

**HUSBANDRY
SPIRITUALIZED**

Or,

**The Heavenly Use of
Earthly Things**

BY

JOHN FLAVEL.

Husbandry Spiritualized Or, The Heavenly Use of Earthly Things

[John Flavel](#), 1628-1691

Consisting of many pleasant observations, pertinent applications, and serious reflections; and each chapter concluded with a divine and suitable poem. Directing gardeners to the most excellent improvements of their common employments. Whereunto are added, by way of Appendix, several choice occasional meditations, upon birds, beasts, trees, flowers, rivers, and several other objects; fitted for the help of such as desire to walk with God in all their solitudes, and recesses from the world.

Honored Friends,

IT has been long since observed, that the world below is a looking-glass to discover the world above; and although I am not of their opinion, that say, the Heathens may spell Christ out of the sun, moon, and stars; yet this I know, that the irrational and inanimate, as well as rational creatures, have a language; and though not by articulate speech, yet in a metaphorical sense, they preach unto man the wisdom, power, and goodness of God, [Romans 1:20](#) "There is (says the Psalmist, [Psalm 19:3](#)) no speech, nor language, "where their voice is not heard." Or (as Junius renders it) there is no speech, nor words, yet without these, their voice is understood, and their line (that is says Diodate) their writing in gross and plain draughts, is gone out through all the earth.

As man is compounded of a fleshly and spiritual substance, so God has endowed the creatures with a spiritual, as well as fleshly usefulness, they have not only a natural use in alimental and physical respects, but also a spiritual use, as they bear the figures and similitudes of many sublime and heavenly mysteries. Believe me (says contemplative Bernard) you shall find more in the woods, than in a corner; stones and trees will teach you what you shall not hear from learned doctors. By a skillful and industrious improvement of the creatures (says Mr. Baxter excellently) we might have a fuller taste of Christ and Heaven, in every bit of bread that we eat, and in every draught of beer that we drink, than most men have in the use of the sacrament.

And as the creatures teach divine and excellent things, so they teach them in a perspicuous and taking manner, says the orator. These two things, similitude, and example, do especially move us. Notions are more easily conveyed to the understanding, by being first clothed in some apt similitude, and so represented to the sense. And therefore Jesus Christ the great Prophet, delighted much in teaching by parables: and the prophets were much in this way also, [Hosea 12:10](#). "I have used similitudes by the ministry of the prophets." Those that can retain little of a sermon, yet ordinarily retain an apt similitude.

I confess it is an humbling consideration, That man, who at first was led by the knowledge of God to the knowledge of the creature, must now by the creatures learn to know God. That the creatures, (as one says) like Balaam's donkey, should teach their master. But though this be the unhappiness of poor man in his collapsed state, yet it is now his wisdom to improve such helps: and while others, by the abuse of the creatures, are furthering their perdition, to be, by the spiritual improvement of them, promoting his own salvation.

It is an excellent are to discourse with birds, beasts, and fishes, about sublime and spiritual subjects, and make them answer to your questions; and this may be done,

[Job 12:7, 8](#). "Ask now the beasts, and they shall teach you, and the birds of the air, and they shall tell you; or speak to the earth, and it shall teach you, and the fishes of the sea shall declare unto you." That is (says Caryl) the creatures teach us when we think of them: 'They teach us, though not formally, yet virtually; they answer and resolve the question put to them, though not explicitly to the ear, yet convincingly to the conscience. So then, we ask the creatures, when we diligently consider them, when we search out the perfections and virtues that God has put into, or stamped upon them. To set our mind thus upon the creature, is to discourse 'with the creature; the questions which man asks of a beast, are only his own meditations. Again, the creatures teach us, when we in meditation make our collections and draw down a demonstration of the power, wisdom, and goodness of God in making them, or the frailty of man in needing them: such conclusions and inferences are the teachings of the creatures.'

Common objects (says another) may be improved two ways; namely, In an argumentative, and in a representative way; by reasoning from them, and by viewing the resemblance that is between them and spiritual matters.

FIRST, In meditation argue thus, as in the present case and similitude of the apostle. If an gardener upon the ordinary principles of reason can wait for the harvest, shall not I wait for the coming of the Lord, the day of refreshing? the corn is precious to him, and so is the coming of Christ to me. Shall he be so patient, and endure so much for a little corn? and shall not I for the kingdom of Heaven! He is willing to stay until all causes have had their operations, until he has received the former and the latter rain; and shall not I, until the Divine decrees be accomplished.

SECONDLY, In meditation, make the resemblance, and discourse thus within yourselves: This is my seed-time, Heaven is my harvest; here I must labor and toil and there rest. I see the husbandman's life is a great toil: no excellent thing can be obtained without labor, and an obstinate patience. I see the seed must be hidden in the furrows, rotten and corrupted, before it can spring forth with any increase. Our hopes are hidden, light is sown for the righteous; all our comforts are buried under the clods, and after all this there must be long waiting, we cannot sow and reap in a day; effects cannot follow until all necessary causes have first wrought. It is not in the power of gardeners to ripen fruits at pleasure, our times are in the hands of God, therefore it is good to wait; a long-suffering patience will reap the desired fruit. Thus you have some hints of this heavenly are of improving the creatures.

