

AS THE MORNING CLOUD

BE "IFUL FIGURE DESCRIBING
OUR VAPORY REPENTANCES.

THE GOODNESS OF A MOMENT

Atmospheric Rejuvenation the Appropriate Theme of the Preacher During the Torrid Weather—How These Nature References Strike a Chord That Glows Deep in Most Human Hearts.

Entered according to Act of Parliament of Canada, in the year 1906, by Frederick Dyer, Toronto, at the Dept. of Agriculture, Ottawa.

Los Angeles, Cal., Aug. 12.—Like a refreshing mountain breeze, dispelling the heat, this sermon comes with its suggestion of atmospheric rejuvenation. The text is Hosea vi. 4, "Your goodness is as a morning cloud."

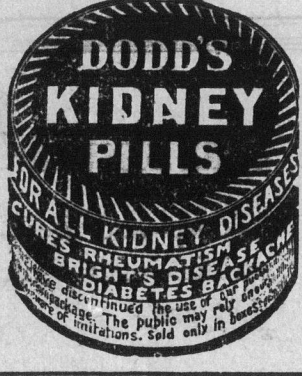
A saintly old preacher said in his latter years: "If I had my life to live over again I would preach most of my sermons from familiar scenes of the Bible, like Christ feeding the multitude with the loaves and the fishes. I believe Bible truths can best be driven home to the hearts of men by ringing the changes upon the old familiar texts." That is true in one sense. But I believe also that an easy way to illustrate our sermon themes is from Bible similes drawn from nature. If any man is a lover of nature and will read the Bible intelligently, he will find the leaves of the sacred book literally filled with descriptions of natural phenomena. Furthermore, if you study church history, almost without exception you will find that the most popular preachers and the greatest winners of souls for Christ have been men like Henry Ward Beecher and John Mason and Thomas Chalmers, who loved the flowers and the stars and the birds and the snowflakes, the same as did David, the psalmist, and Hosea and Amos, the prophets, and Jesus Christ, many of whose parables have the aroma of the woods and the open field.

Talk, for instance, the life of Charles Kingsley. Do you wonder he gripped the hearts of his hearers and readers as he did when you realize the nature lover that he was? One night, after he had recited to his guests the story of a Cornish shipwreck, he led his friends out into the open yard, where he stood under the pelting rain and looked up at a superb thunderstorm as he cried: "What a night! Look! Is it not splendid? This is a night when young men cannot talk or think too much poetry." It was said that he knew every nook and corner of his beloved country. In the centre of which was his parsonage. One day when out walking his son asked him if he thought he would ever lose his love for the country. Charles Kingsley answered: "Nay. If my friends ever ask you that, tell them that I am now looking at the most beautiful scene I ever saw." Does not this sentence reveal the inner workings of a nature loving heart? Did not Charles Kingsley get many of his mightiest gospel lessons by catching the echoes of heaven in the falling waters as they tumbled down the cascade near to his own home? Indeed, I have always felt that a minister was not a fully developed teacher of God unless he can often find his text simultaneously from the book of nature and from the book of the Bible.

Now, Hosea, the prophet, draws from nature a most beautiful sermon simile. He seems to be standing by night upon one of the hillsides overlooking the city of Jerusalem. That great capital of the east is crowded with much wickedness and apostasy. All night long he stands there, with the roof of sky for his covering. He thinks of how the Hebrew people have sinned and how they have been punished and then repented and then sinned again. Their sins followed each other as soldiers in a line of march tread in each other's footsteps. Thus the great prophet of the east reviews the history of his beloved people. And as he weeps and mourns over the sins of the Hebrew race the stars pale and go out. The sunlight rims the eastern hills and turns the early morning clouds into curtains of gold. Then he sees the dewdrops glittering upon every leaf. Then as the sun climbs higher and higher in the heavens and he feels the day grow hotter Hosea sees those early morning clouds evaporate and the dewdrops disappear. Then, like a flash, springs from his lips the simile of the vapory repentances of the Hebrew race. "O Ephraim, what shall I do with thee? O Judah, what shall I do unto thee? For your goodness is as a morning cloud, and as the early dew it goeth away." Let us in God's name try to compare the vapory repentances of our lives to this beautiful figure of the morning clouds.

First we would turn to the meteorologist and say: "Oh student of the cloud land, tell us how these morning clouds are formed. In the great family of clouds have they any individualities or peculiar characteristics?" The prose poet of England, John Ruskin, scans the hillsides of the heavens and lauds the beauty of all the clouds when he writes: "Nature has a thousand ways of rising above herself, but the noblest manifestations of her capability of colors are in the sunset among the clouds. There is no limit to the multitudes and no check to the intensity of the hues assumed. The whole sky, from zenith to horizon, becomes one molten, mantling sea of color and fire. Every black bar turns to massy gold, every ripple and wave into unswelling crimson and purple and scarlet, and colors for which there are no words in the language and no ideas in the mind—things which can be conceived only while they are visible, the intense hollow blue of the upper sky melting through it all, showing here deep and pure, there modulated by the filmy, formless body of the transparent vapor until it is lost, imperceptible in its crimson and gold." But Hosea, the prophet, is not alluding to all clouds of the heavens when he mentions the morning clouds, as did John Ruskin, scanning the whole of the heavens covered with gold. He is alluding to one particular kind of clouds.

