

C. H. SPURGEON



***TALKS
TO FARMERS***

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"I went by the field of the slothful, and by the vineyard of the man void of understanding; And, lo, it was all grown over with thorns, and nettles had covered the face thereof, and the stone wall thereof was broken down. Then I saw, and considered it well: I looked upon it, and received instruction."— PROVERBS 24:30-32.

No doubt Solomon was sometimes glad to lay aside the robes of state, escape from the forms of court, and go through the country unknown. On one occasion, when he was doing so, he looked over the broken wall of a little estate which belonged to a farmer of his country. This estate consisted of a piece of ploughed land and a vineyard. One glance showed him that it was owned by a sluggard, who neglected it, for the weeds had grown right plentifully and covered all the face of the ground. From this Solomon gathered instruction. Men generally learn wisdom if they have wisdom. The artist's eye sees the beauty of the landscape because he has beauty in his mind. "To him that hath shall be given," and he shall have abundance, for he shall reap a harvest even from the field that is covered with thorns and nettles. There is a great difference between one man and another in the use of the mind's eye. I have a book entitled, "The Harvest of a Quiet Eye," and a good book it is: the harvest of a quiet eye can be gathered from a

sluggard's land as well as from a well-managed farm. When we were boys we were taught a little poem, called, "Eyes and no Eyes," and there was much of truth in it, for some people have eyes and see not, which is much the same as having no eyes; while others have quick eyes for spying out instruction. Some look only at the surface, while others see not only the outside shell but the living kernel of truth which is hidden in all outward things.

We may find instruction everywhere. To a spiritual mind nettles have their use, and weeds have their doctrine. Are not all thorns and thistles meant to be teachers to sinful men? Are they not brought forth of the earth on purpose that they may show us what sin has done, and the kind of produce that will come when we sow the seed of rebellion against God? "I went by the field of the slothful, and by the vineyard of the man void of understanding," says Solomon; "I saw, and considered it well: I looked upon it, and received instruction." Whatever you see, take care to consider it well, and you will not see it in vain. You shall find books and sermons everywhere, in the land and in the sea, in the earth and in the skies, and you shall learn from every living beast, and bird, and fish, and insect, and from every useful or useless plant that springs out of the ground.

We may also gather rare lessons from things that we do not like. I am sure that Solomon did not in the least degree admire the thorns and the nettles that covered the face of the vineyard, but he nevertheless found instruction in them. Many are stung by nettles, but few are taught by them.

Some men are hurt by briars, but here is one who was improved by them. Wisdom hath a way of gathering grapes of thorns and figs of nettles, and she distils good from herbs which in themselves are noisome and evil. Do not fret, therefore, over thorns, but get good out of them. Do not begin stinging yourself with nettles, grip them firmly, and then use them for your soul's health. Trials and troubles, worries and turmoils, little frets and little disappointments, may all help you if you will. Like Solomon, see and consider them well—look upon them, and receive instruction.

As for us, we will now, first, consider *Solomon's description of a sluggard*: he is "a man void of understanding"; secondly, we shall notice *his description of the sluggard's land*: "it was all grown over with thorns, and nettles had covered the face thereof." When we have attended to these two matters we will close by *endeavoring to gather the instruction which this piece of waste ground may yield us*.

First, think of SOLOMON'S DESCRIPTION OF A SLOTHFUL MAN. Solomon was a man whom none of us would contradict, for he knew as much as all of us put together; and besides that, he was under divine inspiration when he wrote this Book of Proverbs. Solomon says, a sluggard is "a man void of understanding." The slothful does not think so; he puts his hands in his pockets, and you would think from his important air that he had all the Bank of England at his disposal. You can see that he is a very wise man in his own esteem, for he gives himself airs which are meant to impress you with a sense of his superior abilities. How he has come by his wisdom it would be hard to say. He has

