

SHOWERS UPON THE GRASS

A companion volume to As the Small Rain

by

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CHAPTER FOUR

“FOR GOD SO LOVED THE WORLD”

BRIDGING THE CHASM

When Louis Agassiz, the great Swiss naturalist, was a young boy, his mother sent him across the ice of a frozen lake to take a message to his father, who was on the other side. His little brother went along. After they had started, the mother noticed from the slope of the mountain where she was standing that there was a great fissure in the ice near the center of the lake. She realized that Louis would be able to leap across it, but that his little brother could never make it.

She tried to call them back; but the wind was blowing toward her, and her voice could not reach the children. All she could do was to watch and pray and hope that the little boy would not try to leap the crack in the ice. When they came to the fissure, she noticed that Louis measured the width with his eye and seemed to be weighing in his mind the ability of the little brother to leap it. Then, having decided, quite apparently, that his brother could never make the jump, he seemed to give him careful instructions; and then he threw himself across the chasm, and his little brother walked across his body. Louis then pulled himself across.

This is a wonderful example of what the Lord Jesus Christ does for men. He says: “**I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me**” (John 14:6).

Poor, human creatures have nothing in themselves which makes them acceptable unto God. They cannot leap the chasm of sin which separates them from fellowship with the Almighty; but the Lord Jesus Christ, on the Cross, bore the sin; and as He Himself became a propitiation for our sins, we are able to enter the fellowship of the Father through His merits. He is the Door by which we may enter heaven itself. He is the One who has broken down the middle wall of partition between God and men. He is the Living Bridge over which we may cross from death unto life, from sin unto salvation.

Prof. Louis Agassiz of Harvard University, said, “I will frankly tell you that my experience in prolonged scientific investigations convinces me that a belief in God adds a wonderful stimulus to the man who attempts to penetrate into the regions of the unknown.”

He dipped his pen in fire and sent
These words in flame across the sky:—
“Life is but living beauty”—then, all spent,
He watched the message die.

He wrapped his pen with dust of gold
And, peering on a vision far
As death, he cried, “Life is but growing old!”
And wrote upon a star.

But dawn, tangled in heaven’s hair,
Brushed orbs of night aside and crept
Toward morn, while he in frenzy of despair
Trembled, and knelt, and wept—

And when, amazed, I saw him scrawl,
Pen dipped in blood: “Behold! Christ loved
And died; and this is life and light for all”—
Then heaven and earth were moved.

— Ruth M. Gibbs

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REFORMATION OR REGENERATION

A thief may quit stealing because he decides that dishonesty does not pay. This does not mean that he is any less a thief at heart. He simply refrains from the practice of thievery because it is less of a strain to make a living in an honest fashion or because he is afraid of going to jail. The reasons for reformation are many. Reformation is an act of will and the permanence of the reformation depends upon the strength of the will.

Regeneration is a different matter altogether. It comes not from within but from without. A man is regenerated by faith in Christ. He is made over. He becomes a new creature. The change in his condition does not depend upon his own will but upon the grace and power of God. Regeneration can take man into paths of unselfish service where reformation never walks. Regeneration will lift him to heights of living to which reformation can never climb.

We find an example of this in the fourth chapter of Ephesians where the Christian is admonished: **“Let him that stole steal no more: but rather let him labour, working with his hands the thing which is good, that he may have to give to him that needeth”** (Ephesians 4:28).

A reformed thief may quit stealing and set about earning an honest living but it takes divine grace imparted to a man in regeneration to put one who was a thief to work in order to be able to give the fruits of his labors to someone who has need.

- Reformation may change the outward course of a man's life. Regeneration changes his thought processes and the very attitude of his heart.
- Reformation may make a thief act like an honest man. Regeneration makes him an honest man and a charitable, unselfish one as well.

Come, ye disconsolate, where'er you languish,
 Come, at God's altar fervently kneel;
 Here bring your wounded hearts, here tell your anguish—
 Earth has no sorrow that heaven cannot heal.

