

Good Words for Every Day of the Year,
Good Words, 1860. Editor, Norman MacLeod, DD.
Edinburgh: Alexander Strahan and Co. London: Sampson Low, Son, and Co.

August 15.

“Ask now the beasts, and they shall teach thee; and the fowls of the air, and they shall tell thee; or speak to the earth, and it shall teach thee: and the fishes of the sea shall declare unto thee. Who knoweth not in all these that the hand of the Lord hath wrought this?” --Job xii. 7-9.

O for an understanding heart and a spiritual mind to read God’s book of nature as Job read it, deriving holy instruction from every page written on it by its Creator’s hand! We have received not only such “handwriting on the wall” of creation as Job saw, but the “interpretation thereof” in the “*volume of the Book*,” how diligent, then ought we to be to grow in grace and knowledge by all those means which God has so richly bestowed on us! All the objects of nature may remind us of teachings in God’s Word, if we have but the heart to receive them. The beasts of the field, the sheep and lambs, may remind us how we “like sheep have gone astray,” or may speak to us of Him who is “the Lamb of God.” The ravens tell of His care, who provides for those who are “better than the fowls;” the sparrows tell us that “not one of them is forgotten before God,” and we “are of more value than many sparrows.” The lovely lilies say to us, “Why take ye thought for raiment?” And the grass, so green to-day, so quickly cut down and withered, tells us to remember “all flesh is grass, and all the goodliness thereof is as the flower of the field.” Thus do Thou, O Lord, enable us to read thy book of Nature by thy book of Revelation.

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August 16.

“And I saw and bare record that this is the Son of God.” -- John i. 34.

It was when looking upon Jesus in the flesh, Jesus the *Son of Man*, that the great truth was revealed, of which the Baptist bare record, “that this is the *Son of God*.” It was when dazzled by a light from heaven, and struck to the earth by an overwhelming power, that it was revealed to St. Paul, that he whose glory proclaimed His divinity was *Jesus*, -- Jesus of Nazareth,--whom he in his blindness persecuted. Thus we may look in two ways upon the wonder of wonders, Jesus both God and Man. We may, with John the Baptist, ascend from beholding Him as a man, to look upon Him as God; or, with St. Paul, we may come down from the thought of His *Divine* glory in the ineffable light of the upper sanctuary, where our eyes are “blinded with excess of light,” and we are stricken to the earth with a sense of His majesty; and we may hear this glorious One say, “*I am Jesus*,” Jesus the Saviour, Jesus who is a *brother man*, and who so feels for man by having drunk every bitter cup of human woe, that when His people are persecuted, He is persecuted in them. O Lord, may we feel the power of this great truth, and rejoice in Thee our Saviour, so human to sympathize, so Divine to save!

August 17.

“Go, and say to Hezekiah, Thus saith the Lord, the God of David thy father, I have heard thy prayer; I have seen thy tears: behold, I will add unto thy days fifteen years.” --Isa. xxxviii. 5.

The case of Hezekiah was very remarkable. In answer to his prayer his life was lengthened, but the measure of the reprieve was unalterably fixed and *made known* to him, “*fifteen years.*” Neither more nor less was to be granted. He was the one exception to the rule that “man knoweth not his time.” Till the fifteen years were ended he was invulnerable to the shafts of death. Disease, the sword, and the sudden evils which men call accidents, were alike powerless for Hezekiah during those years; but he knew from the mouth of God himself, that when that term was expired no power could prolong his life for a moment. As a believer, he knew that for fifteen years he would still remain a pilgrim and a stranger on earth; and as a man and a king, he knew that whatsoever his hand found to do he must do it with his might, for the day was named, known, and fixed, when all his labours here were to terminate. Ours is a very different position. Hezekiah could count upon fifteen years, *we* cannot count upon fifteen minutes! “*Now* is the accepted time, *now* is the time of salvation;” for those who delay to come to Jesus, there may be no *to-morrow* on earth, while for those who love His name, a morrow of glory may even now be in store.

August 18.

“Whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth. If ye endure chastening, God dealeth with you as with sons; for what son is he whom the father chasteneth not?” --Heb. xii. 6,7.