never taken the trouble to think, and yet I dare not say that he jumps at his conclusions, because he never does such a thing as jump, he lies down and rolls into a conclusion. Yet he knows everything, and has settled all points: meditation is too hard work for him, and learning he never could endure; but to be clever by nature is his delight. He does not want to know more than he knows, for he knows enough already, and yet he knows nothing. The proverb is not complimentary to him, but I am certain that Solomon was right when he called him "a man void of understanding." Solomon was rather rude according to the dainty manners of the present times, because this gentleman had a field and a vineyard, and as Poor Richard saith, "When I have a horse and a cow every man biddeth me good morrow." How can a man be void of understanding who has a field and a vineyard? Is it not generally understood that you must measure a man's understanding by the amount of his ready cash? At all events you shall soon be flattered for your attainments if you have attained unto wealth. Such is the way of the world, but such is not the way of Scripture. Whether he has a field and a vineyard or not, says Solomon, if he is a sluggard he is a fool, or if you would like to see his name written out a little larger, he is a man empty of understanding. Not only does he not understand anything, but he has no understanding to understand with. He is empty-headed if he is a sluggard. He may be called a gentleman, he may be a landed proprietor, he may have a vineyard and a field; but he is none the better for what he has: nay, he is so much the worse, because he is a man void

of understanding, and is therefore unable to make use of his property.

I am glad to be told by Solomon so plainly that a slothful man is void of understanding, for it is useful information. I have met with persons who thought they perfectly understood the doctrines of grace, who could accurately set forth the election of the saints, the predestination of God, the firmness of the divine decree, the necessity of the Spirit's work, and all the glorious doctrines of grace which build up the fabric of our faith; but these gentlemen have inferred from these doctrines that they have to do nothing, and thus they have become sluggards. Do-nothingism is their creed. They will not even urge other people to labor for the Lord, because, say they, "God will do his own work. Salvation is all of grace!" The notion of these sluggards is that a man is to wait, and do nothing; he is to sit still, and let the grass grow up to his ankles in the hope of heavenly help. To arouse himself would be an interference with the eternal purpose, which he regards as altogether unwarrantable. I have known him look sour, shake his aged head, and say hard things against earnest people who were trying to win souls. I have known him run down young people, and like a great steam ram, sink them to the bottom, by calling them unsound and ignorant. How shall we survive the censures of this dogmatic person? How shall we escape from this very knowing and very captious sluggard? Solomon hastens to the rescue and extinguishes this gentleman by informing us that he is void of understanding. Why, he is the standard of orthodoxy, and he judges everybody! Yet Solomon applies another standard

to him, and says he is void of understanding. He may know the doctrine, but he does not understand it; or else he would know that the doctrines of grace lead us to seek the grace of the doctrines; and that when we see God at work we learn that he worketh in us, not to make us go to sleep, but to will and to do of his own good pleasure. God's predestination of a people is his ordaining them unto good works that they may show forth his praise. So, if you or I shall from any doctrines, however true, draw the inference that we are warranted in being idle and indifferent about the things of God, we are void of understanding; we are acting like fools; we are misusing the gospel; we are taking what was meant for meat and turning it into poison. The sluggard, whether he is sluggish about his business or about his soul, is a man void of understanding.

As a rule we may measure a man's understanding by his useful activities; this is what the wise man very plainly tells us. Certain persons call themselves "cultured," and yet they cultivate nothing. Modern thought, as far as I have seen anything of its actual working, is a bottle of smoke, out of which comes nothing solid; yet we know men who can distinguish and divide, debate and discuss, refine and refute, and all the while the hemlock is growing in the furrow, and the plough is rusting. Friend, if your knowledge, if your culture, if your education does not lead you practically to serve God in your day and generation, you have not learned what Solomon calls wisdom, and you are not like the Blessed One, who was incarnate wisdom, of whom we read that "he went about doing good." A lazy man is not like our Saviour, who said, "My Father worketh

hitherto, and I work." True wisdom is practical: boastful culture vapors and theorizes. Wisdom ploughs its field, wisdom hoes its vineyard, wisdom looks to its crops, wisdom tries to make the best of everything; and he who does not do so, whatever may be his knowledge of this, of that, or of the other, is a man void of understanding.

Why is he void of understanding? Is it not because *he has opportunities which he does not use*? His day has come, his day is going, and he lets the hours glide by to no purpose. Let me not press too hardly upon any one, but let me ask you all to press as hardly as you can upon yourselves while you enquire each one of himself, Am I employing the minutes as they fly? This man had a vineyard, but he did not cultivate it; he had a field, but he did not till it. Do you, brethren, use all your opportunities? I know we each one have some power to serve God; do we use it? If we are his children he has not put one of us where we are of necessity useless. Somewhere we may shine by the light which he has given us, though that light be only a farthing candle. Are we thus shining? Do we sow beside all waters? Do we in the morning sow our seed, and in the evening still stretch out our hand? for if not, we are rebuked by the sweeping censure of Solomon, who saith that the slothful is a "man void of understanding."

