

out in the world. On our knees we gather close around the sown wheat-grain, and, with our tears and prayers, we watch and water it, and wonder whether it will die or grow.

Oh this sowing of the wheat-grain ! We have something to do with it, and it is not without toil and trouble, tears and risks. It is still done. With much weeping the preacher still bears forth the precious seed in his bosom, and sows it on rockland and wayside, and choking weeds and spiny thorns, and his faithfulness, his risk and recklessness, are not always for much of seeming good, and you too, my hearers, in your home yonder, sow the precious wheat-grain ; and around it, on your knees, you wait, and watch, and weep, and work, night and day, for it growing. "And you sometimes fear it is not going to grow at all." Then there are other sowers for the precious wheat-grain, earnest Christian workers, men and women of faith and prayer, who go far forth to sow the world's waste-lands, who find their way to the haunts of the wretched and wicked, and there they risk it. There must be more or less of risk, if any good is to be done, if the world is to be won for Christ. The grain of wheat must be sown.

Sowing the seed with an aching heart,
Sowing the seed while the tear-drops start,
Sowing in hope till the reapers come
Gladly to gather the harvest-home.

Oh what shall the harvest be ?

IV. THE DYING OF THE WHEAT-GRAIN.

"Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die."

The moisture and warmth of the soil cause the wheat-grain sown in it to grow, and growth means decay. The life-germ derives its nourishment from the body of the wheat-grain, until it has sent forth a little rootlet into the surrounding soil, and by that time the grain itself is gone. You look for it, but it cannot be found. The life and growth from itself have used up all its substance. It is dead, gone. And only by this self-dying, strange to say, can it live. The wheat-grain must itself die, perish utterly, if there is to be from it another better life.

And that is true of all life and growth. It is out of the graves of last year's beauty, out of the death of last year's life, that this year's is to come. Last year's flowers had to fade if we are to have flowers this year ; and, so unselfish, so self-sacrificing, were last year's flowers, that they bowed their justly admired heads, and hid themselves in the earth, died, that other flowers might rise in their stead this season, and be admired in their turn.

There is something sad in all this. Here is a beautiful flower. It looks as if it came out of the garden of God, so lovely is it. You say, I must keep this beautiful flower. Why may it not bloom on and on through years ? But you cannot keep your flower. In a few days it fades, and is gone. It falls into the ground and dies, and there is a tear of disappointment standing in your eye, and I hear you say bitterly : "What is the use of flower-raising ; just as soon as I get them to bloom well, they begin to fade and die."

In your home blooms out a beautiful flower, an only flower perhaps. How sweet that flower is to you ! With what care and tenderness you have grown it to the perfection it has come. Its beauty and fragrance gladden all your home and heart, and you say in your way, "I will keep this lovely flower, and let it bloom to please me." But your neighbor over the way has seen, and admired, and loved your one flower. And there comes a day when he asks you to give him your one flower to bloom for him. It is hard. You turn away your head to hide a tear. You knew it would come, must come, to this, in some shape or other, and there is an unutterableness of grief in your heart. Still, you bring yourself to feel that it is the way of flowers to be plucked, and with a noble unselfishness you give up your one flower, and there is in your home and heart as if a kind of grave had been opened, as if a coffin had been brought in, and as if there had been said this : "Earth to earth, ashes to ashes, dust to dust !"

God had one Son. And what a Son, so good, so glorious ! In his bosom dwelt that one Son, and the joy, the rapture, of his dwelling there, were such as no human tongue can tell. But there came a time when He must be given up. And He was given up, and the Eternal Father's bosom was empty, no Son there. Far down amid clouds and darkness, sin and sorrow and woe, the Son of God lived and toiled, wept and worked, suffered and sacrificed. At last an awful pall was spread wide over the heaven. God's One Son was dead ; the Only Begotten of the Father still in the sombre silence of the tomb.

And His death was necessary. Just as the wheat-grain's dying is necessary ; so the Christ's dying is necessary. You say, "Hold there, O murderers ! Stay that spiking, that piercing, that mocking, that scourging, that crucifying of yours ! Let the Christ live ! Let Him weep, and work, and love, and live."

But God said : "Let the spiking and piercing go on ; let the Christ die ! There is no other way for the world's good and men salvation to be wrought out. Let the cruel crucifixion go on."