

fact, in the mere reading of what has been quoted the best comment has already been given.

As to the text itself, it is an image from the natural world. This is quite in harmony with our Lord's manner. His teaching was constantly based on the objects of nature, as when He said, "Consider the lilies how they grow," or "Behold the fields, that they are white already to the harvest." But it is more than an invitation to attend merely to one of the expressive *aspects* of nature. It is an allusion to one of the *laws* of nature, to an ordained method, according to which an important process is carried on, as when He described the silent, gradual, pervading progress of religion by saying that the kingdom of heaven is "like leaven which a woman hid in three measures of meal," or when He counselled wise adaptations of means to ends in critical times by saying that during the process of fermentation it is essential that "new wine" should be put in "new wineskins." So here He calls our attention to the secret force that resides in the seed, which force, however, does not exert itself till the seed has been placed in the ground and begun to pass through the process of disintegration. This death is followed by a new and wonderful life. "If the corn of wheat die, it bringeth forth much fruit." We are familiar with this law of nature, with this life coming out of death; and all through the year we have occasion for thankfully watching and reviewing the great results of this law.

But it is worth while to look yet more closely into the illustration which our Lord uses. It will bear the test even of what may be called the physiological inquiry. Of course such passages are meant for the instruction of the popular mind, even more than of the scientific mind. Otherwise it could hardly be true that it is "to the poor" especially that "the Gospel is preached." Still such passages may often with advantage be

examined and illustrated from the scientific side. The process of the germination of the new plant, after the seed is placed in the earth, is one of the most interesting, one of the most curious, of all the changes that go on around us. It is a process, as it were, of self-sacrifice. There is a true death for the sake of a new life. This is more evident in some classes of plants than in others. But in the class of plants to which the wheat belongs, the process of dissolution can be watched, and the method by which nutrition and strength are given to a new and vigorous life, through the decay of the old.

It is to be added further, in order that we may see all the force of our Saviour's parable, that the seed itself presents a most extraordinary contrast to the living plant which comes from it. Nothing can be more apparently helpless—more separated off from everything else—more hard and dry and poor—than the corn of wheat in itself: and so it remains, until it is buried in the earth. "Verily, verily, I say unto you, Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone." One of the marvels of our life is to compare the broad waving fields of grain with the mere corn-heaps from which they came. Could there be a greater difference? And yet the law that connects them is an immutable law: and it is the law of *death*. "That which thou sowest is not quickened, except it die: and that which thou sowest, thou sowest not that body that shall be, but bare grain, it may chance of wheat, or of some other grain: but God giveth it a body as it hath pleased Him. . . . It is sown in weakness: it is raised in power."

The first application of the parable before us is, of course, to Christ Himself. Let us adore this holy corn of wheat, cast by the Incarnation into the field of this world, then by Resurrection and Ascension springing up and growing into a marvellous life, and now, over all the great harvest-field of God, bearing "much fruit."