Having opportunities he did not use them, and next, *being bound to the performance of certain duties he did not fulfil them*. When God appointed that every Israelite should have a piece of land, under that admirable system which made every Israelite a land owner, he meant that each man should possess his plot, not to let it lie waste, but to

cultivate it. When God put Adam in the garden of Eden it was not that he should walk through the glades and watch the spontaneous luxuriance of the unfallen earth, but that he might dress it and keep it, and he had the same end in view when he allotted each Jew his piece of land; he meant that the holy soil should reach the utmost point of fertility through the labor of those who owned it. Thus the possession of a field and a vineyard involved responsibilities upon the sluggard which he never fulfilled, and therefore he was void of understanding. What is your position, dear friend? A father? A master? A servant? A minister? A teacher? Well, you have your farms and your vineyards in those particular spheres; but if you do not use those positions aright you will be void of understanding, because you neglect the end of your existence. You miss the high calling which your Maker has set before you.

The slothful farmer was unwise in these two respects, and in another also; *for he had capacities which he did not employ*. He could have tilled the field and cultivated the vineyard if he had chosen to do so. He was not a sickly man, who was forced to keep his bed, but he was a lazy-bones who was there of choice.

You are not asked to do in the service of God that which is utterly beyond you, for it is expected of us according to what we have and not according to what we have not. The man of two talents is not required to bring in the interest of five, but he is expected to bring in the interest of two. Solomon's slothful was too idle to attempt tasks which were quite within his power. Many have a number of dormant faculties of which they are scarcely aware, and many more

have abilities which they are using for themselves, and not for Him who created them. Dear friends, if God has given us any power to do good, pray let us do it, for this is a wicked, weary world. We should not even cover a glow-worm's light in such a darkness as this. We should not keep back a syllable of divine truth in a world that is so full of falsehood and error. However feeble our voices, let us lift them up for the cause of truth and righteousness. Do not let us be void of understanding, because we have opportunities that we do not use, obligations that we do not fulfil, and capacities which we do not exercise.

As for a sluggard in soul matters, he is indeed void of understanding, for *he trifles with matters which demand his most earnest heed*. Man, hast thou never cultivated thy heart? Hast the ploughshare never broken up the clods of thy soul? Has the seed of the Word never been sown in thee? or has it taken no root? Hast thou never watered the young plants of desire? Hast thou never sought to pull up the weeds of sin that grow in thy heart? Art thou still a piece of the bare common or wild heath? Poor soul! Thou canst trim thy body, and spend many a minute at the glass; dost thou not care for thy soul? How long thou takest to decorate thy poor flesh, which is but worm's meat, or would be in a minute if God took away thy breath! And yet all the while thy soul is uncombed, unwashed, unclad, a poor neglected thing. Oh it should not be so. You take care of the worse part and leave the better to perish through neglect. This is the height of folly! He that is a sluggard as to the vineyard of his heart is a man void of understanding. If I must be idle, let it be seen in my field and my garden, but not in my soul.

Or are you a Christian? Are you really saved, and are you negligent in the Lord's work? Then, indeed, whatever you may be, I cannot help saying you have too little understanding; for surely, when a man is saved himself, and understands the danger of other men's souls, he must be in earnest in trying to pluck the firebrands from the flame. A Christian sluggard! Is there such a being? A *Christian* man on half time? A Christian man working not at all for his Lord; how shall I speak of him? *Time* does not tarry, *DEATH* does not tarry, *HELL* does not tarry; Satan is not lazy, all the powers of darkness are busy: how is it that you and I can be sluggish, if the Master has put us into his vineyard? Surely we must be void of understanding if, after being saved by the infinite love of God, we do not spend and be spent in his service. The eternal fitness of things demands that a saved man should be an earnest man.