The motives inducing me to this undertaking, were the Lord's owning with some success, my labors of a like nature, together with the desire and inclination (stirred up in me, I hope by the Spirit of the Lord) to devote my vacant hours to his service in this kind. I considered, that if the Pharisees, in a blind zeal to a faction, could compass sea and land, to proselyte men to their party, though thereby they made them sevenfold more the children of the devil than before; how much more was I obliged, by true love to God, and zeal to the everlasting happiness of souls, to use my utmost endeavors both with seamen and gardeners, to win them to Christ, and thereby make them more than seventy-seven fold happier than before? Not to mention other encouragements to this work, which I received from the earnest desires of some reverend and worthy brethren inviting thereunto; all which I hope the event will manifest to be a call from God to this work.

I confess I met with some discouragement in my first attempt, from my unacquaintedness with rural affairs; and because I was to travel in a path (to me) untrodden; but having once engaged in it, those discouragements were soon overcome: and being now brought to what you here see, I offer to your hands these first fruits of my spare hours.

I presume you will account it no disparagement that I dedicate a book of husbandry to gentlemen of your quality. This is spiritual husbandry, which here is taught you; and yet I tell you, that great persons have accounted that civil employment (which is much inferior to this) no disparagement to them. "The king himself is served "by the field," [Ecclesiastes 5:9](#). Or, as Montanus renders the Hebrew text, The king himself is a servant to the field. And of king Uzziah it is written, [2 Chronicles 26:10](#). "That he "loved husbandry." And [Amos 7:1](#) we read of the king's mowings. Yes, Pliny has observed, that corn was never so plentiful at Rome, as when the same men tilled the land that ruled the commonwealth; as though the earth itself rejoiced in the laurelled plowshare, and the triumphant plowman.

What pleasure you will find in reading it I know not; but to me it has been a pleasant path from first to last; who yet have been at far greater expense of time and pains in compiling it, than you can be in reading it. The husbandman's work, you know, is no easy work, and the spiritualizing of it has greater difficulties attending it; but yet the pleasure has abundantly recompensed the pains. I have found Erasmus's observation experimentally true: Those that are addicted to study, (says he) when they have wearied their spirits with study, can recreate them again with study, by making a diversion from that which is severe and knotty, to some more facile and pleasant subject.

But to hear that God has used and honored these papers to the good of any soul, will yield me the highest content and satisfaction imaginable.

May you but learn that lesson which is the general scope and design of this book, namely, How to walk with God from day to day, and make the several objects you behold, wings and ladders to mount your souls nearer to him, who is the center of all blessed spirits. How much will it comfort me, and confirm my hope, that it was the call of God indeed, which put me upon these endeavors!

O Sirs! What an excellent thing would it be for you, to make such holy improvements of all these earthly objects which daily occur to your senses, and cause them to proclaim and preach to you divine and heavenly mysteries; while others make them groan, by abusing them to sin, and subjecting them to their lusts. A man may be cast into such a condition, wherein he cannot enjoy the blessing and benefit of a pious and powerful ministry; but you cannot (ordinarily) fall into such a condition, wherein anything (excepting a bad heart) can deprive you of the benefits and comforts of those excellent sermons, and divinity lectures, which the creatures here offer to preach and read to you.

Content not yourselves, I beseech you, with that natural sweetness the creatures afford; for thereof the beasts are capable, as much, if not more, than you; but use them to those spiritual ends you are here directed, and they will yield you a sweetness far transcending that natural sweetness you ever relished in them; and indeed, you never use the creatures as their Lord's, until you come to see your Lord in and by them. I confess the discoveries of God in the word are far more excellent, clear, and powerful; "He has magnified his word above all his name." And therein are the unsearchable riches of Christ, or rich discoveries of that grace that has no footsteps in nature, as the apostle's expression signifies, [Ephesians 3:8](#).

And if that which might be known of God by the creatures, leave men without excuse, as it is manifest, [Romans 1:20](#). how inexcusable then will those be, who have received not only the teachings of the creature, but also the grace of the gospel in vain! "How shall we escape if we neglect so great salvation?" They that are careless in the day of grace, shall be speechless in the day of judgment.

I am sensible of many defects in these papers, (as well as in myself.) They have doubtless, a taste of the distractions of the times wherein they were written; nor was

I willing to keep them so long under hand as the accurateness and exactness with which, such a subject ought to have been handled, did require. Had I designed my own credit, I should have observed that counsel: To have kept it much longer under the file, before I had exposed it to public view; but I rather inclined to Solomon's counsel, "Whatever your hand finds out to do, do it with all your might: for there is no wisdom, nor knowledge, nor device in the grave, where you are going," [Ecclesiastes 9:10](#).

I apprehend a necessity of some such means to be used for the instruction and conviction of country people; who either are not capable of understanding truth in another dialect, or at least are less affected with it. The preposition in every chapter consists of an observation in husbandry; wherein, if I have failed in using any improper expression, your candor will cover it, and impute it to my unacquaintedness in rural affairs:

The application, you will find I hope, both pertinent and close. The reflections serious, and such as (I hope) your consciences will faithfully improve. I have shut up every chapter with a Poem, an innocent bait to catch the reader's soul.

That of Herbert is experimentally true:
A verse may find him that a sermon flies,
And turn delight into a sacrifice.

I should never have been persuaded to have set my dull imagination upon the rack to extort a poem to entertain my reader; for I cannot say with Ovid: but that I have been informed, that many seamen, induced by the pleasure of a verse, have taken much pains to learn the poems in their compass by heart; and I hope both the children at home, and the servants in the fields, will learn to exercise themselves this way also. O, how much better will it be so to do, than so stuff their memories with obscene ballads, and filthy songs, which corrupt their minds, and dispose them to much wickedness, by irritating their natural corruption! But these are purer flames, you will find nothing here of such a tendency.

