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The Religious Use of Botanical Philosophy.

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S E R M O N

PREACHED AT THE

CHURCH OF ST. LEONARD, SHOREDITCH,

On WHITSUN-TUESDAY, JUNE 1, 1784,

On the WISDOM of GOD, as displayed in the VEGETABLE
CREATION.

BY WILLIAM JONES, M. A.
FELLOW OF THE ROYAL SOCIETY.

THE SECOND EDITION.

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D E D I C A T I O N .

T O

SIR JOSEPH BANKS, BART.

PRESIDENT OF THE ROYAL SOCIETY
OF LONDON.

S I R,

THE following discourse bears an humble testimony to the excellence of BOTANICAL PHILOSOPHY, which has been honoured with much of YOUR attention, and in which YOUR name will always be of the first eminence.

I thought myself happy in an opportunity of expressing on a proper occasion my regard to a science, in which I have found great delight, from

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the time when I first turned my thoughts to the study of nature: and the return of every season still brings some new pleasure with it. But what are our views, Sir, who study at home, when compared with yours? who, not content with the limitations to which we lesser students must submit, have surveyed, so far as man can do, the whole vegetable kingdom; that wonderful theatre, in which the divine wisdom and goodness are so largely displayed: This, Sir, has been your botanical garden! You went abroad with all the botany of your own country, and you added to it that of the terraqueous globe: like a vessel that carries out the commodities of Britain, and returns laden with the riches of the world.

But there is still a farther treasure, which may be daily opening itself to us, in the various applications of this useful and pleasant science. We are all persuaded, that much, (perhaps the far greater part) of the medicinal uses of plants, is still hidden from man; being either totally unknown, or lost and forgotten. I humbly think some experimental enquiries might be forwarded with success, for obtaining a more certain and extensive knowledge of the virtue of trees
and

and herbs. This would be an honour to botanical philosophy; and that no empty honour; it would be highly beneficial to mankind.

That the science of nature, and all the useful learning that relates to it, may be promoted by your example and labours, and encouraged by your patronage and protection in the learned society over which you preside, is the fervent wish of,

S I R,

Your most obedient,

and devoted

humble Servant,

Nayland,
Aug. 2, 1784.

W I L L I A M J O N E S.



A

S E R M O N, &c.

And the earth brought forth grass, and herb yielding seed after his kind, and the tree yielding fruit, whose seed was in itself; and God saw that it was good. GEN. i. 12.

IF an author who should undertake to explain the proportion of architecture, were to trouble us with a long preface, to prove that every house we see, must have been the work of some man, because no house could possibly build itself, or rise into form by accident; I presume, we should all be of opinion, that he might have spared this part of his labour. It seems equally superfluous to insist, that the structure of nature could not raise itself; the cases being exactly parallel, and both self-evident to common sense. There is a sort of sense, which pretends to discover, not only that the argument is necessary, but that the proof is deficient. We trust, however, that such sense neither is, nor ever will be common. If there really be such a thing as speculative or philosophical atheism, that doctrine must be the individual point in

which the affectation of wisdom meets the extremity of folly ; and it would be loss of time to reason with it. We therefore take it upon the authority of the text, that herbs, trees, fruits and seeds, are the work of God ; and the present occasion requires us to consider how, and in what respects, this work is *good*, and displays the wisdom of the great Creator.

The *goodness* ascribed to this part of the creation is evidently not moral but natural : it means, that the several articles of the vegetable kingdom have that sort of goodness of which they are capable ; that they are beautiful and perfect in their kinds ; wonderful in their growth ; sufficient in their powers and properties ; and beneficial in their uses. In these capacities we are to consider them ; and to observe how the wisdom of the Creator is manifested,

First, in the form and structure of vegetables.

Secondly, in the manner of their growth.

Thirdly in their natural uses, for meat and medicine.

Fourthly, in their moral uses ; for the advancement of human prudence and religious faith.

Herbs and flowers may be regarded by some persons as objects of inferior consideration in philosophy ; but every thing must be great which hath God for its author. To him all the parts of nature are equally related. The flowers of the earth can raise our thoughts up to the Creator of the world as effectually as the stars

of heaven : and till we make this use of both, we cannot be said to think properly of either. The contemplation of nature should always be seasoned with a mixture of devotion ; the highest faculty of the human mind ; by which alone contemplation is improved, and dignified, and directed to its proper object. To join these together is the design of our present meeting ; and when they are joined, may they never more be put asunder.

