

ASCENSION DAY

The poem "Drifting Away" (see below) was written in 1867 by the Victorian University professor, Historian, divine, poet and novelist, Charles Kingsley. He was sympathetic to the idea of evolution, and was one of the first to praise Darwin's book. He had been sent an advance review copy and in his response of 18 November 1859 (four days before the book went on sale) stated that he had "long since, from watching the crossing of domesticated animals and plants, learnt to disbelieve the dogma of the permanence of species.

Darwin added an edited version of Kingsley's closing remarks to the next edition of his book, stating that "A celebrated author and divine has written to me that 'he has gradually learnt to see that it is just as noble a conception of the Deity to believe that He created a few original forms capable of self-development into other and needful forms, as to believe that He required a fresh act of creation to supply the voids caused by the action of His laws'.

DRIFTING AWAY - A FRAGMENT.



THEY drift away. Ah, God ! they drift forever.
I watch the stream sweep onward to the sea,
Like some old battered buoy upon a roaring river,
Round whom the tide-waifs hang then drift to sea.

I watch them drift the old familiar faces,
Who fished and rode with me, by stream and wold,
Till ghosts, not men, fill old beloved places,
And, ah ! the land is rank with churchyard mould.

I watch them drift the youthful aspirations,
Shores, landmarks, beacons, drift alike.

I watch them drift the poets and the statesmen ;
The very streams run upward from the sea.

Yet overhead the boundless arch of heaven
Still fades to night, still blazes into day.

Ah, God ! My God ! Thou wilt not drift away !

Ascensiontide is about this belief in the general drift of all life and all human endeavour, drifting away eventually to nothing, compared to the permanence and total reality of God. We all find ourselves believing that we are immune to death and in a way, that is a healthy feeling, especially in the young. Wiser heads counsel us that our lives are lived with greater zest when lived in the knowledge of our finitude.

The doctrine of the Ascension proclaims that if we are drifting, all of us drifting the final conclusion, then God is not and the ascension into heaven is a doctrine which proclaims the ultimate worth and value of the life and teachings of Jesus. It is a ringing statement of the deathless nature of goodness, justice, generosity, self-sacrifice and love. It is the sign of the endless and triumphant victory of the godliness which we strive to achieve and which we see achieved in the life of Jesus who is crucified, risen, ascended and glorified.

All hail the power of Jesu's name
Let Angels prostrate fall;
Bring forth the royal diadem
To crown him Lord of all.