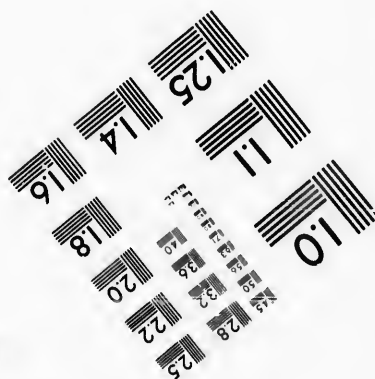
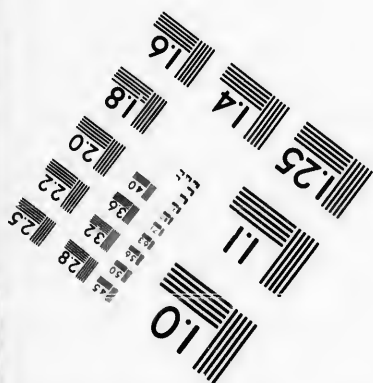
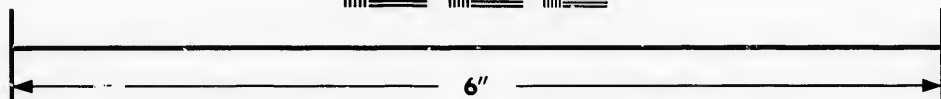
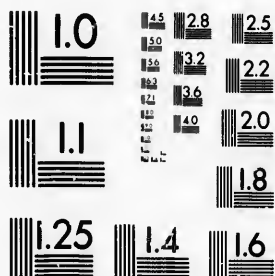


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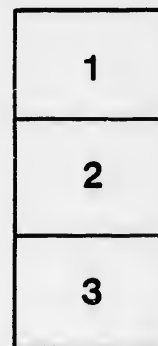
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A SERMON

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BY THE

REV. R. W. NORMAN, M. A.

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SERMON.

"Man goeth forth unto his work,
And to his labour, until the evening."

—104th Psalm, 23rd verse.

In this, the 104th Psalm, David is describing the mighty power and all-observing providence of God. The heavens, the earth, the sea, the mountains, the valleys, the rivers, the springs, the forest and the plains, are all sung of, as each and all displaying peculiar features imprinted on them by the hand of their Maker. All are made to subserve two ends; a present one the support of living creatures, animals and men; and an ultimate one, God's glory. He gives all to all. Even the hunger that animates the ravenous beasts and incites them at nightfall to prowl through jungles and woods, is an instinct bestowed upon them by the Almighty, and He provides for the satisfying of that instinct. How wonderfully is this truth shown in the few words preceeding the text—"The young lions roar after their prey, and seek their meat from God." When the sun ariseth, when men rise to their appointed tasks, then these beasts gather themselves together and lay them down in their dens. "But man goeth unto his work and to his labour until the evening." This, then, is another of God's laws; one which beginning in a curse, has become one of the greatest of blessings and noblest of employments. Our first parents, before their temptation and fall, needed no toil whereby to live. Although we cannot pronounce on the situation of that first garden, or enumerate its glories and beauties, we can say from Scripture, that its plants, trees and flowers yielded to man all he needed without effort or culture. But when the lying tempter beguiled them, and they for hunger's sake and pride's sake disobeyed God, then a change came over the face of God's nature. Its benefits could only be obtained by cultivation. In the sweat of man's brow

