



SUNDAY READING

SERMON.

The Glory of God in Nature and in Grace.
BY THE REV. THOMAS SOMERVILLE, M. A.,
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"Who can understand his errors? Cleanse Thou me from secret faults. Keep back Thy servant also from sumptuous sins."—Psalm xix, 12-13.

The headings placed by the translators above the chapters are always appropriate, and frequently suggestive. The heading above this chapter is the best division of its contents—"The creatures show God's glory." The word His grace. David prayeth for grace." He expatiates on the beauty and grandeur of the outward world, then on the beauty and grandeur of His spiritual kingdom. Our attention is called—First, to the book of nature; and, secondly, to the Book of Revelation. With their separate voices they tell of the same God—righteous, and true, and good. We have all felt our hearts enlarged while gazing on the starry firmament. But David goes beyond this. He sees the glory of God not only in shining star and moving orb, but in the holy and good law of God's spiritual kingdom. "The law of the Lord is perfect, converting the soul; the testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple; the statutes of the Lord are right; rejoicing the heart; the commandment of the Lord is pure, enlightening the eyes; the fear of the Lord is clear, enduring for ever; the statutes of the Lord are true, and righteous altogether." He is meditating upon God's law; and the longer he meditates, the more he sees to admire. He sees and expresses his sense of its sufficiency, utility, infallibility, perspicuity, purity, perpetuity, and equity—in fact, that it is good, and good all round.

And just as the man who comes before a strong and brilliant light discovers the dust and the flaws upon his raiment, so, gazing upon this clear law of God, he discerns his frequent departures from it, for he adds—"Moreover, by them is thy servant warned." Different from many, he regards their warning power as a blessing. He cherishes the law of God for its wholesome tendency upon his own soul.

At this point he pauses. He has been looking at his own life in the light of that holy law, and, realizing how full of imperfection and evil it has been, he resumes again in penitential strain—"Who can understand his errors? Cleanse Thou me from secret faults."

There is not only the acknowledgment that life is full of error. There are errors of the senses, of the conscience, of the judgment, of the will, of the affections, and of the actions. The whole man is like an instrument out of tune which jars in every part. There is corruption at the very spring of life. The heart is like a fountain that sends forth sweet waters and also bitter. He also acknowledges the difficulty of understanding our errors. Sin destroys the power by which we detect it. It creates a false standard by which we judge ourselves. It blinds the eyes, and hardens the heart, so that we take less note of God's holy and perfect law. When I was abroad, I often observed that the exile who had been longest away from home had less desire to return than he who had but recently come forth from the old home. Thus it is with the man accustomed to sin, the law of God loses its charm, he has less regard for the standard of God's law, which is as a sharp sword entering in and dividing asunder that which is right and that which is wrong—separating the true and the false, that which is pure and that which is unclean. But with returning life, there is returning discernment. When the soul is quickened it reads with a new light. Repentance and confession follow. From the depths of its weakness there comes the cry of the distressed soul—"Who can understand his errors?"

There is a personal touch in this acknowledgment. Who can understand his errors—his own errors? This sinner is sharp sometimes in discerning the errors of other people, although blind to his own. Thus it was with David himself. How sharp he was in judgment against the man pictured by Nathan, utterly forgetful of his own foul deed. It needed great plainness of speech on the part of Nathan to bring home to his own sin. "Thou art the man." There are many who keep a sharp look out for the errors of others—forgetful of their own. These are set within a notebook, conned and learned by rote, to cast into their teeth when occasion offers. Despite the sweet mercy of God that droppeth as the gentle dew from heaven—despite the Spirit of God that is knocking at the door of their own hearts, and calling for better things, they persist in stirring up the waters of evil. The most censorious person that ever was in this congregation was the one who proved in himself the most unworthy, and brought the greatest stain upon our brotherhood.

We are all too ready to acknowledge sin in a general way, without trying to note the particular sins we are most guilty of. We are ready to say—"O God, have mercy upon us miserable sinners," without looking within and asking what are our particular offences. How do we sin the most readily? Is it in our temper, in our appetite, in our indifference to others—or is it our forgetfulness of God? Are we honestly seeking to know and to amend these broken parts of our life? In God's light we see light. We have all occasion in this respect to say—"Oh send forth Thy light and Thy truth; let them be guides to us. Thy spirit is good, lead me into the land of uprightness."

