

Pastor and People.

STRENGTH AND BEAUTY.

BY THE REV WM COCHRANE, D.D., FRANKFORD, ONT.

In the Book of Kings we have an interesting and elaborate description of the external and internal fittings of the Temple. The forests of Lebanon furnished the cedar and fir-trees: great stones, costly stones, and hewn stones composed the foundation. Pure gold and chains of gold overlaid the altar and the ark of the covenant. The cherubim and seraphim were overlaid with gold. The doors were of olive trees with carvings of cherubim and palm trees and open flowers. The pillars were of brass, their chapiters covered with a network of pomegranates, and upon the top of the pillars was lily-work.

The idea that seems to be suggested is Strength and Beauty. For such a large edifice, designed to stand for generations, and to be constantly used in public worship, strength was absolutely necessary. The pillars must be solid and unyielding, to sustain the weight of the building. But it does not necessarily follow that these pillars should be devoid of beauty. Their ornamentation does not diminish their capability of bearing the stress laid upon them. It is very true that without the "lily work," they could equally well sustain the building, but by adding this ornament the eye is pleased, and the entire effect considerably enhanced. Solomon and his skilled workers intended the internal furnishings of God's house to be not only massive, grand and imposing, but to be "exceedingly magnificent," the delight of the worshippers, and the fame and glory of surrounding nations.

We may take these words as suggesting what is demanded of the Church and of individual Christians at the present day. Says David: "Strength and Beauty are in His sanctuary." The pillars in their massive grandeur, towering aloft and sublime, are to be fretted over and crowned with gracefulness—with lily-work of choicest artifice.

We want in Christian character, first of all, strength—courage to possess and express our opinions; to defend the truth at all hazards, and make aggressions upon Vice in the community and in the land. No one who reads attentively the New Testament Scriptures can fail to observe how frequently Christians are enjoined to exercise courage and moral bravery. Cowardice is not mere weakness, but positive sin. Timidity should have no place among the followers of Christ. As soldiers carry their head erect in the thickest of the fight, so God's servants are to stand in all the dignity of Christian manhood, firm in the faith and defiant of evil.

Next, we want beauty as an essential element of Christian character.

What is beauty? In the natural world it is pleasing. It is discernible by all, and the universal theme of intelligent beings. There is beauty in the flower and in the rainbow; in the dewdrop and the icicle; in the dawn and in the twilight; in the storm and in the calm; in the snow-capped mountain-peak, and the low-lying valley. God has garnished the universe with the conception of His own mind, and that for the highest ends. The beauty and grandeur of creation are only known to him who traces in the sublime and mysterious harmonies of the heavenly world, and in the variegated scenery of the landscape, marks of unerring wisdom, and that marvellous adaptation of means to ends which characterizes the whole.

All things are beautiful, could we see
The wondrous workings of Divinity!
The corals and the gems that deck the deep,
Where echo cradles in perpetual sleep;
The scented bowers where zephyrs softly lie,
The tuneful choristers that wing on high;
The pristine planets beaming bright above—
All, all is beauty, breathing endless love.

All things are beautiful! for God is love!
Diffusing chasms below, around, above.

Beauty is, therefore, Nature's sweetest soul
And spreads His sacred name from pole to pole.

But after all, who can give a definition of what beauty is? Says one: "It is that assemblage of graces or proportion of parts which produces a certain agreeable emotion or feeling, or which pleases the senses." Says another: "Any material object which gives us pleasure in the simple contemplation of its outward qualities, without any direct exertion of the intellect, is, in some degree, beautiful." By this it is not meant that beauty is not recognized by the inner sense, but that we cannot, in many cases, give the reasons why certain objects afford us pleasure and call forth our admiration. In all high ideas of beauty, much of the pleasure doubtless depends on perceptions which are purely intellectual, but the workings of the mind are so subtle and so rapid that we cannot always give a reason for our conclusions.

As an approximate definition, we may say, that beauty is nature in perfection—comeliness, symmetry and harmony. Art is only beautiful when it approaches nature, and speaks to the heart, and raises our thoughts to the Deity; when we forget the artist

in the grandeur of his conception; when we are instinctively led to think of a beauty "which is not of his creation, and a knowledge which is past finding out." Nature is but the ideal and offspring of the Almighty's mind, and must be perfect. Hence, when we admire nature, we but adore and exalt the proportions of the Great Architect and Designer of the universe.