In the form and structure of plants, with the provision for their growth and increase, there is a store of matter which would more than fill a philosophical treatise : I must therefore content myself with tracing some of the outlines of so large a subject.

The first thing which engages the curiosity of man, and tempts him to bestow so much of his labour and attention upon this part of the creation, is the beautiful form and splendid attire of plants. They who practise this labour know how delightful it is. It seems to restore man in his fallen state to a participation of that felicity, which he enjoyed while innocent in Paradise.

When we cast our eyes upon this part of nature, it is first observable, that herbs and trees compose a scene so agreeable to the sight, because they are invested with that green colour, which being exactly in the middle of the spectrum of the coloured rays of light, is tempered to a mildness which the eye can bear. The other brighter and more simple colours are sparingly bestowed on the flowers of plants ; and which, if diffused over all their parts, would have been too glaring, and consequently offensive. The smaller and more elegant parts are adorned with that bright-

ness, which attracts the admiration without endangering the sense.

But while the eye is delighted with the colouring of a flower, the reason may be still more engaged with the natural use and design of a flower in the œconomy of vegetation. The rudiment of the fruit, when young and tender, requires some covering to protect it; and accordingly, the flower-leaves surround the seat of fructification; when the sun is warm, they are expanded by its rays, to give the infant-fruit the benefit of the heat; to forward its growth when the sun sets, and the cold of the evening prevails, the flower-leaves naturally close, that the air of the night may not injure the seed-vessel. As the fructification advances, and the changes of the air are no longer hurtful, the flower-leaves have answered their end, and so they wither and fall away. How elegant therefore, as well as apposite, is that allusion in the gospel; *I say unto you that Solomon in all his glory, was not arrayed like one of these** for the flower, which is the glory of the lily and other plants, is literally and physically a raiment for the clothing of the seed-vessel. And a raiment it is, whose texture surpasses all the laboured productions of art for the clothing of an eastern monarch. The finest works of the loom and the needle, if examined with a microscope, appear so rude and coarse, that a savage might be ashamed to wear them: but when the work of God in a flower is brought to the same test, we see how fibres, too minute for the naked eye, are composed of others still more minute; and they of others; till the primordial threads or first principles of the texture, are utterly undiscernible; while the whole substance presents a celestial radiance in its colouring, with a richness superior to silver and gold; as if it were intended
for

for the clothing of an angel. The whole creation does not afford a more splendid object for minute examination than the leaves and filaments of flowers ; even of some flowers which look obscure, and promise little or nothing to the naked eye.

But besides this richness of substance and colour, there is an elegance of *design* in the whole form and disposition of a plant, which human artists, in ornamental works, are always studious to imitate. Their leaves, and branches and flowers, are thrown about with that ease, and turned into beautiful lines, so as to charm the eye with a variety of flexure, and convince us that all the excellence of art must take its pattern from nature.

The parts generally observable in plants, are a root, a stalk, branches, leaves, flowers, fruit and seeds, succeeding each other in their order, and all seeming necessary to one another. But under the direction of divine wisdom, vegetable life is carried on in every possible form, and the end of fructification is attained, while the means seem to be wanting : as if Providence meant to shew us, that it is not confined to any particular means ; and that the work of God in this respect essentially differs from the work of man. The *Capillary* Plants, or Ferns, have neither stalks, nor branches, nor flowers, but consist of single leaves on their pedicles, with seeds upon the backs of them. The flower of the Carline Thistle sits upon the ground without a stalk ; while the Euphorbium, or Torch-thistle, has nothing but a stalk, like the staff of a spear. The Melon-thistle is all fruit ; the Opuntia, or Indian fig, all leaf ; the Jessamine has a flower without a seed ; the Fig-tree a fruit without a flower. The *Tuber terraë*, or Truffle, has neither leaf, stem, branch, flower nor seed ; nothing but a globular root, which thrives under ground, and does not appear

pear to be fed by fibres like other roots: yet it increases and multiplies.