There follows the prayer, "Cleanse thou me from secret faults." This refers (1) to faults unknown to ourselves, and (2) to faults well known to ourselves—but secret, so far as others are concerned. Faults unknown to ourselves. In our approaches to the Throne of Grace, we are generally willing to confess the sins of

which we are conscious. And in all truth these are many and serious. If we are really trying to follow Christ, and live a straight and honest and pure life, we find difficulties at every turn. Temptations are strewn thickly around on every path. There is a law in our members warring against the law of our mind. Offences—causes of stumbling—come day by day, which we deplore and confess. But, after all, we are often like the farmer who exposes in the market-place a few handfuls of grain as a specimen, while the stores are concealed in the granary at home. Behind all our confessions of sin, there is much—very much—that is undetected and unconfessed. These unknown sins are the most dangerous to our souls. The very fact that we discern some sins, and confess them, and watch against them, makes them less dangerous. The navigator piloting his ship through a sea known to be dangerous, but which has been thoroughly surveyed, where all banks and rocks and surging whirlpools are clearly marked upon his chart, can make his way cautiously and safely. The very number of the marks upon the chart leads to carefulness. More to be feared is the channel, smooth and open as it may appear, where no mark reveals the hidden danger. The undulating waves roll over the sunken rock, the navigator fearlessly spreads his sails in the prospering breeze, the good ship hurries on, and then strikes and sticks fast. Then all at once the wild shriek rises from those on board—all effort is in vain to save, and in a few hours there is the shattered wreck. And thus also, sins noted and marked upon our memories are less likely to be ruinous to the soul than those secret sins that elude the observation. More to be feared is the hidden disease, that in the silence unnoticed spreads its roots through our frame, than the malady that by biting pain gives us warning of its presence. More to be feared by the Christian are the secret faults which are unknown to himself than those which he detects, and explores, and struggles to be free from. Well, then, may the prayer rise from all of us, "Cleanse Thou me from secret faults." They are sins of ignorance, but they are sins all the same. Let us bring them all to Him who, through Christ, has promised to have compassion upon them who are ignorant and out of the way.

The second class of secret faults are those known to ourselves, and known only to ourselves. There are three lives which all of us lead—the life by which we are known to the world; our public character, the life by which we are known to our household; our domestic character; and the life known only to ourselves—our secret life. This is peculiarly the life. By it we will stand or fall in God's eye. Many will be inclined to say that our public character is the best, and our secret life the worst. This is not my opinion, and I have come as close as most men, spiritually, to people in all spheres of life. I believe that the secret life—the life of thought and aspiration within the portals of our own soul, the life which we live, or desire to live, free from the trammels of outward pressure and limitation—is after all the best. There is a better life deep down in the heart, which, if we could only touch and understand, would appear beautiful and pure. I am certain that could we lift the drapery that hides each soul, we would find warm affections little thought of—yea, we might find many a bright ideal fondly cherished—many traces of the inherent majesty of the soul, and many a high aspiration for which the world gives little credit. But just as our secret aspirations are the highest, so also our secret sins are the worst. We never know how much of the angel, nor how much of the devil may be in those around us. Each one, in his respect, brings his own burden to the Throne of Grace—a heavy burden that is to some. There is that foul deed that has stained our nature through a weary course of years; there is the memory of that one whose warm affections were turned to bitterness through our perversity—those acts of meanness that make us at times despise ourselves; that bad habit that has overmastered us again and again; that secret sin which, if made known, would bring the blush to the cheek—that crime, it may be, which, if proclaimed, would have blasted our fair reputation; that besetting sin which has often made us cry to God, "Oh! Heaven, have mercy!" the enemy, which, all unknown to others, has entered by the door of appetite, or of passion, or of habit; the serpent that has lodged in our bosom for years. Rest assured that that sin, though secret for years, will find you out. Not, possibly, in public, but in yourself—and in God. Hidden it may be from men, but not from God, nor from His sure law. Concealed it may be through life, but not from Him; and, unless repented of, and flung from you by that repentance, it may sink you through all eternity. God calls you this day to repentance. There is a Saviour who is Christ the Lord. "He knows what sore temptations are, for He has felt the same." Oh, consider His precious gospel! Bygone shall be by-gones. Those torn and soiled lines of life shall be blotted out, and forever. He will pardon; He will "cleanse the soul in sin that lies." No one knows how small you can be under pressure, prejudice, and passion; but no one knows how great you will be through His pardoning mercy, through His "cleansing Spirit," and through His prevailing power and intercession.

"Keep back Thy servant also from sumptuous sins." All sins are, to a certain extent, presumptuous. They are all in breach of well-known law; they are transgressions. But we have been speaking of sins unknown to ourselves, and sins known to ourselves, and not to others. Sins of presumption are sins of will, knowingly and wilfully committed. One is the neglect of Christ's command—"Do this in remembrance of Me." In this we acknowledge sin, and proclaim that we trust for mercy in the redemption of Christ. We are full of error, but we believe Christ will help us. We are poor indeed, but we trust to the riches of God's grace in Christ Jesus. All this is implied in the ordinance, and therefore every Christian ought

to observe it. It is a sin of presumption to act as if we needed no mercy—as if we were able to accomplish our own salvation—and, while the whole Christian world is publicly acknowledging Him as Lord and Redeemer, to remain apart. This is presumption—not humility, as some falsely call it. If we would follow Christ, let us begin by obedience to His express command.

The Speed of Thunderstorms.