The Christian who is slothful in his Master's service *has no idea what he is losing*; for the very cream of religion lies in holy consecration to God. Some people have just enough religion to make it questionable whether they have any or no. They have enough godliness to make them uneasy in their ungodliness. They have washed enough of their face to show the dirt upon the rest of it. "I am glad," said a servant, "that my mistress takes the sacrament, for otherwise I should not know she had any religion at all." You smile, and well you may. It is ridiculous that some people should have no goods in their shop, and yet advertise their business in all the papers; should make a show of religion, and yet have none of the Spirit of God. I wish some professors would do Christ the justice to say, "No, I am *not* one of his disciples;

do not think so badly of him as to imagine that I can be one of them." We ought to be reflections *of* Christ; but I fear many are reflections *upon* Christ. When we see a lot of lazy servants, we are apt to think that their master must be a very idle person himself, or he would never put up with them. He who employs sluggards, and is satisfied with their snail-like pace, cannot be a very active man himself. O, let not the world think that Christ is indifferent to human woe, that Christ has lost his zeal, that Christ has lost his energy: yet I fear they will say it or think it if they see those who profess to be laborers in the vineyard of Christ nothing better than mere sluggards. The slothful, then, is a man void of understanding; he loses the honor and pleasure which he would find in serving his Master; he is a dishonor to the cause which he professes to venerate, and he is storing up thorns for his dying pillow. Let that stand as settled—the slothful, whether he be a minister, deacon, or private Christian, is a man void of understanding.

Now, secondly, LET US LOOK AT THE SLUGGARD'S LAND: "I went by the field of the slothful, and by the vineyard of the man void of understanding; And, lo, it was all grown over with thorns, and nettles had covered the face thereof." Note, first, that *land will produce something*. Soil which is good enough to be made into a field and a vineyard must and will yield some fruit or other; and so you and I, in our hearts and in the sphere God gives us to occupy, will be sure to produce something. We cannot live in this world as entire blanks; we shall either do good or do evil, as sure as we are alive. If you are idle in Christ's work,

you are active in the devil's work. The sluggard by sleeping was doing more for the cultivation of thorns and nettles than he could have done by any other means. As a garden will either yield flowers or weeds, fruits or thistles, so something either good or evil will come out of our household, our class, or our congregation. If we do not produce a harvest of good wheat, by laboring for Christ, we shall grow tares to be bound up in bundles for the last dread burning.

Note again that, if it be not farmed for God, *the soul will yield its natural produce*; and what is the natural produce of land if left to itself? What but thorns and nettles, or some other useless weeds? What is the natural produce of your heart and mine? What but sin and misery? What is the natural produce of your children if you leave them untrained for God? What but unholiness and vice? What is the natural produce of this great city if we leave its streets, and lanes, and alleys without the gospel? What but crime and infamy? Some harvest there will be, and the sheaves will be the natural produce of the soil, which is sin, death, and corruption.

If we are slothful, *the natural produce of our heart and of our sphere will be most inconvenient and unpleasant to ourselves*. Nobody can sleep on thorns, or make a pillow of nettles. No rest can come out of an idleness which lets ill alone, and does not by God's Spirit strive to uproot evil. While you are sleeping, Satan will be sowing. If you withhold the seed of good, Satan will be lavish with the seed of evil, and from that evil will come anguish and regret for time,

and it may be for eternity. O man, the garden put into thy charge, if thou waste thy time in slumber, will reward thee with all that is noisome and painful. "Thorns also and thistles shall it bring forth to thee."

In many instances there will be a great deal of this evil produce; for a field and a vineyard will yield more thistles and nettles than a piece of ground that has never been reclaimed. If the land is good enough for a garden, it will present its owner with a fine crop of weeds if he only stays his hand. A choice bit of land fit for a vineyard of red wine will render such a profusion of nettles to the slothful that he shall rub his eyes with surprise. The man who might do most for God, if he were renewed, will bring forth most for Satan if he be let alone. The very region which would have glorified God most if the grace of God were there to convert its inhabitants, will be that out of which the vilest enemies of the gospel will arise. Rest assured of that; the best will become the worst if we neglect it. Neglect is all that is needed to produce evil. If you want to know the way of salvation, I must take some pains to tell you; but if you want to know the way to be lost, my reply is easy; for it is only a matter of negligence:—"How shall we escape if we neglect so great salvation?" If you desire to bring forth a harvest unto God, I may need long to instruct you in ploughing, sowing, and watering; but if you wish your mind to be covered with Satan's hemlock, you have only to leave the furrows of your nature to themselves. The slothful asks for "A little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to sleep," and the thorns and thistles multiply beyond all numbering, and prepare for him many a sting.

