

# Goodly Words

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We have in this world eloquence in the pulpit and on the platform, the Bench and the stage. Then there are the literary productions of many great and skilful writers. But in the pages of the Bible we have both eloquence and literature of quite a different order. There the platform is heavenly and spiritual, and the Speaker is Divine. When we take the writings of the prophets and apostles, the attempt to **compare** must of necessity fall into **contrast**.

It has been remarked that the literary possessions of our ancestors were completed in three books; the Holy Bible, Bunyan's Pilgrim's Progress and Foxe's Book of Martyrs. The second of these is a noble allegory drawn from the Bible, and the third is an awful history of the persecution of lovers of the Bible. But it all goes to prove the divine dignity and power of the Bible.

In the Bible we have both inspiration and revelation; and where its truth is received the result is both illumination and transformation. Men love the tragedies of the stage, but in the Bible we have recorded the greatest tragedies the world has ever seen, and they are truth and not fiction. A great stage actor was asked by a preacher why it was that he could hold the people while the other could not get their attention. The answer was, "I speak fiction as though it were truth, but you speak truth as though it were fiction."

But to return; do not the first pages of the Holy Book show us a tremendous tragedy in relating the fall of man? We see the entrance of the traitor, who is the author of both lying and murder, as seen in the seduction of our first parents and in the death of Abel. Then what awful tragedies are related in the Flood, the judgment on Sodom, and the destruction of Pharaoh and his host in the Red Sea. But let the reader come in thought to Calvary. There he will see the tragedy of eternity.. All this is not the mere spinnings of the imaginations of the creature, but the description of the awful conflict of good and evil, which still rages in God's fair creation.

Then again, the beginnings of the sciences are all in this blessed Book. Things that are known today were on record there before our creature research discovered their existence. And why not? It is the Book of God, wherein the Creator has graciously condescended to stoop to make Himself known. Confessedly there are in it difficulties and mysteries to our minds. How could it be otherwise? We have but to read Psalm 104: 1-4, and we realise how far He is beyond us. But this is the God who reveals Himself to us in the Bible, and it is one of the greatest wonders that He should stoop to do so.

As touching the language of the Bible, where could anything be found to compare with the addresses of Moses in the book of Deuteronomy and his valedictory song in chapter 32? There is not only the subject-matter as giving a prophetic sketch of the nation's history through the ages into millennial blessedness, but the beauty and felicity of the language has such a holy charm that even the enemies of the truth have to admit it. Then compare the blessing of the tribes by Jacob in Genesis 49 with the blessing on the nation pronounced by Moses in Deuteronomy 33. There is great wealth here for those who can appreciate it.

But now do not miss the song of Moses and Israel on the banks of the Red Sea. Read the early verses of Exodus 15. The dignity, purity and nobility of language used here is unsurpassed, and truly

none but the Spirit of God could have given it. This leads us to other songs of Scripture; those of Hannah and Deborah will appeal for their simplicity and beauty. The former has its links with that of Mary, the blessed Virgin, and that of the latter with the victorious majesty of God.

It is in the Book of Psalms, however, that we get the anatomy of the human soul laid bare. Here we travel from the depth of sorrow and distress to the heights of joy, delight and ecstasy. Here the Spirit of Christ is at work in the singers; and not only that, but our Lord is seen there as the Speaker again and again — (see, Ps. 16; Ps. 22; Ps. 40; Ps. 69; Ps. 102).

There can be no comparison between the Bible and all other literature. McCheyne wrote of, "Isaiah's wild measure and John's simple page." We truly find simple words in John, but conveying the profoundest truth. Isaiah has left us language of rugged and transcendent grandeur, such as we find, for example, in Isaiah 40: 12. But the same prophet gives us language of beauty and tenderness, both as to our Lord Himself and His people. Isaiah 53 must ever stand alone as giving us the sacrificial sufferings of our Lord, and based upon it the words of richest mercy and blessings for both Israel and the Gentiles, as seen in Isaiah 54 and Isaiah 55.