'Tis guilt, not poetry, to be like those,
Whose wit in verse is downright sin in prose.
Whose studies are profaneness, as if then
They only were good poets, when bad men.

I shall add no more, but to beg that God who instructs the gardener in his civil calling, to teach him wisdom spiritually to improve it, particularly, that you may reap a crop of much spiritual benefit, from that seed which is here sown by the hand of the Lord's unprofitable servant, and in him,

Your very affectionate Friend and Servant,
JOHN FLAVEL

To the CHRISTIAN READER:

THERE are three things wherein (as it has been said long before my day) the exercise of godliness does chiefly consist: Prayer, temptation, meditation: Meditation is the subject of the following manual.

The object of meditation is twofold:

FIRST, The *word*.
SECONDLY, The *works* of God.

The works of God are twofold:

FIRST, Internal.
SECONDLY, External.

The External works of God are twofold:

FIRST, Of creation.
SECONDLY, Of providence.

The works of providence are likewise twofold.

FIRST, In things civil, the Lord ordering and over-ruling all the affairs and motions of single persons, families, and nations, in a subserviency to his own most holy ends, designs, and purposes.

SECONDLY, In things natural, the Lord instructing the gardener to discretion, and teaching him how to dress and until the earth, that it may give seed to the sower, and bread to the eater; as also how to breed up and manage the beasts of the field, both greater and lesser cattle, for the use and service of man.

Meditation upon this lower part of the works of God, and his wonderful providences about them, may raise our souls very high; and while we wisely consider these natural things, we may grow more and more wise, in and for spirituals and eternal.

The worthy and ingenious Author of the ensuing discourse has supplied us with an excellent help, for the spiritualizing of the providential works of God in natural things, by godly meditations; we chiefly want the help of the Holy Spirit (without which all other helps and helpers are altogether insufficient) to frame and wind up our hearts for this both profitable and delightful duty; yet the help which the Lord is pleased to give us for our direction in it, by the ministry of man, is not only not to be refused, but thankfully received and improved; and all little enough to bring our minds to, or keep them at this work: The best of saints, on this side Heaven, have, though they are not earthly-minded only, much earth in their minds; which like a heavy clog at their heels, or a weight at their hearts, presses them down when they would make an essay to mount upward in meditation.

We find it no easy matter to keep off earthly thoughts, when we are most seriously engaged in heavenly work; how hard is it then to get in, and be fixed upon heavenly thoughts, while we are engaged about earthly work; yes, are (for so is the gardener) working the very earth, and raking in the affections of it? It is a great part of our holiness to be spiritually- minded, while we are conversing with God through Jesus Christ in spiritual duties; but to be spiritually minded, and to mind spiritual things, when we are conversing with the clods of the earth, and the furrows of the field; when we have to do with corn and grass, with trees and plants, with sheep and oxen; when we behold the birds and birds of the air, the worms, and all that creep upon the ground; then, I say, to be spiritually-minded, and thence to have our thoughts ascending, and soaring up to God, in heart-affecting and quickening contemplations, witnesses an high degree of holiness, and of gracious attainments.

To make a ladder out of the earthly materials, for the raising of ourselves in spirit up to Heaven, is the art of arts. Holy and happy indeed are those who, being taught of God, have learned this art, and live in daily practice of it. Earthly objects usually hinder us in our way, sometimes turn us quite out of our way to Heaven. Many plow and sow, dig and delve the earth, until their hearts become as earthly as the earth itself: Many deal about the beasts of the field until themselves become even brutish. Is it not then a blessed design which this Author aims and drives at, so to spiritualize all sorts, or the whole compass of earthly husbandry, that all sorts of

gardeners may become spiritual and heavenly? It seems to be a token of good, that God has an intendment of some special good to the souls of such as are by profession proper gardeners, seeing he has lately put it into the hearts of two faithful ministers (who with all of that profession, are gardeners in a figure) to undertake, though in a different way, this subject, and to publish their labors in print, that they may be of use, not only for the present age, but for posterity.

And that the gardener may be pleased as well as profited, in perusing the labors of this author; he has, with singular aptness and acuteness, contrived and contracted the sum and scope of every chapter into an elegant distich, or pair of verses, placed at the head of it, and concluded it with a choice melodious poem suitable to, and dilating upon the whole matter of it. These the gardener, who can but read, may quickly learn and sing for his solace, instead of those vain ballads and corrupting rhymes, which many of that rank are apt to buy and solace themselves withal, without any benefit, yes, much to their hurt, making their hearts more corrupt, carnal, and vain thereby.

Let me add one word more to the reader. This book of Husbandry Spiritualized, is not calculated only for the common gardener; persons of any calling, or condition, may find the author working out such searching reflections and strong convictions, from almost every part and particular of the husbandman's work, as may prove, if faithfully improved, very useful to them; to some for their awakening, to consider the state of their souls, whether in grace, or in nature; to others for their instruction, consolation, and encouragement in the ways of grace, as also for their proficiency and growth in those ways. That the blessing of the Lord, and the breathings of his Spirit may go out with it, for all those gracious purposes, is the heart's desire and prayer of him, who is, sincere well-wisher to your precious and immortal soul.