The meteorologist again says: "The



morning clouds are scientifically known as the 'cumulus' clouds. Sometimes they are popularly called the 'day clouds,' or the 'summer clouds.' They are not the cirrus clouds, the white, feathery masses of condensed vapor that can be seen far up in the heavens four or five miles away from the earth, at times seeming to be higher than the stars. They are not the nimbus clouds or the clouds of the storm, with darker forehead than the black skin of the royal representative of Queen Candace's palace, who once journeyed to Jerusalem. The nimbus clouds often carry with them the unsheathed swords of fire and speak in the voice of many thunders. They are the 'status' clouds, whose lower layers sometimes form the fog banks lining the seashores and covering the fields which are sometimes called 'the clouds of the night.' But they are the clouds near to earth, which are produced only in fair weather.

"Thus when a bright, warm, beautiful spring morning about dawn, and the owl and the nightingale have gone to their nests, when the aurora has lifted itself above the horizon and the sun's rays begin to absorb the dews and the moisture near to the earth's surface, then the morning clouds appear. Then the meteorologist can see them sporting amid the tops of the lofty mountains, as sea gulls play hide and seek with the crests of the waves. Then the blue expanse of the heavens seems to be a garden in which are a hundred, perhaps thousands of great bushes laden with huge snowballs in full bloom."

Ah, meteorologist, is that your definition of the morning clouds? Then I know what Hosea means when he says "Your goodness is as a morning cloud." He means "You are only a fair weather Christian. You are only a Christian when the sun is up and everything is bright. But you are no Christian for the time of storms and of deluge." Is Hosea calling you a fair weather Christian, a follower of God in prosperity, as he was calling Ephraim and Judah?

You say, "I am not a morning cloud Christian." Well, if you are not, then what are you? Can God with all His omnipotent power put his finger upon one act of your life where you were willing to deliberately sacrifice your own interests or your ease for him? Have you given to him any of your money? Have you given to him any of your time? When you saw his loved ones unjustly treated, have you been willing to leap forward and defend them for their sake? Are you and I ready to sacrifice ourselves for God? Are we simply morning cloud Chris-

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tians, unwilling to serve Jesus Christ except in fair weather, when the sun is bright and when all things are coming our way?

But there is still another fact to which I want to call your attention in reference to the beauty of my text. Johann Eichhorn, the great German Bible commentator and critic, gives unstinted praise to the poetry imagery of Hosea's writings. He said: "His discourses are like a garland woven of a multiplicity of flowers. Images are woven upon images, comparison upon comparison, metaphor strung upon metaphor. He plucks one flower and throws it down that he may directly break off another. Like a bee, he flies from one flower bed to another that he may suck his honey from the most varied places. It is a natural sequence that his figures sometimes form strings of pearls." But amid all Hosea's poetic pearls and garlands there is not one more beautiful than this of the morning cloud. Why? The morning cloud is the first real beauty that we see in the heavens after the day has dawned.

I was most powerfully impressed with this figure last year when up in an Indian reservation. The evening clouds and the morning clouds, in the language of the meteorologist, are one and the same, the evening of a most beautiful day. The members of our party had broken camp in the morning and gone on ahead. I stayed behind in the woods in order to study and write. About 2 o'clock in the afternoon I shouldered my gun, threw my pack over my shoulder and started out to overtake them. I walked on and on toward the west. The sun, high in the heavens, began to drop lower and lower to the edge of the horizon. After awhile it was like a reflector shining directly at me, and I had to pull my felt hat down over my eyes to protect them. But no sooner did the sun fall behind the western hills than it shot its rays up toward the sky and began to tint the evening clouds in the most beautiful colors. Now they seemed to be mirrors of fire. Now they became great molten lakes of gold. Now they were turned into exquisite lace work. Now they seemed to be the great domed heights of the cathedrals of the heavens. Ah, it was a marvelous sight, the more marvelous because I knew that within a few moments, by the atmospheric law of the west, those hills would be shrouded in complete darkness. Thus the figure of the morning clouds is the more glorious because they are the gilded chariots of the day, which seem to rumble across the boulevards of the sky as soon as the king of the barnyard has sounded his reveille to his harem and the farmer's boys awake from their sleep to go forth to do the chores and to care for the cattle.

"Now, what has the night and morning cloud to do with our vapory repentance?" some one asks. Why, do you not see? The darkness of the night represents terror or the punishment of sin. The morning cloud represents the short lived repentance which comes to some of us just after we have been punished. Our morning cloud repentances are a great deal like that of King Pharaoh and his courtiers when the plagues of Egypt came upon them. God said unto Pharaoh, "Let my people go." Pharaoh would not. Then the river Nile was turned into a river of blood, and every chalice the king lifted to his lips seemed to be filled to the brim with the refuse of the public slaughterhouse. Then the frogs came leaping up the palace stairs and crowded to every nook and corner, and as cobblestones, they covered every street and they filled every hallway and bedroom. Then came the plague of murrain, which killed the cattle. Then came the falling hail and buzzing locusts. Then came the plague of darkness. So dark was it that all men had to feel their way around like blind men. Then came the death of the first-born in every house. No sooner did these plagues come than Pharaoh would cry out: "Enough, enough, enough! O God of Israel, I have suffered enough! I will let thy people go!" But as soon as the night of suffering and punishment had ended the beautiful morning clouds of his repentance only lingered a little while, and then they were gone and gone forever. Do you not see the beautiful simile of the repentances of our lives which come only because we are being punished for our past sins?

