

WHAT THE SNOW FLAKES SAY

By Rev. J. J. Cameron, M.A.

He giveth snow like wool. Ps. 147: 16.

The Psalmist, in dwelling upon the manifold gifts and blessings which God has bestowed, mentions the snow as a gift from the same divine source. There are many thoughts suggested by the snow, which forms such a conspicuous feature of our northern winters. First among these, the snow teaches us a lesson of purity. What is purer than the snow? Gaze out on a starlit night, when the full moon sails in the sky and the broad plain lies mantled as far as the eye can reach in pure white snow, sparkling like diamond gems beneath the moonlight, and how enchanting the scene! How suggestive of saintly purity! And what grace more beautiful than purity of heart? "Blessed," says Christ, "are the pure in heart, for they shall see God." The wisdom that cometh down from above, says the Apostle, is first pure then peaceable. "Finally, brethren," writes Paul, "whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure . . . think on these things." Without this purity our hearts resemble the dark and barren earth as, shorn of its fruit and foliage by the biting autumn blasts, it lies withered and desolate; but with purity our hearts resemble our earth as we see it in winter, mantled in its snowy garb, and exciting, as we gaze, feelings of admiration and delight.

The snow-flake, we notice again, may be regarded as an emblem of affliction, because of what it is, and because of what it is, and because of what it does. Snow is cold to the touch, and when it comes we do not give it a warm welcome; we rather shrink from its approach, and are glad when, after a few months' stay, it melts away before the soft winds and warm sunlight of approaching spring. So affliction, like the snow, is an unwelcome visitor; it chills the heart and throws over the home a pall of gloom. No affliction for the present is joyous, but grievous. "But snow is a type of affliction because of what it does." The snow, although itself cold and unwelcome, brings certain blessings in its train. The cold and bracing atmosphere which accompanies it is favorable to bodily vigor and mental activity. The most vigorous races are those that have been nursed amid the snows and storms of winter. Snow, again, has the effect of causing the earth to retain its heat; it gives us the charming variety of the seasons, and thus ministers to the development of our esthetic tastes. It does for our earth what our clothing does for our bodies; so that the seed when dropped in the soil in autumn is preserved by the mantling snows from the killing frosts; and when the snow disappears and spring dawns, it is found fresh, green, and sprouting. Now, just as the snows of winter warm and preserve the seed from the frosts and cause it to grow, so does affliction prove a means of causing the graces of the Christian life to grow and develop.

Some of the more attractive graces—patience, meekness, gentleness, long-suffering—grow and flourish beneath the mantling snows of affliction. As in the darkest night the stars shine most brightly, so it is in the dark night of affliction that the sweeter graces emit their brightest lustre. Or just as it is in mid-winter, when the snows envelop our earth and the blinding drifts sweep by, that our earth is nearest the sun, so, spiritually, it is when the snows of affliction enshroud the soul, and the frosts of disappointment chill the heart, that we are sometimes nearest the sun of righteousness, enjoying closest fellowship with Him, exhibiting the sweetest graces of character and feeling most

sensibly the preciousness of His grace. But, further, we observe the snow-flake teaches us the manner in which the most trivial things conduce to a wise and gracious end; or how the smallest things afford traces of purpose and design. Observe the snow-flake with the naked eye, and how small and insignificant it seems. There seems nothing remarkable about it, as, one by one, the flakes gently descend and whiten and brighten and beautify the earth. But look at the tiny flake through a microscope, and how different it appears. Each flake is seen to be composed of a number of tiny crystals, so regular and symmetrical in form as to be incapable of imitation by the finest mathematical instrument. These tiny crystals unite according to fixed laws which no human science can fully explain, and by their union form the beautiful snow-flake.

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We have, therefore, in the snow-flake a striking illustration of a truth which holds good with respect to the smallest as well as the greatest of God's works, viz.: that the more closely we examine them, the more evidence we find of the wise design and intelligent purpose which pervades them—a design and purpose of which, at first, our dim eyes saw little or no trace. The structure of the snow-flake reveals the fact that God, its maker, is not only a great artist, but a profound mathematician. It is a marvel of mathematical skill. And what is true with regard to the snow-flake is equally true with regard to those smaller, more unnoticed events which chequer our individual lives. Here, too, there is design and purpose, although we may not always be able to trace them. Events sometimes happen which to an impaired vision seem the outcome of blind chance. Affliction visits us, trials cross our pathway, disappointments blight our hopes, sorrow darkens our sky, the burden laid upon us seems greater than we can bear, and while passing under the rod it seems hard sometimes to realize that infinite love is directing our steps and making "all things work together for our good."