The EPISTLE, to the intelligent Country READER

YOU have here the fruit of some of my spare hours, which were thus employed, when, by a sad providence, I was thrust from the society of many dear friends, into a solitary country-dwelling. I hope none will envy me these innocent delights, which I made-out of my lonely walks, whereby the Lord sweetened my solitudes there. It is like you will find some passages here, that are harmlessly pleasant; yet, I assure you, I know of none that the most Cynical Reader can censure, as sinfully light and vain. I must acknowledge, to the praise of God, that I have found some of those (which, possibly, some of my readers will call the slightest and most trifling subjects of meditation) to be the ordinances for instruction, caution and consolation to my own soul; yes, such a degree of comfort, I do profess to have found by these things, as has much endeared the country-life to me, and made me much better to understand that saying of Horace, than when I learned it at school,

What life can with the country life compare?
Where breathes the purest, and most healthful air.
Where, undisturb'd, my study I pursue,
And, when I sleep, bid all my cares adieu.

And what I have found so beneficial to myself, I cannot but think may be so to others. I assure you, reader, I am not fond of any of these conceptions; and yet I think I may modestly enough say, That the emptiest leaf of this book may serve for more, and better uses, than a mere diversion, when you can find leisure to peruse it. I know, your troubles and cares are many; and though your condition of life has many innocent comforts and outward mercies to sweeten it, yet I believe most of you have found that ancient saying of Anacreon experimentally true:

'Some bitter troubles countrymen do meet,
With which the Lord does intermix their sweet.'

The cares of your minds are commonly no less than the pains of your bodies; it concerns you, therefore, to sweeten what you cannot avoid; and I know no better way for that, than what is here directed to. O friends! what advantages have you for a spiritual life? Why may you not have two harvests every year? One for your souls, another for your bodies; if you could thus learn to husband your husbandry. Methinks spiritual meditations do even put themselves upon you. Gardeners of old were generally presumed to be honest and good men.

What you are, godly or wicked, is not for me (that am a stranger to most of you) to determine; but if you are not godly, it is my desire and design to make you so: and I could not think on a more probable mean to accomplish this honest design, than what I have here used.

Methinks it should be a pleasure to you, when you come weary out of the fields from plough, or any other labor, to sit down in the evening, and read that chapter which concerns that particular business, and refresh your souls, even from that which has wearied your bodies.

Were your hearts but heavenly, and more time allowed for spiritual husbandry, your inward comforts would be much more, and your outward gains not a jot less; for if the success of all your civil labors and employments depend upon the pleasure and will of God, (as all that are not atheists do acknowledge) then, certainly, your business can succeed never the worse for your endeavors to please him, upon whose pleasure it so entirely depends. I have many times lifted up my heart to

Heaven, while these papers were under my hand, for a special blessing to accompany them, when they should be in yours. If the Lord accomplish my desires by them upon your souls you shall enjoy two heavens, one here, and another hereafter. Would not that be sweet? The historian tells us, that Altitius Serarius was sowing corn in the field, when Cincinnatus came to him bare-headed with letters from the senate, signifying, that he was chosen to the dictatorship. I hope the Lord will so bless and succeed these labors, that many of you will be called from holding the plough on earth, to wear the crown of glory in Heaven; which is the sincere desire of

Your hearty well-wisher,
JOHN FLAVEL

1 CORINTHIANS 3:9 "You are God's Husbandry"

THE scope and design of the following chapters, being the spiritual improvement of husbandry, it will be necessary, by way of proem, to acquaint the reader with the foundation, and general rules of this are in the scriptures, thereby to procure greater respect unto, and prevent prejudices against composites of this kind.

To this end, I shall entertain the reader a little while upon what this scripture affords, which will give a fair introduction to the following discourse.

The apostle's scope in the context being to check and repress the vain glory and emulation of the Corinthians, who, instead of thankfulness for, and an humble and diligent improvement of the excellent blessings of the ministry, turned all into vain ostentation and emulation, one preferring Paul, and another Apollos; in the mean time depriving themselves of the choice blessings they might have received from them both.

To cure this growing mischief in the churches, he checks their vanity, and discovers the evil of such practices by several arguments, among which this is one, You are God's Husbandry.

What are you, but a field or plot of ground, to be fertilized and cultivated for God? And what are Paul, Apollos, and Cephas, but so many workmen and laborers, employed by God, the great Gardener, to plant and water you all?

If, then, you shall glory in some, and despise others, you take the ready way to deprive yourselves of the benefits and mercies you might receive from the joint

ministry of them all. God has used me to plant you, and Apollos to water you; you are obliged to bless him for the ministry of both, and it will be your sin if you despise either. If the workmen be discouraged in their labors, it is the field that loses and suffers by it; so the words are a similitude, serving to illustrate the relation,

1. Which the churches have to God.

2. Which God's ministers have to the churches.

1. The relation between God and them is like that of an gardener to his ground or tillage. The Greek word signifies God's arable, or that plot of ground which God manures by the ministry of pastors and teachers.

2. It serves to illustrate the relation that the ministers of Christ sustain to the churches, which is like that of the husbandman's servants to him and his fields; which excellent notion carries in it the perpetual necessity of a gospel ministry. (For what fruit can be expected, where there are none to until the ground?) As also the diligence, accountableness, and rewards which these laborers are to give to, and receive from God, the great Gardener. All runs into this,

That the life and employment of an gardener, excellently shadows forth the relation between God and his church, and the relative duties between its ministers and members.

Or more briefly thus:

The church is God's husbandry, about which his ministers are employed.

I shall not here observe my usual method, (intending no more but a preface to the following discourse) but only open the particulars wherein the resemblance consists; and then draw some Corollaries from the whole. The first I shall dispatch in these twenty particulars following:

Propositions

1. Proposition The gardener purchases his fields, and gives a valuable consideration for them, [Jeremiah 32:9](#), [10](#).