Now, as in nature, so in the Church of Christ there is to be a beauty and loveliness of character, discernible by the world. The pillars of the temple should be covered over with "lily-work."

The beauty of holiness which distills from the believer's lips and person is just the reflection of the Deity in the world; a sweet, attractive, and omnipotent influence which compels admiration, and enlists the sympathies of men everywhere. There is a spell in the holy life that overcomes opposition, overturns the dogmas of infidelity, and wins over to Virtue the vilest of men. Dr. Guthrie, when describing the late Robert Murray McCheyne, says: "While a most pleasant and delightful companion, enjoying nature and all good and innocent things in this life, he had, in a rare and singular degree, his conversation in heaven, and the influence for good he left in every place was quite extraordinary. The places where he visited seemed heavenlier than before. Associated with his person, appearance and conversation, on the walls of the house and everywhere around, seemed to be inscribed: 'Holiness to the Lord.'"

The reality of such an influence or moral force is not open to disputation, because it is inexplicable and undeniable. The dewdrop silently crystallizes during the hours of slumber and as quickly evaporates, as if it dreaded the analysis of chemistry and the applications of scientific investigation to reveal its secret; but its refreshing and vivifying power remains behind. And so there are thousands of lives that pass noiselessly through existence, blessing humanity and beautifying the world. "He hath a daily beauty in his life," says the poet. You cannot tell wherein lies the secret power, but the fact remains. For holiness is not so much one outshining grace, as the aggregate of the Christian graces. It is the harmonious proportions of all these excellences which go to make up a perfect man—the nearest approach to what humanity was, when fresh from the Creator's hands, and undefiled by sin.

Which influence is the most salutary—that of the rippling stream or the noisy cataract; the lightning flash, accompanied by the thunder peal, or the calm, steady shining of the sun? Both are necessary, but not equally valuable. The continuous force of the one class of agencies far exceeds the more startling and explosive outbursts of the other.

You cannot always tell wherein lies the charm and pathos of those who are universally acknowledged as the greatest of vocalists, or the most eloquent and impressive of pulpit orators. Listening to detached cadences and sentences, they seem but little different from those of inferior artists; but when the effort is concluded, you are spellbound. You cannot tell wherein lies the charm, but the charm is there. Of such a good man's life we can only say:

Beauty is truth—truth is beauty—that is all
We know on earth—and all we need to know.

There are some who deem such ideal lives utterly unattainable, save perhaps by a favoured few. They believe in "settled, rock-like principles" of religious faith, and argue that from such natures as theirs, there cannot possibly spring forth "comely plants of grace." The possibility of a union of strong religious convictions and tender, dove-life qualities is not hopeful, if we judge by what many Christians are. How unlovely, gainly, repulsive and austere are many good people! How thoughtlessly they conduct themselves in their relations both to the Church and the world—running rough-shod over the most delicate sensibilities and outraging all the proprieties of good taste! They seem to think that piety and gentleness of speech and action are incompatible: that abruptness of manner, stinging rebukes of men's imperfections, and bitter invective, are the elements of saintship. They have no kind word, no cheerful smile, no hearty welcome, no open hand for their fellow-men. They live in a severe, cold, clear atmosphere, unaffected by human sorrows, and disdainful of their weaker and more dependent brethren, who need all the sympathy that the Church of Christ can give. We dare not doubt the sincerity of such good men and women. But, if they are the subjects of grace, they certainly are destitute of gracefulness, which is the outcome of grace. They remind us of those tall, gaunt, leafless trees, straight and rugged, which have their use and place in the economy of nature, but give no shade, emit no fragrance, and bear little fruit. Nay, some good people are not only void of moral beauty, but they have tempers so nettlesome and touchy, that were we not assured that a vast change comes over them at death, their fellowship in heaven would be no attraction.

