God had made to have dominion over all the works of his hands. In the midst of the garden grew that mysterious tree of life, of which we know so little literally, but of

which, I trust, we know so much in its spiritual meaning, for we have fed upon its fruits, and have been healed by its leaves. Hard by it stood the tree of knowledge of good and evil, placed there as the test of obedience. Adam's mind was equally balanced, it had no bias to evil, and God left him to the freedom of his will, giving this as the test of his loyalty, that, if obedient, he would never touch the fruit of that one tree. Why need he? There were tens of thousands of trees, all of which bowed down their branches with abundant fruit for his hunger or his luxury. Why need he desire that solitary tree which God had fenced and hedged about? But, in an evil hour, at the serpent's base suggestion, we know not how soon after his creation, he put forth his hand and plucked from the forbidden tree! The mere plucking of the fruit seems little to the thoughtless, but the breaking of the Maker's law was a great offence to heaven, for it was man's throwing down the gage of battle against his Creator, and breaking his allegiance to his Lord and Master; this was great, great in itself and in its mischievous effects, for Adam fell that day, and out of Eden he was driven to till the thankless, thorn-bearing soil, and you and I fell in him, and were banished with him. We were in his loins. He was "the father of us all," and on us he has brought the curse of toil, and in us all he has sown the seeds of iniquity. Let it never be forgotten, in connection with the garden of Eden, that we are not now a pure and sinless race, and cannot be by nature, however civilised we may become. Men are born no longer with balanced minds, but a heavy weight of original sin in the scale. We are averse to that which is good. The bias of the mind of man, when he is born into the world, is towards that which is evil, and we as naturally go astray as the serpent naturally learns to hiss, or the wolf to tear and to devour.

Ah! brethren and sisters, beware of thinking too little of the fall. Slight thoughts upon the fall are at the root of false theologies; the mischief that has been wrought in us is not a trifling matter, but a thing to be trembled at. Only the divine hand can reclaim us. The house of manhood has been shaken to its foundations; each timber is decayed; the leprosy is in the tottering wall. Man must be made new by the same creating hand that first made him, or he never can be a dwelling place fit for God. Let those who boast of their natural goodness look to the garden of Eden and be ashamed of their pride, and then examine their own actions by the glass of God's most holy law, and be confounded that they should dream of purity. How can he be pure that is born of woman? "Who can bring a clean thing out of an unclean thing? Not one." As our mothers were sinful, such are we, and such will our children be; as long as men are brought into the world by natural generation, we shall be "born in sin and shapen in iniquity;" and, if we are to be accepted by God, we must be born again, and made new creatures in Christ Jesus.

Alas! then, alas! for that first king's garden! The flowers are gone; the birds have ceased to sing! The winter's winds howl through it, and the summer's sun scorches it! The beasts of prey are there. Perhaps the very site of it, which is now unknown, may be a den of dragons, an habitation for the pelican of the wilderness, and the bittern of desolation! Fit image, if it be so, of our natural estate, for we were

altogether given up to desolation and destruction, unless one mighty to save had espoused our cause and undertaken our redemption.

II. The second king's garden to which I will introduce you is very different from the first, but it yields more fragrant spices and healthier herbs by far. It is THE GARDEN OF GETHSEMANE—the garden of the olive-press, wherein the Lord Jesus Christ was the olive, and God's anger against sin was the press.

