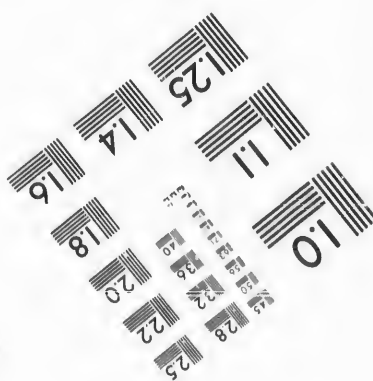
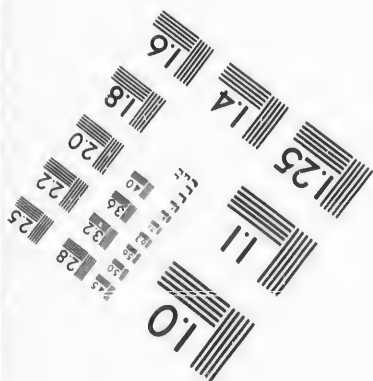
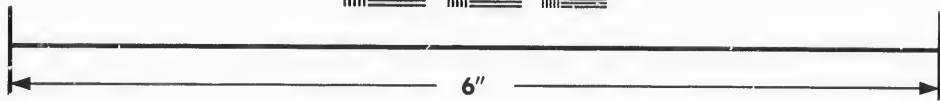
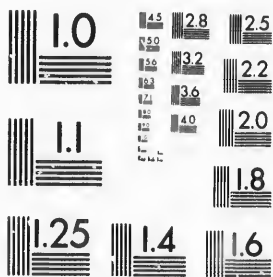


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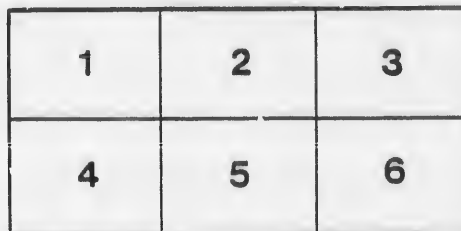
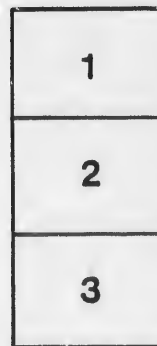
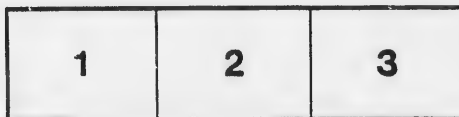
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The Husbandman's Dependence upon Almighty God.

A SERMON

PREACHED IN ST. GEORGE'S CHURCH, ETOBICOKE,

23RD OCTOBER 1853,

BEING THE SUNDAY FOLLOWING THE ANNUAL EXHIBITION OF THE
AGRICULTURAL SOCIETY OF THE TOWNSHIP.

BY THE

REV. H. C. COOPER, B. A.

RECTOR OF CHRIST CHURCH, MIMICO.

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The Husbandman's Dependence upon Almighty God.

“Nevertheless he left not himself without witness, in that he did good, and gave us rain from heaven, and fruitful seasons, filling our hearts with food and gladness.”—ACTS xiv. 17.

Though the Lord is good and bountiful at all times, yet there are occasions which indicate that goodness with peculiar force, and which call for a more marked acknowledgment of His bounty on the part of those who are its rational recipients.

The text directs our thoughts to the goodness of God as it is shewn in the annually recurring supply of those things which are indispensable for our bodily sustenance—that supply which every season brings, and in which is read the fulfilment of that great and universal promise, that “while the earth remaineth, seed-time and harvest, and cold and heat, and summer and winter, and day and night, shall not cease.”

This great purpose of the divine beneficence is effected by the laws which God has impressed upon the material universe, and by the properties, situations, and affinities which he has assigned to the elements and to various substances of the earth. From these spring results, conducive to the happiness and existence of the human race, and of the whole animal creation.

But it is not only, or altogether, to the laws of inanimate matter that these results are owing. Another principle is concerned—namely, that of God's continued providence and superintendence, by which, without changing or arresting

the laws of nature, or doing violence to man's freedom, he, from time to time, so rules and modifies those results as to increase or to diminish the blessings with which he surrounds us.

Had those processes of nature by which the harvests of the earth are produced, been capable of no variation—had the results of those laws and processes been susceptible of no foreign or exterior influence—had the fruits of the earth been alike in every succeeding season, man would perhaps have gathered them with feelings but little higher than the instinct with which the lower animals satisfy their wants upon the repast which nature spreads before them. The returns of the soil would have come into his hands as a thing of course; and he would have been more apt to take them in that light, with less acknowledgment of the unseen hand that bestowed them: he would have had less sense of his own indebtedness not only to a system of beneficent natural laws, but also to the pervading government and direction of a most wise and bountiful Providence.

