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SEARCH

FOR

WINTER SUNBEAMS.

PRELIMINARY CHAPTER.

EXPLANATION OF THE TITLE—SUNBEAMS.

יהי אור ויהי אור—"Be light!" "And light was."—GEN. i. 3.



HEATHEN teacher, Longinus, found in this extract the sublimest expression. What the world would have been 'without a Sun,' the poet Campbell brings home to us by the tenderest of illustrations. There is a Light which never was on sea or land. It consecrates the poet's dream. It is not this illumination, whose beams I would presume to search for; neither is it the *lumen siccum* of the philosopher, nor the inner radiance of the spiritual life; for these may be found in the untravelled tranquillity of scholastic leisure and domestic repose. My pursuit was for that Sunbeam, which makes the tree grow and the waters flow—which makes the earth warm, and the air sweet—which has, in its prismatic rays, colours to paint the beautiful flower and the pallid cheek. The Sunbeams I craved are those which flow from that source whence "the Stars repairing in their golden urns draw light." I sought not the radiation which brings glowing heat, so much

as that which yields temperate warmth, and with warmth, relief, and with that, health. Hence, my search was for Winter Sunbeams. Although the search extended into the Summer, it ended—so far as my experience went—upon a Swiss mountain peak, where, 11,000 feet above the sea, the Sunbeams were discreetly mitigated by the aspect, and tempered with the temperature of a hundred snow-clad mountains.

It would impair the cheerful spirit of these pages, were I to dwell on the physical infirmity which compelled me to seek a gentle clime; and yet, perhaps, the only utility—and I may add the primary object—of this volume is, to point out a path to health, which is such, because ‘irradiate with beams Divine.’

What a beam of light can accomplish—has it not been the theme of many a girlish composition, as well as of scientific disquisition? The regeneration of the Earth with every Auroral advent, is it not a perpetual hymn of praise to the Creator of light, and an ever-during and radiant rainbow-covenant of His love? What a beam can do, even after its untired tour of millions of miles, and through uncounted periods of duration—how it gilds the starry vault, and builds the heavenly structure—how before it the clouds about our star dissolve and the blackness of night is dispelled; and how chaos becomes cosmos, is but the type of what can be wrought upon the human frame and spirit by its sanitary and cheering influence.

It is impossible sufficiently to aggrandize the wonderful functions of Light. All the ‘powers’ of the Earth emanate from the Sun. It gives us coal, food, wind, and water. Efforts have been made to calculate some of these mechanical powers, but they are incalculable. Engineers may ‘estimate’ the work of the Sun in evaporation—A billion of tons a day, over one hundred and fifty millions of square miles, may,

as they tell us, be lifted two thousand feet high every day, equal to a 90,000,000,000 horse power. Even this measures but the infinitesimal part of the Sun's power, as the earth receives only 1-2,000,000,000th of the heat of the Sun. How this wonderful power may be made available—how these horses may be harnessed to the chariot of the Sun, is less interesting to mortals, than how its sanitary qualities may be utilized.

What medicinal efficacy the Light has; how it works in the unseen chambers of the brain and body; how it plays from the optic to every other nerve; what relation it bears to the elements of our physical and spiritual nature—may, doubtless, be determined by the same law under whose administration it gives growth to the tree, glory to the grass, and splendour to the flower. But what that law is, is one of the mysterious arcana of knowledge.

We know that light is life-generating and health-sustaining; that without it, man becomes blighted, even as the parched grass of the field. Take away the light, and both serenity of mind and strength of body are gone. The very tissues of the body degenerate in utter darkness. Take away the light, and the body becomes blanched, etiolated, and wasted. Go to the colliery or the dungeon, and you go to the limbo of ghosts; not ruddy, healthy men and women. I need not refer to the catalogue of diseases belonging to darkness. 'Weeping and wailing,' even in this world, is an inheritance of many of our race before thrust into future 'outer darkness.' Aside from heat, light has its beneficent function. Experiments have shown that life itself will not be generated from the egg so soon in the dark as in the light. Dr. Hammond once tried an experiment on the tadpole. That lively little batrachian was kept in its inchoate

condition for 125 days, by confinement in a lightless vessel; but fifteen days only were required for its magnificent maturity out of its wriggling nonage, under light!

