

“Great Lessons by Humble Masters”

The Present Truth – November 3, 1898

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“Ask now the beasts, and they shall teach thee; and the fowls of the air, and they shall tell thee; or speak to the earth, and it shall teach thee; and the fishes of the sea shall declare unto thee.” Job 12:7, 8.

What is it that these creatures can teach us? They can teach us the one thing that it is necessary for thee to know, namely, that the power of God is manifested in everything that exists. “Thus saith the Lord, Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom, neither let the mighty man glory in his might, let not the rich man glory in his riches; but let him that glorieth glory in this, that he understandeth and knoweth Me, that I am the Lord, which exercise loving-kindness, judgment, and righteousness in the earth.” Jer. 9:23, 24.

Most valuable lessons are given to everybody every day; and are ignored. Men are constantly mourning their lack of advantages for education, when if they would improve the opportunities freely provided, they might obtain knowledge that cannot be found in any school on earth, that is conducted by man. The most valuable things are to be had free. It is only for second-rate things that we have to pay money. “Where shall wisdom be found? and where is the place of understanding? Man knoweth not the price thereof; neither is it found in the land of the living.” “It cannot be gotten for gold, neither shall silver be weighed for the price thereof. It cannot be valued with the gold of Ophir, with the precious onyx, or the sapphire. The gold and the crystal cannot equal it; and the exchange of it shall not be for jewels of fine gold. No mention shall be made of corals or pearls; for the price of wisdom is above rubies. The topaz of Ethiopia shall not equal it, neither shall it be valued with pure gold.” Job. 28:12, 13, 15-19.

Since wisdom cannot be obtained for gold, and no jewels of earth are equal to it in value, it follows that whoever gets it must get it freely. It comes from God without money and without price. “If any of you lacketh wisdom, let him ask of God, who giveth to all liberally and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him.” James 1:5. The wisdom which He gives to man is greater than that which He gives to the beasts of the field and He “maketh us wiser than the fowls of the heaven,” provided we but accept His Word, and do not imagine ourselves to be any wiser, in ourselves, than the beasts and the birds are.

Out of the almost infinite number of facts that might be cited, we will instance only a few, from authentic books of natural history, as well as from personal observation, which show what marvellous wisdom God has given to creatures with the tiniest bodies and brains. Let us first take a look at

THE CALIFORNIAN WOOD-PECKER

This bird nourishes himself upon ants and other insects, but at the same time that he is hunting these, he is engaged in storing up acorns for future use. Whether he eats these acorns, or only the worms that may breed in them, is a question among naturalists, but that is immaterial to our present study. What concerns us at present is the manner in



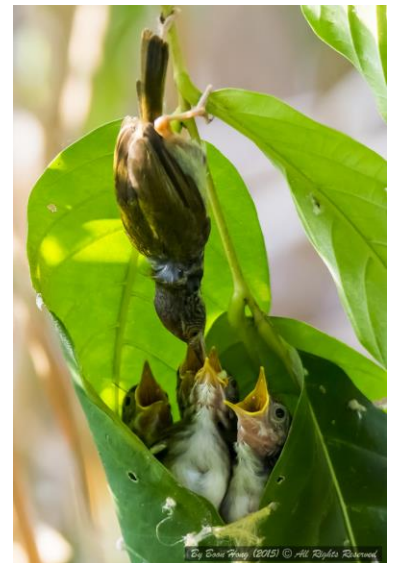
which he stores them up. He chooses a tree, and hollows out in its trunk a cavity just large enough to receive a single acorn. Then he brings an acorn, and inserts it into the hole, so that it cannot fall out, nor can any other bird or animal get it out. In this way he stores up a vast number. I have seen a fir tree so filled from the bottom to the top of its trunk with the acorns which this industrious little worker had gathered, that from a little distance it looked as though it had been shot full of rifle bullets. It is said that a wood-pecker will carry an acorn thirty miles to store it in its larder.

The acorns which are thus gathered are long and slender, very much like a modern rifle bullet. Of course they vary in size, just as any other nuts; but the remarkable thing is that in no case is the hole made a particle too large for the acorn which is designed for it. Each acorn fits its cavity as perfectly as if it were a piece of iron that had been driven in with a hammer. So, as already stated, no animal can get one of them out. Only the wood-pecker with its strong beak, can pierce the hard, polished extremity of the acorn. Man can dig them out with a knife, but in no other way. It is worthy of note that the holes are never made too shallow, so that the ends of the acorns project beyond the bark of the tree. In every case they are exactly even with the surface. How long would a man have to practise before he would be able to do such perfect mortising?

