

all moderns, guided by the interpretation in Jer. xlvi. 45 *end*—a verse based evidently upon Num. xxi. 28 and this passage;¹ *תש* being regarded as a contraction for *תשׁת*, Lam. iii. 47 (“devastation”).

xxv. 3. *Baal-peor*. Doubtless a local Baal, worshipped at Peor, and explained correctly on the margin. So in Phœnician Inscriptions we meet with Baal of Tyre, of Lebanon, of Tarsus, etc. The Greek deities had similarly special local epithets in different localities.

xxxi. 10. *Encampments* (LXX. *ἐπαύσεις*). See Gen. xxv. 16; Ezek. xxv. 4; 1 Chron. vi. 54 (Heb. 39), where the same rare word occurs. In Syriac, pronounced slightly differently, it is used for a nomad village or fold (*אַבְלָה*: e.g. John x. 1).

xxxv. 11. *Unwittingly* for *at unawares*. The alteration may appear to be a needless one, but, in fact, two distinct terms occur in the law of homicide, both rendered in A.V. “unawares.” The one which occurs here, *בְּשֹׁנְנָה*, has been already rendered several times *unwittingly* (chap. xv. 26-29; Lev. iv. 2, 22, &c.). The other, *בְּבִלִי דַעַת*, occurs Deut. iv. 42; xix. 4, and is now consistently represented by *unawares*. In Josh. xx. 3, 5, 9, the two expressions are used together.

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CHRIST, THE INTERPRETER OF NATURE.

(MATTHEW vi. 24-34.)

To the filial eye of Jesus Christ the moral world always shone through the natural world and glorified it. He saw all the beauty of Nature; nothing of all its great riches was lost on Him; and in a multitude of parables and other pictorial touches, He has set Nature in her endless

¹ The “crown of the head” is obtained from the word here rendered *break down*, by a slight change in two letters (*קִרְקַר* for *קִרְקַר*).

operations and aspects before us. But our Lord could never for a moment rest in Nature, or look on her as an end in herself. To him the whole visible universe was eloquent with meanings and lessons, with reminiscences and presages that ennobled and glorified her, because they came through her from a better world out of which she too had sprung, and for the sake of which she was daily sustained and administered.

The cornfields, the vineyards, the flowers, the birds of the air, the flocks of sheep in the meadows, the sky, the clouds, the times of ploughing and sowing and reaping, the starry nights, and the all-enriching sun—all the powers, provisions, and aspects of Nature were dear and beautiful to Him; and all the more so, that their beauty and beneficence were not their own, but were all so many manifestations of the wisdom and power and goodness of His Father. The sun that rose on the evil and on the good was "His sun;" the rain fell on the just and on the unjust from His windows; His Father fed all the fowls of the air, and clothed all the grasses of the field. Jesus Christ was the only true Minister and Interpreter of Nature she has ever had. He alone fully understood her place and appreciated her plan. He alone could reveal her, and set forth her whole message, because He saw her and rejoiced in her as the manifestation of His Father's wisdom, and the operation of His Father's hands. How different was Christ's enjoyment of Nature from much of our modern worship of her! How many in our day stand among the vast processes, and most majestic scenes of Nature, how many delight and make us to delight in watching her adaptations and harmonies, without one thought of Almighty God, whose message of truth and gift of beauty all this is! Nay, it has become a mark and token of the finest art and the truest science that they are to be without God, both in their methods and in their lessons. The truest

esthetic is to be atheistic; and the exactest science is to deny design and causation, and know only sequences and phenomena.

The unfilial and indevout love of Nature may, in some ways, and to a certain depth, refine the mind and beautify the life of the philosopher or the artist, but it has no power at all to make him a moral man, much less a holy. Jonathan Edwards, in his incomparable work on the Religious Affections, connects, as only a devout and a master mind could, the esthetic and artistic delight that is felt in the contemplation of beautiful objects, with the far nobler delight that is felt in the beauty of holiness. And he argues that the original beauty of Nature and the secondary beauty of objects of art would all immediately suggest and lead on to the more exquisite and stately and fruitful beauty of the moral and spiritual world, were it not that men are alienated from God and His holiness in a way they are not from Nature and her beauty. And no wonder; for Nature does not humiliate and condemn and slay her students as the spiritual world always does. A man may be a devotee of Nature and remain under the dominion of evil passions, and cruel and unclean affections; but the seekers after the beauty of holiness seek and find that at their peril and to their shame, as their histories and their works universally testify. "Woe is me, for I am undone," cries one of them, "because I am a man of unclean lips . . . for mine eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts." "Depart from me," cries another, "for I am a sinful man, O Lord." And another, when he saw the King in His beauty, fell at His feet as dead.

