

## The Beauty of Nature the Voice of God.

By Prof. W. Gordon Blair, D.D.

It requires a little poetry in one's nature to understand, in any degree, the symbolical aspect of natural beauty; and to understand it fully requires more than poetry—it requires the grace of God. The Psalmist understood it well. To him the beauty of nature was the voice of God. "Thou makest the outgoings of the morning and the evening to rejoice." He loved to look on the silvery dawn, playing with the dew drops and scattering pearls and diamonds on every side, or casting its gleam on sea and lake and river, or flooding the fields and the mountains with heavenly brightness; he liked to look on this as the voice of God, saying to man, "Go forth joyously to your labor; be cheered and gladdened by your surroundings, and realize the thought that all brightness comes from above. Earth in itself is dreary; toil in itself is hard; but as there is a contact between the sun above and the earth beneath that brightens and beautifies what was lately so dark and dull a world, so let there be a contact between you and heaven; accept the brightness that comes from above, and your life will be transformed into a life of joy and hope, a triumphant march to the home above." Then, after the toils of the day, came the golden sunset, with its soothing, restful influence, its tender tints, its peaceful calm; and this to the Psalmist was God's voice calling man to rest. As he followed the sun on his westward course, he saw him turning the Great Sea into a sea of glory, and distilling something of heavenly calm on "Jerusalem the golden," and inviting toil-worn men to rest and peace. Whence came these bright but short-lived glories these joyful outgoings of the morning and evening? They came from God, symbols of that exuberance of joy which marks the divine nature, tokens of his fondness for all that expresses gladness, and of his desire that man's days should begin with hope and end with peace—a desire not often realized outwardly, but realized in an inward and deeper sense wherever the Sun of Righteousness shines with healing in his wings.

The twenty-ninth psalm, from first to last, is an interpretation of the voice of God in its louder utterances, as it follows the course of a thunder-storm. We sometimes contrast the sublime and the beautiful, but there is beauty in the sublime. In that psalm the thunder-storm first crashed against the cedars of Lebanon, then shakes the wilderness of Kadesh, and, as it advances, issues flaming forks that send their glare into the depths of gloomy forests, while worshippers crowd to the temple of Jerusalem to call on him who doeth these great wonders. But in these sublime manifestations they see the "glory" of the great Lord of all; and drawing from them the assurance that his irresistible power will ever be exercised for the good of his people, they go home with the assurance that "the Lord will bless his people with peace."

So may we hear the divine voice in all the changing aspects of nature. Spring is the symbol of the Spirit of God, flushing souls with holy life; summer represents the time of sunshine, the church walking in the light of God's countenance; bountiful autumn expresses the divine desire for fruitful lives. It is a very ingenious explanation the apostle gives in the eighth chapter of Romans of the groans and dismal sounds of nature. "We know that the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now." The point of this remark is, that the groans of nature are not the pangs of death, but the birth-throes of the new creation; the anguish cries, like those of a woman in travail, amidst which the old world gives birth to a happier age.

This symbolism of the aspects of nature is the congenial theme of some of our best religious poets. Wordsworth and Keble, if they are pre-eminent in anything, shine as interpreters of the divine voice uttering itself in the

seasons, in the lights and shadows of the mountains, and in all the changing aspects of earth, sea and sky. They have an articulate voice for all who believe that nature is full of God. "To whom some visionless teacher brings

The secret lore of rural things;  
The moral of each fleeting cloud and gale,  
The whispers from above that haunt the twilight vale."

Unfortunately, as we have said already, the great mass of men are too careless observers of nature to have much appreciation for its beauty generally, or much understanding of the divine voice that seeks through nature to catch the ear of man. The habit of close observation needs to be much cultivated in order to get at the bare facts; and others habits need to be cultivated in order to come under their holy influence. To promote knowledge of the actual facts, the practice of drawing from nature is invaluable. In his quaint way Mr. Browning says:

"For, don't you mark, we're made so that we love

First, when we see them painted, things we have passed

Perhaps a hundred times, nor care to see.  
And so they are better painted; better to us.  
Which is the same thing; Art was given for that;

God uses us to help each other, so  
Lending our minds out."

