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## THE EARTH AS A TEACHER.

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(*Baptist.*)

Speak to the earth and it shall teach thee.—Job xii., 8.

THERE are two teachers of man, who have not ceased to give instruction in the great school of life. One is the Bible and the other Nature. The resources of wisdom in either have not been exhausted. Both are constantly educating the race, and leading it to a higher and better knowledge. Men learn of them according to their capacity. It has been the custom of some religious teachers to decry the study of Nature, and to consider its lessons as something foreign to the gospel, and to-day there are those who regard with suspicion any pursuit of the problems which it offers to its scholars.

Such either ignore or have failed to perceive the frequent uses which Christ made of Nature's teachings. He saw the truth in things which are beautiful, and was always in close touch with His fellow teacher, Nature. He vocalized earth's symbols and parables. A sparrow, whose value could not be measured in terms of current coin, because it required two to represent the smallest piece of money used in Jerusalem, was the object of God's thought, and as it fell in death was still held in His sympathy and care.

The gorgeous hues of the field lilies, revealed a glory from God, which no human genius could rival. The free and familiar raven, whose burnished robes of sable hue and whose hoarse calls were among the most common objects in the land where Christ taught, was the lesson of a providence, more unfailing, than all the anxious toil and fretting cares of men.

To one who is well acquainted with the Old Testament there is nothing strange in Christ's frequent use of natural imagery. The Bible, unlike all early literature, is full of the symbolisms of Nature. The story of the emancipation of Israel, has a significance, even in

## A LOFTY IDEAL.

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(*Presbyterian.*)

Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report, if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on *these* things.—Phill. iv., 8.

THE painter might himself have sat for this portrait. Lofty as is the ideal presented, every follower of Jesus should strive after it. Nothing tends more to the elevation of character than to have high ideal. Nothing so commends Christianity to men of the world as the daily view of and contact with well-developed, consistent Christians. Such a Christian is a sermon in shoes.

The first characteristic feature in Paul's picture is *truthfulness*. The believer must not only hold sound opinions—the opinions taught in God's Word; but he must hold them sincerely and be willing to die by them. Nay, more, he must be himself as thoroughly true as the Bible creed he adopts. He must possess godly sincerity. This rigid virtue forbids every twist of the tongue into a falsehood, every insincerity of profession, every sham, either in principle or practice. Notorious liars may be quite rare; but equally rare are the people who never give a false impression, or never practice a dissimulation, or never depart from the air-line of unalterable truth. Many a respectable Christian, who would shudder at the idea of playing the hypocrite toward God, does not hesitate to dissemble quite too often before his fellow-men. He calls a man "my dear friend," when he may have a secret contempt for him; and signs himself "yours sincerely," when he knows that he is writing a diplomatic lie. Too much of the current ceremony and etiquette of society is founded on falsehood. The man and woman who, without being boorish are yet brave enough to tell you an unpalatable truth; the merchants who will frankly admit the defects in the wares which they offer for sale; the parents who never practice deception before their children; the friends who will say to your face what they are saying behind your back; even the pastors who dare always say "thou art the man" are sadly in the minority. But who would not rather have a hard truth flung in his face than a smooth lie insinuated under his "fifth rib?" The truth which God enjoins is as transparent as the day-

light. Those who practice it find that, in the fine language of the Sultan Akbar, "no man is ever lost in a straight road."

II. A kindred virtue to truthfulness is that nice sense of honor which our translators have rendered "whatsoever things are honest." The old English word "honestie" signified a great deal more than paying twenty shillings to the pound. It was equivalent to our word *honorable*, and demanded not only fair dealing in business, but that exact conformity to right which never stoops to an unworthy trick. In one of the oldest editions of the Bible we read: "Upon those members of the body which we thynke less honest put we the most honestie upon." The Greek word which Paul employed signifies *nobleness*. It loathes meanness. It never hides in ambush. It walks by the golden rule. The essence and mainspring of it is a Bible-enlightened conscience.

There is no department of life in which a Christian can more effectually command his Christianity than in downright honesty in business. The "rotteness in the bones which produces a large percentage of the commercial failures is nothing else than sheer fraud. Outside veneer and varnish—not even the disgraceful veneer of a Christian profession—are of no avail when the strain becomes too severe for the timber which is worm-eaten by knavery. It is time that every church member realize that to be fluent in prayer is no excuse for being fluent in business falsehood. His Bible commands pecuniary honesty as imperatively as it commands faith in Jesus Christ. It is even a noteworthy fact that the Bible records three different miracles which were wrought to enforce pecuniary integrity. Let our readers search out the three cases we refer to. It will be a profitable Bible lesson.

III. The next traits which Paul introduces into his portrait are justice and purity. The first of these signifies whatever is in accordance with eternal rectitude. It not only gives to God his due, but also to every human being whom God has made. There is not a despot, or an oppressive landlord, or a hard-hearted employer, or a slaveholder, or a cruel husband, or a church member who tramples on a fellow-member for his color or his caste; there is not a single man who robs his fellow men of his rights, but is exposed to the hidden lightning in these holy words: "Whatsoever things are *just*!" If every one of us would simply do what is just, the world would have little need for what is called generosity.

The word *purity* in this great passage must not be restricted, as some expositors insist, to sexual chastity. It does mean that, and it means a great deal more. It not only re-enacts the seventh commandment, but it enjoins purity of soul. If a man claims to have been cleansed by the blood of Christ, then should he be clean—clean in thought, clean in motive, clean in speech, clean in character and conduct. Keep thy garments unspotted from the world. But that can only be done by keeping a clean heart within. Nor can we possess that except in answer to the daily prayer: "Create in me a clean heart, O God. Renew a right spirit within me." A life of constant communion with God can only insure this purity.

IV. The apostle's noble portrait is not complete until he has added to masculine and majestic traits a few touches of delicate and womanly sweetness. He is the handsomest man who has something of the women in his countenance. So when Paul has made his model Christian truthful, and honest, and brave, and upright, and pure, he also adds that he should be loveable. He employs two Greek words which are nowhere else to be found in the New Testament. One of them is translated "lovely," and the other is translated "of good report." The first one literally signifies what is dear to us. The other one signifies what commands our admiration. Both are most important traits in a symmetric Christian. Both increase his spiritual power over others. Both honor Christ.

For not every good man or woman is lovable. Some people's religion has too much acidity in it to taste well. Some who aim to be strictly upright are betrayed into censoriousness. Others who do not want to be thought frivolous put on too sanctimonious a face. Still others, whom we hope Jesus loves, are not loved as much as they might be by their fellow-beings. They need sweetening. Their repulsive sourness, and their sharp angularity, which makes them so needlessly unpopular, are really no part of their substantial piety. They are excrescences. And every follower of Christ is morally bound to make his religion just as attractive and just as impressive and winsome as possible.

A living, lovable Christian is the most powerful argument for the gospel. He is Christ's best representative. A Paul may paint such a character; but Divine grace alone can produce it. Christ Jesus alone can make what the apostle portrayed. His two cardinal requirements for it are: "Believe on Me!" Follow ME!"