Joy of the desolate, light of the straying,
 Hope when all others die, fadeless and pure,
 Here speaks the comforter, in God's name saying,
 "Earth has no sorrow that heaven cannot cure."

Go, ask the infidel what boon he brings us,
 What charm for aching hearts he can reveal,
 Sweet as that heavenly promise hope sings us,—
 "Earth has no sorrow that God cannot heal."

— Thomas Moore

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ASLEEP AND DEAD

One of the most arresting truths in all the Bible is the truth of our own personal accountability to God. "**Every one of us shall give account of himself to God.**" In the fourteenth verse of the fifth chapter of Ephesians, God is speaking to the individual: "**Awake thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give thee light.**" "**Awake thou . . .**" man or woman asleep and dead. Here we have a sinner addressed, a sinner described and salvation offered to a sinner. God's message is a personal message.

Fathers have tried to take upon themselves the blame for the failures and sins of their children here on this earth. Wives have tried to take upon themselves the responsibility for the failures and sins of their husbands, but as far as the individual's eternal destiny is concerned at the judgment bar, each one of us stands alone, personally, individually and solely accountable to God for himself.

The message here is a message to the individual. Today we are prone to overlook the fact that each individual must make his own peace with God.

- We have preached a social gospel in this last generation and have tried to reform society without redeeming the individual.
- We have tried to build a perfect world with imperfect men.

- We have tried to build a godly world with godless men.

Of course we have failed. Mankind cannot be changed by any shower bath of reform. The individual man must be cleansed by a personal application of the blood of the Lord Jesus Christ to his own life and soul.

The sinner is asleep under the hypnotic spell of the devil.

- He is not only asleep, he is also dead in trespasses and sin.
- He is sleeping on the brink of everlasting ruin.
- He is sleeping in a world which God visited in the person of His Son, who hung, bled and died on a cross, bearing the sins of all sleeping sinners in His own holy body.
- The sinner is sleeping in a world where Jesus conquered death, and to which He is coming again someday in judgment.

“Awake thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give thee light!”

Sinners, turn; why will ye die?
God, your maker, asks you why;
God, who did your being give,
Made you with Himself to live;
He the fatal cause demands,
Asks the work of His own hands:
Why, ye thankless creatures, why
Will ye cross His love, and die?

Sinners, turn; why will ye die?
God, your Saviour, asks you why;
God, who did your souls retrieve,
Died Himself, that ye might live.
Will ye let Him die in vain?
Crucify your Lord again?
Why, ye ransomed sinners, why
Will ye slight His grace, and die?

Sinners, turn; why will ye die?
God, the Spirit, asks you why;
He, who all your lives hath strove,
Wooed you to embrace His love;
Will ye not His grace receive?
Will ye still refuse to live?
Why, ye long-sought sinners, why
Will ye grieve your God, and die?

— Charles Wesley

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THE ONLY WAY

The faithless fell from the ranks.

From the time that they discovered that all was not to be a pathway strewn with roses over which they should follow the Saviour to power and prominence—many deserted Him. **“From that time many of His disciples went back, and walked no more with him. Then said Jesus unto the twelve, Will ye also go away?”** Then Simon Peter answered him, **“Lord, to whom shall we go? thou hast the words of eternal life”** (John 6:66-68).

And to whom shall we go, if not to Christ?

He hath still the words of eternal life. The urge to live is innate in the human heart. Men cling to life. The instinct of self-preservation asserts itself in the actions of the poorest, most bestial savage and in the unconscious intellectual processes of the most civilized. Love of life and the determination to secure as much as possible of satisfaction and pleasure from each of its fleeting moments is universal. Man in a normal state of mind flees the dark-robed figure and leering, fleshless face of Death. Stunned by grief, crazed by pain, discouraged by disappointment and hardship, some seek his skeleton arms, not knowing that not death but more life, life in Christ, is the answer to their anguish and the relief from their pain. For He says **“I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly,”** (John 10:10). If there were nothing beyond our brief day but darkness, sleep undisturbed by any dream, if this life were all—Christ only is the Fountain from which man may drink the draught of abundance.

