

# KINGLESS FOLK

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”But Love, that moves the earth, and skies, and sea,  
Beheld his old love in her misery,  
And wrapped her heart in sudden gentle sleep;  
And meanwhile caused unnumbered *ants* to creep  
About her, and they wrought so busily  
That all, ere sundown, was as it should be,  
And homeward went again the *kingless folk*.”  
— *The Earthly Paradise*.

# KINGLESS FOLK

AND  
Other Addresses on Bible Animals.

BY THE  
Rev. JOHN ADAMS, B.D., Inverkeilor.

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PEACE

## The Ant.

”Go to the ant, thou sluggard; consider her ways, and be wise: which having no guide, overseer, or ruler, provideth her meat in the summer, and gathereth her food in the harvest.”—Prov. vi. 6-8.

Of what use is a sluggard? ”Everything in the world is of some use,” says John Ploughman, ”but it would puzzle a doctor of divinity, or a philosopher, or the wisest owl in our steeple, to tell the good of idleness; that seems to me to be an ill wind which blows nobody any good, a sort of mud which breeds no eels, a dirty ditch which would not feed a frog. Sift a sluggard grain by grain, and you’ll find him all chaff.” A sluggard is really a good-for-nothing, and no better advice could be given to boys than this: ”Get out of the sluggard’s way, or you may catch his disease and never get rid of it. Grow up like bees, and you will never be drones.”

In this passage from the Book of Proverbs, Solomon advises the sluggard to go back to school that he may learn *wisdom*, for his folly is quite equal to his idleness. He is too lazy to drive in a nail, and as the old jingling rhyme has it,

"For want of a nail a shoe came off, for want of a shoe a horse was lost, for want of a horse a man was lost, for want of a man a battle was lost, and for loss of a battle a kingdom was lost." Because of the sluggard's first idleness in refusing to drive in the nail the whole kingdom comes down about his ears. It is not much ease he gets for all his scheming, and therefore he is sent back to school to learn wisdom.

The schoolmaster this time is the *Ant*, for, as the Bible tells us, "there be four things which are little upon the earth, but they are exceeding wise: the ants are a people not strong, yet they prepare their meat in the summer" (Prov. xxx. 24).

The wisdom taught by the ant is threefold.

### I.—THE WISDOM OF WORK.

If it be the hand of the diligent that maketh rich, the ants deserve to flourish; for there are few sluggards in their nest. The great mass of the teeming population is called "*the workers*." There may be a few males and females in each community dressed in four beautiful gauze wings, and no doubt regarding themselves as very superior members of the society—the veritable aristocracy of ant life—but they never touch the work with one of their little fingers. The keeping of the nest, the gathering of the food, the care of the eggs, and the rearing of the young ants, all devolves on the shoulders of the willing workers; and they, though they have no wings at all, and are called "neutrals" and some other ugly names, cheerfully undertake the whole labour, and make the entire community flourish through sheer hard work.

And that is a splendid lesson for all young people. All great men, as well as all true ants, have been hard workers. This is the only royal road to success.

What Sir Joshua Reynolds said to his students is equally true when applied to other professions: "You must be told again and again that labour is the only price of solid fame, and that whatever your force of genius may be, there is no easy method of becoming a good painter. Nothing is denied to well-directed labour; nothing is to be obtained without it." Jesus Himself was a hard worker. Go, learn of the ant, and be wise.

### II.—THE WISDOM OF SELF-RELIANCE.

Solomon adds that the ants carry on their labours without "guide, overseer, or ruler," and that is strictly the case. The ants are a feeble people, but they are per-

factly self-reliant. The bees, for instance, have a royal personage in their hive. We call her the queen. And thus we may speak of bees as we speak of ourselves, as living under a monarchical government. But the ants have no king or queen. There is no royal personage in their nest. They are rather to be regarded as staunch republicans, who carry on their labours without any "ruler," guided simply by that unerring instinct which imitates the actings of reason. The silly sheep may require a shepherd to take care of them, but the sagacious ants can take care of themselves.

And all boys who are worth their salt must try to learn the same lesson. They must learn to strike out a path for themselves, and not be content to eat the bread of idleness. They must work for the good of the whole community by learning to stand on their own feet. They must despise the ignoble position of those who, having no mind of their own, are led like a flock of sheep by the will of another. They must think and act for themselves if ever they are to rise to a position of influence. In one word, they must be self-reliant. No doubt there is a sense in which we must be dependent on the labours of others. Every honest man is bound to acknowledge the assistance which he has received from his parents, his fellows, and his God. But the two things are not opposed. "These two things, contradictory though they may seem, must go together—manly dependence and manly independence, manly reliance and manly self-reliance" (Wordsworth). The two things stand or fall together. Self-reliance is not selfishness, manly independence is not ignorant braggadocio. The ants toil for the common weal. They rely on one another.

### III.—THE WISDOM OF MAKING PROVISION FOR THE FUTURE.

"They prepare their meat in the summer." This fact has been denied by modern entomologists. They have told us that ants are dormant in winter (at least in Europe), and, therefore, stand in no need of food. But, as one reminds us, "we had need to be very sure of our facts when we attempt to correct the Spirit of God" (Gosse). It has been amply ascertained that in the East and other warm countries where hibernation is impossible, ants do store up for winter use. It is even stated that these harvesting ants bite off the radicle at the end of the seed to prevent its germinating, and occasionally bring up their stores to the surface to dry, when the tiny granary has been entered and soaked by the rain.

It is at this point that the example of the ant is specially severe on the sluggard. In crass idleness he would sleep even in the time of harvest; but this little creature, the least of insects, avails herself of every suitable opportunity, and gathers a supply of food sufficient for her purposes. "He that gathereth in

summer is a wise son, but he that sleepeth in harvest is a son that causeth shame." Let all boys then lay up for the future. Is it *knowledge*? Let them sow well at school, that they may reap well in business. Is it *character*? Let them sow well in youth, that they may reap well in manhood. Is it *religion*? Let them sow well in time, that they may reap well in eternity. In all these connections let them be warned by these solemn words, "The sluggard will not plow by reason of the cold, therefore shall he beg in harvest, and have nothing" (Prov. xx. 4).

## The Bear.

"I will meet them as a bear that is bereaved of her whelps."—Hos. xiii. 8.

However ferocious a bear may be, she is also capable of a large and generous affection. She is at once a fond mother, a constant friend and, if one may so express it, a magnanimous foe. Her devotion to her young is proverbial. She possesses the strongest maternal instincts, and when to her easily roused ferocity the fury of these instincts is added, it may be imagined what the violence of her attack will be. Any one who threatens the safety of her cubs does so at his peril. The constancy of her friendship is shown by the following curious case, related by Brehm. He tells us of a little boy who crept one night for warmth and shelter into the cage of an extremely savage bear. The latter, instead of devouring the child, took him under its protection, kept him warm with the heat of its body, and allowed him to return every night to its cage. By-and-by the poor boy died from smallpox, and the bear, utterly disconsolate, henceforth refused all food, and soon followed its little *protégé* to the grave.

But the bear is kind—*effusively* kind, even to its enemies. In the manner of its attack it does not fell them to the ground with one blow of its paw like the lion, nor seize them with its teeth like the dog. It *hugs* them. It embraces them with its powerful fore-limbs with a great show of affection, and continues the squeeze so long that the poor wretched victims are suffocated. Bruin does nothing by halves. The advice of old Polonius is followed to the very letter:—

"The friends thou hast and their adoption tried,  
Grapple them to thy soul with hooks of steel."

He *does* grapple them. He may give great attention to the friendships of life, but he does not forget to *embrace* his enemies.

With respect to the bear mentioned in the Bible, we may note three points.

#### I.—ITS KIND.

This is not the common brown bear of Europe, nor the white polar bear of the Arctic regions; but the yellowish-brown Syrian bear, which may still be found in its native haunts around the wooded fastnesses of Hermon and Lebanon. It is shorter in limb and has smaller claws than its European cousin; but its most striking peculiarity is its change of colour. Like many other animals, the Syrian bear changes its colour as it grows older. "When a cub it is of a darkish brown, which becomes a light brown as it approaches maturity. But when it has attained its full growth it becomes cream-coloured, and each succeeding year seems to lighten its coat, so that a very old bear is nearly as white as its relative of the Arctic regions" (J. G. Wood). Alas! the change which is produced by age is not confined to *Ursus Syriacus*. The boy, no less than the bear, will yet experience that solemn transformation. The blackest locks will yet whiten with the frosts of age, for lustre, youth, and virility will all alike perish. But this change is only the outward symbol of what ought to be an inward, spiritual fact. If the locks whiten, so ought the conscience, the soul, the heart. As youth passes into manhood and manhood into age, the man within should "aye be gettin' whiter"; until when the locks have grown grey in the service of righteousness, the children may "rise up before the *hoary* head, and honour the face of the old man" (Lev. xix. 32).

"Yes, childhood, mark the hoary head and rise—  
Stand on thy feet and give the honour due;  
That crown of glory points you to the skies,  
Like snow-capped mountains in the azure blue."

#### II.—ITS FOOD.

The bear, to begin with, is a strict vegetarian. While he can find abundance of vegetables and fruit he is little disposed to go far in varying his means of subsistence. His teeth are formed for the purpose. Unlike those of the lion or tiger, which have a scissor-blade appearance, and are incapable of any but an up-and-down motion, the teeth of the bear are true grinders or molars, and the



hinge of the lower jaw is so constructed that it can be worked from side to side, so that the bear can actually *chew* its food.

It is said to be very fond of strawberries—like some little boys we know—and like the blackbird it can walk daintily along the rows and pick out the ripest. But if there be one thing more than any other that throws the bear into an ecstasy of excitement it is the prospect of a feast of honey. A nest of ants is nothing in comparison. The long nose is thrust into the delicious comb, though it be stung and stung again by the infuriated inhabitants.

It is not till other food fails that the bear becomes carnivorous. But then, driven by hunger, it will even descend into the lower pastures and seize upon the goats and the sheep. This habit is referred to by the youthful David in 1 Samuel xvii. 33. King Saul was trying to dissuade him from matching himself against the gigantic Philistine; but David answered: "Thy servant kept his father's sheep, and there came a lion, and a bear, and took a lamb out of the flock: and I went out after him, and smote him, and delivered it out of his hand.... Thy servant slew both the lion and the bear, and this uncircumcised Philistine shall be as one of them, seeing he hath defied the armies of the living God." And all the young people know the result. One smooth stone from the brook was placed in David's sling, and yon huge mass of human arrogance was hurled to the ground. They who fight for Jehovah need never fear. A stone cast in His name becomes a thunderbolt.

### III.—ITS FEROCITY.

"Let a bear robbed of her whelps meet a man rather than a fool in his folly" (Prov. xvii. 12).

The whelps themselves are not ferocious. Indeed, they are remarkably stupid. They are as confident as they are weak, and do not even try to escape when the hunters come upon them. The young water-fowl by the river-side disappear in an instant if you happen to come upon them; but the cubs of the bear, with a stupid simplicity, just allow themselves to be caught and massacred. They remind one of the lamb mentioned by the poet:—

"Pleased to the last they crop the flowery food,  
And lick the hand just raised to shed their blood."

But there is something far worse than this simplicity. There is brazen-faced irreverence and impudence. When Elisha, the man of God, was going up to Bethel, a crowd of young vagabonds came out of the village and mocked the old man,

and said: "Go up, thou bald head; go up, thou bald head. And two she-bears came rushing out of the wood, and tare forty and two of them" (2 Kings ii. 24). These were not little children, but "young lads" (R.V. margin), who had begun to herd at street corners, and to scoff and gibe at those who passed by. And, in our own day, society would be none the worse of a few she-bears to act as a kind of police at all such corners. They might help to rid the streets of a good deal of juvenile profanity. But alas! because this Old Testament punishment does not fall on these young miscreants, the evil, instead of becoming less, is in great danger of being largely increased. And yet, if boys only knew it, a far worse calamity has already fallen. They may not have been attacked by bears, but they themselves have become bears—not growing fairer, nobler, whiter, as they grow in years; but fouler, darker, meaner, with the awful increase of sin—selling themselves to do evil in the sight of the Lord. Ah! let every true lad beware as to the company he keeps. "Evil company doth corrupt good manners." "Whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap;" and "the way of the ungodly shall perish."

## The Dove.

"And He said unto them that sold doves, Take these things hence."—John ii. 16.

It is reported of St Francis of Assisi, in the Middle Ages, that he would sometimes go out and preach to the beasts and birds. He treated them so kindly, both in the house and field, that they would draw near without any sign of fear, and allow him to stroke and feed them with his hand. In like manner, we may think of Jesus pitying the poor, dumb beasts of burden, when He saw them, as we sometimes see them, unmercifully treated by heartless drivers; or grieving at other times at the frantic efforts of little birds beating against the bars of their cage—those tiny songsters of the field and wood, which had been taken by the snare of the fowler, and bereft of their liberty.