I suppose the beasts of the field see the greenness of the grass and the lustre of the flowers among which they feed their fill and lie down to rest. I suppose the eagle also sees the vast landscape over which he sails; but no one supposes that the brute cattle have any knowledge or

enjoyment of the beauty amid which they browse, or that a ravenous bird is at all tamed by being bathed daily in the glorious sunlight. They have no eye wherewith to see the beauty of earth and sea and sky; Nature has no revelation of that kind to make to them. And there are too many men who are as beasts are before the beauty of Nature: they have eyes, but they see not; and ears, but they hear not. There are other men, again, who are entranced and enraptured with the glory of creation, but who are all the time as dead as a stone to the glory of God. His "invisible things" were clearly seen by the Psalmists and the Prophets, and by Jesus Christ His Son. But to many in our day and land, with shame and fear be it said, the eternal power and Godhead of the Creator are not understood by the things He hath made. Men otherwise learned and open to truth, have in this thing become vain in their imaginations; and while professing to be wise have become fools. They are as dead to the presence and power of God in the works of creation, as their grosser-hearted fellows are to the beauty of a landscape, the raiment of a lily, or the glory of a starry sky.

Science and art may thus be most unprofitable and unblessed to those who pursue them as a chief end and a final and self-sufficing object. Art will be felt to be barren; and science, with all her wealth of secular fruits, will seem smitten with sterility to a wise man when she does not sound abroad and illustrate the greatness and the goodness and the beauty of God. Nature in her noblest aspects is but the threshold and floor of the heavenly temple; and art in all her many departments is best employed when used to adorn its windows and illustrate its walls. But he is surely a poor worshipper whose heart never rises above the pavement; and whose adoration is exhausted on the handicraft, on the furnishings and fittings and ornaments of the sacred house. Nature

is great and manifold, but her God is greater. Art is sweet, but his worship is sweeter far. The creation is an endless cause of wonder and praise to those who search it out, but the beauty and blessedness of holiness is their very life.

In the first place, then, we see an excellent illustration of the filial enjoyment and religious use of Nature in these words of the Creator's incarnate Son: "Behold the fowls of the air: for they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feedeth them. Consider also the lilies of the field, how they grow; they toil not, neither do they spin: and yet I say unto you, That even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these."

But the immediate aim of Christ in this most exquisite passage is to lead us all to trust ourselves and all that concerns us to the Fatherly providence of Almighty God. These cabinet-pictures of animate and inanimate nature are not works of pure art, that is to say, they are not pure art in the sense of being without practical application to the needs and wants of men. They are as beautiful as if they stood here for their beauty alone; and they are as useful, as instructive, and as full of moral ends, as if they were barren of every other quality. We are so limited in our gifts and in our scope, that we have often to shut out all thought of use when we aim at a perfect work of art; just as, on the other hand, we are often compelled to neglect the pursuit of beauty when we are bent on utility. But both Nature and Art, with the language that best exhibits them, are all plastic and harmonious in the hands of Jesus Christ. He is not instructive at the expense of beauty; nor, when most beautiful in His words and works, is He less rich to those who sit at His feet.

Pointing in the most perfect words to the fowls of the air as they are fed from the hand of God, and then at the lilies of the field as they outshine Solomon in all his glory, our

Lord says to us, So, only in better ways, does your Heavenly Father care for, and take all needful thought for you. Leave then all your over-thoughtfulness and anxiety to Him; He alone can fulfil all your thoughts, and without anxiety make them good. Torture not yourselves with what is above your strength and beyond your scope. Take all thought for that part in your life and in His providence which He has appointed you. Do your daily task with all fervour and fidelity, but after your allotted thought has been taken and your appointed part accomplished, leave the issue with Him who holds all issues in His own hand. Plough your field to its utmost furrow; sow your seed with a liberal hand, and when the harvest comes put in the sickle and store up the hundredfold fruits. Sow your seed with all thoughtfulness in the seedtime, and leave it without more thought till the harvest. With the sowing of the seed your work is for the time done. Take your well-earned rest, and thus you will be the more ready for the arduous labours of the harvest. Do not wade about among the sprouting corn as if your restless feet would make the blade fill better, or the shock ripen sooner. The plough, and the seed-basket, and the sickle, and the threshing instrument, and the winnowing fan are all yours to make use of with all due thought and care, each at its proper season; but the former and the latter rains, the filling sun and the mellowing winds are all in your Father's hand. "I have planted," said Paul, "and Apollos watered; but God gave the increase." Leave then your husbandry in His hands also. Take you no thought where He takes all.