While we look upon the lazy man's vineyard let us also peep into the ungodly sluggard's heart. He does not care about repentance and faith. To think about his soul, to be in earnest about eternity, is too much for him. He wants to take things easy, and have a little more folding of the arms to sleep. What is growing in his mind and character? In some of these spiritual sluggards you can see drunkenness, uncleanness, covetousness, anger, and pride, and all sorts of thistles and nettles; or where these ranker weeds do not appear, by reason of the restraint of pious connections, you find other sorts of sin. The heart cannot be altogether empty, either Christ or the devil will possess it. My dear friend, if you are not decided for God, you cannot be a neutral. In this war every man is for God or for his enemy. You cannot remain like a sheet of blank paper. The legible handwriting of Satan is upon you—can you not see the blots? Unless Christ has written across the page his own sweet name, the autograph of Satan is visible. You may say, "I do not go into open sin; I am moral," and so forth. Ah, if you would but look, and consider, and search into your heart, you would see that enmity to God and to his ways, and hatred of purity, are there. You do not love God's law, nor love his Son, nor love his gospel, you are alienated in your heart, and there is in you all manner of evil desires and vain thoughts, and these will flourish and increase so long as you are a spiritual sluggard, and leave your heart uncultivated. O, may the Spirit of God arouse you; may you be stirred to anxious, earnest thought, and then you will see that these rank growths must be uprooted, and that your heart must be turned up by the plough of conviction, and

sown with the good seed of the gospel, till a harvest rewards the great Husbandman.

Friend, if you believe in Christ, I want to peep over the hedge into *your heart* also, if you are a sluggish Christian; for I fear that nettles and thistles are threatening you also. Did I not hear you sing the other day—

"'Tis a point I long to know"?

That point will often be raised, for doubt is a seed which is sure to grow in lazy men's minds. I do not remember reading in Mr. Wesley's diary a question about his own salvation. He was so busy in the harvest of the Master that it did not occur to him to distrust his God. Some Christians have little faith in consequence of their having never sown the grain of mustard-seed which they have received. If you do not sow your faith by using it, how can it grow? When a man lives by faith in Christ Jesus, and his faith exercises itself actively in the service of his Lord, it takes root, grows upward, and become strong, till it chokes his doubts. Some have sadly morbid forebodings; they are discontented, fretful, selfish, murmuring, and all because they are idle. These are the weeds that grow in sluggards' gardens. I have known the slothful become so peevish that nothing could please them; the most earnest Christian could not do right for them; the most loving Christians could not be affectionate enough; the most active church could not be energetic enough; they detected all sorts of wrong where God himself saw much of the fruit of his Spirit. This censoriousness, this contention, this perpetual complaining is one of the nettles that are quite sure to grow in men's

gardens when they fold their arms in sinful ease. If your heart does not yield fruit to God it will certainly bring forth that which is mischievous in itself, painful to you, and injurious to your fellow-men. Often the thorns choke the good seed; but it is a very blessed thing when the good seed comes up so thick and fast that it chokes the thorns. God enables certain Christians to become so fruitful in Christ that their graces and works stand thick together, and when Satan throws in the tares they cannot grow because there is no room for them. The Holy Spirit by his power makes evil to become weak in the heart, so that it no longer keeps the upper hand. If you are slothful, friend, look over the field of your heart, and weep at the sight.

May I next ask you to look into *your own house* and home? It is a dreadful thing when a man does not cultivate the field of his own family. I recollect in my early days a man who used to walk out with me into the villages when I was preaching. I was glad of his company till I found out certain facts, and then I shook him off, and I believe he hooked on to somebody else, for he must needs be gadding abroad every evening of the week. He had many children, and these grew up to be wicked young men and women, and the reason was that the father, while he would be at this meeting and that, never tried to bring his own children to the Saviour. What is the use of zeal abroad if there is neglect at home? How sad to say, "My own vineyard have I not kept." Have you never heard of one who said he did not teach his children the ways of God because he thought they were so young that it was very wrong to prejudice them, and he had rather leave them to choose their own religion

when they grew older? One of his boys broke his arm, and while the surgeon was setting it the boy was swearing all the time. "Ah," said the good doctor, "I told you what would happen. You were afraid to prejudice your boy in the right way, but the devil had no such qualms; he has prejudiced him the other way, and pretty strongly too." It is our duty to prejudice our field in favor of corn, or it will soon be covered with thistles. Cultivate a child's heart for good, or it will go wrong of itself, for it is already depraved by nature. O that we were wise enough to think of this, and leave no little one to become a prey to the destroyer.