The incident before us is a case in point. Here, at the beginning of His ministry, He made a whip of small cords and drove the traffickers out of His Father's temple. Men, money-tables, oxen, were all swept before His holy indignation. But there, in mid-air, the upraised whip was arrested. *Jesus could not strike the meek and gentle doves.* There they sat in their wicker baskets, with large eyes

that were full of tender pleading, and the raised whip was not allowed to fall. He could only say to their keepers, "Carry these things hence," for to the dumb, lower animals, He was "moved with compassion."

It is a great and fitting lesson for the young. They who are kind to their pets are not far from His Kingdom. "A righteous man regardeth the life of his beast."

We ought to be like the dove in three ways.

### I.—IN CHARACTER.

"Be ye therefore wise as serpents and *harmless as doves*" (Matt. x. 16). What the lamb is among animals, the dove is among birds. It is the divine emblem of purity and innocence—the bearer of the olive branch of peace. The whole character of the dove is in keeping with this estimate. Its voice, no less than its disposition, is the embodiment of sweetness. It has "a tender mournful cadence which, heard in solitude and sadness, cannot fail to be heard with sympathy, as if it were the expression of real sorrow" (Gosse). It recalls the language of Isaiah, "We mourn sore like doves"; or those beautiful words of Tennyson—

"Every sound is sweet;  
The moan of doves in immemorial elms,  
And murmuring of innumerable bees."

As symbolical of purity and peace, it became a fit emblem for the Holy Spirit.

"Lo, the heavens were opened, and He saw the Spirit of God descending *like a dove* and lighting upon Him." On the day of Pentecost, however, the form chosen was quite different. "There came a sound as of a rushing mighty wind, ... and cloven tongues *like as of fire*, and it sat upon each of them." Why the difference? Why a gentle dove in the one case and cloven tongues of fire in the other. The difference lay in the character of the men. When it came to men—even to holy men—it encountered prejudice and opposition, which must be burned up, and thus it must needs take the semblance of fire. But when it came to Jesus on the banks of the Jordan, it came to its own, and its own received it with open arms; and to show the fulness and peacefulness of the reception, it must needs be symbolised by a dove. In the holy chrism of that baptismal hour, the dove and the lamb had met together. The sacred bird had found a home, and it folded its wings upon its nest.

But this gentleness of disposition renders the dove a defenceless creature, ill

able to take care of itself, and it easily becomes the victim of persecution. Hence Hosea speaks of Israel as "a silly dove without heart," which shall "tremble as a dove out of the land of Assyria." And thus the words "*wise as serpents*" have to be added. The harmlessness of the dove must be supplemented by the wisdom of the serpent. And both elements are found in the peerless example of Jesus. See how He answered the quibbling questions of the Scribes and Pharisees. They tried to entangle Him in His talk; but His wisdom was more than a match for their cunning. The wolf was utterly discomfited by the lamb. And this is the only worthy ideal for His followers: "Be ready always to give an answer concerning the hope that is in you," but, "with meekness and fear," "be ye wise as serpents and harmless as doves."

## II.—IN SWIFTNESS.

The dove is one of the swiftest of birds. The carrier pigeon "has been known to accomplish a flight of three hundred miles in little more than two hours." Its wings are its strength. Upheld by them she can fly for many hours, and the birds of prey cannot overtake her. Homer himself mentions the dove as the emblem of swiftness and timidity. It is to this that the Psalmist refers in Psalm lv. 6, when he beheld the rock pigeon scudding across the sky in the direction of her mountain home: "Oh that I had wings like a dove! for then would I fly away and be at rest.... I would hasten my escape from the windy storm and tempest." Truly a wise resolve when in the presence of strong temptation! "O man of God, flee these things." "Flee also youthful lusts." If you cannot fight like the eagle, fly like the dove, and, like the carrier pigeon, let your flight be *homeward*. May the homing instinct be as strong in you as in her. For it is only there, in the mountain home of God's grace, that your soul can find shelter. Speed, then, your flight "as the doves to their windows." "Man's spiritual existence is like the flight of a bird in the air: he is sustained only by effort, and when he ceases to exert himself he falls" (Froude's "Bunyan"). Let your spiritual advancement, then, be like the flight of a bird. Imitate the dove in its swiftness.

## III.—IN SACRIFICE.

The dove is pre-eminently the *sacred* bird. "The dove among the Semites had a quite peculiar sanctity." "Sacred doves that may not be harmed are found even at Mecca." "We never read of it in the Old Testament as an article of diet, though it is now one of the commonest table-birds all over the East" (Smith's "Religion of the

Semites," new edition, pp. 219-294). As already noted, it was to the birds what the lamb was to the animals—it derived its chief interest from its use in *sacrifice*.

We find it in the purifying of the Nazarite (Num. vi. 10), in the cleansing of the leper (Lev. xiv. 22); and, as the children will remember, when Jesus was presented in the temple, His mother offered as a sacrifice "a pair of turtle doves or two young pigeons" (Luke ii. 24). In the Virgin Mother's case the offering was the sacrifice of the *poor*. For it is distinctly said in Leviticus xii. 8, "*If her means suffice not for a lamb*, then she shall take two turtle doves or two young pigeons: the one for a burnt offering and the other for a sin offering: and she shall be clean." Jesus, the Great Sacrifice, was born in the homes of the poor. Not the vicious poor, whose poverty is the measure of their thriftlessness; but the industrious poor, whose piety is the measure of their honesty. "Though He was rich, yet for our sakes He became poor, that we through His poverty might be made rich."

In stooping thus far He was manifesting the gentleness of the dove, and we are summoned to copy His example. "Let this *mind* be in you which was also in Christ Jesus." He stooped to death, even the death of the cross, and we are called upon to stoop to something similar—to the great deep of self-surrender and self-sacrifice—the crucifixion and the death of sin. This is the essence of all Christian sacrifice. We must be crucified with Christ, and rise and live through Him. We must be washed in His blood. We must be made great by His gentleness. We must be like the dove and the lamb in *sacrifice*.

In character, in swiftness, and in sacrifice, imitate the dove.

## The Coney.

"There be four things which are little upon the earth, but they are exceeding wise: ... the conies are but a feeble folk, yet make they their houses in the rocks."—Prov. xxx. 24-26.

"Little, *but exceeding wise*," that surely is a splendid diploma for "feeble folk." If all the children in our homes would but try to gain that "good degree," it would be a merit certificate of the highest order, and well worthy of the best gilt frame to be had in the market. Mr Moody, the evangelist, used to say, when speaking of college honours, that he had no wish to be styled a B.D., a D.D., or an LL.D.

He would be content if he got W.D.—"Well done, good and faithful servant." And the diploma granted to little folks in the school of the coney is somewhat similar. They are "capped" on the day of graduation as an L.B.E.W.—"Little, but exceeding wise."

Why, in their school, the distinction between big and little is simply ignored. The little creature is no bigger than a rabbit, and yet, strange to say, its nearest affinity is with the huge rhinoceros. According to modern classification, it is placed between the elephant and the horse. The shape of its teeth, and the form of its feet and skull, make it a first cousin to the hippopotamus. There is little difference between them, except in dimensions, and, as every schoolboy knows, there is not much in a difference like that. If the huge leviathan has nothing more to boast of than mere bulk, the little coney can afford to sit on its rocky ledge and look down on its unwieldy proportions with the utmost indifference. "Wisdom is better than strength." It was the wisdom of the poor wise man that delivered the city, and not the strength of the city walls. And it is not the bones of the rhinoceros, but the wisdom of the coney, that will bring us true success in life. "Wisdom is the principal thing, therefore get wisdom, and with all thy getting, get understanding."

#### I.—THE WISDOM OF KEEPING SHARP TOOLS.

Among the Jews the coney was regarded as one of the unclean animals, "because he cheweth the cud, but divideth not the hoof, he is unclean" (Lev. ii. 5). But, in actual fact, he does neither. All ruminating animals are furnished with a complex stomach for chewing the cud; but this is not the case with the elephant, the coney, and the hippopotamus. They neither chew the cud nor part the hoof. But the coney has a habit of sitting on a ledge of rock and working its jaws from side to side as if it really did chew the cud, so that a careless observer would readily mistake it for a ruminating animal. This movement of the jaws is a very important one. According to J. G. Wood, the coney performs it instinctively, in order that the chiselled edges of the upper and lower teeth may be preserved sharp by continually rubbing against each other, and that they may not be suffered to grow too long, and so to deprive the animal of the means whereby it gains its food.

The coney knows what every good tradesman knows, that sharp tools are the secret of all high-class work. No boy ever cut his finger with a sharp knife, but always with a blunt one. And what a sharp knife is to the finger, a sensitive conscience is to the life. If the heart be kept true and tender, and the mind alert and keen, the conscience will never sting and lacerate the soul. It is only the

wicked who flee when no man pursueth, and whose conscience is like the worm that never dies. "Leave her to Heaven," said Hamlet of his guilty mother, "and to those thorns that in her bosom lodge to prick and sting her." But the righteous are as bold as a lion. Like Paul, they have the approval of a good conscience, and

"A heart unspotted is not easily daunted,  
Thrice is he armed that hath his quarrel just."

And the young people will not forget that tools are kept sharp by exercise, not by allowing them to rust like a sluggard's spade, which no true gardener would touch; but by keeping them sharp and bright like his own steel blade, which is warranted to cut through any sod. Yes, keep the powers of your mind strong and active through diligent application at school, and the faculties of your soul responsive by kindness, obedience, and prayer, and you will find that this is no mean part of the wisdom that will enable you to succeed in life. For at school, in business, and in religion, we have need of sharp tools.

## II.—THE WISDOM OF EARLY RISING.

If any one wishes to see or catch a coney, he must be up with the dawn. For, like the rabbit, it is generally to be found feeding in the early morning or at sunset; while a sentry, which is commonly an old male, is said to be posted to give warning by a short squeaking bark, at which signal they all scuttle away before one can obtain a glimpse of them. After all, it is the early bird that catches the early worm, and the coney has long since decided that it is the early coney that enjoys the sweetest aromatic shrubs. And therefore, if any aspiring sportsman wishes to bag *Hyrax Syriacus* (for that is its Latin name), he must be up and abroad with the dawn.

Indeed, the sharpest tools will avail us but little if the best hours of the morning are idled away in bed. The old adage cannot be repeated too often, that "he who would thrive must the white sparrow see." The lazy farmer who got up at daybreak to try and get a sight of this *rara avis* was not long in discovering the cause of his diminished fortunes. Everything was wrong at the beginning of the day. Dishonest servants came to their work an hour late, and others were helping themselves to everything they saw. On his farm, alas! there was neither an early bird nor an early worm. They were all late together, and he, the latest of them all, was simply being gobbled up by such birds as he had. Poor lie-a-bed had certainly got a glimpse of the white sparrow, and from the day he saw it his fortunes began to mend.

"I never had any faith in luck," says John Ploughman, "except that I believe good luck will carry a man over a ditch if he jumps well, and will put a bit of bacon into his pot if he looks after his garden and keeps a pig." Exactly. Solomon Slow will never be up in time to catch the coach, and then he will waste the rest of the day in blaming the hardness of his luck. But there is no luck about it. It is only downright laziness. And boys cannot learn the golden text too soon, that "drowsiness shall clothe a man with rags."

### III.—THE WISDOM OF KNOWING ONE'S OWN WEAKNESS.

"The conies are but a feeble folk, yet make they their houses in the rocks." They cannot fight with the lion, and they don't try. They run from the least appearance of evil, and so ought we. It is often one-half, and sometimes the whole, of the victory to know our own weakness. Discretion is always the better part of valour.

How many there are who have not this wisdom of the coney! They are feeble as he is, and yet they do not pray, "Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil." They cannot turn aside the fiery darts of the evil one, and yet they carelessly play into his hands by dallying with that which is not good. But

"This is hypocrisy against the devil,  
They that mean virtuously, and yet do so,  
The devil their virtue tempts, and they tempt heaven."

Far better to act as young Gareth acted when he lived among the "kitchen-knives" of King Arthur's palace—

"If their talk were foul,  
Then would he whistle rapid as any lark."

The pure-minded lad refused to listen to it, and he had his reward. They mocked him at first, but afterwards they turned and revered him. A like testimony was borne to John Milton when he entered Christ's College, Cambridge, at sixteen years of age. Because of his virtuous conduct he was ridiculed by his fellow-students, and nicknamed "the lady of Christ's." But the future author of "Paradise Lost" could afford to let them sneer. He had the testimony of a good conscience, and "they who honour Me, I will honour." And all those who are tempted to-day must draw their succour from a similar divine source. With the wisdom of the coney they must betake themselves to the safety of the hills, and say, "Lead me to the Rock that is higher than I." And in that strong Rock of Ages all feeble ones



will be eternally safe, for neither foe nor tempest can reach them there. Flee, then, as a bird to your mountain, or in the language of your hymn—

”Yield not to temptation, for yielding is sin,  
Each victory will help you some other to win,  
Fight manfully onward, dark passions subdue,  
Look ever to Jesus, He will carry you through.”

## The Ass’s Colt.

”And Jesus, when He had found a young ass, sat thereon.”—John xii. 14.

