

## Religious Looks.

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"Look now toward heaven, and tell the stars, if thou be able to number them."—Gen. 15: 5.

This is the look to nature. The great Nature-book was meant to be read. We are surrounded by emblems and symbols and types and helps; yet how little use we make of all this machinery of spiritual learning. The Lord puts arithmetic itself to shame. We can only count up to a given number. We speak of theology dealing with unknowable subjects; so does arithmetic. You can say "millions", but you do not know what you say. You can say "God", and know just as little. But the words fill the imagination, and put all our powers of conception to shame. The Lord hath made some things innumerable, yet they are not therefore useless.

Where our senses give way a larger faculty comes into operation. When we are tired of counting God says: "That will do, poor little child; thou hast not so much as begun the infinite tale. I only wanted to show thee that some things may be unthinkable and yet not unusable, unknowable and yet not unprofitable, endless and by their very endlessness full of tender comfort." So we bring "the power of an endless life," a circle life—for a circle has no end—to bear upon the vexation, and fret, and care and pain, and wonder of this initial and ever vanishing sphere. Beautiful is this exhortation to Abram: "Look now toward heaven, and tell the stars, if thou be able to number them."

Every look to Mother-Nature should make us strong. No man should pass through a green field in the summer time without feeling softened, refined, tranquilized; there is so much of the fullness of God in the growing grass. There may be people who climb mountains and who could give no reason for doing so; but no sensitive man can climb a hill and keep his eyes sullenly on the ground. The hills are altars, the high places of the earth are stairways or mountains, till other stairs be added to them and all heaven thus becomes our-own.

The Lord is still making this same appeal to us: "Look now toward the east, toward the west, the north, the south; look now upon all nature, and say——" Then God gives us liberty to theorize and moralize and poetize; he supplies the material, and says, "Now, in that marble find the breathing bust." The Lord will have us co-workers; he asks at our hands co-operation. He does not grow busts, he grows marble. My chisel could find no bust in that quarried stone, but another man's chisel can find angels there; that other man is my elder brother, my minister, the poet of my soul.

So with the Bible! We cannot all read it with equal intelligence and equal perception and equal appreciation. Some men read the book, and it is nothing but a series of sentences; whereas other men read the book, and the sentences fell into rhythm and music and gospel; and we say to such gifted voices, "Read on forever!" So there is a power of looking at nature and seeing much in it. Look now towards the heavens when all the stars are glittering, and say—"In my Father's house are many mansions." That is a right deduction. In speaking so we are speaking wisdom and poetry. Verily there is room enough in all that galaxy of worlds for all sorts of men and angels. We shall be assorted accordingly. The Lord will not distribute us indiscriminately.

I see great stars yonder, and little stars, some almost ruby, some tinted with green, and some so white as to be all but holy. There may be room up yonder even for the worst of us. They all look beautiful. Look now toward the starry heavens, and believe that God has chambers enough, mansions enough, space enough, into which to distribute all manner of creation, and be comforted. If he had but one star, and all the population of the world had to go into it, we might be filled with a kind of religious despair; but see, there are thousands and tens of thousands, and every new telescope brings back the gospel that beyond the known universe there is another universe.

Look now and say, "In my Father's house there are many mansions." Look towards your own little earth; it would not be so little if the stars were not so many; it would be quite large but for these infinite palaces of light, that make it so small by contrast. Really, taken in itself it is some five-and-twenty thousand miles around. That cannot be a small wedding-ring. It is a beautiful little place; we need not be ashamed of it. Look now toward the earth, and say, "There is land enough for everybody, every man might have a garden here." Look now at the harvest-fields, at the great plains of America, at the wondrous tens of thousands of acres drawn out in unmeasured lines, and say: "There should be no poverty; famine should be a forgotten word, distress an unremembered tragedy." Look now: It is an earth of green fields and colored gardens, and limpid streams and generous rivers, and oceans willing to be made into highways for the commerce of the nations. There, then, is the invitation.