As it is with homes, so is it with *schools*. A gentleman who joined this church some time ago had been an atheist for years, and in conversing with him I found that he had been educated at one of our great public schools, and to that fact he traced his infidelity. He said that the boys were stowed away on Sunday in a lofty gallery at the far end of a church, where they could scarcely hear a word that the clergyman said, but simply sat imprisoned in a place where it was dreadfully hot in summer and cold in winter. On Sundays there were prayers, and prayers, and prayers, but nothing that ever touched his heart; until he was so sick of prayers that he vowed if he once got out of the school he would have done with religion. This is a sad result, but a frequent one. You Sunday-school teachers can make your classes so tiresome to the children that they will hate Sunday. You can fritter away the time in school without bringing the lads and lasses to Christ, and so you may do more hurt than good. I have known Christian fathers who by their severity and want of tenderness have sown their

family field with the thorns and thistles of hatred to religion instead of scattering the good seed of love to it. O that we may so live among our children that they may not only love us, but love our Father who is in heaven. May fathers and mothers set such an example of cheerful piety that sons and daughters shall say, "Let us tread in our father's footsteps, for he was a happy and a holy man. Let us follow our mother's ways, for she was sweetness itself." If piety does not rule in your house, when we pass by your home we shall see disorder, disobedience, pride of dress, folly, and the beginnings of vice. Let not your home be a sluggard's field, or you will have to rue it in years to come.

Let every deacon, every class-leader, and also every minister enquire diligently into the state of the field he has to cultivate. You see, brothers and sisters, if you and I are set over any department of our Lord's work, and we are not diligent in it, we shall be like barren trees planted in an orchard, which are a loss altogether, because they occupy the places of other trees which might have brought forth fruit unto their owners. We shall cumber the ground, and do damage to our Lord, unless we render him actual service. Will you think of this? If you could be put down as a mere cipher in the accounts of Christ, that would be very sad; but, brother, it cannot be so, you will cause a deficit unless you create a gain. Oh that through the grace of God we may be profitable to our Lord and Master! Who among us can look upon his life-work without some sorrow? If anything has been done aright we ascribe it all to the grace of God; but how much there is to weep over! How much that we would wish to amend! Let us not spend time in idle regrets, but

pray for the Spirit of God, that in the future we may not be void of understanding, but may know what we ought to do, and where the strength must come from with which to do it, and then give ourselves up to the doing of it.

I beg you once more to look at the great field of *the world*. Do you see how it is overgrown with thorns and nettles? If an angel could take a survey of the whole race, what tears he would shed, if angels could weep! What a tangled mass of weeds the whole earth is! Yonder the field is scarlet with the poppy of popery, and over the hedge it is yellow with the wild mustard of Mahometanism. Vast regions are smothered with the thistles of infidelity and idolatry. The world is full of cruelty, oppression, drunkenness, rebellion, uncleanness, misery. What the moon sees! What God's sun sees! What scenes of horror! How far is all this to be attributed to a neglectful church? Nearly nineteen hundred years are gone, and the sluggard's vineyard is but little improved! England has been touched with the spade, but I cannot say that it has been thoroughly weeded or ploughed yet. Across the ocean another field equally favored knows well the ploughman, and yet the weeds are rank. Here and there a little good work has been done, but the vast mass of the world still lies a moorland never broken up, a waste, a howling wilderness. What has the church been doing all these years? She ceased after a few centuries to be a missionary church, and from that hour she almost ceased to be a living church. Whenever a church does not labor for the reclaiming of the desert, it becomes itself a waste. You shall not find on the roll of history that for a length of time any Christian community has flourished after it has become

negligent of the outside world. I believe that if we are put into the Master's vineyard, and will not take away the weeds, neither shall the vine flourish, nor shall the corn yield its increase. However, instead of asking what the church has been doing for this nineteen hundred years, let us ask ourselves, What are we going to do now? Are the missions of the churches of Great Britain always to be such poor, feeble things as they are? Are the best of our Christian young men always going to stay at home? We go on ploughing the home field a hundred times over, while millions of acres abroad are left to the thorn and nettle. Shall it always be so? God send us more spiritual life, and wake us up from our sluggishness, or else when the holy watcher gives in his report, he will say, "I went by the field of the sluggish church, and it was all grown over with thorns and nettles, and the stone wall was broken down, so that one could scarcely tell which was the church and which was the world, yet still she slept, and slept, and slept, and nothing could waken her."