Almighty God has so ordered, that while the operations of nature seem to follow the track of certain fixed principles, still there is space for the intervention and action of Providence in completing and perfecting the results. This holds true throughout, that it is He "whose never-failing providence ordereth all things both in heaven and earth." It is true both in the moral and material world: though the manner of God's intervention, and the exact mode in which His providence controuls and regulates all things, may to us be deeply mysterious.

While the philosopher and student of nature seek to penetrate into the secret chambers of her operations, tracing the continuous chain of causes and effects, and noting the sequence of certain results from certain previous conditions—while in viewing the wide range of secondary and material causes, and the adaptation of various means to specific ends, each cause under the like circumstances producing the like

result—while in endeavouring to ascertain what are apparently the guiding principles of nature's proceedings, and in expatiating upon the many thousand ways in which design, and mechanism and combination are displayed, while in doing this the coldest philosophy may be warmed into admiration at the multiplicity and intricacy, the beauty and grandeur of nature's plans and works, it is the office of religion, and of the religious teacher to see that all our sense of what is wonderful and impressive should not rest upon nature alone, but that our minds should be carried forward to that great God of whose power and intelligence nature is but the visible manifestation and exponent. Nature itself is but an effect—the production of the Omniscient Artificer; and the homage of man's heart and reverential feelings is due, not to the works of nature, wonderful though they are, but to him whose offspring nature is—to whom nature owes both its origin and its permanence.

We are permitted, keeping God in view, to admire what are popularly called the works of nature, both for the beauty with which He has clothed them, and as evidences of His being and wisdom; and while we search into her various departments, we may, if not wilfully blind, discover in every one rich store-houses of testimony to his glory. But there is often found in the human heart a disposition to rest upon what is tangible and material, to substitute philosophy for religion, and to make an idol of nature, instead of worshipping Him who has said "the heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool. . . . For all those things hath mine hand made." We are too prone to stop where observation stops, instead of rising upon the wings of faith to Him who has been revealed to us as the great Author of all things.

Many acknowledge the wonders of nature, for all who examine must wonder, but some refuse to go beyond. They think it solution enough of every wonder to say, it is natural—it is always so; not asking themselves, who has caused it to be so—by whose fiat has nature been subjected to all

these laws—whose will is she obeying? But while we are thus conversant with invisible nature, let not the vastness of what is before us hide from our conception Him who is behind, who “made the world and all things therein,” and in whom “we live, and move, and have our being.”

Some of the laws of nature seem to be more invariable than others. Such are those which govern the system of the universe, and which regulate the revolution both of our own earth and of those heavenly bodies which are inaccessible to us but through the medium of partial observation. These, among which are found the sources of light and heat, and of our days and nights and years, have an uniform unchanging course. But there are other laws and processes of nature, which lie more upon the field of man’s habitation, and with which he is familiarly conversant—laws which he is permitted to interfere with, to deal with, and make use of for his own especial purposes. In these we see much variation, that they are susceptible of change and improvement, and that the results are dependent upon many contingencies. Thus, it is a law of nature that seed under certain conditions will germinate and bear fruit, but with what success, and in what proportion, depends greatly upon the application of human skill and science. Such a distinction in the great departments of nature accords with these words of Scripture: “All the whole heavens are the Lord’s; the earth hath he given to the children of men.”

In those processes of nature upon which the fruits of our fields and our harvest depend, while there is an average certainty, there is also a definite range of fluctuation, and there are various circumstances more or less affecting the desired results. In this is afforded room for the working of an invisible but ruling Providence. He may give or withhold “the former and the latter rains”—“a fruitful land he may make barren for the wickedness of them that dwell therein:” again—“he may make the wilderness a standing water, and water-springs of a dry-land.”

This space for fluctuation God may be supposed to have assigned to that department of nature with which man's sustenance is bound up, in order that in the results we may read the evidence of His hand, and may acknowledge our dependence upon Him, and may feel that it is He who "gives us rain from heaven and fruitful seasons, filling our hearts with food and gladness."

In this circumstance of fluctuation and change to which the productions of the soil are liable, another wise provision is apparent—namely, that it affords scope for the exercise of many of man's best qualities both of mind and body. He is thus enabled and permitted to bring his power to bear even upon nature herself; not only animate but inanimate creation is placed to a certain extent under his dominion: he can make his science and energy tell even upon those processes which are hidden beneath the soil; he becomes a fellow-worker with nature—by the application of his faculties, by his industry and skill, increasing her capabilities, and doubling her returns.

In casting our eyes over the earth, and noting its climates, its productions and inhabitants, this rule seems to hold good—that where, through favorable circumstances of soil and climate, nature does the most in the supply of human wants, *there* man does the least, and the races of men are observed to be the lowest in intellectual development and civilization. But where nature does not yield her productions so spontaneously, and where the soil has to be carefully wrought, and difficulties of climate have to be watched and contended against, *there* not only do the powers of man, both mental and physical, seem to attain their highest standard, but there also does nature herself yield the most abundantly, pouring into man's bosom the riches of her prodigality, appearing only to wait till they are unlocked by human industry and skill. In this is furnished both the stimulant to his toil and its gratifying issue—the charm of industry and its recompense.