he was to eat bread. It is surely very remarkable and very interesting to notice in Scripture and in Nature a sympathy with man, a fellow-suffering with man, and a reproduction, if I may use the word, in Nature of certain features of human character. We know also that the converse truth holds good. How much we are affected by climate and by situation. It is certain that particular districts, localities, situations, have particular effects in shaping the characters of nations, in determining their histories, in fixing their destinies, and the parts they play in the world, in influencing their habits, intellects and personal appearance. Let a country be flat as Holland, mountainous as the Tyrol, rugged and sterile as Tartary, sunny as Naples, and the inhabitants will display completely different national qualities. Conversely, God from the first determined to show as an example to man, that creation was affected by man, and was to bear a part of the penalties of human sin. The serpent, an instrument of the evil one for tempting man, was cursed, and constantly in its stealthy habits seems to remind us of the subtle being that assumed its shape. God made the lower animals, in a great degree, for man's benefit, and when the sin of the old world waxed so enormous as apparently to weary out even the Divine patience, then these animals with man were destroyed by the flood. The barren fig tree was cursed by Christ as a timely warning to men of the punishment of hypocrisy. The swine at Gadara impelled headlong into the watery deep, gave a visible evidence of diabolical power, and thus warned men not to admit Satan and his hosts into their souls. The serpent grovelling on the ground is a perpetual memento of the falsehood which the tempter spoke to Eve, when he induced her and Adam to eat the forbidden fruit on the idea that they would thereby become as God.—And the earth formed good by the good God, clothed with fertility, was to bear upon it the constant trace of man's sin. Crops of food fitted for man were not to be its spontaneous produce. It was in most cases to bring forth naturally thorns and thistles. The mildew, the blight, that at times disfigure the earth and take from the value of the crops—what are they but symbols of the withering effects of temptation and sin? Nay, too, as in its outward aspect it was to preach a warning of man's fall, so it was also to reflect the nature of its inhabitants. Do we not judge of the characters of men by the appearance of their ground? If husbandmen suffer their industry to rust and their energy to lie fallow, does not their neglect shew itself in their land? Do we not learn that very wholesome les-

son, that since man's fall, the earth, like the soul of man, cannot be in a negative position? If the soil is not ploughed, and tilled, and sown, it not only bears no crop of any worth, it not only is barren, but it is fertile in weeds. They creep over it with an extraordinary ramifying power, they exhaust the properties of the soil—they cumber the ground. Like the barren fig tree, they occupy space, and while they are worthless themselves, they draw away the nourishment that would have fed useful plants. They impart that utterly melancholy appearance—that depressing effect of rust and neglect which so many must have noticed, and which is such a fitting type of a neglected and uncared for soul. Like the earth, we cannot really be in a negative state. If we are not fertile in good, we are not simply idle and doing nothing, but we must sooner or later be prolific in evil. But the love of God turned that which was a primal curse into an eventual blessing, and catches the evil one in his own toils. The serpent used Eve as a tool for man's fall and degradation;—but God used woman as an instrument for man's restoration. The seed of the woman, who was first in the transgression, was to bruise the head of the serpent. The incarnation of Christ from Mary, the second Eve, did away with the curse, and made woman, who had been the means of bringing in misery, into an instrument for bringing in blessing. As serpents in the wilderness slew men, women and children, so the brazen serpent on the pole set up by Moses, at God's command, was the means of restoring life to those who gazed upon it. The thorns, too again, one of the fruits of man's fall, one of the reminders of the consequences of sin, were woven by the second Adam into a coronet for His brow. Those thorns were a sign of the curse; but when Christ, who became a curse for us, wore them;—they pierced His sacred forehead, they shed His precious blood, and so brought a blessing upon men. Thus, though the labour of man was enjoined on him as compulsory, because of his sin, though he, who if he had continued obedient, would have lived as king of the earth, and then would have been translated to heaven without the pain of death, had now to wring subsistence out of the ground by sweat and labour, until he returned to the very earth which he dug and ploughed; yet the hand of mercy is in that very punishment. Man by his fall had lost the fruits of Paradise. He had thrown away his innocence. A life of idleness would have been a still greater misery and a far greater curse. Labour, occupation, and all of us have to labour, whether with our hands or our minds, is an essential

preservative against sin. Industry is a great help to honesty. St. Paul says to the Ephesians* :—"Let him that stole steal no more, but rather let him labour, working with his hands that which is good." The great Apostle himself, in order not to be burthensome to his flock, helped Priscilla and Aquilla to make leather tent coverings. Let us look into this matter with more care. Labour necessitates self-denial, which is one of the best features in man's character, and one of the most essential towards Christian perfection. Our dear and blessed Lord was the greatest of examples of toil. Was it not toil, too, for others, and were not those others ungrateful at last? Could there be most self-denying labour? He sanctified toil and poverty. He was so poor that he had no house of His own. His disciples were working men,—and some of them humble and unlearned. His Mother had been betrothed to a carpenter; and He, Himself, was sometimes called the carpenter's son. And if we wish to be like Him, we must also take up our cross and labour in things that we like not. Next, labour disciplines our characters;—it enables us to gain a mastery over ourselves; it occupies our minds as well as our bodies.