The rod of chastening may be a sore grief, but it should not be a *mystery* to the child of God. He has been told to expect this as a part of his training, even such a training as he himself, if a parent, would assuredly give to the child of his love. We can look back on the days of childhood with thankfulness, that we were not *let alone*. We know *now* how much we needed teaching, training, and even chastening. It was bitter at the time; childish griefs, though soon forgotten, are often exceeding bitter while they last; but now we see how needful it was, and how true the love was that spared not itself the pain and trouble of correction to the child; for the father delights not in chastening; it is a duty which costs him more than it costs his child. Let us not then misdoubt our Heavenly Father when He chastens; let us glorify Him by exercising that grace which neither angels nor saints in heaven can exercise, -- *patience* under His chastening hand.

“More moulded to Thy will,
Lord, let Thy servant be
Higher and higher still,
Liker and liker Thee.
Leave nought that is unmeet;
Of all that is mine own
Strip me; and so complete
My training for Thy throne.”

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August 19.

“ I will pray with the spirit, and I will pray with the understanding also: I will sing with the spirit, and I will sing with the understanding also.”
-- 1 Cor. xiv. 15.

We often hear the complaint made, that various holy services, at first designed and performed from the heart, have in the course of time degenerated into mere forms, and instead of being helps to devotion, have become a bondage. What then is the remedy? Are we to do away with the forms in which the piety of our fathers found utterance? Nay, let us rather seek to prevent their becoming forms, by making the resolution of the apostle our own, -- “I will pray with the Spirit!” Yes, Lord, it is the Spirit, Thy Spirit, which I need. Thy Spirit alone can give life to services which, without this, are no better than *hypocrisy*; for the only way to escape this sin, so odious to God and man, is to make the worship *real*, to fill out the empty forms with the breath of life, to worship God, who “is a Spirit, in spirit and in truth.” The more I seek to do this, the more am I humbled under a sense of failure in every holy duty; and the more do I feel the truth, that in me dwelleth *no* good thing. But the very longing after the Spirit is a proof that He is not far off, and a pledge that He will be found by those who seek Him.

“If God is mine, then present things
And things to come are mine;
Yea Christ, His Word, and *Spirit* too,
And glory all divine.”

August 20.

“Speak the word only, and my servant shall be healed...When Jesus heard it, He marvelled, and said to them that followed, Verily I say unto you, I have not found so great faith, no, not in Israel. -- Matt viii. 8, 10.

What was the nature of that faith which our Lord so highly commended, and declared to be beyond aught that He found even in chosen Israel? Let us compare it with other cases: the nobleman of Capernaum's cry was, “Sir *come down* ere my child die.” The ruler of the synagogue's petition was “*Come* and *lay thy* hand upon her and she shall live.” Both of these pious Israelites had full confidence in Jesus as the healer, the prophet, whose presence could even restore to life; but it was to the Roman warrior alone, that the faith “not found in Israel,” was given, to discern in Christ, that power divine, attributed to God (as in Ps. cvii. 20) of healing by a word only, “He *sent his word* and healed them.” And the centurion's characteristic illustration is full of belief in the great *power* of Him before whom he stood; no second causes interfere with the clearness of his view in the case; he knew that He alone who had said to the disease “*Come*,” and it came, could say with effect, “*Go*,” and it would go. The Roman mind was clear upon the matter of *authority*, and how well may it teach us a lesson of looking above what we are pleased to call “second causes!” It has truly been said, “second causes are no *causes* at all! there can be but *one cause*.” A strong simple view of God's power as cause of all, removes many difficulties.

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August 21.

“And Mary said, My soul doth magnify the Lord, and my spirit hath rejoiced in God my Saviour.” -- Luke i. 46, 47.

This was the keynote of the song of praise that was never henceforth to cease for Mary. She would sing it many a time by the lonely cradle manger, and in the carpenter of Nazareth's humble abode; she would sing it with deeper and yet deeper meaning as she pondered over the wondrous ways of her Son, her Saviour! And she sings it doubtless now in His presence in glory. While I in thought gaze with her on the babe of Bethlehem, or marvel over all the human part of His history, racing His footsteps from the manger to the cross, let me never forget that He is my *God* as well as my *Saviour*, --let me never forget how the angel's word to Mary proclaimed that “the holy thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God.” Yes, He in whom Mary's spirit rejoiced is He whom all the angels worship. “By him were all things made, and without him was not anything made that was made.” He telleth the number of the stars, he calleth them all by their names.” Well may the believer rejoice as Mary did, and feel how blessed is the security of having such a God and Saviour, One who knows our nature, yet sits upon the throne of the universe!

“Can His pity or His power
Suffer thee to pray in vain?
Wait but his appointed hour,
And thy suit thou shalt obtain.”