Put off your shoes from off your feet, for the place whereon you stand is holy ground! 'Tis night. Yonder are twelve men walking, and talking sweetly as they walk. Observe one, a mysterious, majestic Person, who is evidently superior to the rest. It is the Son of Man. Hush! It is the Son of God, and as he talks you can hear words like these, "I am the vine, ye are the branches; abide in me and I in you." We will conceal ourselves behind that group of olives, and will see what is to happen here. This is the place where that mysterious Son of God was often to be found with his disciples. Just as God walked in the first garden in Eden, so the Son of God walked in the second garden; and as God in the first garden communed with man, so of the second garden it is written Jesus oftentimes resorted thither with his disciples. See, he has dismissed eight of them. He has told them to wait yonder, and on he goes with only three—Peter, and James, and John—the chosen out of the eleven—and speaking to them, and bidding them watch, he leaves them, and is all alone. Let us draw as near as we may; we see the Son of God in prayer, and as he prays, his earnestness gathers strength. He is striving with an unseen enemy—struggling like a man who would overcome an adversary, wrestling so vigorously that he sweats; but it is a strange sweat! "His sweat was, as it were great drops of blood, falling to the ground." He is beginning to drink the cup of Jehovah's wrath, which was due to our sins, a cup which we could not have emptied even through eternity, though every drop of it had been a hell. Christ is quaffing the wrath-cup, and as he trembles under the fiery influence of the draught of worse than wormwood and gall, he cries, "If it be possible, let this cup pass from me." But he recovers himself, and his prayer is, "Nevertheless, not as I will, but as thou wilt." Backwards and forwards you see him go like a man distracted. Three times he looks to the disciples for comfort, but they are slumbering, and then again he returns to his God and casts himself upon his face, with strong crying and tears, pouring out his soul in blood before high heaven, such is the anguish of his tortured heart.

Herein behold the beginning of our redemption. Jesus then began to suffer in our room and stead, atoning for our iniquity. The mischief of Eden fell upon Gethsemane. The mist of sin rose up in the garden of Paradise, and as it rose it gathered and collected into a black, tremendous storm cloud, and anon it burst, with flashes of lightning and with claps of thunder, upon the great Shepherd of the sheep, that we, who deserved to be overwhelmed by the tempest, might find fair weather in the rest which remaineth for the people of God.

Perhaps no sight that was ever beheld of men or angels, except the crucifixion, was more tremendous than the agony of Gethsemane. It must have been a terrible spectacle to have seen martyrs in the fire, or men and women devoured by lions and bears in the Roman amphitheatre.

theatre, but then to the Christian's eye there was a pleasure mingled with these ghastly sights, for God sustained his faithful ones. They clapped their hands amidst the fire. They sang when the wild beasts were leaping upon them. Such holy joy beamed from their countenances, that their brethren were comforted rather than distressed, and saints wished to be there with them, that they might die as they died and win the martyr's crown. But, when you look at Christ in the garden, you miss the help which the martyrs had. God forsakes him. He must tread the winepress alone, and of the people there must be none with him. Ay! and yet, dark as that night was, the darkest night that ever fell upon this world, it was the mother of that gospel light of finished redemption which now enlightens the Gentiles and brings glory unto Israel.

Let us leave the king's garden, then, with feelings of deep repentance that we should have made Jesus suffer so, and yet with holy gladness to think that thus hath he redeemed us from the ruins of the fall.

III. I claim a moment's thought for the GARDEN OF THE BURIAL AND THE RESURRECTION.

In Joseph's garden, in the new tomb, the Beloved of our souls slept for awhile, and thence arose to his glory-life. Detained of death he could not be, for he was no longer a lawful Captive, he had finished his work and earned his reward, and therefore the imprisoning stone was rolled away. He is not here, for he is risen; the seal is broken, the watchmen are dispersed, the stone is removed, the Captive is free. What comfort is here, for, as Jesus rose, so all his slumbering saints shall likewise leave the tomb. His resurrection is the resurrection of all the saints. Wait but awhile, and the tomb shall be no longer the treasury of death. So surely as the Lord came forth from the sepulchre to glory and immortality, all his saints are justified and clean. None can accuse us now that the Lord has risen indeed no more to die. His one offering hath perfected for ever all the chosen ones, and his glorious uprising is the guarantee of their acceptance. Faith delights in the garden where Magdalene found her unknown, yet well known, Lord, and where angel's kept watch and ward over the couch which the immortal Sufferer had relinquished. Henceforth it is to us a king's garden, abounding with pleasant fruits and fragrant flowers.

IV. And now I desire to take you to a fourth king's garden. You will not have far to go. Put your hand into your bosom and your finger will be on the latch of its door. It is THE GARDEN OF THE HUMAN HEART.