Has the reader ever been touched with the pleadings of the heart of God over His poor, wandering, failing people? We know of nothing in the Old Testament that leads us into the knowledge of our God like this. He puts Himself before us in the opening chapters of Jeremiah, and in Hosea, the prophet of the heart of God, in pathetic language like a sorrowing parent, weeping over the wilful ways of disobedient children, who have brought upon themselves the contempt of their neighbours and their own destruction.

But perhaps as wonderful as anything in the Old Testament are the prophetic effusions of Balaam in Numbers 23 and Numbers 24. A man, a poor, deluded mortal trafficking with Satanic powers, yet seeks Jehovah, hoping to be allowed to curse His people. In his endeavours to curse, the Spirit uses him to bless, and his unwilling lips are made to pronounce language as rich and fine as ever came from mortal tongue. All four pronouncements should be carefully read and weighed for they are unsurpassed in depth of meaning as well as beauty of language.

Nearly all that has been said is but calling attention to the beauty of the structure of Scripture, and this we can assert with confidence, "even our enemies themselves being judges" (Deut. 32: 31). But when we come to the New Testament it will be necessary to go inside and beneath the surface, for "the revenues of the ages" are now shown to be brought to us. Those ages ran their time and are necessarily the subject of the Old Testament. The ancient oracles unfold to us the working out of the time ways of God in manifold scenes of mercy and government, attesting in the fullest way that while God stooped to adapt Himself to the fallen creature, yet in holy government He maintained the honour of His name and glory. But in the New Testament there comes to light His eternal plan and purpose. If in the Old we are permitted to see the "back parts" of our God (Ex. 33: 23), in the New we are fitted to stand before Him and behold the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.

But what are "the revenues of the ages"? The answer to this question will take us to the inside of the structure. God, who created the world, formed the ages in His dispensational ways, each of which is marked off from the others and blessed with a different revelation of Himself. For example, the righteous, who lived between Noah and Abraham, had a fuller revelation of and from God than those who lived between Adam and Noah. The same holds good through all the succeeding ages or dispensations of the Old Testament. Referring to the early dealings of God, it is said in 1 Corinthians 10: 11, "Now all these things happened unto them for ensamples [types]; and they are written for our admonition, upon whom the ends [revenues] of the world [ages] are come." What could be more

wonderful than to see God's own thoughts, plans and purposes underlying all His dealings with the fallen race from Adam until Christ came?

The blessed Son of the Father came here as the answer to all the promises, types and shadows; as the fulfilment and the filling full of all that was foreshadowed in the previous provisional ways of God throughout the whole history. That history in its onward march was clearly and definitely leading on to our Lord Jesus Christ.

In the filling up of these ages, our God in His wisdom and resource was bringing out in a little nation like Israel, and in a small part of the earth — the land which He had chosen — that which in its immensity will fill all eternity. It was foreshadowed there in the tabernacle and temple with their ministries and services in the moral code and the ceremonial observances, in the covenants and even in their calendar. There indeed He deposited His oracles, which indicated the things which in their fulness must develop until they fill both heaven and earth.

In the six days of Genesis 1, we have not only the ordering of creation, a scene of vastness and variety, but also how it was fitted for its inhabitant, the head of a race in which the predilections of the great Creator were centred. The sons of God shouted for joy and the morning stars sang at its creation, for it was to be the theatre wherein would be wrought out both His time ways and His eternal purposes. God will carry into eternity a redeemed company for His own everlasting delight. In that eternity, based upon redemption, will be other families, in the midst of which the Church will take her place as the body and bride of Christ, as the "Eve" for the "last Adam." The formation of the man and the woman at the outset foreshadow the eternal purpose of God for Christ and the Church. This is surely something of the revenues of the ages.

It has often been said that the New Testament is enfolded in the Old, and the Old is unfolded in the New. This is confirmatory of what we have been saying as to the revenues of the ages. It recalls also a statement, made long ago, that when we come to the New Testament we find a Man, a blessed, glorious Person, the Son of God, around whom all Scripture pours its treasures. All the wealth of creation, providence, government, redemption and glory are found in Him.

"All hail the power of Jesus' Name,  
Before Him prostrate fall!"

We certainly have to come back to these ancient oracles, as it pleases the Lord to open up to us these things. It is impossible to open any part of Scripture without finding Christ, the blessed Son of the Father, as its Centre and its Theme.