Two varieties of the ass exist in Bible lands, namely, the domesticated and the wild ass. But whether these are two different kinds, or simply variations of the same species, is not yet a settled question. On the assumption that they are one, it would still be disputed whether the wild ass is to be regarded as an emancipated domestic ass, or the latter a reclaimed wild one. But into the merits of this question we have no call to enter.

We may say at the outset, however, that when speaking of the ass of the Bible, we are dealing with a very different animal from the poor weather-beaten, stunted, and half-starved beast of our commons. The coldness of our climate, and the life of hardship endured by the ass in this country, have, no doubt, operated largely in the decay of the breed. But the Arabian ass is quite different. A well-bred Syrian ass will fetch forty pounds. It is well formed and muscular, well cared for and fed, and is altogether a finer and nobler animal than the spiritless and degraded creature so familiar to us.

Consequently, when we read of Jesus riding upon an ass’s colt, there would seem to be some ground for the statement that ”there was no humility in the case. He rode upon an ass as any prince or ruler would have done who was engaged on a peaceful journey” (Wood). In fine, Jesus came riding on the universal saddle animal of the East.

But turning to the ass’s colt, I want you to note three things about it.

## I.—ITS WILDNESS.

The colt of the wild ass is really the most untamable and intractable of animals. Even when captured very young it can scarcely ever be brought to bear a burden or draw a vehicle. Its wild nature is constantly breaking out, and like the asses which Saul the son of Kish went to seek, it is always in danger of going astray.

Love of freedom and hatred of restraint are its main characteristics, and Zophar the Naamathite reminded Job that something very similar is true of man. "Vain man is void of understanding, yea, man is born *as a wild ass's colt*" (Job xi. 12).

Of course, there is wildness *and* wildness. If boys are merely running over with fresh animal spirits, like the young lambs trying to jump over their mother's head, we cannot think there is any great harm in their mirth. It is thus that lungs are exercised and limbs made strong, and the whole body and mind kept healthy and happy. Black care, alas! will leap into the saddle behind them soon enough. And therefore, while the days of youth last, let all the young people run and jump like the wild ass's colt. Buoyancy of fresh young life is not to be regarded as exuberance in sin.

If the wildness, however, is inclined to pass over into what is called "a sowing of wild oats," the circumstances are altered. Innocent pleasures are good, but pleasures which are forbidden are quite another thing. And if the young life is in danger of drifting into the latter, the sooner the curb or drag is applied, the better for all concerned. If one could sow his wild oats and then run away and leave them, it wouldn't so much matter; but alas! a reaping-time is sure to be treading on the heels of the sowing. And as no one ever yet gathered grapes of thorns or figs of thistles, it will not do for any of you young people to expect to gather fruit where you have only sown weeds. No, no, this is a kind of wildness which ought not to be tolerated. This is a piece of folly which must either be tamed or punished. And if we would only introduce the custom they have in Palestine of clipping a bit out of the ear of those asses that go astray, a fresh clip for every new offence, it might then be seen that the wildness which means mischief is not so pleasant an experience after all, and perhaps not a few sowers of wild oats would be found who had scarcely an ear on their head. Some punishment like this is sorely needed, for while mere exuberance of spirits is not sinful, the exuberance that leads to forbidden pleasures ought firmly to be condemned.

## II.—ITS USEFULNESS.

Merchants in the East carried their riches on the shoulders of young asses (Isa.

xxx. 6), and it is added in verse 24 that young asses and oxen were yoked together in tilling the ground. But the chief service rendered by the young ass was its frequent use in riding. In the Book of Judges we read of one judge who had "forty sons and thirty sons' sons that rode on threescore and ten ass colts, and he judged Israel eight years." Both in merchandise, in agriculture, and in riding, the ass's colt was a most useful animal.

And this is the test which must be applied to a boy's pleasures. He must not allow them to interfere with his usefulness. The games that make him neglect his lessons, the pursuits that render it difficult for him to learn his trade, the companions that tempt him to desecrate the Christian Sabbath, or the habits that lead him to lose respect for his parents or reverence for his God—all these must be freely but firmly laid aside; for when judged in the light of the influence they exert, they stand self-condemned. Pleasure is never to be taken as the touchstone of duty, but duty as the touchstone of pleasure.

It is this that gives the evangel of Jesus its inestimable value. He can tame our wildness into usefulness, and make duty itself our pleasure. He can teach us the secret of His own example, and then all work is a joy, every duty is an inspiration. "I *delight* to do Thy will, O my God." The secret is love. That is the new commandment He writes upon the heart, and then the yoke He lays upon the neck is fur-lined—it is easy; and the burdens given us to bear are not grievous, they are light. No service can compare with His service. Any pleasure that would make us think lightly of His love is not pleasure, but wanton folly; and any liberty that would tempt us away from His yoke is not liberty but license. Therefore let every young heart learn this second lesson from the example of the ass's colt, that wildness must be tamed into usefulness.

### III.—ITS HIGH PLACE OF HONOUR.

If wildness is tamed into usefulness, this in turn is followed by honour. The ass's colt had the high dignity conferred on it of being used by Jesus in His triumphal entry into Jerusalem.

The incident itself is full of meaning. Jesus was entering Jerusalem for the last time. On reaching the Mount of Olives He sent two of His disciples into the nearest village. He told them that there, "in a place where two ways met," they would find a colt tied "whereon never man sat." If the owner objected to his removal, they were to say "the Lord hath need of him," and straightway the man would be willing to let him go. And when the two disciples departed to do as they were bidden, they found it even as Jesus had said.

But how did Jesus know that the owner of the colt would consent to this arrangement? And why must the colt itself be one on which never man had sat? These two questions are deeply significant, and we may do well to try and answer them. As regards the first, Jesus knew that the man would agree to what He had

said, because, in all probability, this was not the first time that he and Jesus had met. On some former occasion the man had come under the spell of Christ's teaching and example, and although he had not been added, like Peter or John, to the number of the twelve, he had nevertheless become in heart and life a true and devoted friend. And, no doubt, it was the man himself who informed Jesus that there, on the little bit of common "where two ways met," his ass would generally be found grazing; and if ever the Master required it to carry Him a day's journey, He could come and get it for the taking. It was not a great thing he had to offer, but such as it was the Lord was welcome to it. And I think I see the eye of Jesus filling with a strange moisture as He heard the quaint proposal of this humble villager. It was like holding a cup of cold water to Christ's thirsty lips. And the young people cannot possibly misread the lesson. Little things, when done for the sake of Jesus, become great things. This man had done *what he could*, and love made it immortal. "Wheresoever this gospel shall be preached, this also that this man hath done shall be told for a memorial of him."

On the other hand, the colt itself must be one on which *never man had sat*. Does this not remind us of what is said regarding Joseph's new tomb? It was "a new sepulchre *wherein was never man yet laid*." Why a young colt and why a new tomb? Surely to teach us that even in His humiliation, Jesus the Son of God was worthy of special honour; and perhaps to teach this further truth, that in everything He was "separate from sinners." He who came riding on an ass's colt was still the King of Glory, and although He was "numbered with the transgressors," He was still "holy, harmless, and undefiled." "Behold, thy King cometh unto thee, meek, and riding upon an ass's colt." Let every child run, as the children of Jerusalem ran, and hail Him with the happy acclaim, "Hosanna, blessed is He that cometh in the name of the Lord." And this will be *your* highest dignity. Wildness will be tamed into usefulness, and usefulness will be crowned with honour. "Them that honour Me I will honour."

## The Redbreast.

"The household bird with the red stomacher"—a bird that should be in the Bible, but isn't. We must give it a page here.

Look! there on a sprig of holly,  
 Like a bunch of berries red,  
 He sits, wee bumptious Robin,  
 Cocking his little head.

Let us ask the little fellow,  
 Why he comes so late to sing,  
 For the autumn leaves are falling  
 In a whirling fairy ring.

Where did you go in summer  
 With that little purple vest?  
 Not away to the woods and hedges  
 To conceal a tiny nest?

Oh, you did! you sought the bracken,  
 Where the flowers are wet with dew,  
 And we never heard you singing,  
 You had something else to do.

You were feeding five wee Robins,  
 And they kept you on the wing;  
 But now that they've grown to *Redbreasts*,  
 You can well afford to sing.

So you can, you little wise-head,  
 There is truth in what you say;  
 And may every lad apply it,  
*That after work comes play.*

## The Bee.

"And the Amorites, which dwelt in that mountain, came out against you, and chased you, as bees do."—Deut. i. 44.

Israel had determined at all hazards to storm the strongholds of the Amorites. But as those who disobey God can never stand before their enemies, the Israelites were no match for those hardy mountaineers of Seir. Like infuriated bees rushing out from their nest, the Amorite hordes swept out from their mountain fastnesses, and utterly overwhelmed the hosts of Israel. They "chased you, as bees do, and destroyed you in Seir, even unto Hormah."

This is the only sense in which the bee is referred to in Holy Scripture. The ant may be introduced as an emblem of industry and instinct; but the bee is always regarded as one of the scourges of mankind. It recalls an incident in the African travels of Mungo Park. "Some of his people having met with a populous hive, imprudently attempted to plunder it of its honey. The swarm rushed out in fury and attacked the company so vigorously that man and beast fled in all directions. The horses were never recovered, and several of the asses were so severely stung that they died the next day." The bee was clearly a savage and dangerous annoyance. They "chased you, as bees do."

But turning to the bee itself, let us note the three principal materials it uses in its hive.

#### I.—WAX.

Nothing can be done in the furnishing of the hive until a sufficient quantity of wax has been provided. And this, like the gossamer threads of the spider, is drawn from the insect's own body. The process of secretion, as it is called, may last for some twenty-four hours; and when it is completed the wax projects from between the segments of its body in the form of thin plates. The material is then taken up into the mouth and undergoes a process of mastication, until at last it issues from the mandibles in the form of a small white ribbon.

This is the material with which they build up their hexagonal or six-sided cells; and marvellous is the skill they show in the ingenious arrangement. Like Plato, they might fitly inscribe over their portal, "Let no one ignorant of geometry enter here," for the bee is entitled to a first place in the ranks of the geometers. It is even asserted on the authority of the Rev. J. G. Wood that the angles of the bee-cell are so mathematically correct that by their measurement an error in a book of logarithms was detected; and Mr Darwin himself admits that "the comb of the hive-bee is absolutely perfect in economising labour and wax."

The form of the cell has three distinct advantages. It combines the greatest strength, the largest storage, and the least expenditure of material and labour; and "the little busy bee," as if acquainted with these strict mathematical principles, has followed them so accurately that it easily steps into the first rank as a born

mathematician.

But how is this fact to be accounted for? What is the explanation of these inimitable architectural powers? "Without thought or even the organ of thought, the bee can produce work which embodies thought." But to whom does this thought belong? Can there be thought without a thinker? Can there be the marks of intelligence without an original and creative mind? No! at the building up of a bee-cell, just as at the framing of a world, the thoughtful soul is face to face with Him whose mind is stamped on every part of creation—with Him who is the great and faithful Creator, whose tender mercies are over all His works.

## II.—HONEY.

After the construction of the cells comes the gathering of the honey. Honey, as every boy knows, is the thick, sweet fluid which bees gather from the cups of flowers. Or in the language of myth and fable, it is the veritable nectar of the gods. The mouth of the bee is framed for the purpose. It is so constructed that it forms a sort of proboscis or tongue by means of which the insects suck up the nectarine juice. It serves both as a mouth and a pump through which the liquid passes into the first stomach, and thus is carried to the hive.

The abundance of honey is frequently mentioned in Holy Scripture. Palestine itself is described as "a land that floweth with milk and honey." And we remember that on one occasion Jonathan, the Son of Saul, was faint and weary, and when he saw honey dripping on the ground from the abundance and weight of the comb, he took it up on the end of his staff, and ate sufficient to restore his strength (1 Sam. xiv. 27). John the Baptist also was evidently in no danger of starving from lack of food, when the wild bees afforded him a plentiful supply of the very material which was needed to correct the deficiencies of the dried locusts which he used instead of bread. His food was locusts and wild honey.

There is only one connection in which we find honey prohibited. It was to have no place in the Jewish meat offering (Lev. ii. 11). Everything liable to *fermentation* was excluded from the altar; and "the same principle covers the prohibition of honey" (Smith's "Religion of the Semites"). "The effect of honey is similar to that of leaven, since it easily changes to acid" (Oehler). Honey then was forbidden on the same principle as an animal with any kind of blemish was forbidden. There must be no defect in the sacrificial lamb, and there must be no fermentation in the meat offering. The offering brought by man must be clean—a spotless sacrifice (and God's Lamb is such), an honest heart, and an earnest, unfeigned prayer. Only the pure in heart shall see God.

## III.—POLLEN.

Honey is not the only substance that bees carry home to the hive. They also collect in considerable quantities the fecundating dust or pollen of flowers. If the long tongue is specially adapted for sucking up the one, the hind legs, supplied with a brush of hair, are equally fitted for collecting and conveying the other. When the bee visits the flower in question it dives deep down among the dust-like powder, and comes out again, all covered from head to foot, like a miller well dusted with his meal. But applying the brush of hair which it carries for the purpose, it speedily brushes the pollen all down in the form of a tiny ball, and carries it home on its hind legs to be used in the economy of the hive.