So has God purchased his church with a full valuable price, even the precious blood of his own Son, [Acts 20:28](#). "Feed the church of God which he has purchased, or acquired with his own blood." O dear-bought inheritance! how much does this bespeak its worth! Or rather, the high esteem God has of it, to pay down blood, and such blood for it; never was any inheritance bought at such a rate: every particular elect person, and none but such are comprehended in this purchase; the rest still remain in the devil's right. Sin made a forfeiture of all to justice, upon which Satan entered, and took possession, and, as the strong man armed, still keeps it in them, [Luke 11:21](#). but upon payment of this sum to justice, the elect (who only are intended in this purchase) pass over into God's right and property, and now are neither Satan's, [Acts 26:18](#). nor their own, [1 Corinthians 6:19](#). but the Lord's peculiar, [1 Peter 2:6](#). And to show how much they are his own, you have two possessives in one verse. [Canticles 8:12](#). "My vineyard, which is mine, is before me, mine, which is mine."

2. Proposition Gardeners divide and separate their own lands from other men's, they have their land-marks and boundaries, by which property is preserved, [Deuteronomy 27:17](#). [Proverbs 22:28](#).

So are the people of God wonderfully separated and distinguished from all the people of the earth. [Psalm 4:3](#). "The Lord has set apart him that is godly for himself.

And the Lord knows who are his," 2 Timothy 2:19. It is a special act of grace, to be enclosed by God out of the waste howling wilderness of the world, [Deuteronomy 33:16](#). This did God intentionally, in the decree before the world was; which decree is executed in their sanctification and adoption.

3. Proposition Corn-fields are carefully fenced by the gardener with hedges and ditches, to preserve their fruits from beasts that would otherwise over-run and destroy them. It is as good husbandry to keep what we have, as to acquire more than we had.

"My well-beloved has a vineyard in a very fruitful hill, and he fenced it," [Isaiah 5:1, 2](#). No inheritance is better defended and secured, than the Lord's inheritance, [Psalm 125:2](#). "As the mountains are round about Jerusalem, so the Lord is round about his people." So careful is he for their safety, "that he creates upon every dwelling-place of mount Zion, and upon her assemblies, a cloud and smoke by day, and the shining of a flaming fire by night: for upon all the glory shall be a defense," [Isaiah 4:5](#). Not a particular saint, but is hedged about and enclosed in arms of power and love, [Job 1:10](#). "You have made a hedge about him," The devil gladly would, but by his own confession could not break over the hedge to touch Job, until God's permission made a gap for him: yes, he not only made an hedge, but a wall about them, and that of fire, [Zechariah 2:5](#). Sets a guard of angels "to encamp round about them that fear him," [Psalm 34:7](#). And will not trust them with a single guard of angels neither, though their power be great, and love to the saints as great; but watches over them himself also, [Isaiah 27:2, 3](#). "Sing you unto her, a vineyard of red wine, I the Lord do keep it, I will water it every moment; lest any hurt it, I will keep it night and day."

4. Proposition Gardeners carry out their compost, to fertilize their arable ground, they dung it, dress it, and keep it in heart; and in these western parts are at great charges to bring lime, and saltwater-sand to quicken their thin and cold soil.

"Lord, let it alone this year also, until I shall dig about it, and dung it; and if it bear fruit, well, if not, cut it down," [Luke 13:8](#). O the rich dressing which God bestows upon his churches! they are costly fields indeed, dressed and fertilized, not only by precious ordinances and providences, but also by the sweat, yes, blood of the dispensers of them. "You Londoners (says Mr. Lockier) are trees watered choicely indeed; it is storied of the palm-tree, that at its first transplanting into Italy, it was watered with wine. I cannot say (says he) that you have been so watered by me, I dare not; but this I can humbly and truly say, that if our choicest strength and spirits may be named instead of water, wine; or if the blessing which has gone along with these waters, at any time, has turned them into wine, in vigor upon your souls, then has God by me, watered your roots with wine."

5. Proposition The gardener builds his house, where he makes his purchase, dwells upon his land, and frequently visits it; he knows that such as dwell far from their lands, are not far from loss.

So does God; wherever he plants a church, there does he fix his habitation, intending there to dwell, [Psalm 46:5](#). "God is in the midst of her," she shall not be moved. Thus God came to dwell upon his own fee and inheritance, in Judea, [Leviticus 26:11, 12](#). "And I will set my tabernacle among you, and will be your God, and you shall be my people." Which promise is again renewed to his churches of the New Testament, 2 Corinthians 6:16. And when the churches shall be in their greatest flourish and purity, then shall there be the fullest and most glorious manifestation of the divine presence among them, [Revelation 21:3](#). "And I heard a great voice out of Heaven, saying, Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them, and be their God." Hence the assemblies are called, the places of his feet—And there they behold the beauty of the Lord," [Psalm 27](#).

6. Proposition Gardeners grudge not at the cost they are at for their tillage; but as they lay out vast sums upon it, so they do it cheerfully.

"And now, O inhabitants of Jerusalem, and men of Judah, judge, I pray you, between me and my vineyard; what could have been done more to my vineyard, that I have not done in it? And as he bestows upon his heritage the choicest mercies, so he does it with the greatest cheerfulness; for he says, [Jeremiah 32:41](#). I will rejoice over them to do them good; and I will plant them in this land assuredly, with my whole heart and with my whole soul." It is not the giving out of mercy (says one) that grieves God, but the recoiling of his mercy back again upon him by the creature's ingratitude.