I conclude by remarking that THERE MUST BE SOME LESSON IN ALL THIS. I cannot teach it as I would, but I want to learn it myself. I will speak it as though I were talking to myself.

The first lesson is, that *unaided nature always will produce thorns and nettles, and nothing else*. My soul, if it were not for grace, this is all thou wouldst have produced. Beloved, are you producing anything else? Then it is not nature, but the grace of God that makes you produce it. Those lips that now most charmingly sing the praises of God would have been delighted with an idle ballad if the grace of God had not sanctified them. Your heart, that now cleaves to

Christ, would have continued to cling to your idols—you know what they were—if it had not been for grace divine. And why should grace have visited you or me—why? Echo answers, Why? What answer can we give? "'Tis even so, Father, for so it seemed good in thy sight." Let the recollection of what grace has done move us to manifest the result of that grace in our lives. Come, brothers and sisters, inasmuch as we were aforetime rich enough in the soil of our nature to produce so much of nettle and thistle—and God only knows how much we did produce—let us now pray that our lives may yield as much of good corn for the great Husbandman. Will you serve Christ less than you served your lusts? Will you make less sacrifice for Christ than you did for your sins? Some of you were whole-hearted enough when in the service of the evil one, will you be half-hearted in the service of God? Shall the Holy Spirit produce less fruit in you than that which you yielded under the spirit of evil?

God grant that we may not be left to prove what nature will produce if left to itself.

We see here, next, *the little value of natural good intentions*; for this man, who left his field and vineyard to be overgrown, always meant to work hard one of these fine days. To do him justice, we must admit that he did not mean to sleep much longer, for he said—"Yet a little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to sleep." Only a little doze, and then he would tuck up his sleeves and show his muscle. Probably the worst people in the world are those who have the best intentions, but never carry them out. In that way Satan lulls many to sleep. They hear an earnest sermon; but they do not arise and go to their Father; they

only get as far as saying, "Yes, yes, the far country is not a fit place for me; I will not stay here long. I mean to go home by-and-by." They said that forty years ago, but nothing came of it. When they were quite youths they had serious impressions, they were almost persuaded to be Christians, and yet they are not Christians even now. They have been slumbering forty years! Surely that is a liberal share of sleep! They never intended to dream so long, and now they do not mean to lie in bed much longer. They will not turn to Christ at once, but they are resolved to do so one day. When are you going to do it, friend? "Before I die." Going to put it off to the last hour or two, are you? And so, when unconscious, and drugged to relieve pain, you will begin to think of your soul? Is this wise? Surely you are void of understanding. Perhaps you will die in an hour. Did you not hear the other day of the alderman who died in his carriage? Little must he have dreamed of that. How would it have fared with you had you also been smitten while riding at your ease? Have you not heard of persons who fall dead at their work? What is to hinder your dying with a spade in your hand? I am often startled when I am told in the week that one whom I saw on Sunday is dead—gone from the shop to the judgment-seat. It is not a very long time ago since one went out at the doorway of the Tabernacle, and fell dead on the threshold. We have had deaths in the house of God, unexpected deaths; and sometimes people are hurried away unprepared who never meant to have died unconverted, who always had from their youth up some kind of desire to be ready, only still they wanted a little more sleep. Oh, my hearers, take heed of little delays, and short

puttings-off. You have wasted time enough already, come to the point at once before the clock strikes again. May God the Holy Spirit bring you to decision.