But what is it for? To make *bee-bread* for the young bees. The hexagonal cells are not all used for the storage of honey. A very large proportion of the comb is set apart for the hatching of the young ones. And these infant bees are voracious eaters. Like other little children, they have to be carefully nursed and attended to, and the sagacious nurses have quite enough to do in providing them with the right kind of food. Ordinary honey is too strong for their infantile digestion, and therefore the honey is mixed with the pollen to render it a fit nourishment for these fastidious babies.

This is the only object the *bees* have in collecting the pollen; but it is not the only end they serve in the plan of the great Creator. Unknown to themselves they are doing a great work in the propagating of flowers. The fertilising dust of one flower must be conveyed to the corresponding organs of another; and the bee like a village postman, is brought in to convey the necessary love-tokens. Apart from this service rendered by the bee, the wild flowers that deck the fields and highways would soon be conspicuous by their absence.

We cannot, then, go back to the point from which we started, and say that the bee can only be regarded as a savage and dangerous annoyance. It fills a very important place in the economy of nature. As the maker of wax it is the prince of mathematicians; as the gatherer of *honey* it is the bringer of many choice blessings; and as the collector and distributor of *pollen* it is at once a sagacious nurse, and one who dispenses a harvest, "sowing the To-be." Well may we sit at its hive and learn wisdom.

## The Swallow.



"As the bird by wandering, as the swallow by flying, so the curse causeless shall not come."—Prov. xxvi. 2.

The swallow is the bird of the summer. Like the coming of the cuckoo itself, the arrival of the swallow is anxiously waited for as the harbinger of warmer days. And thus we have the beautiful fancy connected with the little flower Celandine. The name means "a swallow," and was applied to the tiny plant because it was supposed to open its petals when the swallows appeared in spring, and to close them and die when they disappeared in autumn. Whether the flowers hasten to welcome the little bird or not, there are many human hearts that leap up with joy at the sight of the airy wanderer, and hail it as the bird of freedom—the herald and pledge of the summer.

#### I.—IT IS THE BIRD OF FREEDOM.

This is the meaning of its Hebrew name, and surely no more fitting title could be applied to so unfettered and freedom-loving a bird. Tennyson, in his great poem, "In Memoriam," speaks of

"Short swallow-flights of song that dip  
Their wings ... and skim away."

Who does not love to see it darting through the sunshine, skimming along the surface of a stream, or wheeling away in airy circles on its swift, untired wings! It is a thing of beauty and a joy for ever—happy as the summer light, free and untamable as the breeze.

And we set this down as the first law of bird-life—that every songster of the field and wood *should be free*. This is its birthright and blessing, and no one has the right to rob it of its liberty. The green fields and the blue sky have been given to it as its heritage, and the barbarous custom of binding its wandering wing and shutting it up in a cage should be censured and condemned by all healthy minds. The swallow, indeed, cannot be thus tamed and domesticated. She who claims the whole earth as her fatherland refuses to be imprisoned in a cage. She will die rather than yield. And all young hearts cannot learn the lesson too soon that the feathered tribes of the woodland ought to be left to their God-given liberty.

#### II.—IT IS THE BIRD OF OBEDIENCE.

Another lesson taught by the swallow is that *liberty is not license*. Freedom to wander from land to land does not mean freedom from all control. Our text speaks of the law of its migration. Like the stork, the crane, or the turtle dove, the swallow knows the time of its coming.

In France it is spoken of as "the Jew," because of its wandering habits; and in the science of heraldry it was used as a crest by the crusader pilgrims to symbolise the fact that they too were strangers in a strange land. But to the swallow no land is strange. The whole earth is its fatherland. And while it *does* wander to and fro over land and sea, it always observes its appointed seasons. All its wandering is guided by a purpose. Its freedom is regulated by unfailing instinct. It may speed its flight to far distant climes, but it comes back to the same nest. This is the law of its migration; and in obedience to it, the swallows appear in April and disappear in October with all the regularity of the seasons or the ebb and flow of the tide. The cause is there, and the effect follows. The bird of freedom is a slave to its own higher destiny.

And so ought we. Freedom to wander is not so great a boon as obedience to a higher, diviner law. Like the needle trembling to the pole, or the swallow returning to the same old nest, our hearts ought to hark back to the sacredness of home and to the God and faith of our fathers. "There is an instinct in the new-born babes of Christ, like the instinct that leads birds to build their nests" (Rutherford). And this instinct, like the law of migration, makes us the children of *obedience*. There is no license in the liberty of Christ. We are only free to *serve*.

### III.—IT IS THE BIRD THAT BUILDS ITS NEST IN GOD'S TEMPLE.

"Yea, the sparrow hath found an house, and the swallow a nest for herself, where she may lay her young, even Thine altars" (Ps. lxxxiv. 3).

Swallows sometimes build their nests in the most extraordinary places—on a picture frame, on a lamp-bracket, on a door-knocker, in a table-drawer, and between the handles of a pair of shears hung on the wall. James Gilmour, in his missionary travels through Mongolia, found that they actually entered his tent and built their nests within reach of his hand. And so fully do the little birds confide in man's protection, that they will even take up their abode in his places of worship. The heathen temples, the Mohammedan mosques, and the Christian churches are all inhabited by the swallow, and here, in the eighty-fourth Psalm, it is spoken of as having sought and found a home in the courts of the Jewish temple.

The Psalmist, detained at home, envied the little birds that built their nests

under the eaves of the priests' houses, and thought of the very sparrows that were allowed to pick up the crumbs in the temple courts. It reminds us of Samuel Rutherford when a prisoner in Aberdeen. He often looked back to his country church and manse near the shore of the Solway Firth, and sighed, "I am for the present thinking the sparrows and swallows that build their nests at Anwoth blessed birds." These men, as Spurgeon would say, "needed no clatter of bells" to bring them to church; they carried a bell in their own bosoms; holy appetite is a better call to worship than a full chime.

And the lesson is for the young people no less than for their parents. For the Psalmist adds that the nest of the swallow was for "her young." The swallow reared her young brood in the temple courts. And this is the duty and privilege of all Christian parents. The house of God may be a nest for their little ones. How beautiful to see parents and children coming Sabbath by Sabbath to the same family pew! In after-years will not these little ones find their way back to the same old nest? Yes, "train up a child in the way he should go, and even when he is old he will not depart from it." Or if, perchance, they are called upon to suffer, and are not able, like the Psalmist, to come to God's house, the spirit will still be willing though the flesh be weak, and they will sit and sing like another great sufferer—

"A little bird I am,  
     Shut from the fields of air,  
 And in my cage I sit and sing  
     To Him who placed me there,  
 Well pleased a prisoner to be,  
 Because, O God, it pleaseth thee.

"Nought else have I to do,  
     I sing the whole day long,  
 And He whom most I love to please,  
     Doth listen to my song.  
 He caught and bound my wandering wing,  
 But still He bends to hear me sing."

## The Spider.

"The hypocrite's hope shall perish, ... whose trust shall be a spider's web."—Job viii. 13, 14.

What is hypocrisy? It is a bird of evil omen that builds its nest on the tree of religion. It is a kind of homage that vice pays to virtue. Were there no virtue there would be no need to simulate it. Every act of hypocrisy is a tacit acknowledgment of its greatness. O Virtue! how great thou art, when even the bad and the vile are constrained to do thee homage! No one becomes a hypocrite when he pretends to be different from what he is, but when he pretends to be *better* than he is. In spite of himself he is paying a high tribute to thy greatness and goodness!

The attempt to conceal the evil heart, however, shall not always be successful. "The day is coming when hypocrites will be stripped of their fig-leaves" (Matthew Henry). Their trust shall be as frail as a *spider's web*. Could any language be more expressive? In Eastern lands the flimsiness of the spider's web is proverbial. "He shall lean upon his house (on that light *gossamer*), but it shall not stand: he shall hold fast thereby, but it shall not endure." The material is so frail, that the least violence destroys it; and the hypocrite's hope is so flimsy, that it shall not stand in the judgment. "They weave the spider's web, but their webs shall not become garments, neither shall they cover themselves with their works" (Isa. lix. 6).

But turning to the spider itself, we may learn various lessons.

#### I.—ITS SKILL AS A WEAVER.

Like Hogarth's good apprentice, it has made admirable use of its trade. Its web, however frail, is really a marvellous production. It is distinguished by beauty of design, fineness of texture, nicety and sensitiveness of touch, reminding us of Pope's couplet—

"The spider's *touch*, how exquisitely fine,  
Feels at each thread and lives along the line."

And when we add to this that the whole fabric is spun out of its own body—

a part of its very life—it is not difficult to see that the spider's work must be of the finest order, and well worthy of the study and imitation of every young apprentice.

Every lad in going forward to the work of his life should set up a high ideal. In all that he does he ought to aim at perfection. Like the spider's web, his work,

whatever it is, should be a bit of himself—steeped in his own thought and shaped by his own effort. He may only be a weaver, but he must aspire to be a *good* one—one who plans as well as labours, and reads as well as plans. For in the race of life, muscle is no match for mind, and skill will always outstrip slovenliness—just as the great Goliath must go down before the alert son of Jesse, and the pigmies of the African forest can easily outmatch and out-manoeuvre the lion. Let every young life go and examine the perfection of the spider's web, and seek to do likewise.

## II.—ITS PROWESS AS A HUNTER.

Popular prejudice has always been against the spider; and it must be admitted that there is a good deal to sanction the poet's unfavourable verdict when he says regarding it—

”*Cunning* and *fierce*, mixture abhorr'd.”

Its cunning and craft have passed into a proverb; and all the children know that

its apparent treachery, in decoying the little fly into its parlour, has been suitably expressed in verse. Its fierceness also is quite equal to its cunning, and when the thought of its hairy-looking appearance is added to the fact of the poison-fangs which it buries in the bodies of its victims, there would seem to be enough to warrant the general dislike with which the spider has at all times been regarded.

On the other hand, we must not forget these two things—(1) That the spider is only fulfilling the instinct which an all-wise God has implanted in it; and (2) that it is of great service to man in diminishing the swarms of insects by which he is molested. Thomas Edward, the Banffshire naturalist, calculated that a single pair of swallows would destroy 282,000 insects in one year while rearing their two broods, and sometimes they rear three. And if this be the service rendered by a single pair of birds, what may not be accomplished by those innumerable spiders that weave their gummy webs on every bush and hedge-row, and spend the entire day, and sometimes the whole night, in trapping and ridding the atmosphere of those annoying pests. Bereft of these wily hunters, we should be like the Egyptians in the time of Moses—plagued and eaten up of flies: so that in spite of prejudice and general dislike the spider is occupying a real sphere of usefulness in the world. And so may we. We can afford at times to pause and study the hunter's skill, and do something to imitate its prowess.

## III.—ITS FAME AS A TEACHER.

It teaches us how to spin and how to weave, how to hunt and how to snare. And as one has expressed it, it has solved many a problem in mathematics before Euclid was born. Look at the spider's web, and see whether "any hand of man, with all the fine appliances of art, and twenty years' apprenticeship to boot, could weave us such another." Nay, if we think of the *water-spider*, which bottles up air, and takes it under water to breathe with, it is not too much to say, that if people had but "watched water-spiders as Robert Bruce watched the cottage spider, diving-bells would have been discovered hundreds of years ago, and people might have learnt how to go to the bottom of the sea and save the treasures of wrecks."

The name of King Robert the Bruce suggests one special lesson. If all history be true, the spider will always be known in Scotland as the teacher of *perseverance*—

"If at first you don't succeed,  
Try, try, try again."

Once, twice, thrice, nay, six times over the tiny creature, like a swinging pendulum, had swung towards the opposite rafter in that little cottage, but always without success; and the eyes of the defeated and almost hopeless hero of Scotland watched its repeated struggles. But however often it had failed, it was in no wise beaten nor discouraged; but gathered up all its energies for another and more strenuous effort. "England, Scotland, Spiderland expects every one to do his duty," and with one supreme push it swung out and won at last. "Bravo!" exclaimed the Bruce, as he recalled how he himself had been defeated six times, and might read in the triumph of the spider the promise and pledge of his own. Little did the cottage spider think how a mighty courage had been rekindled by its tiny struggles, and how a brilliant page in history would be opened by the memory of its splendid success. Yet so it was. Great results have sometimes sprung from small causes, and the champion of Scottish liberties arose from his pallet bed to deliver and consolidate his kingdom.

And little do children in any age think how great an influence *they* might wield, if only in devotion to what is right they would follow and obey Christ's gospel. Many a tiny seed has grown into a great tree. And Jesus Himself has said, "Out of the mouth of babes and sucklings thou hast perfected praise" (Matt. xxi.

16).

## The Fly.

"Dead flies cause the ointment of the apothecary to send forth a stinking savour."—Eccles. x. 1.