We know how light affects the skin and its hue. This is illustrated under various conditions and latitudes; in the nightless Arctic regions, where if the sun goes down half the year, an aurora, or a snow hill, or ice mountain, keeps it up; and thus, by reflected light, colours the Esquimaux into olive and brown; or on the African coasts, where the intensity of the perpendicular rays secretes in the cuticle a dark pigment of wonderful gloss and glory! How it affects the stature, the blood, the hair, the liver, the whole body in fact, inwardly and outwardly; how it makes men muscular and healthy among mountains, and tiny and feverish among marshes; how it makes one man or race sanguine, and another nervo-bilious in temperament; how it affects conditions, customs, and life,—puberty, marriage, sterility, and longevity; how the Light, or its absence, makes men savage or civilized, passive or active, doltish or intelligent, stationary or progressive; how in one latitude, and under certain conditions, these effects may follow; while under another latitude, and under other conditions, other effects may ensue,—these are discussions which Hippocrates, Newton, Mead, Jackson, Lardner, Brewster, Lindley, Balfour, Draper, Hammond, Page, Herschel, Arago, Florence Nightingale, Sanson Alphonse, and Dr. Forbes Winslow have considered in elaborate treatises. It is enough for me to refer to them, in elucidation of my statements.

In regard to the effects upon the human mind and health, induction has left us its répertoire of facts; and has led us to generalize about the very colours of the spectrum. Red and yellow stimulate the brain;

blue depresses, by exhausting the vital energy; scarlet makes bulls, and some men, madly pugnacious. It has been likened to the sound of a trumpet. Green, violet, and all the sweet tints which Nature paints so often, and which suit the eye, even as the dark cave suits the eyeless fish—these soothe and caress, and have in their tints the elements of cheer and health. Predominating in the radiance, these elements make the life blood of Nature, organic and inorganic. With these elements predominant, come ventilated and lighted houses, fewer inhabited cellars, less corruption and uncleanness, and consequently less disease and death. Not artificial light, which has its offensive effluvia, but the sweet sunbeams,—this is the light which should replace the dark corners of the earth, as the precursor of the full meridian of that better day coming. The utility of light has its application in the construction of hospitals, nurseries, bed-rooms, houses, streets, cities; and, as we shall find out, in the arrangement of gardens, orchards, and forests! Physicians have given us the record of diseases generated on the shady side of a building or street, and of cases cured by removal out of a dark into a bright room or locality.

‘Obscurity hath many a sacred use,’

as Bailey sings in his ‘Festus’; but its medical uses are not so apparent, valuable, or sacred. Wounds heal more quickly, delirium departs sooner, and convalescence comes more rapidly when the system is under solar radiation.

There are exceptions to these deductions. The eye need not be blinded by excess of light. If you must go to Egypt and its hot sands, or to Algiers and its white streets and houses, or to Russia with its white snows, or to parts of France with its white chalk, or to

India with its perpetual glare,—you may expect an over-excitement of the retina. Use dark glasses, or carry a yellow umbrella, or do as the parasol ant of Trinidad does, carry a green leaf over your head, if you can find no turban or other cover, and thus save eye and health from the injurious red and yellow rays. Thus, in travelling you may reverse the gloomy picture which the blind Milton so pathetically makes out of his darkness; for then, with the seasons there will return day, and the sweet approach of eve and morn; the sight of vernal bloom, and summer's rose; the flocks and herds and human face divine; not cloud instead, nor ever-during dark; nor from the cheerful ways of men cut off; nor the book of knowledge presented with an universal blank! Then, you are not only prepared to be restored in health, but you are actually restored. Then you can enjoy all these effects of light in their æsthetic relations to the outer world. Indeed, but for these relations constantly recurring in my journeying, there would have been little for me to note. Wherever I found the volume of Nature open, there I found sunbeams to illumine and beautify. Whatever was seen in or around the sky, be it star or mountain, bird or tree; whatever was painted in water, or written on rocks, had been glorified from this golden source.

Light, like Sound, the learned tell us, comes to us in waves. Professor Maury has said, with philosophic truth and poetic beauty, that the organs of the human ear are so ordered that they cannot comprehend colour, any more than the eye can see sound; yet, that we may hear over again the song of the morning stars; for Light has its gamut of music! The high notes vibrate with the violet of the spectrum, and the red extremity sounds the bass; and though the ear may not catch the song that the

rose, lily, and violet sing, it may—for aught we know—be to the humming-bird, the butterfly, and the bee, more enchanting than that which ‘Prospero’s Ariel’ sung to the shipwrecked mariners.

Ah! there is more meaning here for you, my shipwrecked brother, than meets the ear. The song which Light sings to your wearied spirit, may be the tone or tonic which will stimulate your flagging, suffering life! The gamut of Sunbeams, is it not a medical prescription, not in dead Latin, nor measured by Arabic signs, but in living letters of gold?

This idea of light may be considered fanciful. It is so, to a small extent, but not so much so to the scientific man. Whether he take the theory of Newton or of Huygens—whether he regard light as minute particles, projected with inconceivable velocity from the sun, or as the undulations of an elastic ether—he will find in it many analogies to the phenomena of Sound. Light is so rarified as to offer no obstruction to the sun and stars in their movements; but its vibrations are so substantial, that by them our eyes are struck, our nerves moved, and the sensation of light produced, just as the vibrations of the air make sound for the ear. The frequency of the pulsations or vibrations of the air determines the note; so the frequency of the appulse of light impinging upon the eye determines (as it is held) the colour of the light!