Labour acts as a safety valve. Idle hands are the readiest instruments for Satan's works. Idle, unoccupied minds are the best soil for him wherein to sow his noxious seed, which will bring forth deadly fruit. It was the empty house into which the devil entered. It is the vacant mind into which he drops some wicked suggestion, which there ferments and works mischief. One of the most certain helps against temptation is thorough occupation of mind and body. Next, labour binds us together in our great and wide spread human family. It recalls to us that we are all members of one Body. God wills that no man should be idle. An idle man is a pestilence to others as well as to himself. He is truly an incubus on God's earth. Labour also gives us strength of body; it wins for us refreshing sleep; it improves and fortifies our health and spirits. An idle man is rarely a healthy man. He rarely does that which can ensure him natural appetite and natural slumber. He pampers his jaded taste and weakens his body, and he certainly is not happy. As Shakespeare beautifully puts it†—"If all the year were playing holidays, to sport would be as tedious as to

* Ephesians, 4th chapter, 28th verse.

† 1st Part of Henry IV, Act 1, Sc. 2.

“work, but, when they seldom come, they wished for come.” The man who labours appreciates the true comfort and blessing of rest and sleep. He knows, too, what water is to the thirsty, and bread to the hungry. But not so the man who is selfish and idle. As he is always consulting his own pleasure and indulgence, he has lost the taste for true pleasure, and so, by a singular retribution, he has to exercise that most laborious and delusive of all occupations, the hunting after pleasure. It is laborious because there is no rest to it. It is delusive because true pleasure is that which is natural, which comes of itself, as it were, and which is enjoyed after toil. The idle man is miserable because he has at times a twinge of conscience. Some of his pleasures cannot be innocent. He is therefore reminded in his heart that God did not make him for nothing, and that it was not according to the Divine intent, that he should be as a useless log, impeding the progress of others. Think for a moment how much we are indebted to labour, and that the labours of others. One man cannot do everything. It was a dream of philosophy that man should be self-sufficient, and that a perfect man, perfect as far as human standards of perfection went, should be as far as possible completely independent of others. But such selfish chilling theories are contrary to Scripture, and opposed to fact. God has taught us to look to one another for help, for co-operation, for sympathy and comfort in joy and sorrow. He has told us to rejoice with them that rejoice, to weep with them that weep. He has told us to bear one another's burdens, and so to fulfil His law. And this desire for assisting one another, and profiting by the aid of one another, belongs to what is called society. It belongs to marriage, to friendship, to trade, to association. It is the moving impulse which has brought the inhabitants of towns and villages to cluster together in one spot. This dependence of man upon man is particularly exemplified, in that we have to look to one another for the comforts and even the necessities of life. This should remind us that we are children of one Parent, and give us feelings of mutual charity, when we say “Our Father which art in Heaven.” Thus, by God's ordinance, man goeth forth unto his work and to his labour until the evening. We, the clergy, are working men, and labouring for and with you. However wealthy a man may be in this world's goods, he has a work to do. Whether he inherits riches, or whether he amasses money by honorable honest toil, either by actual manual labour, or mental exertion, it matters not. The possession of wealth,

so far from encouraging idleness, increases a person's responsibility. It should remind him that God looks for good works from him, and that, like his Master, he must work the work of Him that sent him while it is day, for the night cometh when no man can work. From the morning of youth to the evening of old age we have to go forth to our work and to our labour. That work and labour may be humble and small, but if it is honest it is according to God's will. It is the sphere in which we can work out our own salvation, and by doing that we can help on others towards God. On such occasions as this gathering, we, as it were, make a pause in our journey through life, and, to a certain extent, and in an imperfect manner, shadow forth that great in-gathering, that mighty harvesting, that extatic thanksgiving, which will one day come upon the earth. It is indeed a cheering sight to see so goodly a congregation sanctifying such a day by assembling in God's house to pray and to praise Him. It is scarcely less cheering to see this Church chastely, yet beautifully decorated by the flowers and fruits of God's earth. What decoration can be more seemly, or more Scriptural, than those pure and beautiful products, which, in their stainless beauty and innocence, preach the Resurrection, and teach us lessons of goodness. It is also a pleasure to one, who appreciates what worship is, to see the spontaneous efforts made here to render this Church in some degree meet for God's service. It is a recognition of the principle that nothing can be too costly or beautiful for that holiest of places, a Church, and that most sacred of duties, the worship of the Almighty. God calls us to-day to rejoice and be glad. Only He requires of us to rejoice in a thankful spirit. * "Thou, O God, visitest the earth and blessest it; thou makest it very plenteous; thou preparest their corn, for so thou providest for the earth. Thou waterest her furrows; thou sendest rain into the little valleys thereof; thou makest it soft with the drops of rain, and blessest the increase of it." Gratitude to God is one lesson. We should emulate nature, which always gives an equivalent for the benefits it receives. The rain which falls refreshes the earth. The bright sun draws up that moisture lest it should lie too long, and injure the growth of plants and crops. That moisture again appears in the form of clouds and vapour, which mitigate the sun's heat, and which once more descend in the form of rain, making the soil fertile. Nay, as you know, even the death of plants is life.