Are you ready to here and now seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness and have all things added unto you? John Gough, the temperance orator, used to tell this pathetic story: In Edinburgh many years ago there was a clubhouse, and for the purpose of caring for reformed drunkards. One night there staggered into that house a man who was appallingly drunk. "Do you know what place this is?" the superintendent said. "This is not a saloon. This is a teetotalers' club." "I know that," said the man. "and I am a teetotaler." "You a teetotaler? Why, you are beastly drunk." "I know that," said the man. "I know I am awfully drunk, but I am a teetotaler just the same. I signed the pledge an hour ago, and I have not touched a drop since. I have come here for safety. I want to keep the pledge. But I know I cannot keep it in my own strength, so I have come here to have you help me keep it." Ah, the man was right. Not in his own strength could he keep the pledge. Not in our own strength can we keep from sinning. Let us sign the pledge. Let us resolve not to sin. But let us run to Christ to have him help us to keep that pledge. In our own strength we are helpless. Let us be like the cirrus clouds living high up in the heavens and not like the morning clouds living near the soil and of the earth, smelling earthy.

But the morning clouds, in addition to all their short lived beauty, are capable of producing the most marvelous optical illusions. The atmosphere is an elastic invisible fluid which surrounds our old planet. Its height has never been determined any more than the depths of some parts of the ocean have been fathomed. The atmospheric area may be miles high; it may be hundreds of feet high. But no matter how high it is, one fact is certain—the atmosphere, among its many duties, acts as a protector to the earth. It cools off the heat of the sun before the sun rays reach the earth's surface. It acts as a sunshade. If it were not for the cooling process of the atmosphere and the sun's rays were allowed to strike directly upon the face of the earth the sun would burn up this old earth as quickly as a splinter would be consumed in a Nebuchadnezzar's furnace.

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But in passing through its atmosphere the sun's rays may be deflected when they meet the morning clouds. The morning clouds may act in the same way as does a looking-glass in the hands of a schoolboy. These rays are not so much concentrated by the morning clouds into one great ball of fire as they are sometimes scattered to produce the strangest pictures and the most entrancing delusions.

Hermes was not only the messenger of the mythological gods, but because he was also supposed to be the god of the morning clouds he was called by the Greeks the god of deceit. The morning clouds are deceiving clouds. Hermes was the god of the mile, the god who was able to deceive by his fantastic reflections of the light of the sun. But Hermes, with his canvas of morning clouds never drew more false pictures than Satan, the enemy of Christ, draws when he declares that the life of a mortal is the life which shall inherit eternal peace. What says the Bible? "Do not be a drunkard and you shall be saved? Do not be a thief and you shall be saved? Do not be a murderer and you shall be saved? Do not be a libertine or a liar and you shall be saved?" No, no, that was not the message which Christ gave unto his disciples. Read the sixteenth chapter of Mark: "And he said unto them: Go ye into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature. He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved, but he that believeth not shall be damned." To live the life of a pure moralist is not enough. With his left hand Christ brushes away the morning clouds of an earthly repentance, and with his right hand he points to the star of Bethlehem, who shines in the darkness of the night, and says: "That O sinner, that is thy guide to lead thee into paths of eternal joy and peace, that and that alone." Oh, my friends, will you cease here and now to rest your eternal hopes upon the white fleecy mist of a morning cloud repentance?

Among the pictures of the late Vereschagin, the great Russian artist, there is not one which has a more intense interest for art students than that which was painted above the clouds. The noted artist wanted to know "I know not the man, laya mountains, but the guides refused to go with him because the danger was too great. Go Vereschagin did. He went alone. He lived among the snow and ice until he saw them re-splendent in their most gorgeous colors. Then he painted his wonderful picture entitled "Above the Clouds." Higher than all the sea of clouds, Vereschagin portrayed the mighty peaks of the Himalayas lifting themselves. Thus may we be gospel Vereschagins to-day. May we climb the Himalaya heights of Calvary? May we put our hand in Christ's hand and go higher and higher until we climb above the morning clouds of a vapory repentance? May we climb higher and higher until we browse at the foot of the cross? Then may we paint the mountain peaks of God's mercy. We may paint the mountain peaks of love and forgiveness! Then, like Moses, may we come down from the cloud lands and give to the sinful world this picture, in the centre of which we are to be found kneeling at the foot of the cross! What thou dost, O immortal man? Is your repentance to be of longer duration than the morning clouds, or shall we give our whole nature, mind and soul and heart, into his hands to be made a new creation, all attuned to his voice, and then we can say with the psalmist, "I shall be satisfied when I awake with thy likeness!"

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