In the pursuits of the agriculturist there is this peculiarity,

that—unlike the mechanic, who receives but his material from the hands of nature and must carve and fashion it, inch by inch and piece by piece, to such form and purpose as he desires—while he, the agriculturist, can do much towards effecting improved results, he cannot do *all*; while in the several departments of his occupation, his cattle, his grain, his fruits, his herbs, he can increase and improve their quality and quantity—while in everything that he touches, and to which he applies the faculties that God has bestowed upon him, he may reap the benefits of well-directed judgment and perseverance, yet he must leave much—very much, to nature; there are processes in which he *cannot* interfere—operations conducted by an unseen hand, and perfected by a secret power, which is active when man is weary, and working while man must sleep.

Although in aiming at the highest results in agriculture man may bring much skill and science to his aid, making himself acquainted with the properties of various substances, learning by experiment what chemical combinations best promote the growth of the plants in which he is interested, and what preparation of the field is requisite—though he may learn to scatter his seed upon the soil, and in the season most favorable to its vegetation and perfect development, watching and assisting its progress with the artificial appliances and helps in which observation has instructed him—though he may gather round himself the herbs of other regions, and may naturalize within the limits of his farm the grains and fruits indigenous to distant quarters of the globe, making a hundred lands contribute to the prosperity and comfort of that home which is the abiding place of his heart's affections, and in which his happiness and honorable pride are centred—though in this way he may do much, yet it is still to nature that he is indebted at every step: if at any one stage *her* action be arrested, his progress must be stayed also; if a limb be withered he cannot restore it: the fruit which is prematurely delayed he cannot cause to recover

its bloom and soundness : nor can he give life to the seed whose hidden principle of vegetation has been by any means destroyed. He may go *with* nature, but he cannot go without her. It is his privilege to accompany nature—to work with her—nay, more, to contribute to the triumphal display of nature's excellences ; but still he is but nature's assistant, and he may not arrogate to himself all the honor of her productions.

It is not *his* hand that causes the seed beneath the soil to sprout—not his the power that fills the swelling ear with precious food, nor is it human art that ripens the waving fields of corn. One may plant and another may water, “ but it is God that giveth the increase.” Man casts his seed upon the earth, where, fit emblem of his own committal to the dust and resurrection unto life, in the bare grain which he has sown “ he soweth not that body that shall be, but God giveth it a body as it hath pleased him, and to every seed his own body.”

Thus to the devout and right-minded tiller of the soil, nature is but another name for nature's God, and he acknowledges *His* work in the growth and maturity of the herbs of the field and of the tree yielding fruit after his kind, and in the increase of his flocks and herds. Every year brings to him the renewal of God's gifts ; and in the culture of his fields he witnesses the reality of those holy and heart-moving words with which the worship of the sanctuary has familiarized his lips. “ Thou visitest the earth, and blessest it, thou makest it very plenteous. The river of God is full of water : 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. Thou crownest the year with thy goodness, and thy clouds drop fatness. They shall drop upon the dwellings of the wilderness and the little hills rejoice on every side. The fields shall be full of sheep ; the valleys also shall stand so thick with corn that they shall laugh and sing.”

The subject of this discourse has been suggested to me, as you may already have surmised, by the agricultural exhibitions which at this season are generally held throughout the Province, and which may be looked upon as festivals which both indicate and celebrate the prosperity of the country, and also encourage those who are engaged in, or connected with agricultural pursuits, to exercise their utmost care and industry, and to apply all the resources of skill and science to the improvement and perfection of the various productions of the land.

In these respects such institutions as Agricultural Societies are laudable and deserving of countenance and support. But while the cultivator of the soil thus learns how much may be effected in his great department of national prosperity by industry and science, let him not be forgetful of the great Author of all prosperity. In admiration of nature's productions let him not lose sight of Him who has given to nature all that fertility and capability of increase upon which man reckons, and which is found to respond so surely to the application of man's care and knowledge. While in the fluctuations of the season, and in the atmospheric influences which materially affect his returns, he sees causes at work over which he has no control, let him be sensible of his dependence upon a Higher Power, and pursue his avocations with prayerful hope, receiving unfavourable dispensations with submission, gathering in his fruits with thankfulness, recognizing in the produce of his fields that witness which God has left us of himself, and acknowledging that it is He who doeth us good, and gives us rain from heaven, and fruitful seasons, filling our hearts with food and gladness.

In conclusion, I may take this occasion to say that it afforded me much gratification to see that the great duty of thankfulness to Almighty God for these testimonies of His goodness was not overlooked at the recent Agricultural assemblage in this township, and that, while the sense of the

Divine bounty without doubt pervaded many hearts, a resolution containing a special acknowledgment thereof and an application to the government to appoint a day of thanksgiving for the agricultural prosperity of the Province, was moved and seconded by two members of this Congregation.