It is a general rule in nature, that plants which have the same characters have like qualities; but where this rule would teach us to expect a poison, we find a plant with an agreeable odour and wholesome nourishment; as in the *Solanum Esulentum*, which is of a deadly race, with all the external characters of a night-shade. Are we not hence to learn, that quality does not arise from configuration, or from any necessity of nature; but follows the will and wisdom of the Creator; who to every plant, as to every man, *disideth severally as he will.*

It seems essential to trees, that they should be fixed in the earth, and draw their nourishment from it; but some will have no communication with the earth; affixing themselves in a strange manner to the wood of other trees, and subsisting upon their juices; yet preserving their own peculiar nature and complexion.

Flowers are commonly expanded by the heat of the Sun; but some are opened in the evening when others are closed; and break forth at midnight; particularly one, which is the glory of the vegetable creation; like the nightingale, which delights the ear of man, and displays its skill without a rival, while other birds are silent and at rest.

When we survey the plants of the sea, how discernible is that wisdom which hath provided for their subsistence and safety in that element! Such as have broad leaves, and would be forced from their station by tides or storms, if their roots were fixed into an earthy bottom, are fastened by the root to weighty stones and pebbles;

pebbles ; where instead of being driven about at random by the agitations of the water, they lie safe at anchor. That they may not be bruised by lying prostrate on the ground they are rendered powerfully buoyant, and kept in an erect position, by means of large vesicles of air, variously disposed about their leaves or their stalks, as the difference of their form and structure may require. A similar provision for their preservation is observable in many of the plants which grow upon the land. Such as are tender and flexible, and apt to trail upon the ground, are furnished with spiral tendrils, or other like means, by which they lay hold of such other plants as are firm and upright. What an useful lesson is this to human society ! where, according to the analogy of nature, the strong ought to support the weak, and the defenceless should rest securely upon the powerful. How different a place would the world be, if this example were religiously followed.

And now if there are so many effects of the divine wisdom visible to us who are confined in a climate remote from the sun ; what opportunities must they have, what wonders of the Lord must they see, *who go down to the sea in ships*, and make their observations in happier regions ; where the sun, the soil, the air, all things being different, vegetation is on a much larger scale, and presents many grand and glorious objects which can never come to our sight.

In speaking of the growth of plants, which is the second thing to be considered, I must forbear to attempt a theory. The first particular which meets us, is that spoken of in the text, that herbs and trees carry their *seeds in themselves* : from whence it seems deducible, that the primeval tree or plant, which was contemporary with the first father of mankind, included all the trees
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that should proceed from it to the end of time : so that the seed which is growing into an herb at this day, is but an evolution of something which subsisted in the first plant at the creation. How to get clear of this consequence we do not see ; and to pursue it we are not able : our imagination is bewildered and lost in the idea of such a succession ; the rudiments of a future forest included in a single acorn !

It is not so far beyond us to observe, how the elements in their several capacities are made subservient to the life and increase of plants. The soil on which they grow contains a mixture of principles, wisely tempered together, which supply vegetables with matter for their nourishment ; and their root with its fibres and lacteals, which takes in this nourishment, answers the same purpose as the stomach in animals. Water is the vehicle which conveys this nourishment into their vessels ; while the sun and air, expanding and contracting, keep up an oscillatory motion analagous to that of respiration.

It is now allowed, that there is both a vital circulation of the juices in vegetables, and a large perspiration from their pores ; which latter is become a subject of great curiosity and importance, from the successful labours of those who have cultivated this part of natural philosophy. The circulation in plants is strong in the spring, and languid in the winter ; in some it is so forcible and abundant, that if their vessels are opened at an improper season, they will bleed to death, as when an artery is divided in the human body. If the finer spirit evaporates from a plant, and it has no fresh supply, it becomes instantly flaccid and fading, as an animal body dies with the departure of its breath.

The process of vegetation is forwarded in a wonderful manner by the vicissitude of day and night, and the changes of the weather. The heat of the sun raises a moist elastic vapour, which fills and expands certain vessels in plants, and so gradually enlarges their bulk ; while the colder air of the night condenses and digests the matter which has been raised, and so confirms the work of the day. We complain of cold blasts and clouded skies, by the intervention of which, vegetation rapidly advancing is suddenly stopped and seems stationary : but this may be wisely ordained by Providence : the growth of herbs may be too hasty ; they are weak in substance, if they are drawn forward too fast. A cold season prevents this too hasty growth ; as in the moral world some seasonable disappointment may give a salutary check to an aspiring mind, and establish it in wisdom and patience. Even the roughest motions of the elements have their use. Winds and storms, which agitate the bodies of trees and herbs, loosen the earth about their roots, and make way for their fibres to multiply, and to strike more kindly into the soil, to find new nourishment. Thus is nature more effectually progressive when it seems to be stationary or even retrograde ; and all things work together for good ; which they could never do but under the foresight and direction of an all-wise Providence.