It may be most interesting, indeed, to search for the sunbeams which make music for the birds, butterflies, and bees, and which these interpret to us; but when health is in question, the hard facts of meteorology and optics become of paramount consequence. The cool, but pleasant air, interfused with lustre, the absence of damp and chilliness, not only are conditions which create for the human economy an appetite, and thus improve digestion and nutri-

tion; but they also sing a song of joyous health to the diseased mind and dyspeptic soul.

If a lunatic be one—*qui gaudet lucidis intervallis*, according to a legal dictum—what is he who rejoices through all the winter days in sunlight without intervals—for *lucidity* is light. Blackstone calls him a lunatic who sometimes enjoys his senses, and sometimes not, and that frequently depending on the change of the moon. What, then, is he, who, hiding in dark houses, or worse, in dark offices, or worse still, in mines of the earth, but rarely ‘enjoys his senses;’ and whose mind is affected by the peculiar and polarized light from an old volcanic, crazy reflector like the moon. It is the sun which makes the joy, broken by no intervals. It is the sun, with its power to sustain, which, not less potential than its power to create, gives us that intelligent repose which is one of the conditions of health. It is difficult even to use the languages of men, in order to express the full enjoyment of all the senses, without metaphors drawn from the light. Hence the Bible is full of imagery about sun, and moon, and the perfect day. The very acme of all joys—the joys of heaven—is expressed in the words: ‘And there shall be no night there.’

To the same law, which the infant of my vignette obeys, when he endeavours to catch the beams about his head, the matured man yields, when for his defective body he requires fresh vigour and elevated vitality. However unsentimental and humiliating it may be, he ‘must be as a little child,’ and seek sunshine, even across oceans and zones. Even Dr. Fahrenheit must be consulted. The pores of the skin—as an excretory organ, and as a purifier of the blood—do not perform their functions in the cold damp winters of the north. Hence, sore throat, influenza, and bronchitis prevail; and when neglected, are aggravated; and aggravated,

the blood purification, in warm weather, is thrown on the lungs and air passages. They having too much to do, the burdened blood is poisoned. Hence, inflammations and fevers, and finally the tragic destroyer, consumption, closes the scene. Consumption has come to be regarded, therefore, as a disease of debility. It attacks those whose vitality is deficient hereditarily, and those who are injured by excesses, either of vice or of work. Here enters the sunshine, and with its dry, bracing radiance—under proper dietetic, and medicinal rules—restores vitality.

I do not desire to cumber these pages with essays about phthisis and membranes. I am happily required only to write about the enjoyments which create, and which are the proof of renovated health.

In recounting these enjoyments, I but add fresh eulogy to the sunbeams. The associations which Art, Nature, Time, and History have inwoven with natural scenery, and which bestow that rational delight, which an all-bountiful Maker intended as one of the means of health; did more than give enjoyment, because they were sought under appropriate conditions of latitude and longitude, under the protection of mountain walls and hygienic provisions, without which all search for sanitary sunshine, in winter or summer, is in vain. Survey our star, from China to Peru, and you will find no lovelier land or sweeter sun,—none more opulent and fruitful, as well in vegetable glories, as in all that heroism and romance have illustrated; and what is better, none more salubrious or health restoring,—than the sunlit and sea-kissed shores of the Mediterranean!

Selecting a circuit of travel from this—the most favoured part of our globe—the writer found physical scenery and phenomena of rarest attraction. He found a people, picturesque, composite, and interesting,—the

result of systems unique, yet diverse, and of blood and daring the most heroic and adventurous; interesting, composite, and picturesque, because compounded of all the virtues and vices of the pre-historic and historic nations. Phœnician, Hebrew, and Egyptian; Greek, Roman, Goth, and Moor; Frank, Spanish, German, and English—have here done what Human nature, under manifold and various conditions, can do, for Poetry, Art, Science, War, Commerce, Government, and Liberty! Italian, Spanish, Greek, Jew, Turk, German, English, and French—the people who claim Homer and Virgil, Dante, Shakespeare, and Milton; who honour Joshua, Charlemagne, Abderrahaman, Bonaparte, and Wellington; who erect monuments to Mahmoud, Henry IV., Charles V., Lorenzo the Magnificent, and Gonsalva; who reverence Columbus, de Gama, Angelo, Murillo, Gutenberg, and Newton, and how many more, whose names stand pre-eminent in the history of our race, have made these shores resplendent with genius and action. Surely, an American, seeking moderate excitement, aloof from the moil and toil of active affairs at home, could not have chosen a better theatre in which to recall and observe, under the sunshine of the latitude—the associations which most adorn our race.