7. Proposition When gardeners have been at cost and pains about their husbandry, they expect fruit from it, answerable to their pains and expenses about it: "Behold (said James) the gardener "waits for the precious fruits of the earth," [James 5:7](#).

"And he looked that it should bring forth fruit," [Isaiah 5:2](#). This heavenly Gardener waits for the fruits of his fields also; never did any gardener long for the desired harvest, more than God does for the fruits of holiness from his saints: Great are the expectations of God from his people: "And when the time of the fruit drew near, he sent his servants to the gardeners, that they might receive the fruits of it."

8. Proposition Gardeners are much delighted, to see the success of their labors; it comforts them over all their hard pains, and many weary days to see a good increase.

Much more is God delighted in beholding the flourishing graces of his people; it pleases him to see his plants laden with fruit, and his valleys sing with corn, [Canticles 6:2](#). "My beloved is gone down to the garden, into his beds of spices, to feed in the gardens, and to gather lilies." These beds of spices (say expositors) are the particular churches, the companies of believers; he goes to feed in these gardens, like as men go to their gardens to make merry, or to gather fruit, [Canticles 4:16](#). "He eats his pleasant fruit," namely, His people's holy performances, sweeter to him than any ambrosio; thus he feeds in the gardens, and he gathers lilies when he translates good souls into his kingdom above; "For the Lord takes pleasure in his saints, and will beautify the meek with salvation."

9. Proposition The gardener is exceedingly grieved when he sees the hopes of a good crop disappointed, and his fields prove barren, or blasted.

So the Lord expresses his grief for, and anger against his people, when they bring forth no fruits, or wild fruits, worse than none, [Hosea 9:16](#). "Ephraim is smitten, their root is dried up." Christ was exceedingly displeased with the fig-tree, and cursed it for its barrenness; it grieves him to the heart when his servants return to him with such complaints as these, "We have labored in vain, we have spent our strength for nothing."

10. Proposition Gardeners employ many laborers to work in their fields, there is need of many hands for such a multiplicity of business.

God has diversity of workmen also in the churches whom he sends forth to labor in his spiritual fields, [Ephesians 4:12](#). "He gave some apostles, some prophets, and some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry," [Amos 3:7](#). I have sent [my servants] the prophets. It is usual with the apostles to place this title of a servant among their honorary titles, though a profane mouth once called it, a sordid artifice. Christ has stamped a great deal of dignity upon his ministers, in retaining them for the nearest service to himself, [1 Corinthians 4:1](#). "Let a man so account of us, as the ministers of Christ;" they are workers together with God: The gardener works in the field among his

laborers, and the great God disdains not to work in, and with his poor servants, in the work of the ministry.

11. Proposition The work about which gardeners employ their servants in the field, is toilsome and spending, you see they come home at night as weary as they can draw their legs after them.

But God's workmen have a much harder task than they; hence are they set forth in scripture by the laborious ox, 1 Corinthians 9:9. [Revelation 4:7](#). Some derive the word deacon, from εἰσέβω, which signifies dust, to show the laboriousness of their employment, laboring until even choked with dust and sweat. It is said of Epaphroditus, [Philippians 2:13](#). "That for the work of Christ he was sick, and near unto death; not regarding his life, to supply their lack of service." The apostle's expression, Colossians 1 is very emphatic, "Whereunto I also labor, striving, according to his working, which works in me mightily." The word signifies such spending labor as puts a man into an agony; and blessed is that servant, whom his Lord, when he comes, shall find so doing.

12. Proposition The immediate end of the husbandman's labor, and his servants labor is for the improvement of his land, to make it more flourishing and fruitful.

The scope and end of the ministry is for the church's benefit and advantage. They must not lord it over God's heritage, as if the church were for them, and not they for the church; nor serve themselves of it, but be the church's servants for Jesus sake, [2 Corinthians 4:6](#). The power they have received being for edification, and not for destruction, [2 Corinthians 10:8](#). Christ has given them to the churches; their gifts, their time, their strength, and all their ministerial talents, are not their own, but the church's stock and treasure.

13. Proposition The workmen that labor in the fields are accountable for their work to him that employed them.

Church-officers are also accountable to God for all the souls committed to them. They are stewards of the mysteries of God, 1 Corinthians 4:1. and stewards are accountable. "We watch for "your souls, (says the apostle) as they that must give an account," [Hebrews 13:7](#). If these servants be unfaithful in their work and trust, the blood of souls shall be required at their hands, [Ezekiel 3:17, 18](#), which are thunderbolts rather than words. The guilt of blood is the greatest guilt; and of all blood, the blood of souls.

14. Proposition Those that spend their time and strength all their days, in fertilizing and plowing in the fields, do maintain themselves and their families by their labors; their hands are sufficient for themselves and theirs.

"Even so has God ordained, that they which preach the gospel, should live by the gospel," [1 Corinthians 9:14](#). "The working man is worthy of his food," [Matthew 10:10](#). It is a sad thing, if those who break the bread of life to souls, should be suffered to want bread themselves. God would not have the mouth of an ox muzzled that treads out the corn, but have liberty to eat as well as work. Yet if any pretended to the ministry be like the heifer, that loves to tread out the corn, that is cares to do no work, but such as brings in present pay; he therein sufficiently discovers his beast-like disposition. Ministers must be faithful in their Master's work, and if men do not, God will reward them. For "he is not unrighteous to forget their work, and labor of love," [Hebrews 6:10](#).

15. Proposition It is a great trouble to gardeners in a busy time, to be put off from their labors by stormy weather, which drives them out of the fields, and makes them let all lie, until it clear up again; yet mean while, they are not idle, but employ themselves in homework.