THE TAILOR BIRD

This bird is not only a tailor, but a spinner and weaver, as well. "They place their nests in a large leaf, which they prepare to this end. With their beaks they pierce two rows of holes along the two edges of the leaf; they then pass a stout thread from one side to the other alternately. With this leaf, at first flat, they form a horn in which they weave their nest with cotton or hair. These labours of weaving and sewing are preceded by the spinning of the thread. The bird makes it itself by twisting in its beak spiders' webs, bits of cotton, and little ends of wool. Sykes found that the threads used for sewing were knotted at the ends. It is impossible not to admire animals who have skilfully triumphed over all the obstacles met with in the course of these complicated operations."

Yes; and one may well say, It is impossible not to admire the God who teaches these creatures to do such perfect work.



NOT BLIND INSTINCT

But some one will say, "Yes, it is very interesting and amusing; but the bird is born with that instinct, and cannot really do any other way." Even if this were true, it would not in the



least diminish the honour due to God for thus providing it with that sense; but it is not true. "Certain birds change the form of their dwelling according to the climate, or according to the season in which they inhabit it. For example, the Crossbill does not build its nest according to the same rules in Sweden as in France. It builds in every season. The winter shelter is spherical, constructed with dry lichens, and is very large. A very narrow opening, just sufficient for the passage of the owner, prevents the external cold from penetrating within. The summer nests are much smaller, in consequence of a reduction of the thickness in the walls.

"Again, the Baltimore Oriole, which inhabits both the Northern and the Southern States of North America, knows very well how to adapt his manner of work to the external circumstances in which he lives. Thus, in the Southern States the nest is woven of delicate materials united in a rather loose fashion, so that the air can circulate freely and keep the interior fresh; it is lined with no warm substance, and the entrance is turned to the west, so that the sun only sends into it the oblique evening rays. In the North, on the contrary, the nest is oriented to the south, to profit by all the warm sunshine; the walls are thick, without interstices, and the dwelling is carpeted in the warmest and softest manner. Even in the same region there is the greatest diversity in the style, neatness, and finish of the nests, as well as in the materials used."



It is a common idea that birds and animals never improve their methods of labour, but that the young one knows of itself how to go to work, and that it does as well the first time as ever afterwards. This is a mistake, as is already shown. Other instances which may be cited, will show that the brains of these labourers are actively engaged in planning and inventing.

The Popular Science Monthly gives the missionary Moffat as authority for the statement that when lions were yet numerous in South Africa, they were often seen instructing one another in leaping to catch prey, using a bush in their practice, instead of an animal. In one case a lion, which had missed a zebra, through miscalculating the distance, repeated the jump several times, for his own instruction. While he was engaged in this exercise, two other lions came along, and he led them round the rock, to explain the case to them, and then, turning to the starting point, completed the lesson by making a final leap. The animals kept roaring during the whole of the curious scene, "talking together," as a native who watched them said.

By the aid of individual training of this kind birds become clever with age, old birds building more artistic nests than young ones. In Constantinople, where the life of the street dogs depends upon their ability to protect the morsel that they have secured, against all intruders, the writer has been amused by watching an old dog teaching her pups to fight, and training them to secure their food.

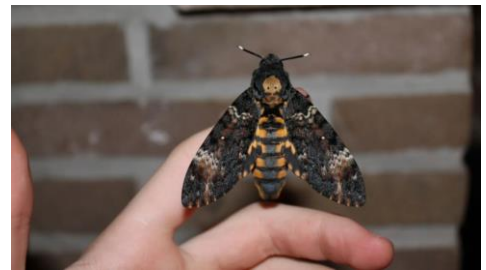
BEES IN THEIR DWELLINGS



In a hive full of active bees the temperature rises considerably and the air becomes vitiated. Accordingly, means are adopted to secure ventilation. "Bees ranged in files one above the other in the interior agitate their wings with a feverish movement; this movement causes a current of air which can be felt by holding the hand before the opening of the hive. When the workers of the corps are fatigued, comrades who have been resting come to take their place. These acts are not the result of a stupid instinct which

the hymenoptera [large order of insects] obey without understanding. If we place a swarm, as Huber did, in a roomy position where there is plenty of air, they do not devote themselves to an aimless exercise."