But this life is not all. There is a life beyond this, and Christ only has the words of eternal life. **“There is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved”** (Acts 4:12), than the matchless name of Christ. **“I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me”** (John 14:6), said the Saviour.

The apostle John, writing under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, said: **“For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life”** (John 3:16).

Thou art gone to the grave! but we will not deplore thee,
Though sorrows and darkness encompass the tomb;
Thy Saviour has pass'd through its portal before thee,
And the lamp of His love is thy guide through the gloom!

Thou art gone to the grave! we no longer behold thee,
Nor tread the rough path of the world by thy side;
But the wide arms of Mercy are spread to enfold thee,
And sinners may die, for the Sinless has died!

Thou art gone to the grave! and, its mansion forsaking,
Perchance thy weak spirit in fear linger'd long;
But the mild rays of Paradise beam'd on thy waking,
And the sound which thou heardest was the seraphim's song!

Thou art gone to the grave! but we will not deplore thee,
Whose God was thy ransom, thy guardian and guide;
He gave thee, He took thee, and He will restore thee,
And death has no sting, for the Saviour has died!

— Reginald Heber

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“FOLLOW ME”

When you come right down to it, Christians are not, in the final analysis, following a special teaching; they are not following a set rule of conduct; they are not primarily following a creed. The Christian is following Christ—a living, divine Personality. Following Him, of course, they try to live up to the truths which He taught. They try to measure up to the principles of conduct which He set down, but no man is a Christian who has not come into a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. One is not a Christian because he goes to church. He is not a Christian even by giving assent to a creed. A man becomes a Christian through faith in Jesus Christ.

A man may believe the Bible is God's Word, he may believe everything that is in the Book, and be unsaved. A knowledge of the facts of Scripture and intellectual assent to those facts do not make a man a Christian. “Head” knowledge is not sufficient. One must have a heart experience of Christ. It is not believing in your head that He is able to save you, but it is in your heart flinging yourself upon His grace and trusting Him to save you that makes you a Christian. Cold and intellectual belief has no service value. Salvation comes when one believes in his heart, for he then entrusts himself to Christ.

The Christians of old Russia used to ask not, “Are you a Christian?” or “Do you know Christ?” but rather “Have you experienced Christ?” That is the thing which changes a man from a sinner to a saint. When a man experiences Christ he passes from a state of death in sin to life in Him.

The reality of Christ in the life is the power which makes the Christian different from other men. “**Christ in you,**” is “**the hope of glory.**” “Thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come and follow me” (Matthew 19:21).

Of Him who did salvation bring,
I could forever think and sing;
Arise, ye needy, He'll relieve;
Arise, ye guilty, He'll forgive.

Ask but His grace, and lo, 'tis given!
Ask, and He turns your hell to heaven:
Though sin and sorrow wound my soul,
Jesus, Thy balm will make it whole.

To shame our sins He blushed in blood;
He closed His eyes to show us God:
Let all the world fall down and know
That none but God such love can show.

Insatiate to this spring I fly;
I drink, and yet am ever dry;
Ah! who against Thy charms is proof?
Ah! who that loves, can love enough?

— Bernard of Clairvaux
(Translated by Anthony W. Boehm)

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SALVATION'S MIRACLE

If you heard that a man with a steam shovel had excavated a city block for the foundation of a great building, you would have no reason to doubt the truth of the statement. Such a task would be relatively simple for an efficient operator with the proper machinery. If someone told you, however, that a twelve-year-old boy had done the same task with his toy shovel, you would not be likely to believe it, for the job would be beyond the strength of the lad and the capacity of his shovel too. So it is with the miraculous. If the God you believe in is big enough, you have no trouble accepting the miracles recounted in the Word of God. If, however, your conception of God dwarfs Him into a puny creature as weak as you yourself, you will naturally “stumble” over the miraculous.

- Why should not a God who can make an ocean and create fish and mammals preserve Jonah three days in the belly of a whale?
- Why should not the God who locks fires beneath the surface of the earth and controls their escape valves in the craters of volcanoes send down fire from heaven to consume the sacrifice of Elijah?
- Why should not the God who created the elements and established the laws of the universe send a flood to cover the whole earth?
- Why should not He who proves His power in the recurring miracle of seedtime and harvest and who causes the grain dropped into earth to bring forth a hundredfold, perform the miracle of feeding 5,000 with the loaves and fish from the lunch basket of a lad?