Even so in God's husbandry, it is an unspeakable affliction to God's workmen to be rendered useless and unserviceable to the churches, by those storms of trouble, which drive them from their public ministerial work. With what a heavy heart did Paul go off from his work at Ephesus, Acts 20. It spends a minister to preach, but more to be silent. It is a loud speaking judgment, when God shall say to them as to Ezekiel, "Son of man, I will make your tongue cleave to the roof of your mouth, and you shall be dumb," [Ezekiel 3:26](#). Such silencing providences, speak thundering language to gracious hearts; yet, even then, the keepers of the vineyard have a private vineyard of their own to look after, they have much home-work, when no out-work.

16. Proposition There is a vast difference between those fields which have been well husbanded and dressed by a skillful and diligent gardener; and those that have been long out of husbandry. How fragrant is the one? How dry and barren the other? When you pass by a field well dressed and fenced, everything prosperous, and in exquisite order, you may know, without farther inquiry, that a good gardener lives there.

Thus stands the case between those places which God has blessed with a faithful, painful ministry, and such as have none, or worse than none: for as the husbandman's cost and pains appear in the verdant and fragrant hue of his fields; so a minister's pains and diligence are ordinarily seen in the heavenly lives, and flourishing graces of the people. The churches of Corinth and Thessalonica, where Paul and other holy instruments spent much of their time and pains, became famous and flourishing churches, [2 Corinthians 9:2](#). A special blessing comes along with a godly minister, to the place where special providence assigns him. Such places, like Gideon's fleece, have the dew of Heaven lying on them, while others round about are dry and barren.

17. Proposition The gardener is not discouraged, though the seed lie long under the clods; he knows it will spring up at the last, and reward him, or those that come after him, for their pains and patience in waiting for it.

Ministers should not be presently discouraged in their work, because they see but little or no appearance of all the seed they have sown among the people. The "servant of the Lord must be patient towards all, waiting if at any time God will give them repentance," 2 Timothy 2:24, 25. And if it never spring up in his time, it may after his death; and if so, he shall not fail of his reward, [John 4:36, 37](#). "And he who reaps, receives wages, and gathers fruit unto life eternal, that both he who sows, and he that reaps, may rejoice together; and herein is that saying true, one sows, and another reaps." Though ministers die, yet their words live; yes, their words take hold of men when they are in the dust, [Zechariah 1:6](#).

18. Proposition Gardeners find low grounds and valleys, most fertile; hills, however lofty they overtop the lower grounds, yet answer not the husbandman's pains as the valleys do: these are best watered and secured from the scorching heat of the sun.

Experience shows us, that the humblest saints are most fruitful under the gospel; "These are they that receive with meekness the engrafted word," [James 1:21](#). whose influences abide in them, as the rain does in the low valleys. Happy is that minister, whose lot falls in such a pleasant valley. "Blessed are they that sow beside all such waters, that send forth thither the feet of the ox and the donkey," [Isaiah 32:20](#). among these valleys run the pleasant springs and purling brooks, which fertilize the neighboring ground. Heavenly ordinances there, leave fruitful influences.

19. Proposition The first crop is usually the best, and the longer the gardener tills his ground, the less it produces; after a few years its vigor and strength is spent.

The first entertainment of the gospel is commonly the best; and what good is done by the ministry is often done at its first entrance. New things are pretty, and very taking. "John at first was to the Jews a burning and shining light, and they were willing [for a season] to rejoice in his light," [John 5:35](#). Paul was highly valued among the Galatians at first; such was their zeal, that they could have plucked out their eyes, and have given them to him! but how quickly did this full tide ebb again? For he complains, [Galatians 4:15](#). "Where then is the blessedness you spoke of?"

20. Proposition Lastly, When fields prove barren, and will not quit the husbandman's cost, nor answer the seed he sows in them, he plucks up the hedges, and lays it waste.

So when churches grow formal and fruitless, the Lord removes his gospel-presence from them, plucks up the hedge of his protection from about them, and lays them open as waste ground to be over-run by their enemies. [Jeremiah 7:12](#). "Go to Shiloh, and see what I did unto it." What is become of those once famous and flourishing churches of Asia? Are they not laid waste, and trodden down by infidels? And now go to, says the great Gardener, "I will tell you what I will do to my vineyard; I will pull up the hedge thereof, and it shall be laid waste," [Isaiah 5:5](#).

Thus you see the allegory opened in its particulars: from the whole, I shall present you with these five ensuing corollaries.

Corollaries

The first Corollary

How great then are the dignities and privileges of the churches of Jesus Christ whom he has appropriated to himself, above all the people of the earth, to be his peculiar inheritance? The rest of the world is a waste wilderness; all other places, however pleasant, in respect of their natural amenity and delights, are truly enough called the dark places of the earth; dismal, solitary cells, where every doleful creature dwells. But the church is the paradise of the earth, a garden enclosed, [Canticles 4:12](#). in whose hedges the gospel birds chirp and sing melodiously, [Canticles 2:12](#). Its beds are beds of spices, [Canticles 6:2](#). and between its pleasant banks, a crystal river of living water runs, [Revelation 22:1](#). the streams whereof make glad the city of God, in the midst whereof the Lord himself delights to walk. O Zion, with what pleasures does you abound? If Bernard was so ravished with the delights of his monastery, because of its green banks, and shady bowers, and herbs, and trees, and various objects to feed his eyes, and fragrant smells, and sweet and various tunes of birds, together with the opportunities of devout contemplation, that he cried out admiringly, Lord! what delight do you provide, even for the poor! How much more should we be ravished with Zion's glory? For, beautiful for situation is mount Zion. Of whom it may much more truly be said, what a chronicler of our own once said of England, That it is the fortunate island, the paradise of pleasure, the garden of God, whose valleys are like Eden, whose hills are as Lebanon, whose springs are as Pishgah, whose rivers are as Jordan, whose wall is the ocean, and whose defense is the Lord Jehovah. Happy are you, O Israel; who is like unto you? Who can count the privileges with which Christ has invested his churches? O let it never seem a light thing in our eyes, that we grow within his blessed enclosure. How sweet a promise is that, [Exodus 19:5](#). "You shall be to me a peculiar treasure, above all people; for all the earth is mine."

