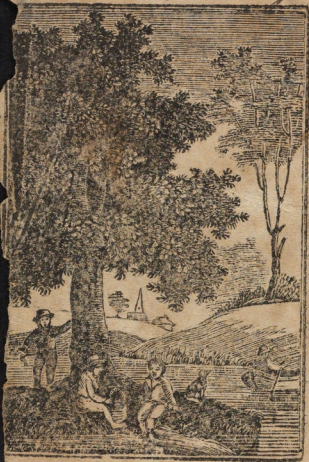


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H. S. Gentry

THE
BOOK
OF
NATURE.



NEW-HAVEN:
FOR J. BABCOCK & SON.
Sidney's Press.

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1820.

books, and I am no less happy in seeing you make so good a use of them. There is, however, my dear child, another book, called THE BOOK OF NATURE, which is constantly open to the inspection of every one, and intelligible even to those of the tenderest years. To study that book, nothing more is required than to be attentive to the surrounding objects which Nature presents to our view; to contemplate them carefully, and to examine and admire their beauties; but without attempting to search into their hidden causes, which youths must not think of, till age and experience shall enable them to dive into physical causes.

I say, my dear Theophilus, that even children are capable of studying this science; for you have eyes to see, and curiosity sufficient to make you ask questions, and it is natural for human nature to wish to acquire knowledge.

This study, if it may be so called, so far from being laborious or tiresome, affords nothing but pleasure and delight. It is a pleasing recreation, and a delightful amusement.

It is inconceivable how many things children would learn were we but careful to improve all the opportunities that they themselves supply us with. A garden, the fields, a palace, are

each a book open to view, and in which they must be accustomed to read, and to reflect upon. Nothing is more common among us than the use of bread and linen ; and yet, how few children are taught the preparation of either ! through how many shapes and hands wheat and hemp must pass before they are made into bread and linen !

A few examples will serve to shew, how far we ought to study nature in every thing that presents itself to our view, and therein trace out the handy works of the great Creator.

The first preacher that proclaimed the glory of the Su-

preme God, is the sky, where the sun, moon, and stars, shine with such amazing splendor; and that book, written in characters of light, is sufficient to render all inexcusable who do not read and contemplate it. The divine wisdom is not less admirable in its more humble productions of what the earth produces, and there we can survey with more ease, since the eye is not dazzled by them.

Let us begin with plants.—What appears to us mean and despicable, often affords wherewith to astonish the sublimest minds. Not a single leaf is neglected by nature; order and symmetry are obvious in every

part of it, and yet with such a variety of pinking ornaments and beauties, that none of them are exactly like the others.

What is not discoverable by the help of micrisopes in the smallest seeds! and with what unaccountable virtues and efficacies has it not pleased God to endow them! nothing can more demand our admiration, than the choice that our great Crator has made of the general colour which beautifies all plants. Had he dyed the fields in white or scarlet, we should not be able to bear either the brightness or the harshness of them. If he had dressed them in a dusky colour, we should



have taken little delight in so sad and melancholy a prospect.

A pleasant verdure keeps a medium between these two extremes, and it has such an affinity with the frame of the eye, that it is diverted, not strained by it; sustained and nourished, rather than wasted. What we considered at first as one colour, is found to afford a great diversity of shades: it is green every where, but it is in no two instances the same. Not one plant is colored like another, and that surprising variety, which no art can imitate, is again diversified in each plant, which is in its origin, its progress, and maturity, of different kinds of green.

Should my fancy waft me into some enamelled meadow, or into some garden in high cultivation, what an enamel, what variety of colours, what richness, are there conspicuous! What harmony, what sweetness in their mixture, and the shadings that temper them! What a picture, and by what a master! But let us turn aside from this general view, to the contemplation of some particular flower, and pick up at random the first that offers to our hands, without troubling ourselves with the choice.

It is just blown, and has still all its freshness and brightness. Can the art of man produce

any thing similar to this? No silk can be so soft, so thin, and of so fine a texture. Even the purple of Solomon, when contrasted with the flowers of the field, is coarse beyond comparison.

From the beauties of meadows and gardens, which we have just been surveying, let us take a view of the fruitful orchard, filled with all sorts of fruits, which succeed each other, according to the varying seasons.

See one of those trees, bowing its branches down to the ground, and bent under the weight of its excellent fruit, whose colour and smell declare

the taste. The quantity as well as the quality is astonishing. Methinks that tree says to me, by the glory it displays to my eyes,—“Learn of me what is the goodness and magnificence of that God, who has made me for you. It is neither for him nor for myself that I am so rich: he has need of nothing, and I cannot use what he has given me. Bless him, and unload me. Give thanks to him, and since he has made me the instrument of your delight, be you, that of my gratitude.”

The same invitations catch me on all sides; and as I walk on, I discover new subjects of

praise and adoration. Here the fruit is concealed within the shell; there the fruit is without, and the kernal within: the delicate pulp without shines in the most brilliant colours. This fruit sprung out of a blossom, as almost all do; but this other, so delicious, was not preceded by the blossom, and it shoots out at the very bark of the fig-tree. The one begins the summer, the other finishes it. If this be not soon gathered it will fall down and wither; if you do not wait for that, it will not be properly ripened. This keeps long, that decays swiftly; the one refreshes, the other nourishes.

Among the fruit-trees, some bear fruit in two seasons of the year, and others unite together spring, summer, and autumn, bearing at the same time, the blossom, green, and ripe fruit, to convince us, that the sovereign liberty of the Creator, who, in diversifying the laws of nature, shews that he is the master of it, and that he can at all times, and with all things, do equally what he pleases.