After all, the greatest of all miracles is this, that God can transform a sinner and an outcast into a saint and a child of the Most High. This is a miracle which is performed many times each day.

The God who through the blood of His Son can change and transform a life and cleanse a soul from guilt is a God who is big enough to do anything.

He dies; the heavens in mourning stood;
He rises, and appears a God;
Behold the Lord ascending high,
No more to bleed, no more to die.

Hence and forever from my heart
I bid my doubts and fears depart,
And to those hands my soul resign
Which bear credentials so divine.

— Isaac Watts

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OPEN THE DOOR

The disciples had shut themselves in the upper room. Suddenly the risen Saviour stood in their midst (John 20:19). He passed through the bolted door. No bars of steel nor planks of wood offer a barrier to the omnipotent God of the universe. The only locked door which can shut Him out is the bolted portal of the human heart. This He never forces. Through this He never passes. He says: **“Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me”** (Revelation 3:20). He asks admission. He begs to be allowed to enter, but it is only when the will of man turns the lock, and flings wide the heart’s door that God’s Son will enter.

The great Sovereign of the universe will never force and override the will of any man. A man said to me on a train some time ago, “I cannot believe in a God who would send me to hell. A God who would send man whom he made to hell would be a cruel tyrant.”

I think I surprised him when I said, “I agree with you. He would be a tyrant. God does not send any man to hell. If you go to hell, you go there of your own will.” The man who goes to hell spurns divine grace, rejects God’s love, stops his ears to the pleading of the Holy Spirit and pushes aside the Cross of Calvary, which God has set like a barrier across the gate of hell.

God calls out to the sinner, saying: “Turn, sinner, why will ye die.” But under God, each man has the power to decide for himself what shall be the eternal destiny of his own soul. Man is offered the choice of life in Christ or death without Him. God seeks to persuade man to the right choice, but never tramples the human will under foot or forces the choice. A nail-pierced hand knocks upon the heart’s door, but the King of the universe will not Himself force the lock or break down the door.

Behold, a Stranger at the door!
He gently knocks, has knocked before;
Has waited long, is waiting still;
You treat no other friend so ill.

O lovely attitude! He stands.
With melting heart and laden hands:
O matchless kindness! and He shows
This matchless kindness to His foes.

But will He prove a friend indeed?
He will; the very friend you need:
The Friend of sinners—yes, 'tis He,
With garments dyed on Calvary.

Rise, touched with gratitude divine;
Turn out His enemy and thine,
That soul-destroying monster, sin,
And let the heavenly Stranger in.

— Joseph Grigg

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HANDS

What stories hands can tell—the hands of a mother as she bathes and caresses her baby, the hand of the farmer as it grips the plow, the hands of the laborer marked with toil, the hands of a grandmother as she knits in the flickering shadows of the fireside or the hands of a surgeon as he performs his delicate task!

God's Word has so much to say about hands. Matthew 26:57 states: "**They laid hold on Jesus.**" Behold the hands of those men who reached out hands of rejection to seize the Son of God. See another pair of hands making a crown of thorns. Behold them as they push it down upon His brow. Other hands place a cross upon His back and drive Him out through the streets of Jerusalem and up the hill. Hands of rejection nail Him to the Cross, smite His face and pull out His beard. Oh, sad picture, as brutal men lay on the lash and drive the nail and erect the Cross. But have you not done the same thing? The person who refuses to yield his life to God's Son crucifies Him afresh—the touch of rejection; but he who opens his heart and accepts the Saviour has his hands of rejection washed white in the blood of the Lamb of God.

But there are hands of doubt. After the Resurrection of our Lord, when the disciples, for fear, had locked themselves in the upper room, Jesus came and stood in the midst, "**the doors being shut** . . ." (John 20:26). He had promised to go before and meet them in Galilee, but they tarried in Jerusalem behind locked doors because of doubt and fear, and He had to force His way through locked doors to stand in their midst.