"Surely you do not object to my having a little more sleep?" says the sluggard. "You have waked me so soon. I only ask another little nap." "My dear man, it is far into the morning." He answers, "It is rather late, I know; but it will not be much later if I take just another doze." You wake him again, and tell him it is noon. He says, "It is the hottest part of the day: I daresay if I had been up I should have gone to the sofa and taken a little rest from the hot sun." You knock at his door when it is almost evening, and then he cries, "It is of no use to get up now, for the day is almost over." You remind him of his overgrown field and weedy vineyard, and he answers, "Yes, I must get up, I know." He shakes himself and says, "I do not think it will matter much if I wait till the clock strikes. I will rest another minute or two." He is glued to his bed, dead while he liveth, buried in his laziness. If he could sleep forever he would, but he cannot, for the judgment-day will rouse him. It is written, "And in hell he lift up his eyes, being in torment." God grant that you spiritual sluggards may wake before that; but you will not unless you bestir yourselves betimes, for "now is the accepted time"; and it may be now or never. To-morrow is only to be found in the calendar of fools; to-day is the time of the wise man, the chosen season of our gracious God. Oh that the Holy Spirit may lead you to seize the present hour, that you may at once give yourselves to the Lord by faith in Christ Jesus, and then from his vineyard—

"Quick uproot

The noisome weeds, that without profit suck

The soil's fertility from wholesome plants."

THE BROKEN FENCE.

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"I went by the field of the slothful, and by the vineyard of the man void of understanding; and lo, it was all grown over with thorns, and nettles had covered the face thereof, and *the stone wall thereof was broken down*. Then I saw, and considered it well: I looked upon it and received instruction."—PROVERBS 24:30-32.

THIS slothful man did no hurt to his fellow-men: he was not a thief, nor a ruffian, nor a meddler in anybody else's business. He did not trouble himself about other men's concerns, for he did not even attend to his own—it required too much exertion. He was not grossly vicious; he had not energy enough to care for that. He was one who liked to take things easily. He always let well alone, and, for the matter of that, he let ill alone, too, as the nettles and the thistles in his garden plainly proved. What was the use of disturbing himself? It would be all the same a hundred years hence; and so he took things just as they came. He was not a bad man, so some said of him; and yet, perhaps, it will be found at last that there is no worse man in the world than the man who is not good, for in some respects he is not good enough to be bad; he has not enough force of

character about him to serve either God or Baal. He simply serves himself, worshipping his own ease and adoring his own comfort. Yet he always meant to be right. Dear me! he was not going to sleep much longer, he would only have forty winks more, and then he would be at his work, and show you what he could do. One of these days he meant to be thoroughly in earnest, and make up for lost time. The time never actually came for him to begin, but it was always coming. He always meant to repent, but he went on in his sin. He meant to believe, but he died an unbeliever. He meant to be a Christian, but he lived without Christ. He halted between two opinions because he could not trouble himself to make up his mind; and so he perished of delay.

This picture of the slothful man and his garden and field overgrown with nettles and weeds represents many a man who has professed to be a Christian, but who has become slothful in the things of God. Spiritual life has withered in him. He has backslidden; he has come down from the condition of healthy spiritual energy into one of listlessness, and indifference to the things of God; and while things have gone wrong within his heart, and all sorts of mischiefs have come into him and grown up and seeded themselves in him, mischief is also taking place externally in his daily conduct. The stone wall which guarded his character is broken down, and he lies open to all evil. Upon this point we will now meditate. "The stone wall thereof was broken down."

Come, then, let us take a walk with Solomon, and stand with him and consider and learn instruction while we *look at this broken-down fence*. When we have examined it, let us *consider the consequences of broken-down walls*; and then, in the last place, let us try to *rouse up this sluggard that his wall may yet be repaired*. If this slothful person should be one of ourselves, may God's infinite mercy rouse us up before this ruined wall has let in a herd of prowling vices.

I. First let us take a LOOK AT THIS BROKEN FENCE.

You will see that in the beginning it was a very good fence, for it was a stone wall. Fields are often surrounded with wooden palings which soon decay, or with hedges which may very easily have gaps made in them; but this was a stone wall. Such walls are very usual in the East, and are also common in some of our own counties where stone is plentiful. It was a substantial protection to begin with, and well shut in the pretty little estate which had fallen into such bad hands. The man had a field for agricultural purposes, and another strip of land for a vineyard or a garden. It was fertile soil, for it produced thorns and nettles in abundance, and where these flourish better things can be produced; yet the idler took no care of his property, but allowed the wall to get into bad repair, and in many places to be quite broken down.

Let me mention some of the stone walls that men permit to be broken down when they backslide.

In many cases *sound principles were instilled in youth*, but these are forgotten. What a blessing is Christian education! Our parents, both by persuasion and example, taught many of us the things that are pure and honest, and