Both of these terms, "apothecary" and "ointment," need to be explained. In Hebrew they have no reference to anything *medical*, whether it be to the person of a chemist or the contents of a chemist's shop. The ointment means the various perfumes in use among the Jews—both in the anointing of the living and in the embalming of the dead; and the apothecary meant the perfumer who prepared and sold these perfumes, whether as cosmetics for the toilet or as spices for the tomb.

If, therefore, the perfumes were carelessly stored or insecurely protected, the flies managed to gain admittance, and the priceless treasure became corrupted by the odour of their dead bodies. For "the fly that sips treacle is lost in the sweets." And the lesson drawn by the preacher is sufficiently telling, "So doth a little folly him that is in reputation for wisdom." The man himself is the ointment, his reputation is the perfume, the little folly is the dead fly, and his disgrace is the stinking savour. Ah! little foxes spoil the vines, and sometimes little follies lead to great sins. "It is very cold," said the camel in an Eastern fable, "and I would be so thankful to you, Mister Tailor, if you would only let me put my nose inside your door." And the good man consented. But soon the camel had thrust in his head as well as his nose, then his neck and his forefeet, and last of all his whole body, which completely filled up the tailor's little shop. It was no use now pleading that there was no room for both. The camel coolly replied that in that case the tailor could go outside. It was the beginning of the evil that wrought the mischief. It was allowing the *nose* that did it. "A little leaven leaveneth the whole lump," just as a tiny spark will kindle a great fire, or little snowflakes become a dreaded avalanche. Let every young heart shun the least appearance of evil. Dead flies corrupt the costly spikenard.

But the fly itself will repay attention from two points of view.

## I.—ITS STRUCTURE.

Were we in search of design in nature, or an illustration of the wonders of the microscope, no better example could be suggested to us than the form and structure of a fly. Its tiny body is even more wonderful than the body of a man. Take, for instance, its marvellous power of walking. It can walk anywhere or anyhow, setting every principle of gravitation at defiance by promenading head downwards along the ceiling, or skipping up and down the glittering window-pane, pursuing objects that to us are quite invisible. How is the feat accomplished? What peculiarity has its little foot that the daring acrobat can keep itself suspended in that dizzy and foolhardy position? The microscope gives us the answer. The foot consists of two pads covered with innumerable short hairs, and these hairs are hollow, having trumpet-shaped mouths filled with gum. This gum becomes so hard when exposed to the air, that it will not dissolve in water, so that at every step the fly glues itself to the ceiling, and there it would remain unless it knew how to lift its feet. It lifts them in a slanting direction while the gum is still moist, just as you would remove a moist postage stamp by taking hold of one corner and gently drawing it back. And think of the creature's eye. It can observe everything in four-fifths of the circle round it, so that to compete with a fly we would require two more pair of eyes, one at the side and another at the back of our head. But in no sense can we compete with these aerial nomads. They have three sets of brain instead of one. They have wings, which we have not. They have six legs instead of two; and their proboscis or trunk is as far beyond that of an elephant "as a railway engine is beyond a wheelbarrow."

As seen under a powerful microscope, the structure of a common fly is a perfect marvel of design, and it may well excite our curiosity and call forth our admiration. It points us to the greatness and wisdom of Him whose works are as perfect in the tiniest insect as in the brightest star, whose power is as manifest in the humblest sea-shell as in the huge leviathan that makes the ocean its playground—

"All are but parts of one stupendous whole,  
Whose body Nature is, and God the soul."

## II.—ITS USEFULNESS.

Instead of usefulness, one might almost be tempted to say that the first law of their nature is to *torment* people; but the service they render to the world at large must not be lightly esteemed.



1. The very torment of which they are so capable may be turned into a visitation of *judgment*. When Isaiah refers to the scattering of the Ten Tribes, he exclaims, "The Lord shall hiss for the fly that is in the uttermost part of the rivers of Egypt, and for the bee that is in the land of Assyria" (Isa. vii. 18). And the children will remember that the ten plagues which fell upon Egypt included "swarms of flies" in all the houses of the Egyptians. These little insects were used as the scourges of mankind to wreak the vengeance of a broken law on the heads of the transgressors. And especially is this the case with the law of cleanliness. The one sin that the fly will not tolerate is the sin of laziness and dirt. Wheresoever the filth is, there will the flies be gathered together. Those who despise this first law of their being will not offend with impunity; and if no other scourge be available, that little torment—the common fly—will be commissioned to undertake the duty.

2. But the sword they wield is double-edged. It not only flays the law-breakers, it also slays the infection and the fever which have followed in their train. They are *the scavengers of the atmosphere*. They do for the air what the pariah dogs of the East do for the earth—they gather up and remove everything that offends, everything that occasions or breeds disease. Let no one say that the swarms of flies bring the cholera and the fever. They are the camp-followers who tread on the heels of those dreaded foes, and they feed upon and do their best to remove the foul odours. We need not grudge the spider his savoury morsel, but it will be a dark hour for the earth if he should gain the mastery. If he should prove too much for the fly, we shall be left to the miasmas and pestilences from which the presence of the fly relieves us.

3. Even in its death the fly renders a most substantial service. It forms the food of innumerable song-birds, which, apart from the fly, would never be found in our land at all. How dull and lifeless would the months of the summer be without the swallow, the willow-warbler, and the fly-catcher. And yet these feed almost entirely on flies. "And if the trout had not discovered what a savoury morsel the fly is that dances on the stream, what a very dull, stupid amusement would fishing be! Many a schoolboy would lose the greatest treat of a summer holiday if there were no flies, and no trout that appreciated them."

The niche filled by the fly is therefore a very important one. It neither lives a useless life nor dies a useless death. Its sphere of usefulness is as striking and suggestive as the wondrous delicacy of its form and structure, and they both point us to the Great Creator whose greatness and goodness are manifested through all His works—

"Who sees with equal eye, as God of all,  
A hero perish, or a sparrow fall."

And if the boy be the father of the man, we may justly emphasise another lesson—that the law of kindness ought to rule in the least as well as in the greatest—that he who begins by torturing a fly may end with something far more solemn—a *human heart*.

## The Pearl-Oyster.

“Neither cast ye your pearls before swine, lest they trample them under their feet.”—Matt. vii. 6.

The disciples of Jesus are here told not to talk too freely of their spiritual enjoyments before men of debased tastes. Religion is brought into contempt, and its professors insulted, when it is forced upon those who cannot value it and will not have it. “Throw a pearl to a swine,” says Matthew Henry, “and he will resent it, as if you threw a stone at him; *reproofs* will be called *reproaches*.” Such men cannot appreciate the jewels of Christianity, and like swine, which prefer peas to pearls, they will trample them under their feet and turn again and rend you.

On the other hand, this caution is not to be carried too far. We are not to set down all our neighbours as dogs and swine, and then excuse ourselves from trying to do them good on this poor plea. The Saviour’s golden rule shows us a more excellent way: “Whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them; for this is the law and the prophets.” We are to deal with each other as God deals with us. He does not judge us uncharitably; but still less does He give that which is holy to the dogs. He gives to each what is suitable to each. He sends His *rain* on the just and on the unjust; but He keeps His *love* for those who worship and love His Son (John xiv. 21). And that is His example to you and me. We must seek His Spirit to guide us in all things, that being made wise with His wisdom, we may ourselves possess the pearl of great price and not cast our pearls before swine.

### I.—BUT WHAT IS A PEARL?

It is a well-known gem found in several shell-fish, such as the common mussel and the oyster. How it came to be there was long a puzzle to man. In ancient times

they imagined it was formed from the dew of heaven. The sparkling dewdrops and the shining pearls were so like each other that they adopted the beautiful fancy that the pearl was begotten from the dew. To explain the shining lustre of the gem this other detail was added, that just at the moment when the conception was taking place there was a vivid flash of lightning, and the pearl caught something of the fiery gleam. All these fancies are read together by one ancient writer, when he says regarding the pearl of great price, "This Pearl is Jesus, whom the virgin conceived from the divine lightning."

But all this, of course, is pure fancy. A pearl is not formed from the dew, and still less is its lustre derived from the lightning. Science would describe it as the result of an accident. It is "an *accidental* concretion of shelly matter deposited within the shell of certain mollusca." If you open an oyster-shell you find the inside of *it* all covered over with a bright smooth covering of shelly matter. This is laid on in innumerable layers, the one above the other, and the thinner and more transparent the layers, the more perfect is the lustre. Now, if any hard substance like a grain of sand gets inside the shell, this shelly matter begins to gather round it, coat after coat, which harden as they gather, until the pearl is fully formed. It is said the Chinese take advantage of this fact to get the little creatures to make imitation pearls. They insert round pellets between the valves of the mussel, and in a short time the creature deposits a coating of this pearly substance upon them, and they can scarcely be detected from true pearls.

A pearl, then, is a grain of sand transformed into a precious gem. It began as a kind of thorn in the flesh, and ended in a jewel so valuable that thousands of pounds cannot buy it. The unwelcome intruder was really an angel in disguise. The pain became a pearl.

And do not all human pearls come in the same way? Is there any gain without pain? or is there any perfection without the fire of suffering? No. The fruit-tree does not flourish apart from the pruning-knife, and the fruit is not ripened apart from the scorching heat of the sun. Iron is not hammered into shape until it has been thrust into the furnace, and character does not glisten like a gem until it has been polished by the lapidary. And thus we find the poets saying that they learn in suffering what they teach in song; and the young people will not forget that even Jesus—the Pearl of great price—was made "perfect through sufferings" (Heb. ii. 10). So that Carlyle was well within the mark when he wrote: "Thought, true labour of any kind, highest virtue itself, is it not the daughter of pain?" Yes, every thorn may be a blessing in disguise. Every pain may become a pearl.

There is one gem in the character of Jesus that all you young people would do well to imitate. I mean the *pearl of obedience*. Though He knew that God was His Father, and the temple was His Father's house, He went down to Nazareth with Joseph and Mary, and was "*subject unto them*." That was the keynote of

His life. To obey was better than sacrifice; and even at the tragic close He was "obedient unto death." Is that the ornament, children, with which you are trying to adorn your character? Are you in loving subjection to your parents on earth, and are you learning to be in subjection to your Father in heaven? That can only be obtained in one way—the way Jesus won it—the way of self-sacrifice and self-denial. Every pearl is the product of a pain. Jesus *learned obedience* by the things which He *suffered* (Heb. v. 8).

## II.—THE VALUE OF PEARLS.

The most valuable pearl-fisheries are to be found in the Persian Gulf and on the western coast of Ceylon. The annual produce of the former is said to be over £200,000; while that of the latter is set down at even a higher sum. The value of single pearls has sometimes been enormous. Those who have read Rider Haggard's books will remember the graphic way in which he describes an incident in the life of Cleopatra. That unscrupulous woman, at a supper with Mark Antony, took from her ear one of a pair of pearls of the value of £80,000, and having dissolved it in vinegar, swallowed the absurdly precious draught; and she would have done the same with its fellow had it not been rescued from her wanton pride.

But however valuable pearls may be, there are other things more valuable still. Holy Scripture mentions three.

(1.) **Wisdom.**—"No mention shall be made of coral or of pearls; for the price of wisdom is above rubies" (Job xxviii. 18). The wisdom here referred to is the divine wisdom—the plan or purpose of God exhibited in the universe. But the same truth applies to human wisdom—the gaining of knowledge and discretion in human affairs. The price of this is far above rubies. It is not to be had for pearls. How then shall a boy get it? Only by hard work and diligent application. He must shun the company of the idle and the frivolous, and give his time and thought to the companionship of books. He must show diligence at school, obedience in the home, and reverence in the church. All his lessons must be faithfully learned, every task must be faithfully performed. And if he learn thus early to sow well in youth, a harvest of intelligence and wisdom will be the reward. And this will be a possession more valuable than pearls, for

"Just experience shows in every soil  
That those who *think* must govern those who *toil*."

(2.) **Good Works.**—"In like manner, that they adorn themselves ... not with gold

or pearls, but with good works" (1 Tim. ii. 9). The wisdom must show itself in outward action. If the fountain be pure, so also must the flowing stream. The hand must follow the heart.

And all this in the way of adornment—the adornment of a good woman; and girls especially will not miss the lesson that brodered hair and golden trinkets are not the only kind of ornaments. Peter speaks of the ornament of a meek and quiet spirit, which is in the sight of God of great price; and Paul points us here, in 1st Timothy, to the beauty and excellency of good works. She who is arrayed in meekness and kind-hearted generosity has no need of flounces and finery. She may even say of all other ornaments, "Unadorned, adorned the most."