The heart is a little garden, little apparently, but yet so extensive that it is all but infinite, for who can tell the limit of the heart of man, or how far-darting the imaginations and the affections of the soul of man may be? Now, this little-great thing, the human heart, is meant to be a garden for God. Did I say it was a garden? It should be so, but alas! by nature it scarcely deserves the name, for I perceive it to be all overgrown with weeds; thistle and briar, deadly nightshade, and nettles, and I know not what besides, spring up everywhere. I see trees, but they drop with poison, like the deadly upas, whose drip is death. There are no luscious fruits, but instead thereof grapes of Gomorrah and apples of Sodom; this loathsome den of festering evils is what

should have been God's garden, but lo! it is a tangled wilderness of all manner of noisome things; thorns, also, and thistles doth it bring forth.

What must be done to this neglected garden? What heavenly horticulture can be used upon it to reclaim it from its desert state? God, the great Husbandman, must come and turn it over after his own fashion. The rough plough of conviction must be dragged through it. The spade of trouble must break up the surface and smash in pieces the clods, and kill the weeds, and fire must burn up the rubbish. Has that ever been done in the garden of your heart, dear hearer? Have you ever had your soul ploughed and cross ploughed and harrowed with sorrow till you were driven well-nigh to despair? Have you seen your sweet sins killed, so that you could not take pleasure in them any longer, but desired to be clean rid of them? That must be done if the garden is to be reclaimed and made worthy of the divine owner.

Then when the soil is broken up, and the clods are turned, there must be seed-sowing, and the planting of slips from the tree of life, seeds from the nurseries of heaven, seeds that shall turn to flowers which shall be full of sweet perfume, acceptable to Christ. The seeds of faith, and love, and hope, and patience, and perseverance, and zeal, must be carefully cast into prepared soil by the Holy Spirit's hand, and fostered by the same kindly care. Ere the heart can be called a garden fit for the King of kings, these must bud, and blossom, and yield their fruits. When I regard attentively that garden which was so lately covered over with weeds, but which is now sown and planted, I perceive that the plants grow not well unless the soil be drained. There must be always drained out of us much superfluity of naughtiness and excess of carnal confidence, or our heart will be a cold swamp, a worthless plant-killing bog. Affliction drains us. We do not like to have our money or our friends taken from us, and yet the love of these might ruin us for all fruit-bearing if God did not remove them. Besides the draining, there must also be constant hoeing, and raking, and digging. After a garden is made, the flower-beds are never left long alone, the gardener must have his eye upon them or they run to riot. If they were left to themselves, they would soon breed weeds again and return to the old confusion, but the hoe must be constantly kept going, if the garden is to be clean. So with the garden of the heart; cleansing and pruning must be done every day, and God must do it through ourselves, and we must do it by constant self examination and repentance, striving in the power of the Holy Spirit to keep ourselves free from the sins which do so easily beset us. I find that the weeds grow fast enough in my soul, and keep me in full employment to check their growth. Cowper talks about

"The dear hour which brought me to thy foot,
And cut up all my follies by the root."

Surely, good Cowper must have made a mistake! I know mine were never cut up by the roots. When they have been cut down, the root soon sprouts again. They will come up by the root one day, as I believe and hope, and till then I must be incessantly watchful; but the roots are there still; alas! alas! alas! that it should be so! O Lord Jesus, help us, or we shall be overgrown with our besetting sins. Corruption still remaineth even in the heart of the regenerate, and the garden

of the King of kings is often overgrown with weeds. But still for God it is a garden now, a garden for Jesus to walk in, and there are happy times when he deigns to sit down in the arbour of our souls. What a royal garden our poor heart then becomes! It may be the body is covered with poor garments, it may be our whole outward man is very sick and faint; but still our manhood is a King's garden when Christ is within, and we are kings and priests unto our God when Jesus holds fellowship with us. The angels come into that garden too, and when the air is still, and the noise of outside cares is hushed, we have often enjoyed a little heaven within our heart, the beginning of the heaven to which we hope soon to go. Dear hearer, do you know what we mean by paradise within, glory beaming in the heart, heaven in the soul? Jesus can teach you this.

The heart is a King's garden, beloved. Jesus bought it with his precious blood, and he has now by his grace come into it and claimed it to be his own. My friend, if he has not come to you yet, I hope he will. If you have not given your heart to him, I hope you may be led to do so by his gracious Spirit. But, if your heart be his, oh, keep it for your Beloved! Do not give the keys to anyone else. The love of husband, wife, and child, each of these is to have its proper place, but the heart's core is the King's garden. Mark you, it is not the husband's garden, nor the wife's garden, nor the child's garden; the dearest idols we have known must not be set up there; it is the King's garden. I hope you will say to-night, before you go to rest, "O king, come into my garden, and eat my pleasant fruit! Awake, O heavenly wind, and blow upon the garden of my soul, and let all the plants of my new nature give forth their sweetness, that my Beloved may be charmed with my company, and that I may be filled with his sweet love."

