

THE CALL OF NATURAL BEAUTY.

"As the centuries pass the mystery of the Universe deepens. The thoughts of civilised man accumulate like snowflakes on the summit of Everest, or the leaves of many years in winter woods, burying one past system after another, one fashion after another, in religion, science, poetry and art. Knowing that so much lies buried beneath, which but now was so hot and certain, it becomes ever more difficult to trust so implicitly as of old whatever still for the moment lies on the surface of human thought, the still surviving dogma, or the latest fashion in opinion. At least it becomes difficult to trust either to dogma or to thought alone. Man looks round for some other encouragement, some other source of spiritual emotion that will not be either a dogma or a fashion, something

'That will be for ever

'That was from of old.'

And then he sees the sunset, or the mountains, the flowing river, the grass and trees and birds on its banks. In the reality of these he cannot fail to believe, and in these he finds, at moments, the comfort that his heart seeks. By the side of religion, by the side of science, by the side of poetry and art, stands Natural Beauty, not as a rival to these, but as the common inspirer and nourisher of them all, and with a secret of her own beside.

"The appeal of natural beauty is more commonly or at least more consciously felt to-day than ever before, just because it is no new argument, no new dogma, no doctrine, no change of fashion, but something far older yet far more fresh, fresh as when the shepherd on the plains of Shinar first noted the stern beauty of the patient stars. Through the loveliness of nature, through the touch of sun or rain, or the sight of the shining restlessness of the sea, we feel

'Unworded things and old to our pained heart appeal.'

"And to the young who have no pain, who have not yet kept watch on man's mortality, nature is a joy responding to their own, haunting them like a passion.

"This flag of beauty, hung out by the mysterious Universe, to claim the worship of the heart of man, what is it, and what does its signal mean to us? There is no clear interpretation. But that does not lessen its value. Like the Universe like life, natural beauty is also a mystery. But whatever it may be, whether casual in its origin as some hold who love it well, or whether as others hold, such splendour can be nothing less than the purposeful message of God—whatever its interpretation may be, natural beauty is the ultimate spiritual appeal of the Universe, of nature, or of the God of nature, to their nursing man. It and it