

THE VOICE OF NATURE.

“ALL these things will be burnt up” is a reply I have sometimes met with when speaking of the beauty of created things. And yet they are God’s workmanship, and as such command our attention. “They show traces of the curse pronounced upon the ground,” I am told. Too true indeed; but also they evidence what divine mercy has spared for man’s delight. The silent testimony of nature tells of the goodness of God, as well as His eternal power and Godhead; and the varied beauty of inanimate creation appeals to all who enjoy it on behalf of its Creator. “He hath made every thing beautiful in his time.” (Eccles. iii. 11.)

If we have an earthly friend whom we greatly respect and value, we usually feel some interest in anything which is his workmanship; yet there are some who think the works of God are not worth their while to study. (See Job xxxviii., xxxix.) God never repeats Himself; and the lessons we may learn from natural things we are not likely to find elsewhere.

Though planning yet greater wonders in the moral universe, the eternal God could condescend to design and fashion the flowers and trees, whose wonderful perfections are unnoticed because so familiar. And the same mind, out of the simplest

elements, could form the most rudimentary and the most complex organisms, showing the same perfection of detail in the most minute as in the greatest, and implant in each the mysterious vital principle which no human wisdom can define or human skill create.*

I was once travelling some seventy miles through the country towards London. It was early summer; and looking from the carriage window at the changing landscape around, I was struck by the great variety and beauty of nature. Without noise or notice, the seeming deadness of winter had been clothed with the choicest tints; and the impression was enhanced by the thought that these beautiful effects were produced by one or at most two colours, green and brown, neither of which finds much place in man's decorations.

Arriving in town on the evening of the Queen's jubilee, I was in the midst of the decoration and display in honour of the event; yet to me the many lights and coloured flags, however tastefully arranged, could not compare with the quieter beauty of the country-side in summer.

To look at another part of God's workmanship. Can we conceive anything more wonderful than the structure of the human body? As a machine it is simply perfection, a model which man can admire but never imitate. The most

* It is true some leading scientists are endeavouring to manufacture a living organism. "Life," say they, "is a combination of chemical elements." It may be, but they have forgotten one ingredient no formula can supply—they have left God out.

striking proof of the perfection of this, as of any other of God's works, is that no suggestion could possibly be made for its improvement.

Then consider the wonderful harmony of nature, the indestructibility of matter, the inter-dependence of created things. To illustrate, take the growth of a plant. The thawing snow slowly percolates through the soil, the succeeding frost pulverizes the hardened ground, the seed germinates through the action of heat and moisture, life springing out of death and decay; the roots feed on the surrounding soil, and search for the moisture which, as rain, has fallen from clouds formed by the heat and carried by the wind. Thus we find winter and summer, frost and sunshine, wind and rain combining to bring one seed to fruition. (Job xxxviii. 26.)

Well may we learn our littleness from the book of nature, and yet feel assured that in God's purposes there is a niche for each to fill. Look through the grass on a country hill-side, and maybe you see some little insect, busied with the small concerns of its short life. Perhaps your eye alone has seen it—your eye and God's; yet that feeble thing is wanted there to live its unnoticed life, and place its unnoticed mite in the treasury of nature's temple.

They speak of sermons in stones, but all nature bears eloquent testimony to its Creator. "The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament showeth His handywork." (Ps. xix. 1.)

Let us briefly glance at the most wondrous scene of all. Can our finite minds take in the immensity of the universe, peopled with countless worlds even greater than our own? We can write the words, but cannot grasp the idea. And each world, with awful swiftness, is swinging through space in its determined path. No sound heralds its approach, no trail marks its path. Who made these worlds? Who gives them motion, and guides their course? GOD!

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Eternal Punishment.—I often recall a good saying of the quondam infidel, Thomas Cooper: “When the belief of eternal punishment is given up, then the eternal demerit of sin has faded from a man’s conscience; and what consistency can he see in the doctrine of Christ’s atonement?”

That is, I think, a most pregnant statement. He connects sin, atonement, and punishment, and views them in the eternity of their co-relations, so that what is true of one is true of all. If sin be a trifle, then so is atonement, and therefore also punishment. But if sin be what Scripture says, and to which a groaning creation of 6000 years of sorrow bears awful witness, then punishment is infinite, as also the value of the atoning sacrifice. Sin and the sin-offering are necessary antitheses of one another, and the offering must balance the sin. Thank God He has done so! Oh, may we humbly, but firmly, hold the eternal worth of that sacrifice, and measure all else by Him! “Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world.”

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