V. However, I want you to spend most of your time in a fifth garden, and that is THE GARDEN OF THE CHRISTIAN CHURCH—*our* garden, and yet the King's garden, planted and flourishing in this place.

Follow me in each word of the text. What is it? *A garden.* The church of God is a garden. Many thoughts are gathered in that one metaphor like bees in a hive. It is called a garden in the book of Solomon's Song, so I know that we are not wrong in using the illustration. But what does a garden mean?

In the first place, it implies *separation*. A garden is not the open waste, the heath, or the common; it is not a wilderness; it is walled around; it is hedged in. Ah! Christian, when you join the church, remember you, too, become by profession hedged in for King Jesus. I earnestly desire to see the wall of separation between the church and the world made broader and stronger. Believe me, nothing gives me more sorrow than when I hear of church members saying, "Well, there is no harm in this; there is no harm in that," and getting as near to the world as possible. It does not matter what you may think of it, but I am certain that grace is at a low ebb in your soul when you even raise the question of how far you may go in worldly conformity. We are to avoid the very appearance of evil, and especially just at this festive season of the year, this Christmas, when so many of you are having your parties, your children's sports, and all that kind of thing.

I would have you doubly jealous, do recollect, church members, that you are to be Christians always, if Christians at all; we do not grant dispensations to sin, as the Roman Catholics did in Luther's day. You are always to wear your regimentals as Christian soldiers, and never, at any time, to say, "Well, I shall do this just now; it is only once a year; I shall do as the world does; I cannot be out of the fashion." You must be either out of the fashion, or out of the true church, recollect that, because the place for Christ's church is altogether out of the fashion. You are called to go forth without the camp, bearing his reproach. If you want to be in the camp, you cannot be Christ's disciple, for the love of the world is enmity to Christ. You *must* be a separated one or be lost. If you want to be the common, you cannot be the garden; and if you are willing and anxious to be the garden, why, then, do not attempt to be the common. Keep the hedges up; keep the gates well bolted; king's gardens must not be left open to thieves and robbers. Be not conformed to the world, but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind. The King's garden, is a separated place—keep it so.

The king's garden is a *place of order*. You do not, when you go into your garden, find the flowers all put in anyhow, but the wise gardener arranges them according to their tints and hues, so that in the midst of summer the garden shall look like a rainbow that has been broken to pieces and let down upon the earth, delightful to gaze upon. All the walks are regular, the beds are in proportion, and the plants well arranged, just as they should be. Such should the Christian church be—pastor, deacons, elders, members, all in their proper places. We are not a load of bricks, but a house. The church is not a mere heap, but it is to be a palace built for God, a temple in which he manifests himself. Let us all try to maintain order in the household of Christ, and above all things hate discord and confusion. Let us be men who know how to keep rank, maintaining a decent order and regularity in all things. We seek not the order which consists in all sleeping in their places, like corpses in the catacombs, but we desire the order which finds all working in their places for the common cause of the Lord Jesus. May we never become a disorderly, disunited, irregular church. May there be order in the garden, preserved by the power of love and grace.

A garden is a *place of beauty*. Such should the Christian church be. You gather together the fairest flowers from all lands, and put them in your garden, and if you see no beauties in the streets, you expect to see them in the florist's beds. So, if there be no holiness, no love, no zeal, no prayerfulness outside in the world, yet we should see these things in the church. We are not to take the world to be our guide, but we are to excel it. We must do more than others. The Lord Jesus Christ told his disciples that *their* righteousness *must* exceed that of even the Scribes and Pharisees, or they could not enter the kingdom; and the genuine Christian must seek to be more excellent in his life than the best moralist, because Christ's garden ought to have the best flowers in all the world. Even the best is poor compared with Christ's deservings; let us not put him off with withered and dying plants. The rarest, richest, choicest lilies and roses ought to bloom in the place which Jesus calls his own.