It is observable, that weak trees, or those of an indifferent pitch, are those that bear the most exquisite fruits; and the higher they grow, the less rich are their productions. Other trees, which bear nothing but

leaves, or bitter and very small fruit, are nevertheless useful for the important purposes of building and navigation.

If we had not seen trees of the height and bigness of those that are in forests, we could not believe, that some drops of rain falling from the skies would be sufficient to nourish them; for they stand in need of moisture not only in great plenty, but also such as is full of spirits and salts of all kinds, to give the root, the trunk and branches, the strength and vigour we admire in them. It is even remarkable, that the more neglected these trees are, the handsomer they grow; and

that if men applied themselves to cultivate them, as they do the small trees of their gardens, they would do them more harm than service.

Thou therefore, O Author of all things! thus establish this indisputable proof, that it is thou alone who hast made them; and thou teachest man to know, that his cares and industry are useless to thee. If indeed thou requirest his attention to some shrubs, it is but to employ him, and warn him of his own weakness in trusting weak things only to his care.

Let us now turn to the scaly inhabitants of the water, and



what a variety and number of fishes are there formed!

At the first sight of these creatures they appear only to have a head and tail, having neither feet nor arms. Even their head has no free motion; and were I to attend to their figure only, I should think them deprived of every thing necessary for the preservation of their lives. But few as their exterior organs are, they are more nimble, swift, artful and cunning, than if they had many hands and feet; and the use they make of their tail and fins shoot them forward like arrows, and seem to make them fly.

How comes it to pass, that in the midst of waters so much impregnated with salt, that I cannot bear a drop of them in my mouth, fishes live and sport, and enjoy health and strength? How, in the midst of salt, do they preserve a flesh that has not the least taste of it?

It is wonderful when we reflect, how the best of the scaly tribe, and those most fit for the use of man, swarm upon our shores, and offer themselves, as it were to our service; while many others, of less value to him, keep at a greater distance, and sport in the deep waters of the ocean.

Some there are that keep in

their hiding places unknown to men, whilst they are propagating and growing to a certain size; such as salmon, mackerel, cod, and many others.— They come in shoals at an appointed time, to invite the fishermen, and throw themselves, as it were of their own accord, into their nets and snares.

We see several sorts of these scaly animals, and those of the best kind, get into the mouths of rivers, and come up to their fountain head, to communicate the benefits of the sea to those who are distant from it. The hand that directs them, with so much care and bounty for man, is at all times, and every where

to be seen; but the ingratitude of man, and the capricious wanderings of his heart, often make him forgetful of the greatest bounties.

From the scaly inhabitants of the water, let us turn our attention to the feathered animals of the air. In several dumb creatures we see an imitation of reason, which is truly astonishing; but it no where appears in a stronger degree, than in the industry and sagacity of birds in making their nests.

In the first place, what master has taught them that they had need of any? Who has taken care to forewarn them to

get them ready in time, and not to be prevented by necessity? Who has told them how they must be contrived? What mathematician has given them such regular plans for that purpose? What architect has directed them to choose a firm place, and to build upon a solid foundation? What tender mother has advised them to line the bottom of them with materials so soft and nice as down and cotton; and when these are wanting, who suggested to them that ingenious charity, which urges them to pluck from their breast with their bill, as much down as is requisite to prepare a conven-

to foresee, that all his dexterity would vanish like a shadow.

In the third place, who has made these little feathered animals sensible, that they are to hatch their eggs by sitting over them? that both the father and mother must not be absent at the same time from the nest; and that, if one went in quest of food, the other was to wait till its partner returned? who has taught them that knowledge of calculating time, so as to make them able to know precisely the number of days of this rigorous attendance?— who has told them how to relieve the egg of the burden of the young one perfectly form-

ed therein, by first breaking the shell at the critical moment, which they never fail to perform.

Lastly, what lecturer has read lessons to birds, to teach them to take care of their young till they have proper strength and agility to shift for themselves? who has taught them that wonderful sagacity and patience, to keep in their mouths either food or water, without permitting them to pass into their stomachs, and there preserve them for their young ones, to whom it supplies the place of milk? Who has made them capable of distinguishing between so many

things, of which some are adapted to one kind, but are pernicious to another ; and between those which are proper for the old ones, but would be hurtful to their young? We have daily opportunities of seeing the anxieties of mothers for their children, and the tenderness of nurses for the little ones committed to their care ; but it will admit of a doubt, whether we see any thing so perfect in the nursing of the human race, as we see among the feathered inhabitants of the air.

It cannot be for birds alone, that the omnipotent Creator has united in their natures so



many miracles, of which they are not sensible. It is obvious, that his design was to direct our attention to Him, and to make us sensible of his providence and infinite wisdom; to fill us with confidence in his goodness. Think of these things, my Theophilus, and do not fail to read THE BOOK OF NATURE, from which you will learn to perceive your own insignificancy, and the omnipotency of Him who made you.

## THE LORD'S PRAYER.

Our Father, who in heaven art,  
 All hallowed be thy name ;  
 Thy kingdom come ; thy will be  
 done

Throughout this earthly frame,  
 As cheerfully as tis by those

Who dwell with thee on high ;  
 Lord let thy bounty, day by day,  
 Our daily food supply.

As we forgive our enemies,

Thy pardon, Lord, we crave ;  
 Into temptation lead us not,

But us from evil save,  
 For kingdom, power, glory, all  
 Belong, O Lord, to thee :

Thine for eternity they were,  
 And thine shall ever be.—*Amen.*

# BOOKS.

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