

SEEDS OF LIFE.

No man ever truly measured his influence. If in every action there were present to our mind its possible consequences, near and remote, the responsibilities of life would become unbearable. Yet it is true that as every one atom in the universe attracts another, every one act has infinite relations. We propose to give a few illustrations of the manner in which this complexity in human affairs is controlled to Divine ends. The wisdom of God conspicuously appears in the marvelous adaptation and variety of means by which he works out his sure results, and it may prompt to a more comprehensive faith to recall some few of the diverse modes by which in the conversion of men the glorious resources of his grace have been manifested. As none can tell the precise effect of his conduct, so too, we recognize how the commonest things may become instruments of inestimable good. In the highest sense it is true that men may find "sermons in stones and good in everything." What is there which God cannot make instinct with heavenly power? As from a hundred different plants the seeds of life may be scattered abroad, but falling on prepared ground, each shall bring forth fruit according to its kind.

First, as to the preaching of the Gospel, the ordinary means of influencing men, it is encouraging to note how often, when there may be no immediate sign, the word of salvation reaching some stray hearer has prepared a channel of extraordinary usefulness. Our readers may remember how John Owen, after years of anxious thoughtfulness, went one day to hear the celebrated Edmund Calamy, but was disappointed to see a country preacher ascend the pulpit. The stranger gave out as his text, "Why are ye fearful, O ye of little faith?" and preached a plain sermon. Owen never ascertained his name, but the perplexities with which he had long been harassed disappeared, the natural energy of his character, weakened by distress of mind, reasserted itself, and he entered on a career which has made his name illustrious in all the churches. Thus the individual smaller influence may in a single act of usefulness stand related to a succession of important results. "The lips of the righteous feed many." What wonderful transformations, again, have been wrought by books. The fragment of a leaf rent off at a fair has been known to change the current of a life; and in how many hundred instances has a volume casually lent or bought proved the entrance into another world of thought and feeling. Of Plavet's treatise "On Keeping the Heart," it is related that the publisher once offered it to a "sparkish gentleman" who came into the shop inquiring for some plays, and that his customer, glancing into it, responded by abusing the fanatic who could make such a book. However, he bought it, at the same time saying, "I don't mean to read it." And what, then, will you do with it?" "I shall tear it, and burn it, and send it to the devil." "Then," said the bookseller, "you shall not have it." The upshot was that he promised to read it. About a month after the gentleman returned, by no means so gaily attired as on his former visit, and addressing the publisher, said, as he ordered a number of copies for distribution, "Sir, I most heartily thank you for putting this book into my hands, and I bless God, that moved you to do it; it has saved my soul."