

The Revelation of Beauty.

IN the past, the strength of Baptists has sprung from their evangelical emphasis. But one of their weaknesses has undoubtedly been too narrow a view of the comprehensiveness of the Gospel. They have often consecrated ugliness as if it were the proper bride of holiness; are not our chapels often no more than "utility" buildings? What is there in them to draw the reverent soul away from the world, and to prompt prayer in a week-day hour?

Yet the Bible itself claims the noblest setting of architecture and music that we can give to it, and this because it is what it is, and before we come to anything it says. It is a revelation of beauty, as well as of truth and goodness. We know that the simplicity of devotion and of Gospel faith can attain to a genuine beauty which is much more than that of outward adornment. But, if beauty belongs to all that God is and does, the fuller application of it, and the personal response to it, can surely reinforce the Gospel and that love of men which springs from the love of God in Christ Jesus. To-day, the literary beauty of the Bible has been re-discovered by many, whose eyes are yet veiled to its deeper meanings. (The numerous "literary" editions of Scripture are the best proof of this.) But we could not claim that the Church in general or Baptists in particular have led the way to this re-discovery.

Let anyone who would hesitate to say that God meant the Bible to be a revelation of beauty give half an hour's quiet thought to the *forms* in which God has given it to us. Not the least service rendered by the Revised Version of the Old Testament is that some of its poetry is set out in the "parallelism" of Hebrew poetry—the repetition of similar thought in somewhat different expression. Thus, when the 29th Psalm says:

"The voice of the Lord is upon the waters,"

it goes on to say the same thing a little differently:

"The God of glory thundereth."

Indeed, the whole psalm is a splendid description of a thunder-storm sweeping up from the Mediterranean to the north of Palestine, and then through the whole land to the south. In contrast with this storm on earth is set the opening and closing verses describing the unruffled peace of the heavenly worship above in its "holy array" (as "the beauty of holiness" here implies). So in the magnificent descriptions of nature in the Book of Job and the delicate use of natural scenery and the details of nature in the Song of Songs. But much that comes to us through the prophets also is given as poetry, and ought to be set out in poetic form, as for example the lovely lyric of the

Vineyard (Isaiah v. 1-7), which our Lord appropriated and re-applied.

The quantity of such poetic form in the Old Testament cannot be accidental. It makes its permanent appeal to the aesthetic side of human personality, which God has surely created to find its supreme satisfaction in Himself. There is a revelation of His beauty as well as of His truth, and both have their service to render in moving the human will into heartfelt obedience. "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God," and love is the only way to fulfil the law of God. Therefore, whatever makes God more beautiful to us will also make us more able to bring to Him "the gold of obedience." The sixth chapter of Deuteronomy, from which that command is taken, leads up to the redemption from Egypt as that which makes it possible since it makes God more lovable. But redemption itself, in both Testaments, has its aspect of divine beauty, its poetry of divine activity. It reveals beauty chiefly because it is beautiful.

So the revelation of beauty passes into the beauty of revelation. The transition, indeed, is imperceptible, which is as it should be when we think of the "attributes" of God. For He is One, and His revelation of Himself is one in the last resort. Some day (or rather when eternity has gathered the "days" of time into itself) we shall see that all nature is gracious and that all grace is natural. If I remember aright (for I cannot check this reference, as all references should be checked) it was the poet Tennyson who, when found gazing at a little woodland pool, said "How beautiful God is!" It may well be that we have to learn to say that of the truths of the Gospel, and to see in them a higher and deeper beauty than of any light that has ever shone on land or sea. St. Paul compared the light of the second creation with that of the first (II. Cor. iv. 6)—a comparison worth pondering for its aesthetic as well as its moral and religious suggestions. What can be more beautiful than the surrender of a soul to the newly-seen light of Christ?

One thing alone is more beautiful, because it is perfect and complete, as no human surrender has ever been. This is the perfect surrender on the Cross of Christ. Its beauty is the more wonderful because it is cradled in so much ugliness, made by men and not by God. The words and deeds of Jesus have their human beauty before we go on to think of their divine meaning. But that meaning enshrines the crowning beauty of the universe, the love of God that enters this world of men in the grace of Christ, the love that creates the new fellowship by the Holy Spirit. The simplicity of the Cross makes its appeal universal. Such simplicity is the highest art, and God is the supreme Artist:

Out of Zion, the perfection of beauty,
God hath shined forth.

H. WHEELER ROBINSON.