There are others who say: "We are so constituted that we cannot be otherwise than we are; we cannot unbend or relax. We don't believe in your religion of sentiment. Our inflexible adherence to principle, and steadfast maintenance of orthodoxy and regular attendance upon ordinances, ought to be sufficient to

attract to a love of what is virtuous, and hatred of what is vicious." There may be some little truth in such language, but there is more error. Whatever be a man's temperament, Divine grace and persistent effort can change it. Not until every possible effort has been made should men despair of acquiring this moral beauty, which is so attractive to the world. No man who has attained the forgiveness of sins, and who believes himself at peace with God, should rest satisfied with these alone. Whatever will commend the religion of Christ to others, he should attempt. "Covet earnestly the best gifts," says the apostle. Be all things to all men, if thereby they may be saved. If the great orators of ancient times spent long years in acquiring their powers of persuasion that they might, by the flexibility and compass of their voice, and the chasteness of their diction, gain the intellectual mastery over their audiences, why should a Christian grudge years of patient toil to possess such gentleness and comeliness of manner, as shall enlist his fellow-men on the side of truth, and bring them to practise the virtues of the Master?

Be courteous, then, in all your intercourse with your fellow-men. Let the pillars be ornamented with lily-work. If naturally of a taciturn and austere disposition, try, by God's grace, to overcome it. A sunshiny countenance costs no more than a cloudy one. Cultivate not only the grand and lofty in deportment, but the amiable and the winning. Religion should make men excel in true refinement—not sickening affectation, nor outward gentility, but in a sweetness of disposition that purifies all it touches.

It is wonderful how the most haughty and disagreeable of men can become *suave* and congenial when their personal interests are at stake. How bland are our merchants to their patrons! They overflow with good nature and do their utmost to please! How gracious and condescending also are our candidates for municipal and parliamentary honours in their intercourse with those whose suffrages they seek. No effort is spared to win men over to their ways of thinking. Such conduct is commendable within certain limits. The children of this world are wise in their generation. They know that urbanity and courtesy are often of more value than lengthened discussion of abstract theories. And shall Christians, having the prospect of a nobler destiny than anything this life can furnish, allow their opportunities of usefulness to pass unimproved and their capacities for saving souls to lie dormant, and not the rather "clothe the enduring vitalities of the hidden life in the comely garment of the Christian graces."

SECRET PRAYER.

O, sweet and healing is secret prayer, when the heart, oppressed with a burden which none but God must know, and none but God can remove, retires with Him apart and lays down the load at His feet, and pours all anxieties into his pitying bosom, where no eye but His can see and no ear but His can hear! There we use postures, expressions, or pleadings that might not be suitable in the presence of others. There we may lay open those hidden wants and solicitudes which we may not reveal to our dearest friend. Cyrian has very beautifully described the benefit and delight which he found in retired prayer and meditation: "That no profane listener may hinder my musings, and no domestic clamour drown them, I withdraw to a recess in the neighbouring solitude, where the creeping tendrils of the young vines form a shady arbour. Behold! there I obtain a feeling of truth which learning could not give, and drink in, from the quick impartings of Divine grace, stores of heavenly thought which long years of study could never supply."

I love to steal awhile away
From every cumbering care,
And spend the hour of setting day
In humble, grateful prayer.

EFFECTIVE FAMILY RELIGION.

Family religion requires the highest mutual confidence. The reading of the Bible, prayer in the morning and evening, attendance at church, cannot constitute family religion. The spirit of the parents must be devout; the children must know that both father and mother depend upon God for direction, and look to Him for comfort. The accidental discovery of a parent at prayer makes a deeper impression upon a child's mind than a month of routine services. The spirit in which religious subjects are referred to is more than the things that are said. The undertone is more important than the overtone. Not gloom, not tasks, nor morbid conscientiousness, but simple, unaffected confidence in God and truth, a personal trust in Christ, and a love for each other, which is the result of all for Christ, and a sincere spirit of good-will to all at home, and of kindness of thought and expression to all who enter the home or are mentioned there, these make the family religion, and make its Bible-reading, prayer and church-going as natural as its social life. No child ever goes out from such a family to become an unbeliever or a scoffer. But from the pharisaic, the stiff, the dead, the intolerant, whose religion is a yoke of forms without heart, few of the youth become religious.