He said: **“Touch me and believe.”** They touched Him; and in touching, all the doubts fled and all the fears vanished. He who goes on in darkness and in doubt and in fear does so because he will not reach out to clasp a hand which waits beside him for his touch. No life is complete until it touches Him. All the glories of earth and all the fame of men and all the riches of the world can never bring complete fulfillment, but to touch the Son of God can bring joy unspeakable and full of glory.

Father, I stretch my hands to Thee;
No other help I know:
If Thou withdraw Thyself from me,
Ah! whither shall I go?

What did Thine only Son endure,
Before I drew my breath!
What pain, what labor, to secure
My soul from endless death!

Surely Thou canst not let me die;
O speak, and I shall live;
And here I will unwearied lie,
Till Thou Thy Spirit give.

Author of faith! to Thee I lift
My weary, longing eyes:
O let me now receive that gift!
My soul without it dies.

— Charles Wesley

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“PASSING THE BUCK”

No man can escape from a responsibility which is rightly his by simply seeking to avoid the discharge of that responsibility. That is what Pilate tried to do. He was the representative of the Roman government and as such the final authority on all matters of law in which a man’s life might be at stake. It was his duty to render a decision as to whether or not Jesus Christ deserved death. If, under the law, Pilate had found Christ guilty and deserving of death, it was his obligation to pass the death sentence. On the other hand, finding Him innocent, it was his duty to set Him free and to give Him the protection of all the power of Rome, to which, as a free and innocent man, He was entitled.

What did Pilate do? He found Him innocent. He knew He was guiltless, but he knew if he did his duty as the Roman governor he would incur the antagonism of the influential Jewish priests.

He sent for a basin, therefore, and in the presence of the assembly washed his hands and said: “**I am innocent of the blood of this just person; see ye to it**” (Matthew 27:24). In modern slang, Pilate attempted to “pass the buck.” Knowing Christ was innocent, Pilate sought to escape the responsibility of His death and passed the blame to the Jews. Pilate did not escape the responsibility. He has forever been guilty because he failed to discharge his obligation.

God has placed upon each of us certain responsibilities: family and financial, spiritual and moral. We may find them irksome. We may seek to escape them by refusing to discharge them, but our failure to discharge a responsibility does not remove from us the responsibility. We cannot avoid obligations by running away from them. We cannot escape responsibility by refusing to exercise it. It is the responsibility of each man to prepare for eternity by accepting God’s salvation offered to him in Christ. The man who refuses to meet his responsibility in this matter is lost, not because he deliberately wishes to be lost, but because he refuses to face his obligation to become reconciled to God.

Must Jesus bear the Cross alone,
And all the world go free?
No, there’s a cross for everyone,
And there’s a cross for me.

How happy are the saints above
Who once went sorrowing here!
But now they taste unmingled love,
And joy without a tear.

The consecrated cross I’ll bear,
Till death shall set me free;
And then go home my crown to wear,
For there’s a crown for me.

— Thomas Shepherd

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BY HIS WORK ONLY

While the work of Satan in the world takes many forms, there is no doubt that he specializes in deception. His first contact with man was on this basis. He led Eve in the Garden to believe that the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil was “**to be desired to make one wise . . .**” (Genesis 3:6). Actually, it was not a thing to be desired at all but a thing to be shunned; for the wisdom which it brought destroyed innocency, wrecked the perfection of God’s creation and cost man the Garden of Eden.

Satan still attempts to deceive men in many ways. He persuades them that some things are attractive which prove to be a source of sorrow and destruction. That which he represents as a blessing turns out to be a blight; that which he presents as desirable proves to be destructive.

One of Satan's most dangerous forms of deceit is this: he makes men and women believe that he tempts them only to wicked and immoral acts and that his work in the world is limited to tempting people into gross and fleshly sins. His field of deception is much broader than that and his work more dangerous in the realm of the spiritual than in the physical.

