

Sabbath Readings.

THE OFFERING OF FIRST FRUITS.

"And the Lord spake unto Moses, saying, Speak unto the children of Israel, and say unto them. When ye be come into the land which I give unto you, and shall reap the harvest thereof, then ye shall bring a sheaf of the first-fruits of your harvest unto the priest; and he shall wave the sheaf before the Lord to be accepted for you. . . . And ye shall eat neither bread, nor parched corn, nor green ears, until the self-same day that ye have brought an offering unto your God."—*Levit.* xxiii. 9–14.



ALTHOUGH the ritual of the Mosaic law has long ago been done away, the great principles on which the main enactments of that ritual were founded have not been, and never will be, repealed or changed. Those enactments were not mere arbitrary commands, with no reason for them save the bare authority of Him who enjoined them. They expressed immutable truths, and reminded men of essential and ever-binding obligations. And these remain in all their integrity and force, though the forms in which they were expressed have passed away; a better, more complete expression being found for them in the facts and doctrines of the gospel. Thus, for example, the institute of sacrifice has been abolished; but the grand truths which that institute was intended to teach endure, and are taught with unspeakably greater power by the cross of Christ.

The text refers to one characteristic and frequently recurring provision of the law, namely, the sanctifying or setting apart of the first of everything for God. The first born of man and beast was thus to be reckoned "holy unto the Lord." And here it is commanded that at the festival of the Passover, before any of the corn of the commencing harvest was appropriated to human convenience and use, a sheaf of the first-fruits should be solemnly devoted to God. Let us enquire what lessons this command was intended to teach the Jews,—what lessons it is intended to teach us; for it becomes us seriously to take heed lest, in our thankfulness for the abrogation of the ceremonial law, we forget or evade the eternal truths and duties which that law expressed.

The first fruits of the harvest were to be

offered to God, as an acknowledgment that the blessings of the harvest came from God. In the wilderness the Israelites had been fed by the daily descent of the manna. "He gave them bread from heaven to eat."

But now their wants were to be supplied by the results of their own labour, and of the ordinary processes of nature. And the danger was lest they should forget, or fail to perceive, that this made no real difference as to the fact of their dependence upon God; that if they tilled the ground, the strength to till it, and the early and latter rain which made the tillage fruitful, must come from him. And so God, to keep them in mind of their dependence, bade them bring the first fruits of their harvest as an offering to him. And do not we need to be reminded of the same truth? Are not we also apt to forget that the golden plenty which crowns our fields this bright autumn tide comes from the same love and power which multiplied the five loaves and few fishes into a meal for thousands? There is danger—a danger of which it becomes us prayerfully to beware—lest the very commonness and constancy of God's gifts, and the instrumentality of human labour through which those gifts are secured by us, should beguile us to forget the Giver of all our mercies.

But the provision which the text records has lessons for us of wider application even than this,—lessons which may be briefly expressed in this threefold form:

- I. Our first for God.
- II. Our best for God.
- III. Our all for God.

I. Our first for God; or, in other words, God to be thought of, served, attended to before ourselves. This is the plain and obvious principle of the text,—a principle enforced with special emphasis in ver. 14: "Ye shall eat neither bread, nor parched corn, nor green ears, until ye have brought an offering unto your God." And the same principle pervades the Bible, enforcing the claim of God to the supreme love, homage, and service of our heart and life. You find this principle in the decalogue: the first table prescribes our duty to God, the second our duty to man. The first and great commandment is, "Thou shalt love the