Nor are our Heavenly Father's providences toward us exhausted in providing us with food and raiment. It is not we that say first of ourselves that we need more than meat. It is God and His Son who thus enhance and exalt our estimate of ourselves. It is Christ who says, after having spoken so beautifully about the fowls of the air, "Are ye not

much better than they?" Yes; much better, in this at least, that we need much more help and attention than they. For long after we have found the right answer to the anxious question "What shall we eat? and what shall we drink? and wherewithal shall we be clothed?" there arises a whole world of anxious thoughts, of infinitely more moment than the thought of food or raiment. Thoughts about our work; thoughts about our children; thoughts about the Church and the cause of Christ so bound up with her as we think; thoughts in thousands about our life till death, our prospects in death, and our deserts and destinies after it. Now in this and in many other kindred scriptures Christ gathers up all these overwhelming thoughts, and brings them all under this wide and blessed law of our heavenly Father's love and care. Leaving, then, one class of issues in God's hand, leave all. Leave the life of the body, and leave with it the life of the soul; leaving the time to come, leave also the time past; and leaving time past and time to come, leave your immortal soul when time shall be no longer. In a word, "Be careful for nothing; but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known unto God. And the peace of God which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus."

"The words of the wise are as goads, and as nails fastened by the masters of assemblies." And both as goad to spur on our slow faith, and as a nail fastened so as to rivet the truth He has taught, this wisest of masters adds: "Let the morrow take thought for the things of itself. Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof." That is to say, you will have enough every present day to occupy your thoughts and employ your hands though you let to-morrow's troubles alone. Let each day deal with its own duties and cares and leave to-morrow's duties and cares to to-morrow's strength. Take the ills of life, not in battalions,

but as single foes. Thus meeting them you may, with a steady bravery, conquer them ; but if you call them all up and challenge them all at once, you will be drowned in a sea of troubles. Deal with the ills of life as the Roman hero dealt with the three brothers who set upon him in full armour. Seeing them all rushing on him at the same moment, and knowing that he could not stand up under the threefold onset, he turned and fled for a space before them ; when, looking back, he saw one of his pursuers ahead of the others ; then, turning suddenly, he slew him, and again fled ; after a time turning suddenly again he slew the second, and, standing over his dead body, he waited in confidence the approach of the last of his foes. So do you fight life's sore battle, taking one enemy at a time. God has divided your life into days, with the rest and repose of intervening nights, and He has spread the ills of life over many days. Meet your ills so. Divide and conquer. Sufficient for each day is the evil thereof.

But the best thing in this rich and beautiful passage, and the thing to which it all leads up, is yet to come, and it comes in these noble and inspiring words : " But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and His righteousness." Having taught and illustrated in the happiest and wisest way the religious observation and use of Nature, and having by means of Nature risen above Nature and entered the all-embracing economy of Divine Providence, Christ now comes to that for which both Nature and Providence exist and operate, namely, for man, and for his pursuit and possession of righteousness. This is the end, this is the goal, this is the crown of all. He has already warned His disciples in never-to-be-forgotten words that their righteousness must far exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees ; must indeed be a righteousness of another kind and quality altogether. Seek first, He would say, the solid righteousness of the ten commandments. " Think

not that I am come to destroy the law or the prophets; I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil." Then seek the yet more spiritual righteousness of this sermon I am now preaching unto you. And if there be any other righteousness yet to be revealed, God will ere long open up and make offer of that also unto you. Sufficient for the Sermon on the Mount is the righteousness thereof.

These hortatory words, "Seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness" are, so to speak, the application of the second head of the Sermon on the Mount. The final and most solemn appeal will come, in due time, at the close of the third head. But meantime, having set the righteousness of His kingdom before His hearers, our Lord here tarries in His discourse for a moment, and with His utmost urgency exhorts them to seek it with paramount care and resolution. And these, according to this great sermon, are some of the chief things that enter into all true righteousness: poverty of spirit; meekness of mind; mercifulness, and the love of peace; reconciliation, instant and entire reconciliation with an offended brother; a clean heart, again and again returned upon, and a clean eye, and these at the expense of any pain or self-denial; uttermost integrity and simplicity of speech; absence of all retaliation, even to our greatest enemy; the most generous treatment of those who look to us for help; with an utter abhorrence of all ostentation and self-exhibition in our good works and our worship; and in all and above all, and repeatedly enforced, a single eye, and a right intention. Let this noble ideal of a disciple's life be found in all of you. Seek it always; seek it first; seek it like meat and drink; and it is Christ's promise and engagement that at last—it may be long, but wait and hunger for it—at last it will come, and then you shall be for ever filled with it. "Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness, for they shall be filled."

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