The second Corollary

Hence it follows, That spiritual barrenness is a great reproach and shame to Christians. Shall God's husbandry, which is planted, watered, fenced, filled with favors and mercies, be like the barren heath in the desert? Surely it should be said of every soul that grows here, as the historian says of Spain, that there is nothing barren or unfruitful in it. God's vineyard is planted in a very fruitful hill. [Isaiah 5:1](#). "And surely they that are planted in the house of the Lord, should flourish in the courts of our God; they should bring forth fruit, even in old age, to show that God is upright," [Psalm 92:13, 14](#). "They are created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God has ordained they should walk in," [Ephesians 2:10](#). "They are married unto Christ, that they might bring forth fruit to God," [Romans 7:4](#). An empty branch is a dishonor to the root that bears it, a barren field to the gardener that owns it; God cannot endure that in his fields which he suffers in the wilderness.

The third Corollary

If the church be God's husbandry, then there is such a special, gracious presence of the Lord in his churches, as is not to be found in all the world beside. Where may you expect to find the gardener but in his own fields? There lies his business, and there he delights to be. And where may we expect to find God but in the assemblies of his saints? "He walks among the golden candlesticks," [Revelation 2:1](#). I will walk among you, (says he) and be your God, [2 Corinthians 6:16](#). Upon this account the church is called Jehovah Shammah, the Lord is there, [Ezekiel 48](#). ult. You may see the footsteps of God in the creatures, but the face of God is only to be seen in his ordinances. Hence, [Psalm 27:4](#). "David longed for the temple, that he might see the beauty of the Lord. Now what is beauty, but a symmetry and proportion of parts? In the works of creation you see one attribute manifested in one thing, and another in another thing; but in the sanctuary you may see beauty, even in all the attributes of God displayed there: And, indeed, we find in scripture such astonishing expressions about the visions of God in his church, that in reading them, a man can see little difference between it and Heaven; for as the church is called Heaven, [Matthew 25:1](#). so its description is like that of Heaven. [Hebrews 12:22, 23](#). "You are come to the heavenly Jerusalem, and to an innumerable company of angels," etc. And [Revelation 22:4](#). "They shall see his face, and his name shall be written in their foreheads." And verse 6. The saints are represented "standing nearer to the throne of God than the angels themselves." Hence also ordinances are called galleries, in which both saints and angels walk, beholding the glory of him that sits upon the throne. [Zechariah 3:7](#). "If you will keep my ways, I will give you galleries to walk in among them that stand by."

The fourth Corollary

If the church be God's husbandry, then those that be employed in ministerial work ought to be men of great judgment and experience in soul affairs; for these are the laborers whom God, the mystical Gardener employs and entrusts about his spiritual husbandry. Should gardener employ ignorant persons, that neither understand the rules nor proper seasons of husbandry; how much would such workmen damnify and prejudice him? He will not employ such to weed his fields, as know not wheat from tares; or to prune his trees, that think midsummer as fit for that work as December: much less will God. He qualifies all that he sends with wisdom for their work. "His workmen approve themselves workmen indeed, such as need not be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth," [2 Timothy 2:15](#). As Bezalel was furnished with wisdom before he was employed in tabernacle-work; so Christ instructs his servants with skill and insight, before they are employed in ministerial work. He gives them a mouth and wisdom, [Luke 21:15](#) endues them with power

from on high; as Christ was filled abundantly with the Spirit for his work, so, according to proportion, are those that are sent by him. [John 20:21, 22](#). "As my Father has sent me, so send I you." And as for those that run before they are sent, and understand not the mysteries of the gospel; I shall say no more of them but this; "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do."

The fifth Corollary

To conclude, If the church be God's husbandry, that is, if husbandry have so many resemblances of God's works about the church in it; then how inexcusable is the ignorance of gardeners in the things of God, who, besides the word of the gospel, have the teaching of the creatures; and can hardly turn their hands to any part of their work, but the Spirit hints one spiritual use or other from it to their souls? How do the scriptures abound with parables and lively similitudes taken from husbandry? From the fields, the seed, the plow, the barn, from threshing and winnowing; similitudes also from planting, engrafting, and pruning of trees; and not a few from the ordering of cattle. So that to whatever business you turn your hands, in any part of your calling, still God meets you with one heavenly instruction or other. But alas! How few are able to improve their civil employments to such excellent ends! these things are but briefly hinted in the scriptures, and those hints scattered up and down, that they know not where to find them; and if they could, yet would it be difficult so to methodize them, as it is necessary they should be, in order to their due improvement by meditation.

And therefore I judged it necessary to collect and prepare them for your use; and in this manner to present them to you as you find them in the following chapters. Read, consider, and apply; and the Lord make you good gardeners for your own souls.