Look to the stars, look to the worlds, look to the lilies, look to the fowls of the air, look to the grass of the field, look to kind, sweet mother nature, and say if she has

not in her lap goodly gifts for all; and she does not turn away the worst; nay, she may turn her own kind eyes aside a moment when the very worst comes up, and shed a tear, part anger, almost all pity, but she does not send away any empty-handed. Look! Let nature plead; let the acres testify; let the worlds show the purpose of God.

Is that the only look? Is there not another quite as religious? "And Peter, fastening eyes upon him with John, said, Look on us." (Acts 3, 4) This is the look to man. That is a natural look; there is reason in that observation. This is the cry of the church to everybody when the church is in the right mood and temper, filled with the Spirit of her Lord. "Look on us." Men have a right to look to people who go to temples. Lame men have a right to be on the church step. Other buildings may or may not permit them, but the church was built for lame people, for hurt lives, for crushed hearts, for beclouded souls. Let respectability hasten to its museum or to its place of entertainment, to its gallery of art, to its haunts of science, all of which may be able to contribute substantially to human education and human progress; but smitten folks, halt, maimed, blind, palsied, beggared, damned—the church was built for them, and if any Pharisee is in it, he is taking up room which does not belong to him.

It is wonderful how wisdom and folly fall from those marvelous lips of Peter. None could be so far astray, none so precise and definite in holy eloquence. "And Peter said, Look on us," expect something from us; expect the greatest gift of all; silver none, gold none. The church does not give what other people give; the church through its Lord gives "life;" stand up and beg no more! The church should bring life. Not "We will give you that which perishes in the using;" but in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, we will give you the power to help yourselves, we will give you life; we will cure the ankle, we will not merely fill the hand.

So the Christian church ought to stand out as the foremost of institutions, the true arbiter, the divine regulator of society. Are approaches and interchanges of good feeling valueless? Nothing of the kind. For the moment, they may be most welcome and most important and most useful; within their own lines, they are only to be spoken of with commendation; but, looking to the largeness and the lastingness of things, we want a living principle, a divine life; and this principle and this life revealed in Christ Jesus alone. That is the Christian creed, that is the faith in which we should all wish to work and stand. The weak man has a right to look to the strong man. What right has he? The right of your strength. If you see a weak person wronged by a strong one, the weak person belongs to you by his very weakness. If you see a child overborne by a tyrant, that child instantly becomes your boy; you are his father, and you must protect him. Why, even a beast of the field has many a time looked to man for refuge when pursued by other beasts.

I can never forget a little bird, that would have been afraid of me under ordinary circumstances, hovering near me and, as it were, asking for hospitality. I could not understand the appeal until I saw the hawk poised high in air. The little bird had a right to look to me; and if a bird, hawk-followed, threatened with the stroke of death, has a right to look to man, how much more that little child, that poor man, that poor old woman that might have been my own mother! As long as I have a loaf, poverty has a right to part of it.

I know there are fine distinctions drawn between respectable poverty and self-inflicted poverty; but we cannot be metaphysical in the presence of overwhelming sorrow. It is delightful to retire to the summer-house at the foot of the garden, and turn human circumstances into metaphysical reasonings; but when these circumstances are at the door, and smiting the door with the fiat of appeal and urgency, what we have to do is to deal with the circumstances first, and dose over the metaphysics afterwards.

Is there any more looking to be done? Here is another exhortation: "Look unto me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth," Isaiah 45: 22. That is a look to God. We are getting up in the process of survey. "Look now toward heaven" or to nature; "look on us," or to man; "look unto me," the look upward, the look all-saving. That is a generous appeal on the part of God. "Look and be saved;" when was love ever so willing to simplify processes?

God never encumbers the soul with long and tedious ways of escape. The Lord hath taken out of our language, our own very mother tongue, just little words that children could carry and remember and repeat, and he has fixed everything upon the use of such words. "Look" is one; "come" is one; "believe" is one; "draw near" is another, and they are all such common words! What is so common as water? Yet the world could never quench its thirst on wine. What is so common as bread? Yet hunger could never appease itself on confectionery. When we live at all we live on simplicity, on things elementary. So with these great looks to nature, to man, to God. If we can but turn our eyes in the right direction, the act will be regarded as faith, and will be crowned with peace.

