

THE GARDENER ... who neglected his weeding
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(PROVERBS 24: 30-34)

If King Solomon kept a diary, the pages devoted to the story of the ancient gardener made strange reading. Undoubtedly other events found space between the items of news, but when these were separated from the main story, the following was left for posterity.

APRIL. " I went by the field . . . and by the vineyard." What possibilities !
The weather is getting warmer; spring is in the air. The trees are awakening after their long winter sleep, and all nature is beginning to sing. To-day I passed by a vineyard, and it looked lovely. The owner, a self-satisfied man, was very proud of his possession. He seemed one of the sort who never takes kindly to rebuke or instruction. He knew it all! Yet I admired his vineyard, for it presented great opportunities. It was favorably situated, well sheltered, well watered. A man could make a lot of money in that vineyard. The young vines were very healthy. I envied that dreamy husbandman. I have a haunting fear that he might neglect his picturesque garden. Ah, it was so lovely ; it reminded me of a man's soul.

MAY. " And lo, the vineyard was all grown over with thorns." What problems!
Yes, I was really shocked. That lovely vineyard was unrecognizable. The well-kept paths had almost disappeared ; the warm brown soil was hidden. That silly man had neglected his weeding. His garden is swiftly becoming a wilderness. What a fool! I saw him on the veranda of his house. Well! His snores betrayed his whereabouts. His long legs were stretched in front of his chair, and his big hat rested on his nose! I felt like shaking him ; but after all, my being king did not give me the right to interrupt a man's siesta. But he's a fool, for all that. Those weeds and thorns will increase every day, and all the possibilities so apparent last month will vanish. What would happen in my soul if I acted similarly? Weeds will grow anywhere in very quick time. The snores of that man annoyed me!

JUNE. " And nettles had covered the face of the vineyard." What pain!
Well, well, well! I could hardly believe my eyes. I saw that vineyard again to-day, and this time it was worse than ever! The young vines were lost in a forest of nettles. Yes, nettles, mark you! They'll take some getting out now. Somebody will be hurt before that garden is reclaimed. And would you believe it-the gardener was sleeping again. His feet were on another chair, his hat covered his face, his snores were as regular as the incoming waves of the sea. I looked at the blue skies ; I felt the warmth of the glorious sunshine. It was wonderful to be alive on such a day, and yet he slept. My! Yes, it's strange how that vineyard reminds me of a human soul. A little neglect, and weeds give place to thorns ; a little more neglect and thorns give place to nettles. I think the husbandman has already lost his harvest. Nettles! Weeding will be useless now. Only immediate ruthless action will save the crop!

JULY. " And the stone wall of the vineyard was broken down." What peril!

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Yes, I expected it! Other people have noticed the indolence of that stupid fool. He spends all his time sleeping. His vineyard is utterly neglected, and now he is being robbed. The encircling wall has been broken. I wonder who did that? Now the foxes can get in, and anyone can steal the sleeper's possessions. I had a look around the place, and soon detected evidence that thieves had been in the vineyard. I walked across to the veranda -oh, yes, he was there as usual. I was tempted to awaken him, but on second thoughts I left him. I am wondering if he will ever change his foolish habits. Anyhow, there he sat; his lower jaw was rising and falling on his heaving chest, and all the while his nasal organs produced discords! What would I have liked to do! It's not safe to write that in any diary-some day others might read my words!

AUGUST. " Yet a little sleep . . . so shall thy poverty come." What poverty!
Cheers! A miracle has happened ; the impossible has taken place ; the dead has been resurrected. Yes, I was down there again to-day, and I could have laughed when I saw dismay written on the face of the husbandman. He had been across to witness the harvesting of the grapes in the adjacent vineyards, and was filled with remorse. He was calling himself by all the unholy names imaginable, but the nettles were higher than ever! " Then I saw, and considered it well: I looked upon it, and received instruction." Neglect can ruin any garden even the garden of my soul. Have I been as foolish as the sleepy husbandman? I have looked at other vineyards and forgotten my own. I must get on with my own weeding. They've grown a lot lately!

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