But above all, the showers of heaven, concurring with the sun, promote the work of vegetation. They keep the matter of the soil soluble, and consequently moveable ; for salts cannot act but in a state of solution ; they furnish matter for an expansive vapour, which acts internally and externally ; and, what is but little understood, though equally worthy of admiration, the rain brings down with it an invigorating ethereal spirit from the clouds, which gives it an efficacy far beyond all the waterings which human labour

can administer. It is here in the kingdom of nature as in the kingdom of grace ; nothing can succeed without a blessing from heaven : *Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of Lights* *. How commonly do we see, that some seeds which lie still in the ground, and cannot be made to stir by all the waterings of art, will suddenly start up to life as soon as they are touched by a watering from the heavens. Such is the difference between the gifts of God and the gifts of man.

But, thirdly, the goodness of God, as well as his power and wisdom, is displayed in the uses of plants : and it is rather a matter of duty than of curiosity to consider them attentively. It is the wisdom of man to learn the will of God from the state of nature, as well as from the pages of revelation ; and it is his happiness to follow it when known. According to the state of nature a preference seems to be given to vegetable diet. For the useful and harmless cattle, which either feed man with their milk, or assist him in his labours, nothing is provided but a vegetable or farinaceous diet. Animal food is proper to wild beasts of fierce and savage natures ; and the man who abuses it, is too nearly allied to that class of animals. The beasts distinguished by the Levitical law as proper and wholesome to man are very few. The inhabitants of the waters, which supply a more temperate diet, are administered to us in much greater variety : but the luxuriance of nature is found in the vegetable kingdom ; where the roots, leaves, fruits, and seeds of plants, afford all that is most tempting to the eye, grateful to the taste, and desirable to the appetite. The sweetest food in the world, which is honey, is a composition elaborated

* James i. 17.

borated by the bee from the flowers of vegetables. The emblematical horn of plenty is not stored with beasts, fowls, and fishes, but with herbs and fruits for the sustenance and delight of man. The efficacy of a vegetable diet, for preserving the body in health, and the mind in a clear and temperate state, hath in all ages been confirmed by the experience of the wise and good. The greatest instances of longevity have been found among the virtuous and the recluse, who feasted on the herbs and roots which their own hands had cultivated.

Of the goodness and wisdom of God we have farther evidence in the medicinal herbs. If men obtain the reputation of wisdom by a judicious application of them to the cure of diseases; what must that original wisdom be, which gave them their forms and their faculties? *The Lord*, saith the son of Sirach, *hath created medicines out of the earth, and he that is wise will not despise them.** When he considers who is the author of them, he will be persuaded, that, if understood, they must be found more safe in their use, than the preparations of human art, he will therefore respect their virtues, and give them the preference which is due to them. There is certainly a momentum in mineral preparations, which produces sudden and great effects; but their power approaches too near to violence; while the vegetable medicines, ordained to be such by the Creator, are more congenial to the human constitution; and thus a reasonable alliance is preserved between the medicine of man and the diet of man: but we never eat minerals, though we use them in medicine; often with some good, but also with the danger of some bad effect. The mineral materials of a volcano will warm us, as the fuel of any other fire; but at the same time they may suffocate, or send down ruin upon our heads.

What possible modification of minerals can chemistry exhibit, which will quiet a distempered agitation of the nerves, and lessen the sensation of pain, which would otherwise be insupportable? But this desirable effect is wonderfully produced by the medicinal juice of the poppy. The learned know that there are several effects in medicine, which are never to be obtained but from vegetables; and so persuaded are they of a specific salutary power in them, that they apply for help even to such plants as are poisonous. That the poisonous plants have their use, we must presume, because they have the same divine author with the rest. *Every creature of God is good* in its proper capacity; but if we mistake its capacity we shall abuse it. Poisonous herbs, from their great power, may do service internally, in very small quantities: but we should rather suppose, from what we have heard and seen, that they were intended chiefly for external application; in which they can perform wonders; and medicine might perhaps be improved if more experiments were made in this way. But, it is not my province to enlarge here, and I have nothing but a good meaning to plead for proceeding thus far.