The king's garden is *a place of growth*, too. I do not suppose the florist would think that soil fit to be a garden in which his plants would not grow. It would be a dead loss to him if the slips remained slips, and if the buds never turned to flowers. So in the church of God. We are not introduced into fellowship to be always the same, always little children and babes in grace. We should grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. The prayer-meeting should be a school of practical education for our beloved young members, a place for the young nestlings to try their callous wings. If they try to pray, at first they may almost break down, perhaps, but if they will not give way to a foolish timidity, they will soon get over it, and find themselves useful, not merely in public prayer, but in a thousand works of usefulness besides. Growth should be rapid where Jesus is the Husbandman, and the Holy Spirit the dew from above.

Again, a garden is *a place of retirement*. When a man is in his garden, he does not expect to see all his customers walking down between the beds to do business with him. "No," saith he, "I am walking in the garden, and I expect to be alone." So the Lord Jesus Christ would have us reserve the church to be a place in which he can manifest himself to us, as he doth not unto the world. Oh! I wish that Christians were more retired, that they kept their hearts more shut up for Christ! I am afraid we often worry and trouble ourselves, like Martha, with much serving, so that we have not the room for Christ that Mary had, and do not sit at his feet as we ought to do. The Lord grant us grace to keep our hearts as closed gardens for Christ to walk in.

This, then, is a poor description of what the church is; and now, very bri fly, *whose is it?*

The church is a garden, but it is *the King's* garden. The church is not mine, nor yours, but the King's. It is the King's garden, because he chose it for himself.

"We are a garden walled around,
Chosen, and made peculiar ground;
A little spot enclosed by grace
Out of the world's wide wilderness."

We are the King's, because he bought us. Naboth said he would not give up his vineyard, because he inherited it. So doth Christ inherit us by an indefeasible title. We are his heritage, and he has so dearly bought us with his own blood that he will never give us up, blessed be his name! We are his, because he has conquered us. He won us in fair fight, and now we acknowledge the validity of his title-deeds, and confess, every one of us, as the members of his church, that we are his, and that he is ours.

What a nobility this gives to Christ's church! I have sometimes heard people talk disparagingly of church meetings; there may be but few persons present, some of those may be young members, some may be very old, yet I have been much grieved when I have heard people despise such a church meeting, for Christ would not despise it. Let such beware. Whenever the church meets, either as a whole or representatively, there is a solemn dignity cast about that assembly

which is not to be found in a parliament of kings and princes. Ay, I will say it—if Louis Napoleon could call a senate of all the potentates in this world in Paris, and hold a congress there. the whole of them put together would not be worth the snap of a finger compared with half-a-dozen godly old women who meet together in the name of Christ as a church, in obedience to the Lord's command; for God would not be there with the potentates—what cares he for them?—but he would be with the most poor and despised of his people who meet together as a church in Jesus Christ's name. "Lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world," is more glorious than ermine, or purple, or crown. Constitute a church in the name of Christ, and meet together as such, and there is no assembly upon the face of the earth that can be compared with it, and even the assembly of the first-born in heaven is but a branch of the grand whole of which the assemblies of the church on earth make up an essential part. The church is *the King's garden*.

I am going to ask, now, if the church be a garden, *what does it need?*

One thing it certainly requires, is *labour*. You cannot keep a garden in proper order without work. We want more labourers in this church, especially of one sort. We want some who will be *planters*. I had a letter last week from a young woman; I do not know who she is; I do not know where she sits; it may be in the top gallery, it is quite as likely to be in the second—perhaps more likely; and in the area, quite as likely again. She says that she has been here for two years; that she has been very anxious about her soul, and she has often wished that somebody would speak to her, but nobody has done so. Now, if I knew where she sat, I should say to the friends who sit there, that I am ashamed of them! As I do not know where she sits, will those of you who do love Christ, but who have not been in the habit of looking after others, be so kind as to be ashamed of yourselves, because there is somebody or other to be blamed in this business. If you love Jesus at all, I cannot tell how you can let a person come to this Tabernacle for two years and not speak to them. Somebody has been negligent, very negligent; whoever it may be, let him see to it. I do not say you can speak upon the best things the first time you see them, though you might try to do that at any rate; but how can you have been silent for two years? How is this? You have been here twice on the Sunday, and that young woman has been here twice; well, there are two hundred times—two hundred opportunities that you have lost; two hundred times that you have let that poor soul go away burdened without speaking to her! I want labourers very badly, real hard-working soul-winners. I want planters who can get the young slips and put them where they will grow. I want helpers who will gather up the young lambs just as they are born, and carry them in their bosom a little while; spiritual nurses who will give comfort to the broken-hearted, and pour in the oil of consolation into the wounds of poor trembling sinners.