(3.) **Salvation** (Matt. xiii. 46).—Both wisdom and good works must show themselves in religion. The beginning of wisdom is the fear of God, and the best of good works is to believe on Him whom He hath sent (John vi. 29). Till this is done, we are like the merchant man seeking goodly pearls. He found a great many; for this beautiful world in which we live has many precious secrets to reveal to the earnest seeker. But not until we find salvation through Jesus does the great *Eureka*, "I have found it," burst from our lips. This is the treasure which all the wealth of the world cannot buy. Not all the thousands of Cleopatra could lay it at her feet. And yet, wonder of wonders, it is given to the penitent soul without money and without price. Jesus says, "Buy of me gold tried in the fire, that thou mayst be rich; and white raiment, that thou mayst be clothed." "He that hath no money, come ye, buy and eat, yea come, buy wine and milk without money and without price." This is true wisdom, and this is the soundest morality, to come and find in the salvation of Jesus *the Pearl of Great Price*.

## Some Other Shells.

### I.

Happy sunlight on the sea,  
Sparkling diamonds, all for me;  
Wavelets chasing for the land,  
There to kiss the golden sand.

See! a floating, straying shell,

Run! it has a tale to tell;  
Children, with their eager eyes,  
Splash the water, seize the prize.

Hold it to the little ear,  
List and tell me what you hear..  
Music? Yes, for you and me,  
That's the music of the sea.

Down below the water blue,  
There it lived and there it grew,  
Gazing through its watery dome,  
Happy in its ocean home.

List'ning there both night and day,  
Hearing what the wild waves say,  
Watching sea-weed float along,  
There it learned the ocean's song.

II.

But the children never still,  
See them leap like mountain rill,  
Ringing out their laughter sweet,  
Sending forth their little fleet.

Full of mirth, but leaving me  
Musing by another sea,  
Casting with its angry swell  
At my feet another shell.

There upon the sand to rest,  
With a babe upon her breast,  
Came a mother, not a wife,  
Tossed upon the sea of life.

As she sat and sat alone,  
Did she hear another moan?  
Waves that smiled, then swept the deck,

Till they left this shattered wreck?

Yes, while tear-drops rose and fell,  
There I heard the murmuring shell;  
Strange the tale it brought to me,  
Moaning echoes of the sea.

Round and round the eddying world  
Had this straying shell been whirled;  
Round and round lay blackest night—  
Moths see nothing but the light.

Tossed by sin and idle care,  
Pain and anguish found her there,  
Young and mirthful, fair but frail,  
There she learned the ocean's wail.

### III.

Hold it to the little ear,  
Children, tell me what you hear.  
Nothing? No, you cannot know  
All this human tide of woe.

Would I be a child again,  
Not to know another's pain?  
Mourn like some for childhood's hours,  
Gathering nought but summer's flowers?

No. I want the power to tell,  
Power to hear the murmuring shell,  
Power to catch the rising moan,  
Power to make its wail my own.

Learning thus to feel with pain,  
I shall be a child again,  
But a child experience taught,  
Child in heart—a man in thought.

Then I'll hear the echoing swell  
 In the murmur of each shell,  
 And with touch of friendship warm,  
 Try to lull the raging storm.

Lulled to rest, its song shall be,  
 Murmurs of *another* sea—  
 Heavenly love shall thrill and dwell  
 In the murmur of the shell.

\* \* \* \* \*

Of that higher sea to tell,  
 Make me, Lord, an echoing shell,  
 That the world may hear in mine  
 Echoes of the love divine.

## The Calf.

"Ye shall go forth and gambol as calves of the stall."—Mal. iv. 2 (R.V.).

Malachi is known as "the last of the prophets." With him the sun of a thousand years was sinking in the west. It had its rise in the prophetic school of Samuel, its zenith in the glowing visions of Isaiah, and its setting in the earnest appeals of Malachi. But before it loses all its glory in the gathering twilight, it gives the fair promise of another and better sun. Malachi is led to write—"Unto you that fear My name shall the *Sun of righteousness* arise with healing in His wings; and ye shall go forth and gambol as calves of the stall." He had frequently seen the young calves let loose in the morning sunshine, and as he stood and watched their happy gambols, they became a kind of illustration to him of far higher joys. They led him to think of the coming "day of the Lord," when, in the brightness of that better Sun, those that feared His name would rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory. They too would go forth like the beasts of the field and skip and play in the sunshine.



”To hail Thy rise, Thou better Sun,  
 The gathering nations come,  
 Joyous, as when the reapers bear  
 The harvest treasures home.”

The Bible imagery of the calf, however, has much more to tell us than this, and I propose to-day to direct your attention to three points.

### I.—THE CALF AS AN IDOL.

In Exodus xxxii. we have the story of the *golden calf*. It was a solemn hour in the history of the Hebrews. Moses was up on Mount Sinai communing with God, and all the people were waiting in the plain. They had watched their leader ascend the hill and disappear within the cloud; and for well-nigh forty days they had been waiting for his return. But evidently they were waiting in vain. Day by day they had expected the cloud to lift and pass away, but there it was still lying on the rocky summit, brooding and dark as ever. They began to lose heart. They gradually grew impatient, and finally they broke out in actual rebellion. They turned to Aaron and said, ”Up, make us gods which shall go before us; for as for this Moses, the man who brought us up out of the land of Egypt, we wot not what is become of him.”

And then follows the sad story of Israel’s idolatry. Moses on the hill was receiving a new revelation. He was receiving from Jehovah the two tables of stone. And these were the first two lines inscribed upon them: ”*Thou shalt have no other gods before Me.*” ”*Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image.*” And lo! at the very moment that these words were being written, the chosen people at the foot of the hill were breaking off their golden earrings and making a molten calf. They were renouncing the worship of Jehovah and setting the worship of Egypt—the worship of the *bull*, Apis, in its place.

When Moses came down and beheld this idol, he was completely overcome. In a great outburst of grief and anger he dashed the tables out of his hand and break them beneath the mount. Israel had sinned a great sin. They were a stiff-necked and rebellious people. And the anger of the Lord was kindled against Israel, ”and there fell of the people that day about three thousand men.”

It is the same taproot of sin which is the cause of all our sorrows. We, too, have sinned against the Lord. We have made some kind of golden calf, and set it in the place of Jehovah. And unless we are saved from the awful consequences of our sin, we also will suffer, as those rebellious Hebrews suffered, because of

the idol which we have made. This is the first lesson that we may learn from the Bible imagery of the calf. It sets before us the true nature and the terrible consequences of sin.

## II.—THE CALF AS A SACRIFICE.

The stain of sin may be deep, but the power of redemption is deeper. Moses said unto Aaron, "Take thee a bull calf for a sin offering, and offer it before the Lord" (Lev. ix. 2). Not indeed that the blood of calves could take away sin.

"Not all the blood of beasts  
On Jewish altars slain,  
Could give the guilty conscience peace,  
Or wash away the stain."

But that was the Old Testament way of setting forth the great fact of redemption. The offering of the bull calf was a picture of the sacrifice of Jesus. For as we read in Hebrews ix. 11, "Christ having come a high priest of good things to come, not through the blood of goats and calves, but through His own blood, entered in once into the holy place, having obtained eternal redemption for us." This is the hope and plea of every poor sinner. "The blood of Jesus, His Son, cleanseth us from all sin."

And as a sacrifice, the bull calf *could not be redeemed*. The first-born of man might be redeemed, as also the firstling of any unclean animal; but not so the firstling of an ox. It was a *clean* animal, and its blood must be sprinkled upon the altar (Num. xviii. 17). In this way it shadowed forth the sacrifice of Christ, of whom it was said, "He saved others; Himself He cannot save." As our Divine Isaac He came to Mount Moriah, but there was no ram found there to take His place as the sacrifice. He alone was a perfect offering. He alone was clean; and therefore He alone as the Great High Priest offered Himself as the victim. He poured out His soul unto death. And it is to this Saviour that all you young people must look. "Neither is there salvation in any other: there is none other name under heaven given among men whereby we must be saved." Looking unto Jesus, loving Him, and resting on Him—that is the way we enter into life. "Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world."

This is the second lesson we learn from the Bible imagery of the calf. Sin is followed by sacrifice. The molten calf gives place to the calf that was slain.

## III.—THE CALF AS A FEAST.

You remember the story of the Prodigal Son contained in the Gospel of Luke. In that pearl of parables we have the mention of the "*fatted calf*": This was considered a great delicacy among the Jews. Large numbers were carefully selected and fattened for the purpose. And this is what we are to understand by "calves of the stall." Even the witch of Endor had "a *fat calf*" in her house, which she killed and dressed for King Saul (1 Sam. xxviii. 24). And Abraham ran unto the herd, and fetched "a calf *tender and good*," and prepared it for the three angels who had visited him in the plains of Mamre (Gen. xviii. 7). This was hospitality worthy of both kings and angels; and this is the kind of entertainment which is set before every returning prodigal. They feed on angels' food. They eat of the finest of the wheat. They are brought into Christ's banqueting house, and His banner over them is love.

Did ever any one sin a more grievous sin than the prodigal? Was ever any one visited with a sadder and sorer punishment? Like the silly sheep, he had strayed away into the far-off country; and there, in that distant land, he found himself in penury and rags. He would fain have filled his belly with the husks that the swine did eat. But the Shepherd found the sheep. The poor wanderer came to himself in that distant land, and found his way back again to his father's house. And what was the result? His home-coming was celebrated by a feast. The father said unto the servant, "Bring hither the *fatted calf* and kill it."

"A day of *feasting* I ordain,  
 Let mirth and song abound,  
 My son was dead, and lives again,  
 Was lost, and now is found.

Thus joy abounds in paradise,  
 Among the hosts of heav'n,  
 Soon as the sinner quits his sins,  
 Repents and is forgiven."

The sin, the sacrifice, the feast. The golden calf, the slain calf, the fatted calf. The first is ours, the second is Christ's, and the third is designed for *both*. "Behold, I stand at the door and knock: if any man hear My voice and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup *with him*, and he *with Me*." Nay, Jesus Himself is both sacrifice and feast. He could turn to the Jews and say, "Whoso eateth My flesh, and drinketh My blood, hath eternal life." "I am the living bread

which came down from heaven: if any man eat of this bread, he shall live for ever.”

We must repent of the sin, we must trust in the sacrifice, and we must feed upon the feast. Not till then shall we be fired with the hope and filled with the joy of the last of the prophets—”Unto you that fear My name, shall the Sun of righteousness arise with healing in His wings: and ye shall go forth and *gambol* as calves of the stall.”

## The Bat.

”In that day a man shall cast his idols to the moles and the bats.”—Isa. ii. 20.

The bat is only mentioned three times in the Bible, and it cannot be said at a first reading that the references are very flattering. They seem to justify the kind of horror which most people feel when they encounter a bat; for it is generally regarded as ”a creature of such ill-omen that its very presence causes a shudder, and its approach would put to flight many a human being.”

Moses speaks of it as one of the unclean animals—a creature neither to be eaten as food nor offered in sacrifice; while Isaiah describes it as a fit companion for the mole, or rather the mole-rat, which crawls away from the sunshine, and seems to love the darkness rather than the light, because its deeds are evil. Clearly the little ”night-flier” has a good deal to contend with in winning for itself a place among the world’s favourites. It has enough against it to crush an Atlas, not to speak of a bat; and if it rise to a position of honour after all, it does so in spite of the incubus of general dislike and loathing which the ignorance of superstition has heaped upon it. But all true bats, like all true boys, but seek to rise above any such reputation.

### I.—THE JEWISH PROHIBITION.

The bat was regarded as unclean. Two reasons may be given for this—corresponding to the two classes of bats which are known to have existed in Bible lands. We have first the *insectivorous* bats, which, both in habits and ap-

pearance, are so repugnant that no one would ever dream of regarding them as food, or as fit objects for sacrifice. They were rejected on the principle that nothing repulsive or hideous is to be eaten or offered; for this would offend the *horror naturalis* which is so great a safeguard in human life. And indeed, if these were the only bats known to the Jews, the prohibition as thus applied would seem to be needless. But these were not the only bats. We have also the large *frugivorous* bats which have been used as food in various parts of the world; and they may have been so used by the Jews themselves when sojourning in the land of Egypt. The Egyptian monuments show that these large fox-headed bats were not at all uncommon in the valley of the Nile; and Canon Tristram secured two fine specimens even in Central Palestine, which measured twenty and a half inches from wing to wing. Now if surrounding nations ate these bats as a common article of diet, would not this be a sufficient reason why the Jews should not be allowed to touch them? I think it would. Israel as a nation was set apart to Jehovah. They were His peculiar people. They were His chosen and purchased possession; and therefore even in their food there must be a separation in which this reference to Jehovah was expressed. They must be made to feel that even in the prohibition of the bat and other animals, the divine command had been addressed to them, "Come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord."

And yet one cannot but think that all this was rather hard on the bat. "It is said that the African negroes depict and describe *their* evil spirits as white; and that in consequence, the negro children fly in consternation if perchance a white man comes into their territory. Yet a white man is not so very horrid an object after all, if one only dare look at him, and the same remark holds good with the bats." (J. G. Wood.) A very pretty and useful creature is the bat, and it is quite qualified to teach us many valuable lessons.

## II.—WHAT A BAT IS.

How are we to describe this little puzzle? Are we to call it a bird or a beast, or is it both of these rolled into one? The possession of wings would seem to argue that it must be a bird; but then its sharp teeth and mouse-like body would as clearly prove that it must be a beast; so that the simple question whether the bat is a bird or beast is not so simple as it looks.