There are undoubtedly risks connected with the cultivation of taste or the love of beauty which need to be guarded against. Highly cultured minds are tempted to think bitterly and scornfully of the untutored. Yet the untutored vulgar may have qualities of high value of which the others have none. We must remember the Christian rule, "Honor all men." More serious is the danger of allowing beauty to excite our love and draw our homage for its own sake. There is something sad in what has commonly been the history of "Christian art." At first it was the handmaid of religion, but as it improved, the devout spirit began to disappear, until at last religion ceased to be the mistress of art and became its servant; the religious sentiment passed into the background, the conception of beauty alone remained. It is a perilous time when art begins to eat away the soul of religion; when in sacred music, for example, the idea of worship is subordinated to the sense of beauty; or when, as the effect of a religious painting, admiration of the painter's art preponderates over the devotional feeling. The remedy lies in the higher culture of our moral nature; such culture as regards truth, righteousness and holiness as infinitely higher and more important than aesthetic emotion. There are blessings in this world which we need to use with constant watchfulness lest we go too far. The joys of beauty must be ranked among these, when they are associated with the worship of God. We must partake of this joy with an ever-wakeful anxiety lest it betray us into sin. If this limitation should distress us, we may comfort ourselves with the thought that a world draws nigh where the pure in heart shall see God, where all the aspects of divine beauty shall be infinitely stronger and where there shall be no risk of plunging too deep into the stream, or forgetting God amid the fullness of his gifts. For there is no forbidden fruit in Paradise Regained: "He that overcometh shall inherit all things."

## Life's Little Things.

A little bit of patience often makes the sunshine come,  
And a little bit of love makes a very happy home;  
A little bit of hope makes a rainy day look gay,  
And a little bit of charity makes glad a weary way.

Many might go to heaven with half the labor they go to hell, if they would venture their industry in the right way.—Ben Jonson.

## The Studio.

The extra summer number of The Studio will consist of a masque entitled "Beauty's Awakening," written and illustrated by members of the Art Workers' Guild. The text has been contributed to by Messrs. Walter Crane, C. Harrison Townsend, Schwyn Mage, Christopher Whall, C. R. Ashbee, H. Wilson, and others; while among the numerous illustrations will be found an original etching by William Strang and a double page reproduction in colors especially designed by Walter Crane. The cover is the design of R. Anning Bell. The Studio, 5 Henrietta street, Covent Garden, London, W. C.

## Strength for the Day.

Strength for the day! At early dawn I stand,  
Helpless and weak, and with unrested eyes.  
Watching for day. Before its portals lies  
A low black cloud—a heavy iron band.  
Slowly the mist is lifted from the land,  
And yearl and amber gleam across the skies.  
Gladdening my upward gaze with sweet surprise.  
I own the sign; I know that He whose hand  
Hath frightened these son-bro clouds with  
ruby ray,  
And changed that iron bar to molten gold.  
Will to my wandering steps be Guide and  
Stay,  
Breathe o'er my wavering heart His rest  
for aye.  
And give my waiting, folding palms to hold  
His blessed morning boon—strength for the  
day!  
—Rachel G. Alsop.

## Help for the Drowning.

Drowning accidents are so common and yet so often preventable, if help is only given promptly and intelligently, that everyone should know just what to do in such an emergency. It is probably useless to say what one ought to do when in danger of drowning, for the person in such a situation will not be likely to follow the rules. The body is so little heavier than water that the slightest support, scarcely more than the proverbial straw, will suffice to keep it afloat, if the person can keep cool, avoid struggling, and be satisfied to keep the nose and mouth out of the water while waiting for assistance. If a person is brought out of the water apparently dead, the first thing for the bystanders to do is to get away. If any one among them knows what to do let him assume charge while the others help by keeping at a distance, so as not to destroy the dying man's last chance of getting air. He should be placed on the ground, face down, with the head sloping, and the one who is working over him makes pressure with both hands under the abdomen so as to expel any water that may be in the air-passages. Of course if the clothes are on they must be loosed immediately, and then pulled or cut off by an assistant without interfering with the work of resuscitation. As soon as the water has been squeezed out, the patient is to be turned on his back and covered with a blanket, a by-stander's coat, or anything warm, and hot-water bottles or hot bricks, wrapped in cloths, so as not to burn the skin, should be placed about the body and feet underneath the covering. A very good way to get rid of inquisitive and excited people who persist in crowding around the drowning man and shutting off the air is to send them in different directions to the nearest houses for blankets, hot bricks, bottles filled with hot water and with thick stockings drawn over them, smelling-salts, hot tea or coffee, brandy, and anything else that can be thought of. Few of the things brought can be used, but that will not matter.—Montreal Witness.

The life of Christ was not one of idleness; ours should not be. We ought to be so busy doing good that the world would recognize us as its best friends.