In every church there ought to be some *to watch over those who are planted*. When we receive members we ought to look after them, and as one person cannot do it thoroughly, as even the elders and deacons are hardly numerous enough for so great a work, it should be the aim and duty of all the experienced Christians in the church to fondly tend

the younger ones. I believe that many of you do this, and I am very thankful to zealous friends who are not in office in the church, but who do a great deal in visiting the sick and watching over the younger members. Only I want *all of you* to do it. Oh! if everybody were duly anxious about keeping this garden in order, how beautifully trimmed all the borders would be, and how few weeds should we find springing up in the beds! May I ask you, members of the church, are you doing your duty by the King's garden? You are yourselves his own chosen ones, and he has worked for you, so that you have no need to work to save yourselves; but still, you must not be idle, for your Lord has said to you, "Go, work to-day in my vineyard." Are you doing it? I thank you if you are. If you are not, blame yourselves.

There should be a little band in every church *to collect the straggling*. Our vines will grow out of order if they can, but we must deal wisely with them, and fasten them up in their places. We must be on the alert where we see backsliding begin. How much can be done by old Christians in trying to stop backsliding amongst the young! I believe that half the cases that have gone badly might have been stopped by a little judicious forethought, if believers had taken them in time. I say again, what can we, who are the officers of this church, do with so many? Why, we number more than three thousand five hundred in church fellowship. But if you will look after each other, and seek wherever you see a little decline, a little coldness, to bring the brother back, the King's garden will be well cared for. The King's garden wants labourers; may you all labour, and its wants in this respect will be met.

Sometimes we need, brethren, *to burn up the rubbish and sweep up the leaves*. In the best church there will always be some falling leaves. Somebody gets out at the elbow with another brother. We are not any of us perfect. We get on far more than reasonably well with one another, as a church. I never saw any church that was really so well knit together in Christian love as we are; but there are always a few leaves about, and not a little dust to be put in the corner and burned. May I ask a brother, whenever he sees any mischief, to sweep it up and say nothing about it. Whenever you find that such-and-such a brother is going a little amiss, talk to him about it quietly; do not spread it all over the church, and make jealousies and suspicions. Pick up the leaf and destroy it. When a brother member has offended you, so that you feel vexed, forgive him; for I dare say *you* will want forgiveness before many days are over. We have none of us, perhaps, the sweetest of tempers, but, if we have the sweetest, the way to prove it is by forgiving those who have not. If every one would seek to make peace, there never could be any great accumulation of discord in the King's garden to annoy him; but when he came walking in he would find it all beautiful and in good order, and all the flowers blooming delightfully, and he would find his delights with the sons of men.

Now, I have said that the church wants labourers, but, dear friends, it wants something else. *It wants new plants*. I wish I might find some to-night. Our King finds plants for his garden outside the wall. He takes the wild olive branches, and grafts them into the good olive, and then the sap changes the nature. A new thing that! It is not thus in our gardens at home, but wonders are wrought in the garden

of the King. He transplants weeds from the dunghill, and makes them to grow as lilies in the midst of his fair garden. Will you be such a plant? May the Master's love constrain you to desire to be such a one, and, if you desire it, you shall have it. Trust in the Lord Jesus Christ, and you are his. Rest alone upon him, and you are a plant of his right hand planting, and shall never be rooted up. God grant that you may blossom in the skies.