The stores of bees often suffer from the raids of a large moth called the "Death's Head Moth." "Protected by the long and fluffy hairs which cover him, he has little to fear from stings, and gorges himself with the greatest freedom on the stores of the swarm. Huber, in his admirable investigations, narrates that one year in Switzerland numbers of hives were emptied, and contained no more honey in summer than in the spring. During that year Death's Head Moths were very numerous. The illustrious naturalist soon became certain that this moth was guilty of the thefts in question. While he was reflecting as to what should be done, the bees, who were more directly interested, had invented several modes of procedure. Some closed the entrance with wax, leaving only a narrow opening through which the great robber could not penetrate." Others built up before the opening a series of parallel walls, leaving between them a zigzag corridor through which the bees themselves were able to enter; but which would not admit the long body of the moth. In the same way man constructs a turnstile, which will allow him to pass, but which excludes the long body of a cow. The bees set up the barricades only in the years when the Death's Head Moth is numerous. In years when it is rare, they let in their doors wide open, for their own greater convenience.



GARDENING ARTS



Whole numbers of this paper could be filled with authentic stories of the wisdom of this little insect, but we must be content with one or two facts. The Leafcutting ants of tropical America are often referred to by travellers on account of their ravages on vegetation. "They climb a tree, station themselves on the edge of a leaf, and make a circular incision with their scissor-like jaws; the piece of leaf,

about the size of a sixpence, held vertically between the jaws, is then borne off to their house." It is said that they are capable of destroying whole plantations of orange, mango, and lemon trees. But the ants do not eat these leaves. If they did, their performance would not be so wonderful. These ants are in reality mushroom growers and eaters, for "the real use of the leaves is as manure on which to grow a minute species of fungus." Great care is taken that the nest should be neither too dry nor too damp. If a sudden shower comes on, the leaves are left near the entrance, and carried down only when nearly dry. During very hot weather, on the other hand, when the leaves would be parched in a very short time the ants work only in the cool of the day, and during the night. "Occasionally, inexperienced ants carry in grass and unsuitable leaves; these are invariably brought out again, and thrown away."

HARVESTING ANTS

In spite of Solomon (Prov. 6:6-8), naturalists for a long time asserted that ants do not store up food in barns for the winter; but it is now admitted that they spoke from too meagre data. Nearly all ants may therefore be called harvesters, but there is one species which specially deserves this name. They procure various kinds of grain towards the end of autumn, collecting them from the ground, or even climbing the stalks and gathering them. But they have not completed their task when they have the grain safely in their storehouses. The



conditions of heat and moisture in the interior of the ant-hill are such that the grain, if left to itself, would soon begin to grow. But this the ants do not desire, at least not until it suits their convenience. How they prevent the grain from germinating is a secret not known to man; but it is certain that they do it, for as long as the ants have access to the grain it does not germinate, but if from any cause they are denied access to one of the chambers where the grain is stored, it immediately begins to grow.

But although they thus hinder germination in the grain, they do not render it impossible, and when the time has come for utilising the accumulated stores, they allow the grain to follow the natural course. The radicle and stalk of the plant soon come to light. But the ants do not allow the development of the plant to go too far. As soon as the starch in the grain has been, in the process of growth, converted into sugar for the use of the growing plant, the young stalk is cut off before it has an opportunity to consume the food thus prepared for it. Then the ants bring out their stores to the sun, dry them, take them back to their barns, and thus through the winter have a supply of sweet flour. Here we have the manifestation of wisdom that is not merely wonderful as exhibited in ants, but which is beyond the understanding of man.

TOPOGRAPHICAL KNOWLEDGE

"Yea, the stork in the heaven knoweth her appointed times; and the turtle and the crane and the swallow observe the time of their coming." When the season comes for these birds to migrate, they go; but they do not go at the same time every season. If warm summer weather continues till late in autumn, the birds remain; and what is more remarkable, they do not, except in single instances, anticipate the return of warm weather in the spring, even though its coming be delayed beyond the usual time. How do they know the right time?

But there is something even yet more remarkable connected with the migration of birds. It is the fact that they will cross the ocean and come back to the very spot from which they started, building their nests year after year in the very same tree or house.



When we stand on the deck of a steamship in mid-ocean, with a trackless waste of waters on every side, we wonder at the human skill which guides the great vessel across the waters, and brings it straight to its destination, even though the place be one to which the master has never before sailed. But he could not do it at first. It took years of study to enable him to accomplish the feat, and when he undertakes the task he has charts and maps of the entire route, and the most delicate instruments, besides his Compass, to enable him to mark his course. But the bird will make the same trip without compass or chart. If this be attributed to "instinct," then the question arises, Isn't instinct better than reason? Wouldn't it be a good thing for man if he had instinct?