Poor soul, thou canst at all events "look" toward God. I come to thee in Christ's dear name and say, "Poor blind soul, turn thy sightless eyeballs in the right direction; if thou canst see nothing, yet the very turning will express a desire, and that desire was never left unsatisfied by the condescending Christ." That is all! What you want to do is to argue; you may be cursed with disputatiousness; you may want long words, difficult processes of reasoning; and you vainly want an intellectual ladder up to heaven. There is none. The only way to heaven is the way of simplicity—the look of the soul, the cry of the heart: "Come unto me thou Son of God, for I cannot come unto thee; I am laden, I am lost: Saviour, come."

Shall Peter speak and John say nothing? Has John no "look," no appeal for the use of the soul's eyes? See 2 John 8—a one-chaptered epistle, but in it occur the words, "Look to yourselves." That is the want of every day. We are so apt to be looking to other people as to forget we need a little self-inspection and self-criticism. When you criticize others you aggravate your own iniquity; if you had a kind soul, you would have kind eyes—you would see more virtue in the world than ever you had seen before.

There is a genius that sees the bright side of things. The man who is most severe with himself will be most gentle to others. Here a man with a file of a tongue, exasperating, rasping, offensive, and you find a man who has not paid much attention to himself. Find a man hopeful, gentle, pacific, conciliatory, gracious—a man who says, this little gutter-child may one day be a Prime Minister of England, he may be a downright honest soul who can tell what is in that little child?—and you will find a man who is full of the spirit of Christ. We ought to see in other people something that is lovely; and if we do not, we should inquire how far the fault is in ourselves. The apostles, following the teaching of their Lord, insist upon self-criticism, self-analysis, self-severity. Have not some of us so cut ourselves to pieces that sometimes we have not dared to pray? Every fibre seemed to be so bad that there was nothing in us that could be saved, and has not that been a time of redemption on the part of God—a revelation of divine grace and sustenance, and comfort and inspiration; and gathering "Oh, that sweet, tender, caressing word "ingathering" "With ever-lasting mercies will I gather thee." It is the action of the arms, it is a drawing of us to the warm heart. Be severe with thyself if thou wouldst be gentle to others.

There are more "lookings" in the Bible; we might continue upon this line, but there is one more that must not be omitted. It is the look which is called for by Christ himself. "Look," said Jesus in John 4: 35, "to the fields; for they are white already to harvest." That is a look in the direction of opportunities. The fields were ready; why were not these men going forth to reap? The opportunity is at hand, why stand ye here all the day idle?

Opportunities! Have you spoken to your friends, your servants, workmen, children? The fields are already white unto harvest. Who shall respond to all these calls? "Look now toward heaven," the look to nature; "look on us," the look to man; "look to yourselves," the inspection of the soul conducted in secret; "look on the fields," the look of opportunities.

May the Lord look upon us with eyes of ineffable tenderness and help us to look upon him with reverent expectation! Jesus "looked" and "saw" and "said." So it is reported in the picturesque story of Zacchaeus. Many "look" who do not "see," many "see" who do not "say." The process should be continued and completed if we would follow the Divine example of our Lord and Master. Let us look away from ourselves away to the ascended Lord, away from the guilt to the Sacrifice provided for its removal. Let every man say, "Lord, that I may receive my sight," the whole heart will glow as a vision of living splendor, and the soul will begin to know somewhat of the joy of its Lord.

## Self-Rooting.

In April, or the beginning of May, when the corn is sending up through the brown soil its first tender blades after a few days the field that looks so green suddenly turns yellow, and the blades seem to languish. The farmers call this strange drooping of the corn "spanin brash." You know what happens to a child when it is weaned, and instead of its infant's milk its ordinary food like the rest of the children. For a few days it is fretful, and seems to fall off in health, and does not take kindly to the new diet. That is what happens to the corn. In the seed of the corn there is stored up supply of food for the young plant that grows out when it is sown in the ground. This amount of nutriment is enough to enable the young plant to send its green blade out of the soil into the air and sun. But when it has done that, it can do no more; the store of food in it is in this way used up, and the young seed in the ground becomes a wizened, empty husk. And then the young plant must shift for itself. It can no longer live off the seed, but, by making a root of itself, and sending it down into the soil, can find its food. It has not a first strength to do this, and