He causes men to believe that by only resisting the temptations of the flesh they become acceptable to God. He plants in human minds and hearts the conception that morality and good works is in itself all that is necessary to take one to heaven. Others he deceives into believing that the practice of certain rites and ceremonies earns salvation.

Terrible delusions these, for God's Word declares plainly that: "**By the works of the law shall no flesh be justified**" (Galatians 2:16); that "**all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags**" (Isaiah 64:6); and that salvation is to be found not by works of righteousness which we may do, but by faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, who shed His blood on the Cross for our redemption.

The worst deceptions of Satan are in the realm of religion when he leads men to substitute works for Christ and self-righteousness for the Grace of God. "**Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved . . .**" (Acts 16:31).

This is God's way, all the delusions of Satan to the contrary notwithstanding.

By Thy birth, and by Thy tears;
By Thy human griefs and fears;
By Thy conflict in the hour
Of the subtle tempter's power,
Saviour, look with pitying eye;
Saviour, help me, or I die.

By Thy lonely hour of prayer;
By Thy fearful conflict there;
By Thy Cross and dying cries;
By Thy one great sacrifice,
Saviour, look with pitying eye;
Saviour, help me, or I die.

By Thy triumph o'er the grave;
By Thy power the lost to save;
By Thy high, majestic throne;
By the empire all Thine own;
Saviour, look with pitying eye;
Saviour, help me, or I die.

— Robert Grant

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MANNA FROM ON HIGH

There is a remarkable parallel between spiritual life and physical life. A man comes into the world by means of physical birth. Then, having been born, it is necessary, if life is to be sustained and developed, that it be properly nourished. Therefore, food is an essential.

Food in itself, however, does not guarantee healthy, normal life. There also must be exercise and activity. Muscles which are unused soon atrophy, and no man ever develops fully into the finest specimen of physical manhood without attention to exercise and proper physical activity.

The same laws follow in the spiritual realm. No man possesses spiritual life until he is born into it. This is what the Lord Jesus Christ meant when He said to Nicodemus, “**Ye must be born again**” (John 3:7).

This great fact has been so often overlooked in present-day preaching. No man can know the life of God or possess it until he secures it in God’s way—that is, by the miracle of the new birth through faith in Christ. A man must be born of the Spirit before he possesses spiritual life. Then, having come into this experience, it is necessary that this life of the Spirit be nourished.

Spiritual nourishment comes through a study of the Word of God and through fellowship with Him in prayer. The Word of God, the Bible, is the nourishment which feeds the soul. No man can be a well-nourished Christian unless he feeds upon it regularly. First, he is nourished on the milk of the Word. Then, as he grows spiritually, he begins to understand other portions which at first were not clearly open to him; and as he goes deeper and deeper into the things of God, he finds himself feasting on the strong meat of the Word.

But it is not enough simply to be born and to nourish oneself spiritually. There must be, if the spiritual life is to be healthy and normal, plenty of exercise, and spiritual exercise comes as we work for the Lord.

All too many Christians are satisfied to enjoy their fellowship with God, to feed themselves upon the Word, to enjoy spiritual things without making any effort to make Christ known to others; and since they are not busy working for God, their spiritual development is hindered. There must be, for a healthy spiritual life, both nourishment and exercise.

To fail to nourish oneself spiritually means there is no strength for the spiritual exercise; there is no incentive to it. To feast on the Word and not use the spiritual energies derived therefrom in the service of the Lord will mean the lack of fullest development, and the spiritual life will be an unhealthy, abnormal one.

Lamp of our feet, whereby we trace
Our path when wont to stray;
Stream from the fount of heavenly grace,
Brook by the traveler’s way;

Bread of our souls, whereon we feed,
True manna from on high,
Our guide and chart, wherein we read
Of realms beyond the sky;

Word of the everlasting God,
Will of His glorious Son;
Without Thee how could earth be trod,
Or heaven itself be won?

Lord, grant us all aright to learn
The wisdom it imparts;
And to its heavenly teaching turn,
With simple, childlike hearts.

— Bernard Barton

~ end of chapter 4 ~

<http://www.baptistbiblebelievers.com/>
