

## THE VALUE OF A WORM.

Among the works of God there is nothing contemptible, nothing even insignificant: that which seems so is only in consequence of our limited faculties; the more inquisitively we look at nature the more occasion shall we have to exclaim with Wordsworth:—

"Pride,  
Howe'er disguised in its own majesty,  
Is littleness; and he who feels contempt  
For any living thing, hath faculties  
Which he has never used."

We have no better illustration of the importance of apparently insignificant things than in the worm. Whoever beholds the creature delving and winding through the mould, probably has thought how useless a place it occupies in the scale of creation; and yet, what will our readers who are unacquainted with the fact think, when we assure them that the common earth-worm is at once shovel, plough, harrow, and manure? Of all that soil which is the richest and most adapted for the gardener's purpose, there is scarcely any which has not passed through the intestines of the worm, and the earthy casts which are seen lying about after its burrowings, are little patches of rich mould which have derived an extraordinary nutrition from the cause we have mentioned. Mrs. Somerville, in her "Physical Geography," mentions it as probable that of the finer vegetable mould there is not a particle which has not been prepared by this wonderful little labourer.

It is only recently that science has devoted much attention to this interesting subject; but the fact to which we have alluded was placed beyond dispute some years ago by Charles Darwin, esq., in a paper on the formation of mould, read before the Geological Society of London. The work performed by each individual worm may seem so insignificant as to place almost in doubt the possibility of an achievement so considerable; but this idea is refuted by the immense number of earth-worms constantly ploughing their way, and especially when driven by dry weather, to a considerable depth below the surface. It is satisfactorily ascertained that no plough could reach so deep as the worm, in many instances; and Mr. Darwin remarks, that it would sometimes be much more consistent to speak of animal mould rather than vegetable. It is both amusing and beautiful to contemplate how, by the agency of this little creature, nature buries stones, pebbles, and the rough earth which was too near the surface. Many of these, covered by the castings of worms, lie waiting for the disintegration and separation into finer particles, which in the course of some few seasons they may undergo, then in their turn to pass through the bowels of the worm and return to the surface as useful soil. Thus nature constantly operates around us without our being aware of it. How many persons have ungratefully supposed that these little creatures were to be regarded as a pest and a nuisance. The farmer, the grazier, and the gardener, have beheld them without suspecting that they were an important fellow-workman; the farmer and grazier especially deriving benefit from them, since they work in fields where the spade cannot penetrate.

The reverend William Kirby slightly alludes to them in his *Bridgewater Treatise* on the "Wisdom of God in the Creation of Animals;" but since this volume was written, the earth-worm, as well as the whole class of worms to which it belongs, namely, the Annelida, has undergone a very lengthy and popular examination by Dr. Williams, who has published the result of his observations in a paper of some hundred and twenty pages in the report of the British Association for 1851. That paper unfolds in a remarkable degree the exquisite contrivance of nature in her most unobserved works, or, rather, let us say, the wonderful wisdom of God in the most unobserved of his creatures. The very name by which this class is distinguished by naturalists, the Annelida, is given to it from an early perception of the marvellous contrivance of its rings; for if the reader observes it, which he may very easily do either by watching its movements in the mould, or placing it before his eyes on a table, he will see that its coil of blood-red rings are marked very plainly, and he will further notice, too, how all these assist it in the act of moving. The grace of the snake and the serpent has often been referred to; the proud beauty of that creature, so shunned by man, has been repeatedly made a subject of comment; but the beauty of the worm, to an eye capable of perceiving it, is no less remarkable; and although we would not place the serpent or the snake beyond the circle of the useful purposes of creation, yet the impression made upon the mind by the worm in this particular is much more interesting. We have watched it, industrious little peasant! hard-working little ploughman! as it has moved on, swiftly shooting its way through the soil, and we have wondered that it has not been a theme for poets. Its movements surely illustrate the poetry of motion; and indeed one of our later poets, Walter Savage Landor, has made the worm the subject of his song. The following lines are as just as they are beautiful, in homage of the subject of our paper:—