It is now to be observed, lastly, that the same wisdom which ordained the vegetable creation for the natural use of feeding and healing the body, hath applied it also to a moral or intellectual use, for the enlarging of our ideas, and the enlightening of our understandings. It joins its voice in the universal chorus of all created things, and to the ear of reason celebrates the wisdom of the Almighty Creator. *As the heavens* from day unto day, and from night unto night, *declare the glory of God*, so do the productions of the earth, all trees and herbs, in their places and seasons, speak the same language; from the climates of the north to the torrid regions of the south, and from the winter to the spring and the harvest.

The holy scripture hath many wise, and some beautiful allusions to the vegetable creation, for moral and religious instruction. The most ancient piece of this sort is the parable of *Jotham* in the book of *Judges*; where the dispositions and humours of men, and their effects in society, are illustrated by the different natures of trees. On occasion of *Abimelech's* treachery, *Jotham* tells the people, under the form of a fable, that the trees went forth to anoint them a king; and when all the good and honourable, as the olive, the fig-tree, and the vine, declined the trouble of ruling in society, the bramble offered his services, and invited them to *trust* in his *shadow* *. Thus it had happened in the case of *Abimelech*: and doth not experience shew us at this day, that the moral is still good? that the worst, and most worthless, are always the most forward to thrust themselves into power, and promise great things; how safe and happy we should be under their shadow! As if brambles, of a nature to tear the skin, and draw blood from every part of the body, and fit for nothing but to be burned out of the way, could form an agreeable shade for the people to sit under: The good and the virtuous, who are fruitful and happy in themselves, would be deprived of their internal comforts by the hurry and danger which attend the possession of power: but bad men, who have no source of content and enjoyment within themselves, are always so forward to seek it without themselves, and would turn the world upside down, or tear its inhabitants to pieces, to satisfy their own ambition. When circumstances conspire to bring those into action who are most worthy of power, then people sit *under the vine* and *under the fig-tree*, in the enjoyment of peace and plenty.

Our blessed Saviour, with a like allusion, hath referred us to the natural state and condition of plants and flowers; thence to learn

learn the unprofitableness of that anxiety and distrust, with which we seek after the things of this world. *Consider the lilies, how they grow---If God so clothe the grafs of the field, shall he not much more clothe you? ** As if he had said; “ You admire the beautiful clothing of a flower ; and indeed it is worthy of all admiration : the God on whom *you* depend, is the author of its wonderful contexture ; whence you ought to learn, that if he hath bestowed this rich attire upon the inferior part of the creation, the grafs of the field, so fading and transient, he will never leave you unprovided who are made for eternity.

The accidents to which plants are exposed in their growth afford matter for the beautiful and instructive parable of the sower, which conveys as much in a few plain words as a volume could do in any other form. † The seed of God’s word, when it is sown by a preacher, may fall into an honest and good heart, as the seed of the sower into a happy fruitful soil ; or it may light among the thorns of worldly cares, and the rank weeds of worldly pleasures, which springing up with it, will choke it and render it unfruitful : or it may fall into an hasty impatient mind, like seed upon a shallow rocky soil, where it has no depth of earth, and so cannot endure when the heat of the sun dries it. Other minds are open to the ways of the world in public or fashionable life, and unguarded against the dangers of sin ; so are exposed to the depredations of evil spirits, which rob them of what they had heard ; as birds of the air pick up without fear or molestation, the seeds which are scattered by the side of a public road.

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* Matt. vi. 22.

† Matt. xiii. 3, &c.