But, dear friends, all the labourers and all the new plants would not be what the church requires if she had not something else, for every garden wants *rain*, and every garden needs *sunshine*. This church, if it had ever so many labourers, could never prosper without the dew of the Holy Spirit, and the sunshine of the divine favour. We have had these blessings to a very great extent. We must pray that we may have more. I should like to know of some of you, how long it is since you have been to a prayer-meeting. Shall I stop and let you count? Well, you have not been just lately, because it is Christmas-time. Very well, I did not expect to see you; and, if I had expected, I should have been disappointed. But it was not Christmas-time last October, and yet you were not here then. Some of you very seldom come at all. If you are lawfully detained at home, I would never ask you to come, or upbraid you for minding your home duties, for you have no right to leave legitimate business that ought to be done to come here. But I am certain that some of you are idle, and might come if you liked. I pray the Lord to send you a horse-whip in the shape of trouble in your conscience till you do come, for it very much weakens us all in our prayers when our numbers decline; and whenever people come to despise week-night services, be sure of it, farewell to the vital power of godliness, for week-night services are very, very much the stamp of the man. Any hypocrite will come on a Sunday, but a man does need to take some interest in religious services to be found mingling with the people of God in prayer. Am I to believe that some of you do not care whether souls are saved or not? Am I to believe that some of you, our church members, have no care whether our ministry is blessed or not? Am I to believe that you continue members of a church in which you take no interest? Am I to believe that it is nothing to you whether Christ is crowned or despised? I will not believe it, and yet your absence from the meetings for prayer tends to make me fear that it must be so. I beg you correct yourselves in this matter, and as the King's garden wants rain and sunshine, and we cannot expect to have it without prayer, let us not forget the assembling of ourselves together as the manner of some is. Oh! for more prayer, more to pray, and for those who do pray, to pray with more fervour and more constancy in supplication! One favour I would ask. If you cannot come to the prayer-meetings—and many of you, I know, cannot, and I do not speak to you, blaming you—do pray in the family, do pray in the closet for us. Do not let us become poor in prayer. It is a bad thing to become poor in money, because we need it for a thousand causes, and cannot get on without it. But we can do without money better than we can do without prayer. We *must* have your prayers. I had almost said, if you do not give us your daily prayers give up your membership, for

it is no good to yourselves, and cannot be of any use to us. The very least thing that a church member can do is to plead with God that the blessing may descend. It is the King's garden, and will you not pray for it? It is the King's own garden wherein he loves to walk, and which he has purchased with his blood; shall not your prayers go up that his church may flourish, and that his kingdom may come?

And now, lastly, on this point. This King's garden, *what does it produce?* If there had been time, I meant to have waited while you answered the question as to how much *you* produced. Sometimes in our garden we have a tree which is so loaded with fruit that we have to put props under it to keep the branches from trembling; there are one or two in this church of that sort, who bear much fruit for God, and are so weak in body that their very fruitfulness of zeal and earnestness seems as though it would break them. I pray God that with his gracious promise he may prop them up. I am afraid that this is not the picture of most of us. You say to the gardener sometimes, "Will there be any fruit on that tree this season? It is time that it should show." He looks, and looks, and looks again, and at last the good man says, "I think I can see one little one up at the top, sir, but I do not know whether it will come to much." That, I am afraid, is the photograph of many professors. There is fruit, or else they would not be saved ones, but it is "a little one." "Herein is my Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit; so shall ye be my disciples." May your prayer be, not for fruit only, but for much fruit, and may God send it. Remember, if there be any fruit at all, it all belongs to the King. If a soul be saved, *he* shall have the glory of it. If there be any advance made in the great cause of truth and righteousness, the crown shall be put upon his head. The keepers of the vineyard shall have their hundreds, but the King himself shall have his ten thousand times ten thousand, for he deserves it all.

VI. And now, dear friends, before I send you away, there is one more garden I must mention, but the time is so far past that I shall not keep you to say much about it; it is the GARDEN OF THE PARADISE ABOVE. I shall let God's word speak to you about that garden, and then I have done.

"And he showed me a pure river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding out of the throne of God and of the Lamb. In the midst of the street of it, and on either side of the river, was there the tree of life, which bare twelve manner of fruits, and yielded her fruit every month: and the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations. And there shall be no more curse: but the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it; and his servants shall serve him: and they shall see his face; and his name shall be in their foreheads. And there shall be no night there; and they need no candle, neither light of the sun; for the Lord God giveth them light: and they shall reign for ever and ever."

In that garden of the paradise above may we all be found at the last. Amen.

PORTIONS OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—

Genesis ii., and Matthew xxvi. 36—46.