"First-born of all creation yet unsung,  
I call thee not to listen to my lay;  
For well I know thou turnest a deaf ear,  
Indifferent to the sweetest of complaints,  
Sweetest and most importunate. The voice  
Which would awaken, and which almost can  
The sleeping dead, thou rearest up against,  
And no more heedest thou the wreck below;  
Yet art thou gentle, and for due reward,  
Because thou art so humble in thy ways,  
Thou hast survived the giants of waste worlds,  
Giants whom chaos left unborn behind,  
And earth with fierce abhorrence at first sight  
Shook from her bosom, some on burning sands,  
Others on icy mountains far apart;  
Mammoth and mammoth's archetype, and coil  
Of serpent cable long, and ponderous mail  
Of lizard, to whom crocodile was dwarf.  
Wrong, too, hath oft been done thee. I have watch'd  
The nightgale, that most inquisitive  
Of plumed powers, send forth a sidelong glance  
From the low hazel on the smooth footpath,  
Attracted by a glimmering tortuous thread  
Of silver left there when the dew had dried,  
And dart on one of thine, that one of hers  
Might play with it. Alas! the young will play  
Reckless of leaving pain and death behind.  
I, too, (but early from such sin forebore)  
Have fasten'd on my hook beside the stream  
Of shady Arrow, or the broad mill-pond,

Thy writhing race. Thou wilt more patiently  
 Await my hour—more quietly pursue  
 Thy destined prey legitimate.

FIRST-BORN

I call'd thee at the opening of my song ;  
 Last of creation I will call thee now.  
 What fiery meteors have we seen transcend  
 Our firmament, and mighty was their power  
 To leave a solitude and stench behind.  
 The vulture may have revell'd upon men ;  
 Upon the vulture's self thou revellest.  
 Princes may hold high festivals ; for thee  
 Chiefly they hold it. Every dish removed,  
 Thou comest in the silence of the night,  
 Takest thy place, thy train insinuateth  
 Into the breast, lappeth that wrinkled heart  
 Stone-cold within, and with fresh appetite  
 Again art ready for a like carouse."

There is another remarkable feature in the worm. No organs of sense have been discovered, and yet it is all sensation ; it sees without eyes, hears without ears, as truly as it walks without feet : it is a constant marvel. Like the human hand, it unites in itself the most opposite and various faculties : by the sense of touch it seems to supersede the necessity for other faculties. In all the contrivances connected with its formation, it seems evident enough that nothing has been omitted conducive to its happiness ; it bounds to and fro with a merriment of motion which assures us that it is capable of enjoyment in its little circle of sensation and small world of action. Those who have anatomised it, speak of the exquisiteness of its mechanism ; with rapture they laud the muscular feats of the Annelida as wonderfully distinguished by their complexity and harmony ; and yet it is allowed to pass long without a chronicler and a historian, though no single creature in the whole compass of creation more illustrates the marvellous excellency of divine arrangement, or the dependency of man for his happiness upon the meanest of God's creatures.

Such were some of our reflections the other day, while wielding the spade in our garden ; and then we very naturally turned from the worm to other characters in the scale of moral creation, slighted like the worm, fulfilling a round of lowly duties unnoticed and unperceived. How many there are in society, the delvers, the diggers, and ploughmen, nay, even the unseen philosophers, who work silently and obscurely in the dark beneath the mould, but who have the same value attaching to them which, as we have seen, attaches to the worm—preparing the soil in which others are to place the seed—exploring the dark and the unsightly, and bringing it out into the light, that others may cause beauty and bloom to hang their brightness over it. Let us, in moral conditions, recur to the often uttered but never sufficiently felt truth, that nothing useful is mean or contemptible. How much soever the employment seems to stamp with contempt, let us constantly remember that not employment, but motive and object, are the foundations of real dignity ; nay, that sometimes workers may be engaged in really dignified employment, important in itself and its results, although they may be entirely ignorant of the magnificence of the foundation they are preparing. The humblest action, it is pleasing to remember, is dignified, if done to the glory of God.