The tranſient nature of plants and flowers has given occaſion to many ſtriking representations of the brevity and vanity of this mortal life. “ As the leaves wither and fall away from the trees “ and others ſucceed, ſo,” ſaith an ancient poet, “ are the generations “ of men.* ”

How ſublime and affecting is that reflection in the book of Job---“ Man that is born of a woman hath but a ſhort time to live, and is full of miſery : he cometh up like a flower, and is cut down †.” In the ſame figurative language doth the Pſalmiſt ſpeak of the flouriſhing ſtate of man in youth, and his decay in the time of age: “ In the morning they are like the graſs which groweth up, in the morning it flouriſheth and groweth up; in the evening it is cut down and withered.” To cure us of our confidence in the wealth and proſperity of this world, and make way for the ſerious temper of the goſpel, nothing can be more expreſſive and rhetorical than that ſentence of St. James: “ Let the brother of low degree rejoice in that he is exalted; but the rich in that he is made low; becauſe as the flower of the graſs he ſhall paſs away: for the ſun is no ſooner riſen with a burning heat, but it withereth the graſs, and the flower thereof falleth, and the grace of the faſhion of it periſheth: ſo ſhall the rich man fade away in his ways;

* Οἷη περὶ φυλλῶν γένειν, ταῖσδε καὶ αἰθρῶν.
Φύλλα τὰ μὲν ἴσπερος χαμαδὶς χεῖν.

Hom. II. ζ. 146.

Like leaves on trees the race of man is found,
Now green in youth, now withering on the ground.

Pope's Hom. b. 6. l. 181.

† Job, xiv. 2.

ways: that is, he shall decay in his prosperity, as the flower fades the sooner for the enjoyment of the sun-shine.

The reviving of seeds and roots buried in the earth, though so common a fact, is yet so wonderful, that it is more than a figure, it is a pledge and assurance that the dead shall rise again. In every spring nature presents us with a general resurrection in the vegetable world, after a temporary death and burial in the winter. The root that lies dormant under the ground *is a prisoner of hope*, and waits for the return of the vernal sun. If it could speak it might repeat (and to the ear of faith it does repeat) those words of the apostle; *O grave where is thy victory?* So plainly doth vegetable nature preach this doctrine of the resurrection, that the man is supposed to be senseless, who does not make this use of it---*thou fool, it is not quickened except it die.*

I would now only observe, after what hath been said, that a right use of our present subject in all its parts, must contribute to the dignity and to the happiness of man. How innocently, and how pleasantly is he entertained, who in cultivating the various productions of the earth, hath the elements working with him and assisting him, to perfect his flowers and fruits, and raise a Paradise around him! What a rational and noble employment it is, to trace the effects of divine wisdom in a survey of the vegetable kingdom; in the beautiful forms of plants, their endless variety, the configuration of their organs, the distinction of their characters; the places of their inhabitation; by land, by sea, in rivers and in lakes, on rocks and mountains, in the fields, the pastures, and the woods: with their successions from the spring to the summer, from the summer to the autumn; their appearances by day and by night.

How proper is it to use them for health and for temperance, as the wise have done, and as the Creator, ever mindful of the *sum* of our happiness hath appointed. What a respectable benefactor is he to mankind, who discovers their virtues in medicine, and applies them to the relief of the miserable; an office ever grateful to a benevolent mind.

But happiest of all is he, who having cultivated herbs and trees, and studied their virtues, and applied them for his own and for the common benefit, rises from thence to a contemplation of the great Parent of good, whom he sees and adores in these his glorious works. The world cannot shew us a more exalted character than that of a truly religious philosopher, who delights to turn all things to the glory of God; who from the objects of his sight derives improvement to his mind, and in the glass of things temporal sees the image of things eternal. Let a man have all the world can give him; he is still miserable if he has a groveling, unlettered, indevout mind. Let him have his gardens, his fields, his woods and his lawns, for grandeur, ornament, plenty and gratification; while at the same time God is not in all his thoughts. And let another have neither field nor garden: let him only look at nature with an enlightened mind; a mind which can see and adore the Creator in his works; can consider them as demonstrations of his power, his wisdom, his goodness, his truth: this man is *greater*, as well as happier, in his poverty, than the other in his riches. The one is but little higher than a beast, the other but little lower than an angel.

We ought therefore to praise those who in their life-time made this use of the natural world, and gratefully to remember that piety, which directed our minds to an annual commemoration of

God's wisdom in the works of the vegetable creation: a great subject, in discoursing on which, I have only scattered some seeds, to be opened and perfected by your future meditation; in which may the grace of God assist us all, through Jesus Christ our Lord, &c.

F I N I S.

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