* Ps. 65th, 9th verse.

The very constituents into which they are resolved, give nourishment to others, while the earthy matter into which they are finally turned, fattens and enriches the soil.

Man, therefore, is called upon to thank God. He is called on to make a rehearsal of his employments in heaven. For him now a table is spread. To stimulate him creation is making melody. And as God above gives us the increase, however man may labour, therefore a harvest should make men thankful and not self-glorifying. It should make them think of others. It should make us feel for those less well off than ourselves in this world's goods. It should make us regardful of those whose labour has brought this about. Scripture tells us that it is a Christian's duty to labour, not specially to enrich himself, and not only in order to live honestly, but to give to him that needeth.* There is no greater blessing to a country than a plentiful harvest. There is no greater eagerness than a scanty one. All classes feel the one and the other; it is noticeable that some of the most dreadful disturbances in history have been connected with scarcity of bread.

Benevolence, then, should come next to thanksgiving. And he who is mindful of others will never be forsaken. The bread that is cast upon the waters will return to him. If affliction come upon him, friends will be raised up, and his seed will not be begging their bread.

Lastly, brethren, this day should remind us of the great harvest. The time is coming when our work and our labour will have its fixed end, which God has known all these years. These years steal with noiseless steps, and as they leave their mark upon our bodies, as they gradually impair our strength, so they should leave an impression of good on our souls. †“He that gathereth in summer is a wise son, but he that sleepeth in harvest is a son of shame.” Our present life is in the true sense a time of tribulation. That word strictly means a sifting, a threshing, or winnowing of corn. It means the separation of the chaff from the wheat—the division of the worthless from the solid and valuable part of our nature. This ought to be always going on. It is absolutely necessary. Through much tribulation some alone can enter into the kingdom of God. Satan also is allowed, at times, by God, to sift us and prove

* Ephesians, 4th chapter, 28th verse.

† Prov. 10th chapter, 5th verse.

our quality. Our Lord said to His Apostle*—"Simon, Simon, "Satan has desired to have you that he may sift you as wheat." Our death will determine whether we have done our labour,—whether we shall be as the good grain which can be gathered into the heavenly granary, or whether the sifting has found us and proved us to be empty and unprofitable. There will be a harvest at the end of the world. For that, as it were, all creation is waiting. Nature, as we have seen, in some mysterious way has shared man's fall, and nature will share, to a certain degree, man's restoration. St. Paul tells us†—"That the earnest expectation of creation waiteth for the manifestation of the sons of God." Also, that "the creation was made subject to vanity, (*i. e.*, imperfection); and that it will be delivered from the bondage of corruption to the glorious liberty of the children of God. For the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now, and not only so, but we ourselves, groan within ourselves, waiting for the redemption of our bodies." Let us then labour from the morning of youth to the sunset of age. In the one we can do good by our earnest, active, good principles, in the other by our peaceful resignation, our humbleness, our purity of conscience. Let us too rejoice to-day, brethren, as Christian Church people. Let us show this by giving to God's church. Let us take example from these fruits of nature. They have repaid the toil bestowed on them. Let us try to do the same. Let us offer to God our humble thanks, our good resolutions, our liberal alms, a wave sheaf as it were of prayers and good works, so that we may return in some small way what He has done for us. We are in the field of God's Church. Has He not warmed us with the sun of His love and care? Has He not watered us with the dews of His Grace and His Sacraments? Has He not trained and tended us? What reward shall we give to the Lord for all these benefits? Let us thank Him heartily. Let us try to live, so that at the last in-gathering, the angel reapers may carry us to the storehouse above, where we shall find the feast spread for us by the Lord of the harvest, Jesus Christ our Lord.

* St. Luke, 22nd chapter, 31st verse.

† Romans, 9th chapter : 19-23rd verses.

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