My circle began at the Riviera under the Alps; it includes Corsica; thence enters into Africa, and passes through Spain and Southern France, until, again in the Alps of Italy, it ends, with a view so eminent, that it seems to comprehend the whole sweep of nearly a year's tour of travel.

When I reached the point, where the current of ordinary travel became visible, I dropped the pen. But Corsica, Algiers, and Spain—about which the body of the volume speaks—are not hackneyed themes, or trodden ground. Corsica, indeed, is almost

a *terra incognita*. It is the connecting link between the two continents of Europe and Africa. It is in the centre of the basin of the Western Mediterranean. Its mountains are midway between the Alps and the Atlas. They have all the fruitful vigour of Atlas, with the rugged grandeur of the Alps, and the vegetable growth of each. Volney gives Corsica three zones. Up to 1800 feet, the climates of Italy and Spain are found, with the date palm of Elche and the *chamaerops humeris* of Algiers, the oranges of Nice and Blidah, and the lemons of Malaga and Mentone,—the oleander, cistus, lentiscus, and myrtle, which make its macchie, like the shrubs of the Riviera and Algiers. Above 1800 feet, and thence to 6000 feet, France is reproduced, with its vines, olives, chesnuts; and its forests of ilex, ordinary oak, pine, and beech. These last indicate the third zone—the climate of Norway; and reach above 6000 feet. The larch which is indigenous to Corsica, and especially the ilex, are gigantic trees, and their forests are covered with snow half the year.

Hence in Corsica you have an epitome of my whole circle of travel, and of the continents of Europe and Africa. Before visiting the island, I presume to print two chapters about the Riviera; partly with the view to show why I started from so shining a spot, in search of other and distant sunbeams.

CHAPTER I.

*THE RIVIERA—NICE, CANNES, AND HYÈRES—
THEIR ATTRACTIONS.*

THE beginning of the year 1869 found me in the Riviera. Where that sun-favoured land is, may be best seen by glancing at a map of Italy or France. It is a mountain amphitheatre. A little correction of the natural irregularities would make it a semi-circle; with Hyères at the western, and Leghorn at the eastern end; and Genoa sitting upon the apex of its arch, while Corsica points her Cape Corso northwardly, like an index finger, directly to the 'superb' city.

There are, in fact, two Rivieras; 'Levante,' on the east, and 'Ponente,' on the west. The mountains and the sea join here to give their glories to the scenery; and the sun looks down upon them, during the winter, with smiling serenity. The mountains are rugged and bold, and the sea blue and bright. The picture is that of Beauty reposing in the arms of Strength. Here all that we imagine of Italy, as the loveliest of lands, finds its nearest approach to realization. The army of Alps from Switzerland, Savoy, and Dauphiny, which the traveller down the valley of the Rhone never ceases to observe and admire, marches down to the sea near Toulon, and its summits 'fall in,' like good soldiers; while a detachment, called the Maritime Alps, move by the left flank along the coast until they effect a junction with the Apennines. Whither they tend after that, whether under the sea to Corsica, Sardinia, and Sicily,

or along the backbone of the Italian peninsula into Sicily, and thence into Africa, to join the serried ranks of the Atlas, I may hereafter inquire when I follow them thither. My purpose now is to mark only that mountain section, whose shields protect the shores of the western Riviera. It would be sufficient for this purpose to call attention to the segment of the semicircle which binds Hyères to St. Remo, and which includes a string of sunlit brilliants, Nice, Monaco, and Mentone being the chief gems.

The writer passed a winter along this part of the Riviera, principally at Nice and Mentone. A little rain now and then, sometimes a harsh wind, hardly any frost, snow, or ice, and nearly all the time sunshine—so bracing and elastic as to have in its beams the vitalising qualities before described, made the winter pleasant and memorable for health restoring. Although under medical direction, he had the happiness to have a physician who did not prescribe low diet and water, nor indoors and opiates, nor leeches and blisters. His therapeutics were oxygen, and his pharmacy sunbeams. He treated me, as he did the plants and flowers of his garden. The sickly plant which came under his nurture, like his patient, had no inheritance of ills. The innate constitutional vigour—like that of other constitutions, political and otherwise—had survived many infractions, and even ‘amendments.’ When parasites attack the tree, they hide their deadly work under the fair exterior of moss. To remove the parasite, you must scrape away the moss. The fungi will then die. By trenching, digging, draining, and loaming the roots, the organization of the tree, by its native vigour and the sunshine, will do the rest. So with the body. Give it pure atmosphere, aliment, and plenty of sunbeams to digest; let the