The common name, "*Flitter-mouse*," exhibits the same difficulty; and so also does Æsop in his amusing description of the battle of the beasts and birds. The bat, availing himself of his combination of fur and wings, did not join himself to either party. He hovered over the field of battle, and waited to see which side was going to be victorious. He was determined in the final issue to be on the side

of the victors. But in this little game he was entirely unsuccessful; for when they saw the tactics of the little traitor, he was scouted by both parties, and has been compelled ever since to appear in public only at night. It is quite evident that when Æsop wrote this fable, he was not sure what to call the bat—whether to describe it as a bird because it had wings, or to place it among the beasts because it had fur. But what then is the tiny creature? A mammal, of course. A whale is not a fish because it swims in the sea, and the bat is not a bird because it flies in the air. They both suckle their young, and therefore are true mammals. Nay, Linnæus has actually placed the bat in the highest order of the mammals—in that of the primates beside the monkey and the man. Indeed, in one essential particular it has easily excelled both. It has grown for itself a pair of wings—not a mere parachute like that of the flying squirrels or the flying fish, but a real pair of wings which enable it to laugh to scorn all the flying machines and balloons ever invented by man. How clumsy all these inventions are in comparison with a bat's wing. Four of its fingers are drawn out like the ribs of an umbrella, and then covered over with its own skin like the web of a duck's foot; and thus furnished with the necessary means of competing with the birds, it sails out like the swallow in pursuit of its prey. The remaining finger or thumb is used as a hook to suspend it from the roof or rafters where it takes up its abode. Here then is the high position to which the bat has attained. It is the only mammal that flies.

### III.—WHAT THE BAT DOES.

Let no one say that it lives a useless life. It is one of the most useful animals we have. It vies with the swallow in destroying the swarms of insects that infest the atmosphere. They divide the day of twenty-four hours between them. The bat begins the work where the swallow lays it down; and ruthlessly pursues the insect prey all through the night. From dark to dawn, and sometimes far into the day, it does yeoman service in this important connection. The present writer remembers a pair of bats in Perthshire, which were found in company with the swallows even at the hour of noon. It was the month of September, and perhaps they felt they must now make haste in preparing for the winter's hibernation. For the bat is not able, like the swallow, to migrate to a warmer clime when the supply of insect food begins to fail. It must find another way of spending the long months of the winter. It must pass into a deep death-like slumber, from which it is awakened, as the flowers in spring are awakened, by the returning life of the summer. But the traces of a wise design are seen everywhere. The marks of a good and faithful Creator are found through all His works. If one creature has the power of migrating, another has the power of hibernating; and thus even in

the mode of existence pursued by a bat, there is abundant evidence of the wisdom and goodness of God.

And how is the bat able to thread its way through the darkest caverns where the sharpest eyes are rendered useless? It is not blind, like Tibbie Dyster in "Alec Forbes"; and yet it might say, as she did when congratulated on her fine spinning, "I wadna spin sae weel gin it warna that the Almichty pat some sicht into the pints o' my fingers 'cause there was nane left i' my een." The bat has indeed a marvellous power of sight in "the pints o' its fingers." Prof. Mivart can only compare the sensitiveness of its *touch* to a state of inflammation; and it is this extreme sensibility that enables them to direct their flight in these dark caverns. This is another coign of vantage reached by the bat. It is the only mammal that possesses wings, and these wings, in turn, are the very perfection of the delicate sense of touch.

But we go back to the point from which we started, and say that, however useful and wonderful the bat may be, it is not to be eaten as food or offered in sacrifice. It is *unclean*. This, indeed, is a principle which is full of gospel teaching. A thing may be good and useful in its own place, and yet be quite unfit as an offering when we appear before God. Good thoughts, kind words, and brave deeds are all needed. They are all necessary for the adornment of our Christian character; but for the forgiveness of our sins, and the reception of "so great salvation," there is no sacrifice which can be mentioned save one: "Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world." To Jesus then must every boy and girl look, saying in the language of the hymn—

"Just as I am, *without one plea,*  
*But that Thy blood was shed for me,*  
 And that Thou bid'st me come to Thee,  
 O Lamb of God, I come."

## The Eagle.

"Doth the eagle mount up at thy command, and make her nest on high?"—Job xxxix. 27.

Jehovah is answering Job out of the whirlwind. He brings before him a grand

panorama of external nature—the earth and sea, snow and hail, the Pleiades and the lightning—the wild goat, the wild ass, the ostrich, the hawk, and the eagle; and as the glorious pageant defiles before his eyes, he forces him to face and answer the question: Shall mortal man be more just than God? Shall he that contendeth with the Almighty instruct Him? He that reproveth God, let him answer. And Job's answer is all that could be desired: "Behold, I am vile: what shall I answer Thee? I will lay mine hand upon my mouth." The greatness of God in nature has taught man his own utter insignificance.

Doth the eagle mount up at *thy* command? No. All these pictures point man to God. They combine to illustrate the mind and thought of Him who formed them and cares for them. So that the conclusion of Ruskin is more than justified that the universe is not a mirror that reflects to proud self-love her own intelligence. It is a mirror that reflects to the devout soul the attributes of God.

#### I.—THE ROCK-DWELLING HABITS OF THE EAGLE.

"She dwelleth and abideth on the rock, upon the crag of the rock and the strong place" (ver. 28). It is to this that Obadiah refers when he takes up his parable against the Edomites. They too were rock-dwellers, who had made for themselves houses and founded cities in the rocky fastnesses of Mount Seir. But they are reminded that the impregnable and inaccessible heights to which they have resorted will be no defence against Jehovah: "Though thou exalt thyself as the eagle, and though thou set thy nest among the stars, thence will I bring thee down, saith the Lord." It is even added that Edom would become utterly desolate: "As thou hast done, it shall be done unto thee, ... and there shall not be any remaining of the house of Esau." And if the testimony of modern travellers may be accepted, the desolation is mournful enough. In 1848 Miss Harriet Martineau visited Petra, the chief of these rock-cities, and describes it as follows: "Nowhere else is there desolation like that of Petra, where these rock doorways stand wide—still fit for the habitation of a multitude, but all empty and silent except for the multiplied echo of the cry of the eagle, or the bleat of the kid. No; these excavations never were all tombs. In the morning the sons of Esau came out in the first sunshine to worship at their doors, before going forth, proud as their neighbour eagles, to the chase; and at night the yellow fires lighted up from within, tier above tier, the face of the precipice" ("Eastern Life," vol. iii. 5).

The Edomite, alas, is gone, though the eagle is still left, and she fixes her habitation on the dizzy crag.



## II.—THE ACUTENESS OF THE EAGLE'S SIGHT.

"From thence she seeketh the prey, and her eyes behold afar off" (ver. 29). The eye of a bird is a marvellous structure. It is a telescope and microscope combined. It has the power of compressing the lens to adapt it to varying distances; and is larger in proportion than the eye of quadrupeds. The kestrel hawk, for instance, feeds on the common field mouse; but this tiny creature is so like the colour of the soil, that a human eye could scarcely detect it at the distance of a few yards. The kestrel, however, has no such difficulty. Her telescopic eye sees it from the sky overhead, and like a bolt from the blue, she swoops down upon the helpless prey. No mistake is made as she nears the ground. Swiftly and almost instantaneously the telescope is compressed into the microscope, and the daring freebooter could pick up a pin.

The same power is possessed by the Griffon vulture or "eagle" of Holy Scripture. "*Her eyes behold afar off*." A dozen eagles may be soaring upwards in the sunlight, until they become mere specks against the blue of heaven, but they are carefully watching each other in their wheeling circles, and diligently scanning the desert below in the hope of discovering some prey. The moment the object is sighted, and even one bird has made a swoop downwards, the movement is detected by the one nearest, which immediately follows; while the second is followed by a third, and the third by a fourth, until in a few minutes, "wheresoever the carcass is, there will the eagles be gathered together." Their vast power of wing and acuteness of sight have led them to the prey.

And the lesson is not far to seek. In the Carlyle use of the word it emphasises the need of being able to *see*. "To the poet, as to every other, we say first of all, *see*. If you cannot do that, it is of no use stringing rhymes together and calling yourself a poet, there is no hope for you." And in religion it is the pure in heart that see God. If the inner eye be single, the whole body shall be full of light. The aged *seer* on Patmos saw into the heaven of heavens. Like Paul, he heard words not lawful to be uttered; and thus in the symbolism of the Christian Church, he is known as the New Testament *eagle*. He was the one who "saw more and heard more, but spake less than all the other disciples." But all the saints of God may soar and *see* in some measure as he did—

"On eagles' wings, they mount, they soar,  
 Their wings are faith and love,  
 Till past the cloudy regions here  
 They rise to heaven above."

## III.—THE EAGLE AND HER YOUNG.

"Her young ones also suck up blood, and where the slain are, there is she" (ver. 30).

The eagle is one of the most rapacious of birds, and her terrible instincts are transmitted to her young, which "*suck up blood*." This is heredity in its most awful form, and is well fitted to shadow forth the grim heritage of woe which is handed down to *their* children by the drunkard, the libertine, and the thief. But in any form the thought is a solemn one, forcing even the Psalmist to wail, "Behold, I was shapen in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me." The fountain of the life is polluted, as well as the streams—"Her young ones also suck up blood."

But this is not the only way in which the eagle influences her young. Allusion is frequently made to the way in which she supports them in their first essays at flight. When the tired fledgeling begins to flutter downwards, she is said to fly beneath it, and present her back and wings for its support. And this becomes a beautiful illustration to the sacred writers of the paternal care of Jehovah over Israel: "As an eagle stirreth up her nest, fluttereth over her young, spreadeth abroad her wings, taketh them, beareth them on her wings: so the Lord alone did lead them, and there was no strange god with them" (Deut. xxxii. 12). "I bare you on eagles' wings, and brought you unto Myself" (Exod. xix. 4).

Let ours be the holy ambition to be worthy of that care. Let us try, like the young eagles, to soar and *see* for ourselves. Let us gaze upon the Sun of righteousness and rejoice in the fulness of His light, remembering the promise, that "they who wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength: they shall mount up with wings as eagles: they shall run and not be weary, and they shall walk and not faint."

"What is that, mother? The eagle, boy!  
Proudly careering his course with joy.  
Firm on his own mountain-vigour relying,  
Breasting the dark storm, the red bolt defying:  
His wing on the wind, and his eye on the sun:  
He swerves not a hair, but bears onward, right on.  
Boy, may the eagle's flight ever be thine,  
Onward and upward, true to the line."

—G. W. DOANE.

## The Lion.

"He went down also and slew a lion in the midst of a pit in time of snow."—2 Sam. xxiii. 20.

This text treats of the way in which lions were hunted in Bible lands before the introduction of firearms. A deep pit was dug in the woods, and carefully covered over with withered leaves, and when the monarch of the forest came out in search of his prey and stumbled into the trap, he was easily secured by the wily hunters, or forthwith despatched with their long-pointed spears. Benaiah, however, did a more valiant deed than this. He went down single-handed to the bottom of the pit and slew the lion in the depth of winter. Evidently he was one of those muscular giants whom all young Britons will delight to honour—a very Samson in sheer herculean valour, a brave and dauntless warrior, who was well worthy of a place among King David's mighty men.

David himself, as a young shepherd, had gone after a lion and a bear, and rescued a lamb out of their teeth. And Samson, when going down to the vineyards of Timnath, had also slain a young lion which came out and roared against him. But both of these encounters had taken place in the open, where there was a fair field and no favour; whereas Benaiah met his antagonist in the most dangerous circumstances—in the middle of winter, when the lion was ravenous with hunger, and at the bottom of a lion-trap, where there was no possibility of escape. Clearly this man was a hero who would neither flinch nor fear: "He slew a lion in the midst of a pit in time of snow."

**Brave and fearless**—that is the lesson which is written large for all healthy and noble-minded boys, and it is taught by the character of the lion, no less than by the courage of the lion-slayer. There are few books in the Bible that do not contain some reference to this majestic animal, and it is always introduced as an emblem of strength and force, whether used for a good purpose or abused for a bad one. Jesus Himself is spoken of as the Lion of the tribe of Judah, and our adversary the devil is described by Peter as a roaring lion walking about and seeking whom he may devour.

## I.—THE MAIN CHARACTERISTICS OF THE LION.

(1.) It is the incarnation of **strength**. Size for size, it is one of the strongest of beasts. It can kill a man or an antelope with one blow of its terrible paw; and so powerful are the muscles of the neck, that it has been known to carry away in its mouth an ordinary ox. Well may its name signify in the Arabic language "the strong one."

(2.) It is also celebrated for **courage**. A lioness is simply the most terrible animal in existence when called upon to defend her cubs. We all know how a hen, when concerned about her chicks, will beat off both the fox and the hawk by the reckless fury of her attack. And it may be imagined what the fury of a lioness will be when she has to fight for her young ones. She cares little for the number of her foes or the nature of their weapons.

