

SAINT GEORGE.

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A MEMORIAL ADDRESS.*

By the Rev. Canon H. D. Rawnsley.



We are met this morning, on this quiet day of rest, beside a stone of restfulness for many a weary heart. None of our generation of thinkers and writers passed away, saw more clearly or thought more truly that "from Nature and her overflowing soul" we could, if we were in sympathy with Nature, obtain her calm, and find in her thousand manifestations an anodyne for petty care and worldly restlessness.

I am glad we meet here to lay, as has just been laid by the present Master of the Guild of St. George, a wreath upon the late Master's monument, because I feel that Ruskin, for me at any rate, was a true teacher of the Spirit of Christ, the Life-giver and Joy-bringer to mankind. He Who came to be the True Bread from Heaven has had few disciples, who have more constantly insisted "that man doth not live by bread alone but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God." Go to the inscription on the back of this Borrowdale monolith, and see if it be not so. "The Spirit of God is around you in the air you breathe,—His glory in the light that you see, and in the fruitfulness of the earth and the joy of His creatures. He has written for you day by

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day His revelation as He has granted you day by day your daily bread."

Spiritual bread and joy, it was for this that Ruskin pleaded. The glory of the Heavenly Father, it was for this he urged men to live and work. And all this in the spirit of self-sacrifice and obedience which was the essence of the life and will of Him who came to show us of the Father.

The little lad who at five years old felt the beauty of this Friar's Crag view pass into his heart, and who afterwards said, "The first thing that I remember as an event in life, was being taken by my nurse to the brow of Friar's Crag on Derwentwater," never for one moment of an arduous life of intellectual effort, wavered in his allegiance to his high aim, which was to set forth the glory of that Heavenly Father as revealed by storm and shine, by roar of waterflood and singing of streams, by the silver shining palaces of the clouds, and the blue cloudless azure above the hills, by the blossom on the wild-rose, and the fruitfulness of the field, by the leaping of the deer across the lawns, and the dance of the shy squirrel from bough to bough, by song of bird, by cry of meadow herds, by all the wonder of the rose-red even-tide, and "all the beauty of a common dawn."

Ruskin proved by what he perceived of man and his history, that they only lived wisely, worthily, and well, who were in unison with this quiet joyfulness of happy nature, and found that in work of their hands, as well as work of their brain, if only that work was done at its highest and best, they could enter into the deep joy that Nature knows of living according to the Will of God up to its fullest capacity for life, and of being peacefully obedient unto the end.

But we who meet to-day in the Master's memory, know that this teacher did but enforce the teachings of other lovers and learners at the English lakes. The man who wrote :

"The world is too much with us ; late and soon,
Getting and spending, we lay waste our powers :

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Little we have in Nature that is ours ;
We have given our hearts away, a sordid boon."

has had few more able to enforce his teaching in our generation than John Ruskin. From first to last the Master of St. George's Guild insisted as Wordsworth taught

"That virtue and the faculties within
Are vital, and that riches are akin
To fear, to change, to cowardice and death."

He told the men of Manchester in his early lectures on political economy that the wealth of a nation lay not in money but in men, in character and not in cash, and his voice is still a trumpet for the lips of those who would call back to a noble national life a people who seem to have forgotten that their Saviour and their Lord lived a poor workman's life on earth without riches, and was content.

Nor can we gathered here to-day forget that he alone of his time, our first Master of the Guild, was insistent that just as all great and true art was praise, so all good and true work meant joy of heart to the worker. If ever the time come back to us when men shall feel the dignity and the joy of labour, shall know that "joy's soul lies in the doing," we shall have to bless the name of John Ruskin. He taught more, he taught that it was only in fair surroundings that the best work was likely to be produced. And when in a century hence men are found returning to the quiet vales and the silent hills, to carry on the work which they find impossible in the huge and restless towns, they will gratefully read the writings of the man who as a little lad had been inspired here to devote his life to the happiness of the workman's lot.

But the greatest debt we, who are assembled here, owe to the late Master of St. George's Guild is the debt that is hinted at in the little hymn you will presently sing—

"He gave us eyes, for we were blind,
He bade us know and hear."

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Yes, a true follower of the Lord of Life and Light, the good message that he gave; the gospel that he preached was—that God had given us all eyes to see, and all ears to hear, and placed us in a world wherein not a cloud rose, nor a shaft of sunshine fell, not a lowly moss or lichen gleamed, nor a rock-fortress stood up in gloom or glory of pine-clad beauty, nor a quiet lake rippled, nor a great sea broke, no voice of bird or water-flood or child was heard in the woodland, no cry of cattle on the thousand hills or bleating in the meadows, but all had a message for the heart of man, all had a power to speak to us of the All Father and His love from everlasting.

Nor did Ruskin only open our eyes to see the glory of God as revealed by nature. He opened doors for us into many of the mighty minds of old, and sent many of us with his own enthusiasm to the study of Shakespeare, of Dante, of Plato, of Tennyson, of Chaucer and Spenser, and taught us to turn with abiding love to Wordsworth and Sir Walter Scott. The architects of old, the sculptors of old, the painters of old, and painters of modern time, to these he sent us, and under his guidance we saw the wonders of art revealed in their handiwork. So that my friend and neighbour and old friend and true follower of Ruskin, did right when he wrote for the late Master's epitaph the words—

“He taught us to love poor men and their work,
Great men and their work,
God and His work.”

And here on this day of rest we meet to thank him who spent his whole life in an endeavour to tell us where true rest was to be found; we meet to urge the people who shall never see the gentle face of the prophet of the holier and happier life who loved these familiar scenes, and whose soul was ministered to by their beauty, at least to make themselves familiar with his words, and to listen to the echoes of a voice that cannot die.