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"Why is this?" we sometimes complainingly ask when passing through some sore trial, or hearing of some heart-rending calamity. "What is its meaning; what purpose can be served by it; and how reconcile it with the sway of One whose name is Love?" But we forget that in our present state it is part of our moral discipline to be called upon to believe where we cannot see, and to trust where we cannot fully comprehend. Because of our dim, imperfect vision, we have sometimes to wait to see God's purposes unfold, and not until eternity dawns shall we discern their full meaning. But this much we know as a matter of present experience, that it is when the storm of trial has broken and passed away, and as a result the heart has been made better and braver, and the life more fruitful because of the very trial through which we have passed—it is then, and not till then, that the believer, as he looks back, is enabled to trace in the blessed fruits which the affliction brought forth, tokens of a Father's love which, when the trial was upon him, he could not see; and although we cannot always fathom God's purposes or fully comprehend His ways of working, yet may we understand enough to be able to believe that even with regard to these events which seem to us most mysterious, that all, from the least to the greatest, are working together, if not always for our temporal, yet for our spiritual and eternal good. That is the case of the world of men and things around; so in that of our individual lives, where the eye of sense sees naught but the workings of a blind carter, there is discernible to the eye of faith a Father's wisdom and love, directing the most trivial events of our

lives—"a divinity which shapes our ends, rough hew them as we may," leading us onward and upward, through joy and sorrow to larger views to sunnier heights of mental and moral attainment.

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DR. CAMERON LEES RETIRING.

The impending retirement of the Rev. Dr. Cameron Lees, of St. Giles' Cathedral, is announced. It is expected that the resignation will take effect in May. Dr. Lees is seventy-four years of age. He was ordained in 1856 to the charge of the church and parish of Carnoch, in Ross-shire, being presented to that living by the Crown. The Church of Scotland had few adherents in the parish. It has now to this day. The minister of a remote parish in Ross-shire could scarcely expect to find himself in later years the minister of the foremost church in Scotland. But those were the days of patronage, and that system had in it, in spite of its great abuses, the possibility of discovering and advancing men of genuine worth. The present system is fairer, perhaps, all round, but it fails precisely where patronage sometimes succeeded in the divining of latent and undeveloped powers. The story goes that when the second charge of Paisley Abbey was vacant in 1859 the patron was one of a shooting party in the parish of Carnoch. There he met the young parish minister, and judged him a man of power. He had offered the Paisley charge to another who had declined it, and he determined now to do a bold thing, and present the Rev. Mr. Lees to the vacant living.

There never was a happier appointment. He did his work in Paisley so well that seven years later he was promoted to the first charge of the parish. In 1877 he was translated to St. Giles', where, for more than thirty-one years, he has made the great High Church of Edinburgh a centre from which has flowed the influences of a vital Christianity.

Long before such interchange of pulpits became common Dr. Lees welcomed to St. Giles' men of other denominations, and in particular made the cathedral a place of healing for the wounds of the body of Scottish Presbytery. Like Dr. Norman Macleod, of the Barony; Dr. Donald Macleod, of Glasgow; Dr. Macgregor, of St. Cuthbert's; and one or two other great Scottish divines, Dr. Lees enjoyed the friendship of Queen Victoria. On one occasion, while sitting in his hotel at Salt Lake City, he received a telegram from the late Queen directing him to proceed to Balmoral to baptize Princess Ena of Battenberg, now Queen of Spain.—Scottish correspondence of Belfast Witness.

Three Methodist denominations in Great Britain have demonstrated the practicability of church union by unanimous consent, according to the following from The Interior:—"The United Methodist Church of Great Britain, formed in 1906 by a union of the Methodist New Connexion, the Bible Christian Methodist, and the United Methodist Free Church, have actually effected what pessimists in America say is impossible—a unanimous merger of denominations. It is said that when the last steps are taken by which the united body becomes legally the successor of its three constituent parts, there will not be a single outstanding or protesting congregation. The new denomination, which has recently held a conference in London, reports 2,36 churches, 321 ministers, 6,217 local preachers and 196,929 members, including probationers. It has six foreign mission fields; and, considering that the membership is made up largely of the working classes, its record for home work, especially among the poor of industrial centers, is worthy of all praise."