On the authority of the superintendent of the London meteorological office, the average speed of thunderstorms is about twenty miles an hour. In 1888 Herr Schonrock studied 197 thunderstorms in Russia, with reference to their speed of travel. He obtained as mean velocity about 28.5 miles an hour, with variation from 13 to 60 miles. As a rule thunderstorms occur more frequently at sunset than at any other period of the day, and are more numerous in high latitudes than in low. The dampness of the English climate causes them to be more destructive than elsewhere. They never occur in the Arctic regions, and previous to June, 1890, they never had been experienced in the Mauritius since 1801. Madagascar suffers very much from their frequency and severity, the annual loss of life from them amounts to 300. Java has the greatest number of any country in the world; they take place with intensity about once in ninety-seven days throughout the year. In Great Britain they take place about seven days annually. In Jamaica they occur with the greatest regularity between the hours of 12 noon and 3 p. m. during the rainy season, which lasts for five months, or about 150 days. The same thing occurs at Natal, but during the summer months, October to February. In Brazil they occur with such regularity that invites to parties, etc., are given intimating they are to take place either before or after the diurnal thunderstorm.

Old Maryland Churches.

An interesting landmark of the past is All Hallows' church at Snow Hill, Worcester Co., Md., which has just passed through a perilous process of improvement. The parish is nearly 200 years old, and the church edifice was reared in 1734. The earliest church was built of logs, but the present building is of brick imported from England and paid for with tobacco raised by a general levy upon the parish. Sixteen miles from Snow Hill is old St. Martin's church, now disused, a brick structure of nearly the same age as All Hallows'. St. Martin's parish is older than the church, as the baptismal service still in use was presented by Queen Anne. Quite as old as either of these church organizations are several Presbyterian churches in the same region, founded by MacKenzie, the father of American Presbyterianism, while some of the earliest Methodist congregations in the United States were founded upon the same peninsula.

Picturesque Scene at Naples.

At Naples on the 29th ult., a picturesque ceremony took place near the harbor. It being the feast of St. Peter, the fisherman begged the Archbishop of Naples to celebrate their patron saint by going to "bless the sea." The cardinal, therefore, accompanied by his secretary and many priests, repaired to the Marina, followed by an immense crowd, and embarked in a boat with a cross at the prow. Rowing out for about 300 feet, the cardinal rose and blessed the sea, while the multitude on the shore remained kneeling. Carriages and trains were stopped for some time, and all windows, terraces, and balconies decorated with the silk and lace counterpanes used by the Neapolitans, were full of people, who cast bunches of flowers and branches into the air. When the cardinal returned he was followed a long distance by men and women, the latter lifting up their children to be blessed. And so ended the fishermen's feast.

A Custom of Eight Hundred Years Ago.

In January last the bells of all the parish churches of Brussels rang merry peals to celebrate the anniversary of the return home from the Holy Land of the survivors of the Crusaders who took part in the first Crusade. They left the 1095 with Godfrey of Bouillon, whom they left there, and for six long years no news was received of them. They were given up for lost, and more than one of the forsaken wives was thinking of taking a successor to the absent one, when on January 19, 1101, at dusk, the arrival was announced of a troop of men-at-arms at the Treurenberg. The long-awaited husbands were welcomed with the best of suppers, to which they did such ample honor that when bed-time came they were unable to move from their chairs, and their valiant wives had to carry them to bed.

Whatever is—Is Best.

I know as my life grows older,
And mine eyes have clearer sight,
That under each rare circumstance
There lies the root of Right;
That each sorrow has its purpose,
By the sorrowing unperceived,
But as sure as the sun brings morning,
Whatever is—is best.
I know that each sinfulness,
As sure as the night brings shade,
Is somewhere, sometime punished,
Tho' the hour be long delayed.
I know that the soul is aided
Sometimes by the heart's unrest,
And to grow means often to suffer—
But whatever is—is best.
I know there are no errors
In the great eternal plan,
And all things work together
For the final good of man.
And I know when my soul speeds onward
In its grand eternal quest,
I shall say, as I look back earthward,
Whatever is—is best.
—Ella Wheeler Wilcox.

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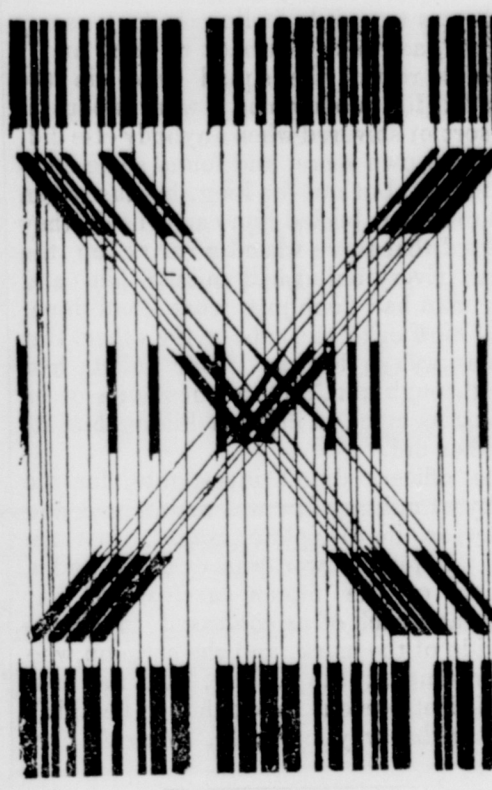
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