THE SOURCE OF WISDOM

Where do the birds get this knowledge? The answer is indicated by the Lord in His question to Job: "Doth the hawk fly by thy wisdom?" and by His statement concerning the ostrich, that "God had deprived her of wisdom, neither hath He imparted to her understanding." Now God "teacheth us more than the beasts of the earth, and maketh us wiser than the fowls of heaven." Why then do not men invariably know more than these creatures do? Here is the answer: "The wise men are ashamed, they are dismayed and taken: lo, they have rejected the Word of the Lord; and what wisdom is in them?" Jer. 8:9.

Some one will ask: "Do you mean to say that if men were wholly controlled by the Word of the Lord, they would be able to cross the ocean without chart or compass?" To that we have no answer to make; but we are to learn from the birds and beasts not merely to do the same things that they do, but that dependence on God which will make us proportionately wiser than they are, in the things which are necessary for us to do. One thing is certain, and that is, if men were wholly yielded to the Word and Spirit of God, they would make no mistakes in whatever they undertook. See Ps. 1:1-3. The degree of knowledge that a man would possess if he were wholly guided by the Lord, is incalculable. That in the world to come man will be able to go to all parts of the Lord's dominions; and not get lost, there is not the slightest doubt. Every Sabbath day, and every new moon, all flesh will appear in the temple of God to worship. From every quarter of the globe they will make the journey, and each one will by the most direct route come to the Holy City. Who

dare say that even in this present world a man wholly led by the Spirit of God could not do the same thing, if it were necessary in the service of God. When God's ways are in a man's heart, God will direct his paths.

When we study the life of Christ we can see what wonderful wisdom can be attained by one who takes counsel of God alone. Remember that Christ was here on earth in man's place, so that "in all things it behoved Him to be made like unto His brethren" (Heb 2:17), so that He had access to no wisdom that is not open to mankind. He never went to the schools, which taught the wisdom of the day, but He had wisdom even as a child, that caused the wisest doctors of the law to marvel. Here is the secret of His wisdom: "The Lord God hath given me the tongue of them that are taught, that I should know how to sustain with words him that is weary; He wakeneth morning by morning, He wakeneth Mine ear to hear as they that are taught. The Lord God hath opened Mine ear, and I was not rebellious, neither turned away backward." Isa. 50:4, 5.

STRENGTH IN HELPLESSNESS: WISDOM IN SIMPLICITY

In this connection let us learn another lesson from the ant. In "Glimpses of Nature," in the Strand Magazine, Grant Allen has the following in a little treatise on ants:—

"It takes the insects three or four weeks, in the pupa form, to develop into full-grown ants and even when they have finished, they are as helpless as babies, and could not escape from the cocoon but for the kind offices of the worker attendants. 'It is pretty to see the older ants helping them to extricate themselves, carefully unfolding the legs and smoothing out the wings of the males and females, with truly feminine tenderness and delicacy.' This utter helplessness of the young ant is very interesting for comparison with the case of man; for it is now known that nothing conduces to the final intellectual and moral supremacy of a race so much as the need for tending and carefully guarding the young; *the more complete the dependence of the offspring upon their elders, the finer and higher the ultimate development.*"

Make special note of the words we have placed in italics. They let us into the secret of wisdom and strength, although the naturalists who note the fact, do not carry it out to the proper conclusion. We are the offspring of God. Acts 17:28. God deals with us as with children, if we do not get so wise in our conceits that we imagine we can get along without instruction from Him. No other animal that is born into the world is so ignorant and helpless as the human infant. And no matter how long we live, we are always little children—babes—in the eyes of God. He says: "Hearken unto Me, O house of Jacob, and all the remnant of the house of Israel, which are borne by Me from the belly, which are carried from the womb: and even to your old age I am He; and even to hoar hairs will I carry you; I have made, and I will bear; even I will carry, and will deliver you." Isa. 46:3, 4. "As one whom his mother comforteth, so will I comfort you." [Isa. 66:13]

Jesus Christ was born a helpless infant, and was wrapped in swaddling clothes, in which even a man would be helpless, and laid in a manger. He was a perfect picture of human helplessness and foolishness. But He was cast upon God from the womb (Ps. 22:9, 10), and so in Him we have the full demonstration of the fact that "the foolishness of God is wiser than men; and the weakness of God is stronger than men." 1 Cor. 1:25. In Him "are

hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge" (Col. 2:3), and He is made unto us wisdom. God's "strength is made perfect in weakness." [2 Cor. 12:9] "Let no man deceive himself. If any among you seemeth to be wise in this world, let him become a fool, that he may be wise." 1 Cor. 3:18. "Happy is he that hath the God of Jacob for his help, whose hope is in the Lord his God; which made heaven, and earth, the sea, and all that therein is." Ps. 146:5, 6.