(3.) Another marked feature is that "in the dark there is no animal so **invisible** as the lion. Almost every hunter has told a similar story of the lion's approach at night, of the terror displayed by the dogs and cattle as he drew near, and of the utter inability to see him, though he was so close that they could hear his breathing."

(4.) The main characteristic, however, is the lion's **roar**. This is said to be truly awful. Gordon Gunning speaks of it as being "extremely grand and peculiarly striking. He startles the forest with loud, deep-toned, solemn roars, repeated five or six times in quick succession, each increasing in loudness to the third or fourth, when his voice dies away in five or six low, muffled sounds, very much resembling distant thunder." It is to this Amos refers when he speaks of his own prophetic call: "The lion hath roared: who will not fear? The Lord God hath spoken: who can but prophesy?"

## II.—TWO LESSONS FROM THE LION.

(1.) *It is glorious to have a lion's strength, but it is inglorious to use it like a lion.* When this is not attended to, heroism degenerates into big-boned animalism, and courage into selfishness and ferocity. What might have been the glory of our expanding manhood and a tower of defence to the weak and defenceless becomes the Titanian arrogance of the bully and the senseless boast of the braggart. This is to imitate the lion in a bad sense, and "I'd rather be a dog and bay the moon than such a Roman." This is to walk in the footsteps of those Assyrian monarchs who took the lion as their favourite emblem, and counted it their greatest glory to lash the nations in their fury. But all this is selling oneself to do wickedness in the sight of the Lord, and becoming willing captives to him who walketh about

as a roaring lion seeking whom he may devour.

(2.) *It is glorious to have a lion's strength, if the strength be the measure of our gentleness.* It is in this sense that Jesus is the Lion of the tribe of Judah. He conquers by stooping. His other name is the Lamb.

You remember how beautifully this is illustrated in Æsop's Fables. A lion asleep in the wood one day was awakened by a little field-mouse, and quick as lightning he laid his terrible paw on the tiny intruder, and forthwith would have sentenced it to death. But the trembling captive implored him to show mercy, and the great beast was softened, and allowed it to escape. And that gentleness was twice blessed—it blessed him that received and him that gave. A few days after this the same lion was caught in a strong net which the hunters had set for him, and struggle as he might, he could not set himself free. But the little field-mouse heard his terrible voice, and came to the rescue. Patiently, thread by thread, it gnawed through the stout rope, and the monarch of the forest was free. And no doubt, as he stood and shook his bushy mane before plunging into the depths of the forest, he thought within himself, saying, "My former gentleness hath made me great."

Yes, "he that is slow to anger is better than the mighty, and he that ruleth his spirit than he that taketh a city." Even a lion may be tamed. Even a lion may become a lamb; and it is glorious to have a lion's strength when it is tempered and tamed into gentleness.

## The Cock-crowing.

"And one shall rise up at the voice of the bird."—Eccles. xii. 4.

Youth and age are strangely blended in this chapter. With a pathetic reference to old age, the young heart is called upon to remember its Creator in the days of its youth. The days of youth are the choice—the choosing days. They are full of temptation, but they are also blessed with many great advantages; and no better season could be mentioned for resisting the one and improving the other than the moulding season of what the paraphrase calls "life's gay morn." Old age, like a sick-bed, has enough to do with itself. There are many discomforts that beset the path of the aged. For one thing, they cannot sleep so soundly as young people

do. *"They rise up at the voice of the bird"* The first twitter of the swallow under the eaves, or the first crowing of the cock, is quite sufficient to break their night's repose, for their light and fitful slumbers are very easily disturbed. And old age is soon followed by death. The silver cord is loosed, and the golden bowl is broken; the pitcher is broken at the fountain, and the wheel broken at the cistern. And the dust returns to the earth as it was, and the spirit returns unto God who gave it. How foolish then to neglect religion until a time of decay like that! It is worse than foolish: it is suicidal. The whole life ought to be given to God, and not the mere dregs of the cup. "Remember thy Creator in the days of thy youth, while the evil days come not, nor the years draw nigh, when thou shalt say, I have no pleasure in them."

"Deep on thy soul, before its powers  
Are yet by vice enslaved,  
Be thy Creator's glorious name  
And character engraved."

#### I.—THE COCK-CROWING AS A DIVISION OF THE NIGHT.

We are so accustomed nowadays to clocks and watches, that the ancient difficulty of marking the time may never have occurred to us. We listen to our time-pieces striking the hours and think no more about it. But the Jew had no such time-piece. He had no other way of knowing the hour than by listening to the voices of nature. The starry heavens stretched above him like a great clock, and he could read its face every night. The clear ringing voice of chanticleer was also heard, reminding him of the advent of the dawn. And listening to these and such like voices, and dividing the night by means of them, he was able in a rough and general way to tell the advance of the hours. He made the night to consist of four watches—"the even" from sunset to about nine o'clock, "midnight" from nine to twelve, "cock-crowing" from twelve to three, and "morning" from three to sunrise (see Mark xiii. 35).

The Rabbis used to say that David, the sweet singer of Israel, had a harp hung over his bed, which sounded at midnight of its own accord, and woke the king to prayer. And the children may remember that our own King Alfred is reported to have used graduated candles to measure the hours of the night. But until the advent of the pendulum, the accurate measurement of time was impossible. The face of the sky or the crowing of the cock could not give an exact chronometry.

Nevertheless it had one clear advantage. It kept man in touch with nature.

It made him listen reverently to the voices of the night. And that was an education which we can ill afford to disregard. We are not made richer by its loss. We may only have lost our reverence for the sake of our mathematics. Influenced by it, the pious Jew responded to every voice of nature by uttering a blessing on the divine name. Even when the crow of the cock fell on his ear he was instructed to say, "Blessed is He who hath given wisdom to the bird." If our modern chronometry has abolished that, perhaps we have paid too dear for our clocks and watches. To have time-pieces that go to the minute is a great deal; but to hear voices that keep us in touch with God is a great deal more. "Remember thy Creator in the days of thy youth." Rise up and pray at "*the voice of the bird*." We are even told that God giveth *songs* in the night (Job xxxv. 10).

"They err who say that music dwells  
 Alone within the halls of light;  
 In anthems loud it also swells  
 Within the temple of the night.

The happy birds that soar and sing  
 May all be mute when day is done,  
 The hum of insects on the wing  
 May sink to silence with the sun.

But when the sounds of toil are o'er,  
 And silence reigns beneath the stars,  
 A murmur runs along the shore,  
 Where ocean smites his sandy bars.

Its echo floats upon the wind,  
 Beneath the moonbeam's mystic light,  
 And stealing o'er the listening mind,  
 Produces music in the night.

While far among the stars, as runs  
 The legend through a thousand years,  
 Amid the rolling of the suns  
 Is heard the *music of the spheres*.

The roll of ocean and of star  
 Dispensing music through the night;  
 The one behind its sandy bar,

The other in the realms of light.

But both to teach the human breast  
 That He who guides the star and wave  
 Can also breathe a psalm of rest  
 Around the portal of the grave.

The night of grief, of sin, of death,  
 Is not impervious to His power;  
 It feels the influence of His breath,  
 Like springtime come to woo the flower.

It melts in music o'er the soul,  
 For grief has caught the glorious light,  
 And rolling as the billows roll,  
*His songs are heard within the night.*"

## II.—THE COCK-CROWING AND THE FALL OF PETER.

"Verily I say unto thee, Before the COCK crow *twice*, thou shalt deny Me thrice" (Mark xiv. 30). But why twice? There is no mention of this detail in the other three gospels. No; but Mark got his information from Peter himself. The pain of the degradation had sunk so deeply into Peter's soul that he had no difficulty in recalling each separate particular. His self-confidence had been so great that he would *not* deny his Lord, and his subsequent profanity had been so awful after he had once entered on the downward course, that not one warning was sufficient to show him his danger, but a warning repeated and repeated again, before he was rudely awakened from the terrible stupor of his sin. The first crowing of the cock at midnight, and the second crowing-time about three o'clock, were both alike needed to arouse and humble him in the dust; and thus with painful accuracy he was able to recall the very words of the Master, "Before the cock crow *twice*, thou shalt deny Me thrice."

On the other hand, his self-confidence was a measure of his sincerity. Matthew Henry has well said, that Judas said nothing when Christ told *him* he would betray Him. There was no protesting on his part. "He sinned by contrivance, Peter by surprise: he devised the wickedness, Peter was overtaken in this fault." In the language of "Baxter's Second Innings," "It was a *swift* that bowled out Peter, the night the cock crowed." And the same author adds, "The best of boys are sometimes taken by swifts." But, swift or slow, it was clearly Peter's duty not



to wait even for the first crowing of the cock, before he laid to heart the solemn warning of the Master. It would have been his wisdom to say, "Lord, Thou knowest my nature better than I do; and if Satan desires to have me, that he may sift me as wheat, take Thou charge of my life, lead me not into temptation, but deliver me from evil." That would have been Peter's wisdom and safety. But this he didn't do. He planted his feet on the shifting sand of his own self-confidence, and fell into the awful quagmire of denying his Lord. He would not believe the pointed warning of his Master, and therefore he was left to start up at the voice of the bird, and to go out and weep bitterly. The cock-crowing may come to one man as the summons to praise and prayer; but it comes to another as the very trump of God, calling him to penitence or—judgment.

### III.—THE COCK-CROWING AND CHRIST'S SECOND COMING.

"Watch ye therefore: for ye know not when the master of the house cometh, at even, or at midnight, or at the cock-crowing, or in the morning" (Mark xiii. 35). There is here a large element of uncertainty. Not the uncertainty of the event, for the second coming of Jesus is one of the things that cannot be shaken, but the uncertainty of the *time*. "Of that day or that hour knoweth no man, not even the angels in heaven, neither the Son, but the Father." The time of His coming has not been revealed, to the end that we should be always ready.

And yet, in that early age, the second advent was believed to be nigh at hand. Jesus spake of it as "*a little while*." "Behold, I come *quickly*, and My reward is with Me, to give every man according as his work shall be." And James, the Lord's brother, wrote, "Be patient, therefore, brethren, unto the coming of the Lord, for the coming of the Lord draweth nigh." If the little while has now stretched out into centuries, and the crowing of the cock has not yet been heard, it is not because the Saviour has forgotten His promise, but because the godlessness of men and the worldliness of the Church have raised up innumerable obstacles in His way. Oh, if men would but repent and turn again to Him, those times of refreshing would not be long delayed. God would send Jesus, whom the heavens must receive until the times of restoration of all things (Acts iii. 19-21, R.V.).

What a coming that will be to all those who love His appearing! At midnight, or at the cock-crowing, the cry will be heard, "Behold, the Bridegroom cometh, go ye out to meet Him." And they who are ready will rise up at "the voice of the bird," and go in with Him to the marriage supper of the Lamb. But the foolish virgins will be shut outside. They too will rise up at the voice of the bird; but for them, alas! it will be no "bird of the *dawn*." Like Judas, they will go out into the darkness—a darkness that has no morning; and there will be the

weeping and the woe.

But that day, or rather that night, has not yet arrived. It has not yet come for you young people. With you it is still the time of *choosing*; and if you choose Jesus, if you remember your Creator in the days of your youth, that evil day will never come at all. The cock-crowing will still be to you the trump of God; but it will call you to happiness and not to misery. It will proclaim to you the advent of the eternal dawn; and you will rise up at the voice of the bird to exclaim, "Even so, come, Lord Jesus."

## Peace.

"Then had thy peace been as a river."—Isa. xlvi. 18.

I sat alone in the pinewood,  
 And mused with the falling leaves;  
 And the Autumn breath like a requiem  
 Hymned low for the garnered sheaves.

And the pensiveness of the Autumn,  
 Like the ocean rocked to rest,  
 Found a fitting shell-like murmur  
 In the heavings of my breast.

For a something came from the stillness,  
 It had touched me oft before,  
 Sometimes in the hush of pinewood,  
 Sometimes on the lonely shore.

It came and it touched my being,  
 Laid its finger on my brain,  
 And there alone in the pinewood  
 I could *pray* as a child again.

It was not the spell of memory

Cast around me its soothing power,  
Nor the magic of thought that held me  
Entranced in that silent hour.

The rarest and deepest impressions  
Come from fingers, but not our own,  
From music unbarred and unmeasured,  
From language unuttered, unknown.

They come, the unnamed and the dateless,  
They come as the waves of light,  
Like the murmuring breath of the pine-woods,  
Like the voices of the night.

And they leave their deep impressions  
In the tidemarks of the soul,  
Those pulses that come as in secret,  
And roll as the billows roll.

It may be in yon far region,  
Far above the remotest star,  
My glowing and growing vision  
May find what those pulses are.

May find in the land of the morning,  
In the brightness beyond the flood,  
That the pensive hush of the woodland  
Was a breath of the *peace* of God.

Till then I will seek the pinewoods,  
I will muse with the falling leaves,  
And watch the design in symbols  
That the silent finger weaves.

And catch from the fleeting river,  
And the ocean so vast and broad,  
From the Autumn quiet and the pinewoods,  
How to know and worship God.

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